

Some Key Factors Affecting the Treatment of Women In the Early Christian Church

In this paper I focus upon several factors which affected the treatment and position of women in the early Christian church. These factors are religious and cultural and had an impact upon the views and practices of the early church. The three areas discussed are the effect of the Levitical Priesthood and the synagogue system, the treatment of widows by the early church and the effects of vow of celibacy upon the early church. All of these areas impacted women and fashioned the mold for future treatment of women in the early church. These factors are not the only factors but they are important factors. As we better understand these factors, we can better understand some of the Scriptures utilized especially by the Apostle Paul as well as appreciate the historical factors which gave direction to the Christian Church in its early years and its direction today.

A. The Levitical Priesthood and the Synagogue System

It is obvious to all that the root of Christianity was Judaism. Jesus was Jewish. The Apostles were Jewish. Jesus taught in Jewish synagogues. Jesus and the Apostles kept the feasts and the law. Jesus even said that he was called to the Jews first and he did not come to abolish the Law but to complete it (Matt. 5:17). Being a Jew was through birth or conversion and Jews kept the commands of the law and the Feasts of Israel. Part of the keeping the law was carrying out of rituals at the Temple in Jerusalem. These rituals were overseen by the High Priest and his relatives who were descendants of Aaron. The priests were members of the Tribe of Levi. Those serving at the Temple and those in the priesthood were male. There were no females.

The Aaronic Priesthood and the Levitical priesthood were not celibate. They were expected to marry and to reproduce. Nonetheless prior to serving they were required to abstain from sex and ritual purity including washing was a requisite. The priesthood, both Aaronic and Levitical, was reserved for men.

Jesus was not of the Tribe of Levi and therefore he was not qualified to serve as a High Priest under the Aaronic line nor as a Levitical priest under the Tribe of Levi. That being said, Jesus was both King and Priest and is our High Priest. That priesthood is explained in depth in the Book of Hebrews where Jesus is considered to be an eternal High Priest under Melchizedek. Abraham had been blessed by Melchizedek and the Priesthood of Melchizedek was, according to the writer of Hebrews, superior to that of Levi. In fact Hebrews explains that when Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek effectively his genetic line, including Levi and Aaron, had made sacrifice when Abraham their forefather did. (Heb. 7:9-10).

Jews were somewhat distanced from the Temple and the Levitical practices due to the fact that the Temple practices were run by the Sadducees. Practically most Jews were more attuned to the local synagogues and there were numerous synagogues even in Jerusalem at the time of the Temple. The Temple sacrifices and practices were destroyed in 70 A.D. (also now known as 70 C.E.).

It is important to keep in mind that the early Christian church grew out of the practices of the Jewish Christian church which in turn adopted many of the practices of the Jewish synagogue. The Church in Jerusalem was a Jewish church obviously and in fact had many in it who were priests (Acts 6:7).

Much of the expansion of the early church resulted from the missionary journeys of Paul of Tarsus. As part of the evangelization of the Gentiles, Paul often began by going first and sharing the gospel in the local Jewish Synagogue. Often meeting resistance, Paul would then expand his efforts and move outside of the local synagogue. Paul's methodology is illustrated in Acts. Here are some examples:

- Salamis, Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas share Jesus in the Synagogue-Acts 13:5
- Antioch of Pisidia. Paul and Barnabas present the gospel first in the synagogue. –Acts 13:14. In verse 43 we learn that many of the Jews and devout proselytes follow Paul. When Paul meets resistance he tells the resisting Jews that he is turning to the Gentiles because the Jews judge themselves as being unworthy of everlasting life. (Acts 13:46).
- Iconium. Paul and Barnabas go to the synagogue to share the gospel and a number of Jews and Greeks believed. Acts 14. 1
- As Paul and Barnabas make the return visit to the cities where they shared the Gospel, they appoint elders in churches rather than sharing in the synagogues. Acts 14:23.
- Neapolis. When Paul and Silas go on Paul's Second Missionary Journey, they do not find a synagogue in Neapolis so that proceed on the Sabbath to the river where "prayer was customarily made." Acts 16:13. There Paul converts Lydia who is the first convert to Christianity in Greece.
- Thessalonica—Paul shares the Gospel for three Sabbaths in the local synagogue. Acts 17:1-3.
- Berea-Paul shares the Gospel at the synagogue in Berea. Acts 17:10.
- Athens-Paul reasons in the synagogue in Athens, in the market place and before the Areopagus. Acts 17:7.
- Corinth-Paul ..."reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Acts 18:4. When Paul meets resistance, he says he will go to the Gentiles. He then begins meeting at the house of Justus whose home was next door to the synagogue. (Acts 18:7). At Corinth the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and his family, follow Jesus. Acts 18:8.
- Ephesus—Paul goes to the synagogue in Ephesus and speaks for three months. When he is opposed by some he moves to the School of Tyrannus where he teaches for two years. Acts 19:8.
- Rome- When Paul is taken to Rome, he does not go to the synagogue because he is under house arrest. Instead, Paul calls the leaders of the Jews to his house and a day was set when they came to hear him and to hear about Jesus. Acts 28:17.

Paul's pattern of evangelism is clear. He would first go to the Jews and share about Jesus. Some Jews would follow Christ but others would not. Eventually Paul would leave the synagogue and form a new meeting which would be made up of the Jews and the Gentiles who believed in Christ. These new bodies would then have elders appointed over them and they would meet for prayer, worship and the study of the Scripture.

The early Christian churches established by Paul grew out of the background of the synagogue and they quickly achieved their own identity with some of the characteristics of the synagogue and the new additions from the Christian faith.

The Church in Jerusalem kept more closely to the Jewish law and continued to follow the Jewish law. The churches established by Paul followed more closely to the Antioch pattern. The Gentile churches were largely free from compliance with the Mosaic law except for the minimum requirement set by the church in Jerusalem which were to abstain from items polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood. (Acts 15:20; 29).

It is not surprising that since many of the first churches grew out of first synagogues that some of the characteristics of the first century synagogue would carry over to the church, including the treatment of women in the first century synagogue.

Jesus often spoke in synagogues during his ministry. We know that Jesus customarily taught in synagogues. In Luke 4:16 it says that when Jesus came to Nazareth: "... as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." Jesus himself admitted that he regularly taught in the synagogue. In John 18:20 Jesus answers his accusers: "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always met, and in secret have said nothing."

In fact Jesus not only taught in various synagogues regularly but he also did a number of his healings in synagogues. In the synagogue in Nazareth, he healed a man with a withered hand. (Matt. 12:9; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-11). At the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus taught and delivered a man from an unclean spirit (Mark 1:1-29; Luke 4:31)

The Jewish synagogue evidently originated during the Babylonian captivity when temple sacrifices were not available. Homes and then buildings were utilized for Jews to assemble to read and study scripture and to pray and worship. It generally would take a requisite of ten people to be present to have a service. At the time of Jesus, it is believed that the number of people could be either male or female. Later in history, it evolved to being 10 males. At the service would be psalms, hymns, the reciting so the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9; Deut. 11:13-21) reading of portions of the Torah and the Prophets. Synagogue services did not require priests although if there were priests or Levites present they would be asked to read the Scriptures. Often there was discussion of the teachings and readings.

Women during the time of Jesus attended synagogues. In most instances they sat with their families. After the time of Jesus, women were often seated separately or in balconies of synagogues. Synagogue practice was very localized and varied from place to place.

Most synagogues had an "Ark" to store Scriptures when they were not in use. After the destruction of the Temple most "Arks" were placed facing Jerusalem. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem it is not clear whether Arks had to face in any particular direction.

Most synagogues had a pedestal where the Scriptures or Scrolls were placed. The individual reading the scrolls would stand and read them. When Jesus was in Nazareth, he got up and was handed the Scroll with the writings of the Prophet Elijah. (Luke 4:15-17).

Synagogues generally were run by a community leader who was in charge of the administration of the synagogue. There was also a person called a "chazzan" who took care of the facility and the scrolls and who had other administrative functions. (Luke 4:20).

There are a couple of instances where Jesus dealt with a leader of a synagogue. In one instance Jesus healed the 12 year old of Jairus who was the "leader" of a synagogue. (Luke 8:41). In another instance, Jesus and the leader of a synagogue came into conflict. In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus was in a synagogue and called a women who had been bent over with a spirit of infirmity for 18 years and healed her. The synagogue leader or ruler admonished Jesus and said that there was 6 days to work and that Jesus did not heed to heal her on the Sabbath. Jesus was incensed and called him a "hippocrite" reminding him that the law allowed donkeys and oxen to be watered on the Sabbath and this woman had been loosed from Satan's bondage after 18 years of bondage.

The running of synagogues during the time of Jesus were fairly independent and so there was freedom and latitude about how a synagogue might respond to Jesus. In the synagogue at Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, they became so enraged at him that they tried to kill him (Luke 4:16-30). Likewise, some of the synagogues in Jerusalem determined that if anyone confessed Jesus as the Messiah, they would be excluded from the local synagogue. (John 9:22; John 12:42)

Women did not run the synagogue. They were not elders. They did not read or lead discussions on the Torah or the Prophets, they were not priests or Levites, and they did not give the Aaronic blessing to the people. In short, the Jewish woman was not involved in the leadership or running of the synagogue.

It is not surprising that as the church grew out of the synagogue that the church would follow rules similar to the synagogue and had it not followed those rules it probably would have alienated those who came out of the synagogues and formed the first churches. The cultural treatment of women including both religious treatment along with the cultural dictates of proper dress carried over from the synagogue to the church without much thought or concern. Further, a change from the customs of the past probably would have been both offensive and even limited the expansion of the Gospel.

Moreover the early churches were not too concerned about establishing a new kingdom of justice upon this earth as they were about establishing the kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women. From an eschatological viewpoint, the church believed that its time here on this earth was limited in any event and justice would be established upon the return of Christ. I believe that it was for this reason the church did not rail about the injustices of this life, seek a political change in the status of women, seek the abolishment of slavery or get distracted in a host of other social issues. Meanwhile its innate treatment of men and women and things of this life did work a quiet revolution in society but its changes more like the yeast working its way through the dough. The changes were slow and not always visible. Christ could return at any time and it was imperative that the individual be ready for that return meanwhile leaving to Caesar what was Caesar's.

B. The Treatment of Widows in the Early Church

The treatment of widows by the early church was a natural outgrowth from the Jewish antecedents of the early Christian Church. The Jewish Scriptures made it quite clear that God paid special attention to make sure that widows and orphans were treated justly and compassionately. There are numerous verses in the Torah respecting the need for just treatment to widows. These verses include: Ex. 22:21-24; Deut. 10:18; 14:28-29; 24:19-21; 26:12-13 and 27:17-19. In the Prophets and other writings there were similar admonitions including Psm. 68:5; 146:9; Prov. 15:25; Job 31:16-18; Is. 1:7, 23; Jer. 7:3-7; 49:11; 22:3; Zech. 7:9-10 and Mal. 3:5.

The protection and provision for widows was primarily provided by the fathers if they were alive, their brothers and their children. There were a few other modest provisions in the Jewish law for providing assistance to widows and orphans. For instance in every third year there was provision for a tithe which went to the benefit of the poor, the strangers, the Levites, the widows and the orphans. Deut. 14:28-29.

In addition there were certain rules for harvesting crops which provided a type of assistance for the widows and the orphans. Deut. 24:19-20 provides as follows:

When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in your field,
you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless
and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all of the work of your hands.
When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again,
it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.
When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it
afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

Similar provisions to those in Deuteronomy were also expressed in Leviticus 19: 9-11.

Notwithstanding the provisions, it is reasonable to expect as a general matter not too many sheaves were left behind and that a fairly thorough job was done of beating the olives and gathering the grapes with only the most difficult to reach being left behind.

A wonderful example of how this worked in practice is found in the Book of Ruth. Some Scriptures which are very instructive are Ruth 2:6-8; 14-15. In addition the Book of Ruth makes clear the risks that women faced when out collecting the remnants left in the fields included the possibility of thirst, ridicule and sexual assault. In addition the work was hard and strenuous. Ruth was doing the collecting; Naomi, who was older, was not doing it.

The provision for widows and orphans was a high priority for the Jews and became an even higher priority to the new Christian church.

Although we can not be absolutely certain, we believe that the Book of James was written by James the Just who was the leader of the Jerusalem church and a close relative of Jesus. The view of James and

the early church regarding the important of providing for widows is expressed in James 1:27 which says "Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after the orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. " Thus the provision for widows was a high priority to the early church and no doubt the emphasis on taking care of widows and orphans is likely to have contributed to quick growth of the church.

Apparently there were daily distributions of provisions to widows which would have been highly unusual in the non-Christian experience. Widows would have been attracted to the hospitality and generosity of the early church. In fact one of the developments in church structure centered upon the provision of widows. The situation is revealed in Acts 6:1-4 which reads as follows:

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

There are a number of things that interest me regarding this passage. First it is the need to care equitably for the Greek widows which resulted in the need to develop a new class of servants in the church called "deacons." This development occurred early in church history and we can already see there were numerous widows that were being cared for by the church including both Jewish widows and widows of Greek proselytes. The passage also makes it clear that the distributions going on were "daily" distributions not weekly or monthly or occasional distributions. Obviously, Greek widows felt that they were getting shortchanged in the distribution in favor of the Jewish widows.

It is also worthy of note that the Apostles following the synagogue pattern did not suggest the selection of deaconesses to oversee the distributions but called upon the people to select men for the task. As mentioned previously this is consistent with the fact that it was men who carried out the religious and administrative roles of the Jewish synagogue.

I conjecture that this daily care was expensive and probably was an impetus for many people selling their property and extra property and giving funds to the church which could be used to help the poor and the widows. The need we can expect was great because the social programs for taking care of widows outside the church were either non-existent or very limited. The early church was committed to taking care of the poor and the widows. The commitment was so strong that the church initially moved toward a form of Christian economic socialism which is described in Acts 2:44-45:

Now all who believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

The poor and the widows probably flocked to the church as they saw the principles of Christ being put into action in their economic and social environment. The actions of the church to take care of the needy were extraordinary not only for its time but for any time. The sharing of goods and property are also described in Acts 4: 32-35:

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

The selling of one's goods is reflected in some of the accounts in Acts including the selling of property by Barnabas (Acts 4:32) and the selling of property by Ananias and his wife Sapphira in Acts 5. In Acts 5 Peter condemns the actions of the couple because they lied to God. Peter makes it clear that the couple were not required to sell the property and they were allowed to sell it and keep the proceeds. Their issue was that they lied to God and the church about it. (Acts 5:1-4).

Due to its mission of taking care of the poor and the widows, money was always welcomed by the church. As a great famine happened which was predicted by Agabus, the needs of the church for funds to help the poor continued to be pressing. Acts 11:27-30.

Paul in his missionary work was always mindful to collect money for the church in Jerusalem. When it had been determined by the leaders in the Jerusalem church that Paul would go to the Gentiles, he had been encouraged to remember the poor in Jerusalem. Gal 2:10 says: They (James, Cephas and John) desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." Paul as he ministered in Greece kept his commitment and collected funds for Jerusalem church to distribute to the poor which would include the widows. Paul was cognizant that financial affairs be kept above board and travelled with representatives from the Greek churches to Jerusalem. A good example of Paul's pleas for funds for the Jerusalem church can be seen by reading 2 Corinthians, Chapters 8 and 9. A short summary of Paul's actions is found in Romans 15:26 which says, "For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem."

Paul argued that the Jewish Church had contributed spiritual riches to the Gentile Churches through sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them and that it was equitable that the Gentile Churches help the Jewish Church in Jerusalem by making monetary contributions to it to help support the poor ministered to by the Gentile church.

There are certain other small evidences of the ministry of the church to widows and orphans. One, where the curtain is pulled back for a second, is the healing of Tabitha (also known as Dorcas). In Acts 9:36 we learn of the death of Tabitha who was a woman "full of good works and charitable deeds..." When Peter is summoned by two men he goes to the room where Dorcas is laid out and "...all of the widows stood by him (Peter) weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas (Tabitha) had made when she was with him. " (Acts 9:39) Peter raises Tabitha from the dead and then "called the saints and the widows" and presented her alive. (Acts 9:41). It seems likely that Tabitha was one of the women who helped provide for the poor and the widows by sewing clothes for them. Although the account was included to show miraculous healing and the expansion of the faith, coincidentally, one can see for an instant one of the ways that the Jewish church was providing for the widows and the poor.

Like welfare rolls everywhere, they seem to expand constantly. In addition, children often find novel ways to supply the need of their parents. This type of problem was not limited to the early Christian

church but was even found from time to time in Judaism. In Mark 7:1-23, Jesus is asked about why his disciples do not wash their hands. In that passage Jesus responds that the Pharisees are hypocrites.

Mark 7:9-13 says the following:

He said to them. "all too well, you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother; and, he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban- (that is a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.

In short a Jewish person could extinguish his obligation to care for his aged parents by taking his possessions and declaring them to be "Corban" (that is dedicated to God). This allowed the individual to enjoy his possessions for life and not care for his parents by declaring that his goods were dedicated to the temple and could not be alienated, including for the care of his parents. Thus the Pharisees found a way to erase the Scriptural obligation to honor and care for parents including widows.

Not surprisingly the list of widows needing aid constantly grew and expanded along with the expansion of the church. Paul instructed Timothy regarding who should be considered a "widow" eligible for church assistance. 1 Tim. 3-16 sets forth Paul's instructions regarding the topic:

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he had denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

Paul felt it necessary to give clear instruction regarding widows and their treatment to Timothy who was in Ephesus. Apparently the role of widows receiving distributions from the church had blossomed and

now needed to be brought back under control. First, Paul commands that believers take on responsibility for their own parents and not throw that responsibility onto the church.

Apparently, those who were getting distributions from the church were expected to be older women and they were expected to spend time praying on behalf of the church. Paul gives a minimum age for being included in the widow category which was sixty. Today that may not seem to be a high age, but in light of the life expectancy of the first century, sixty was a very old age. Paul further sets some criteria of piety although it is unclear to me how this was enforced.

Paul also makes it clear that the system was being abused and that a number of women were using the system and simply being busybodies.

Lastly Paul redirects younger widows strongly to consider second marriages with Christian men and reestablishing families.

The care of the church for widows was an incredible event in history and contributed to the growth of the Christian church including its great popularity among women. At the same time, the approach of the church in caring for widows further contributed to the concept of women not being leaders of the church but instead as objects of the compassion of the church. The need for women to receive this type of care and compassion largely resulted from the fact that they lived in a society where women did not have the opportunities for education, advancement, and employment as men, but instead were primarily oriented toward the feeding and care of the family and the raising of children.

The role of the widows who received distributions from the church and who prayed for the church would make it easy for the growth later on of convents and orders where women would take vows of chastity and poverty and spend time praying for the church.

As a final note, I would point out that Christ himself dealt with the widow situation in the case of his own mother. Although a chapter could be dealt with this, Christ made provision for his own mother by entrusting her to the Apostle John. There are numerous views as to why Jesus entrusted her to John as opposed to James or another relative. The fact that he entrusted her to John has been used as an argument that James was not a brother or half-brother of Christ. At the time of the crucifixion, James was not a believer that Jesus was the Messiah. Further, once James became a believer and became head of the church in Jerusalem, he still died an early death as a martyr of the faith.

John was a believer, he would be the one apostle who would have a natural death, he was from a priestly family and we believe his family was relatively well off for the time. The point is that Jesus made provision for his own mother and that provision was from the cross. Even while Jesus was in extreme pain and suffering he only did what we are required to do by Scripture which is to provide for the widows in our families.

C. The Takeover of the Church by the Celibates and Ascetics

This section deals with the ascension of the celibates and ascetics to the positions of church leadership and power and the eclipse of the married clergy. This resulted in the practical exclusion of married priests completely in the Western Church and the exclusion of married priests from positions of power

and control in the Eastern Church. The ascension of the celibates and ascetics further contributed to the denigration of the position of women in the church.

The Jewish faith encouraged a married priesthood. In fact the Jewish view was that God was the Creator and that man had been commanded to “Be fruitful and multiply;” (Gen. 1:28) and the Jews took God at his word and did just that. In addition God made a covenant with Abraham and promised that from him would come nations and that his children would like the dust of the earth and like the stars of the sky. (Gen 13:16; 28:14). In fact the sign of the promise and of being one of the Children of God was circumcision involving the male reproductive organ. Accordingly it is not surprising that the Jews saw having families and children to be part of God’s blessing and plan. The Levites married as did the Temple priests. The High Priest was also married. In short celibacy was not part of the Jewish religious landscape. Instead it was the norm to marry.

Notwithstanding the views regarding religion and marriage, there were certain requirements regarding sex and cleanliness when ministering in the Temple. In addition there was ritual washing prior to ministering in the Temple. However, except for these minor exceptions, marriage was the normal part of the Jewish religion. In addition, those moving in the prophetic ministry were also married.

Later in Jewish history there were a group of Jews expecting the end times known as the Essenes. Many of the Essenes did not marry; however there were other groups of Essenes which did marry and have families.

Strangely, Jesus would often be held up as the model for asceticism in Christianity. However, embarrassingly, Jesus did not fit into the pattern of being an ascetic. Instead it was John the Baptist who was ascetic and Jesus was more likely to be included among those who were not. Matthew 11:18-19 says, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Thus John the Baptist set the pattern for a more ascetic life as opposed to Jesus. Nonetheless both currents of asceticism and a less ascetic approach existed in Christianity.

When it came to celibacy both Jesus and apparently John the Baptist embraced a life of celibacy. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands an even higher level of personal holiness in matters relating to marriage than found in the Old Testament pointing out that adultery was more than a physical unfaithfulness but that it was an unfaithfulness of the heart. He said at Matt. 5:27-32:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery” but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it far from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast in hell. And if your right hand causes you sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Furthermore it has been said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Jesus takes us up to the next level in understanding the commands of God and the law. Items allowed by the law are not necessarily the intent of God. God's intent is for a man to be faithful to his wife and a wife to be faithful to her husband. Lust and adultery are more than just the acts of the body but they are the spirits found in the heart. Simple compliance with the law is not enough; instead God is looking for a change of the heart. It is in the heart that the seeds of adultery are sown. Jesus demands that people deal with the root causes of evil in their lives.

Although Jesus sets the highest standards when dealing with the heart, it is this same Jesus who deals forthrightly with the woman in the well who had five husbands and was living with a man and it is the same Jesus who deals compassionately with the woman caught in the very act of adultery. Despite the high standards of Jesus' teaching, it is the same Jesus who seems to be much more forgiving toward the sins of the flesh than he ever was regarding the sins of the spirit such as the sins of pride and hypocrisy found in the religious rulers and the Pharisees.

Despite the attempts of subsequent celibates and theologians to paint Jesus as an ascetic, they are almost embarrassed when Jesus shows up at a wedding or at a feast or is having his feet anointed with perfume. Just as Judas and some of the disciples thought it might be better if Jesus had sold the perfume and given the money to the poor, they find the thoughts of the non-ascetic Jesus to be a bit of an embarrassment.

The fact that Jesus and later Paul were not married, encouraged the celibates and ascetics in the church to conclude that celibacy and chastity were great virtues and once they reached the places of power in the early church they began not only to extol the virtues of celibacy and chastity but weave it into their theology and view of the times in which Jesus lived.

Jesus in Luke 14:26 said: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." The celibates read these Scriptures as mandating that once the Apostles followed Christ they in effect gave up conjugal relationships with their wives and became celibate. Such a concept was generally foreign to the Jewish Christian mind and certainly no where indicated in Scripture. However, the celibates apparently assumed that if nothing was said about sex in marriage, it must not have happened.

The life and writings of Paul also helped to buttress the position and assumptions of the ascetics and celibates. Paul and many Christians expected the imminent return of Christ. Their eschatological views raised the question as to why a Christian would want to marry in the end times and last days. Also Paul in the sixth and seventh chapters of 1 Corinthians endeavored to deal with marriage and sexual immorality which, which like today, was very prevalent in a pagan and hedonistic society.

Below, we deal with some of Paul's views which were quickly twisted by the early church fathers who were quick to land upon the benefits of the celibate life style and to ignore and denigrate Paul's more practical views regarding men and women and sexuality.

Paul stated at 1 Corinthians 6: 13: Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Effectively the celibates read this as meaning that "the body is not for sexuality but for the Lord. In reality, Paul was addressing immoral sexual practices which were prevalent in the Gentile environment. The celibates, in my opinion, twisted verses like this to justify their own choices of celibacy and their desire, which in many instances, was a good thing, to remain separated from the

rampant and immoral sexual practices of the time in which they lived. Paul continues to make his point in 1 Corinthians 6:18 where he instructs the Corinthians to “Flee sexual immorality.”

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul addresses certain questions which had been addressed to Paul about celibacy and marriage. Paul tells the Corinthians that : “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul apparently did not feel the need to have sexual relations. In 1 Cor. 7:7 he says: “For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.” In fact, Paul believed that he had been gifted in not needing to have sexual relations and to enter into marriage. He felt that this was a gift of God which was very useful in the end times and in helping him to spread the gospel.

Despite Paul’s view, he was above all practical and knew that most people were not given the gift of celibacy. That left most Christians in the place where they needed to deal with their passions and sexual needs, and Paul desired that they deal with these things in a Christian manner as opposed to an immoral manner. Paul’s advice to Christians who did not have his gift is found in 1 Cor. 7: 2-6 which says:

Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over his own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourself to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self- control.

There are several very interesting things about this passage. First the passage does not imply that sex is to be given up except for the propagation of children. Second, it assumes that sex is the normal thing and not the exception. Third, when Paul talks about the body, unlike the time in which he lives, he assumes that the wife has sexual rights not just the man. This is an extraordinary conclusion for the time and culture in which Paul lived. The celibates who came after Paul would not be anywhere so generous with the rights of men or women in the church, especially those who aspired to religious positions.

Paul continued to answer questions posted to him by the Corinthians. Regarding the unmarried and widows he stated : “It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn.” (1 Cor. 7:9).

To those who were virgins and to the widows, he suggested (not as direction from the Lord) that they not get married, but if they do they have not sined. (1 Cor. 7:28). Paul’s conclusion was because “the time is short” (1 Cor. 7:29) and “the form of this world is passing away”(1 Cor. 7:31).

Paul further added to his arguments that the married person has to be concerned about pleasing the person’s spouse whereas the unmarried person can care about the things of the Lord as opposed to the things of this world. (1 Cor. 7:32-35). As a short summary, to Paul , marriage was always good in that it provided an ability for people to live honorably without sin, however, celibacy was better because it allowed people to focus upon God more easily rather than focusing upon both the needs of one’s spouse which could be a distraction from focusing solely upon carrying out God’s mission and

commands. That being said, Paul was keenly aware that not everyone had the gift of celibacy and if being celibate was a problem there was a simple solution, which was to marry.

Despite Paul's preference for a celibate life style, he did not set up leadership of the churches for celibates. Instead, as discussed earlier, Paul followed the Jewish pattern and utilized married pastors, elders and bishops. He also utilized married individuals as deacons. This followed the Jewish pattern where utilizing married men was the norm. In Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders ("presbyterous") in every church. The elders are to be the "husband of one wife" and "having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. (Titus 1:6). A similar standard is given by Paul to Timothy in 1 Tim. 3:1-13 where the bishop ("episcopos") is commanded to be the "husband of one wife" and later one who "has his children in submission with all reverence." Similar qualifications are given for deacons in Titus 1:5-9. Paul therefore contemplated that the leaders of churches be married, and further, that the leaders have children, all of which is consistent with Jewish and Levitical custom and practice. There has been debate as exactly what Paul meant when he wrote that Christian leadership should be a man of one woman. Some have taken the position that this only excludes polygamists. Others take the view that Paul simply meant that Christian leaders were to be monogamous and faithful to their spouses. Others have taken a more conservative view that Paul only meant a church leader should have been married only once.

Most commentators have been silent regarding that elders, bishops and leaders should have raised children and those children should have been obedient and followed the faith. The raising of children who are obedient and followers of Christ is an acid test of leadership ability. However, in an area where celibacy was becoming an overreaching virtue, the requirement of having children and raising them was conveniently ignored or spiritualized to mean spiritual children.

Although Paul's views were reasonable and Scriptural, they were quickly twisted by the celibates. There were two types of people in the church, celibates and the non-celibates, and the celibates considered themselves to be superior. Accordingly, it made sense to prefer celibates for the ministry and for the position of elders, priests, pastors and for levels of ecclesiastical authority which would develop in the future. Celibates were not only gifted with celibacy, but they had the focus and time and self-control required for the leading of God's people. Celibates considered that not only had Christ and Paul been celibate, but they further believed all of the other apostles had given up sex pur purposes of their high calling in the church.

In the Bible there is mention of only several instances where Apostles were married. Ironically, the "founder" of the Catholic Church, Peter, instead of being single and celibate like Jesus, had a wife. There are a number of reasons to believe this. First we know that Peter had a mother-in-law. In Matthew 8:14-15 it says: "When Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her." The same account is also found in Mark 1:29-31 and Luke 4:38-40. The celibates who commented upon these verses and who came to rule the Church have found this fact to be embarrassing and have, in my opinion, rewritten both history and theology to explain this all away. Some have postured that perhaps there was a mother-in-law but the Peter's wife was deceased. After all there is no mention of Peter's wife. Others, have postured that there may have been a wife, but Peter left her to follow Jesus. After all Jesus had said those who loved wives or children more than Jesus were not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37) and later Peter and the other disciples of Jesus said " We have left all to follow you." (Matt. 19:27; Luke 18:28; Mark 10:28). Still others with no back-up from Scripture have said that if Peter had a wife, he certainly did not have sex with her after he followed Christ and that she was a sister-wife (a believing follower of Christ) and that it is unthinkable

that Peter would have had sex with his wife. The attempts to enforce a legend of celibacy upon Peter by those who chosen celibacy is not convincing to me. Further to assume that there was celibacy because there was no evidence in Scripture that there was sex in marriage (a type of a-priori celibacy) is also unconvincing. The fact that Peter came out of the Jewish faith and was a Jewish Christian suggests that he was not the product of those who found sex to be incompatible with following God.

Further evidence that Peter, other apostles and the “brother/relatives” of Jesus had wives is found in 1 Corinthians 9:4-6 reads as follows:

Do we have no right to take along a believing wife as do the other apostles,
the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who
Have no right to refrain from working?

In short, Paul is using this to deal with the question in 1 Cor. 9:1: “Am I not an Apostle?” Apparently it was customary for the Apostles to take their wives with them while doing missionary work. Since celibates were proud of their calling, their self-control and their special status with God and the church, they have marshalled all sorts of attempts to explain away these verses including the fact that after the Apostles followed Jesus they embraced celibacy and then these poor women were then favored with celibate husbands who had foresworn sex to follow Christ. Like nuns, these wives followed their celibate husbands making sure to avoid all sex with them and to go and minister to women everywhere since men were precluded from ministering to women. Again, the assumption of the celibates, is that this is obviously what happened because there is nothing written down indicating that they may have engaged in sex and further that sex was for the procreation of children anyway .

Returning again to Peter, there is also the testimony by Clement of Alexandria who was Christian theologian and writer who lived circa 150-215 A.D. In *The Stromata*, Book VII, Chapter 11 (Volume II of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, pg. 541) he says:

They say, accordingly, that the blessed Peter, on seeing his wife led to death,
rejoiced on account of her call and conveyance home, and called very
encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, “Remember thou
the Lord.” Such was the marriage of the blessed and their perfect disposition
towards those dearest to them.

As mentioned previously, once the celibates came to rule the church, there is little mention or celebration of the death of Peter’s wife. The Catholic church does not celebrate the martyrdom of Peter’s wife preferring to believe that she died prior to the time that Peter entered into the ministry despite the clear reading of 1 Corinthians 9:4-6.

Just as Catholics have tried to eradicate Peter’s wife from history, some Catholics and non-Catholics have endeavored to add a deceased wife to Paul and classify him as a widower. Eusebius, who lived from 265 A.D. to 339 A.D. in Book 3, Chapter 30 of his *Ecclesiastical History* writes “...and Paul does not demur in a certain epistle to mention his own wife, whom he did not take about with him, in order to expedite his ministry the better.” I believe Eusebius was referring to the passage in 1 Corinthians 9:4-6 where Paul was saying : “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife.....” Others believe that Paul had been a member of the Sanhedrin because he had been educated by the great teacher Gamaliel and had cast his vote for the persecution of Christian Jews according to Acts 26:10. Because Paul was a Pharisee and possibly a member of the Sanhedrin it is believed that he may have been married at some

point in time because Pharisees, like most Jews, were married. Also, in most cases, members of the Sanhedrin were married. Other commentators believe that Paul classified himself as among the “unmarried” in his writings because the Koine Greek had no word for “widower” at the time that Paul was writing. For these and other reasons a number of well-known commentators including Ironside and Barclay have concluded that Paul was at one time married.

Another commentator, Ignatius, lived from 30 A.D.-70 A.D. and studied under St. John believed that Peter and Paul were both married. Ignatius said the following in his Epistle to the Philadelphians , Chapter IV:

For I pray that, being found worthy of God, I may be found at their feet in the kingdom, as at the feet of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; as of Joseph, and Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets; as of Peter and Paul, and the rest of the apostles, that were married men. For they entered into these marriages not for the sake of appetite, but out of regard for the propagation of mankind.

Regardless of the reason for marriage, Ignatius is a very early source of non-Scriptural information and Ignatius saw both Peter and Paul as being good examples of men who were fell into the class of married men. Further, Ignatius mentioned that there were other apostles who were married men which again is in accordance with 1 Corinthians 9:4-6.

Another Apostle who was married is believed to be St. Philip. Apparently there was both a St. Philip who was one of the twelve apostles and a Philip the deacon, who was one of the Seven (the first seven deacons chosen by the church). Sometimes, these two Philips have gotten confused. Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History at Book 3, Chapter 31(2-3) talks about the Apostle Philip and his daughters and that Philip was buried in Hierapolis with two of his aged virgin daughters and that another one of his daughters was buried in Ephesus. (See also Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 39 (9)).

Philip, the deacon and the evangelist, had four unmarried daughters. It was this Philip which had preached to the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. He finally settled in Caesarea (Acts 8:40). In Acts 21:8-9, Paul is returning to Jerusalem and stayed at the house of Philip and the following is written:

On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Apparently in this instance we are dealing with Philip the evangelist and one of the original seven deacons. Philip was one of the leaders of the church in Caesarea and it is obvious that Philip was married.

Accordingly it was not unusual for apostles, deacons and elders of the church to be married and further the requirement of Paul for elders, bishops and pastors was that the individual to have been married and to have raised children who were not rebellious and who were in the faith. Further the brothers/relatives of the Lord who went out and preached also took their wives which is a fact generally not discussed by most commentators, especially by Catholic commentators who would just as soon not get into debate regarding the brothers and sisters of Jesus and whether they were cousins or half-brothers and sisters.

Celibacy and its advocates would quickly to grow to predominate the church. This growth to a position to preeminence and control would be propelled by a number of factors which I will only summarize here. Some of the factors are obvious. First, advocates of celibacy began to believe that their position was one of first among equals. Jesus had been celibate and they, like Jesus, had chosen celibacy. Married clergy were at first permissible but, like Paul, the celibates concluded that being celibate was better and even spiritually superior. Clergy who could not show the virtue of self-control or have the gift of celibacy could marry due to their weakness. After all, it was better "to marry than to burn." So celibate clergy considered themselves to be a notch above those who were married.

Second, celibate clergy could focus full time on the things of the Lord instead of being distracted by the demands of a wife and a family. The lessons learned by being a husband and a father were not that highly esteemed by the celibates.

Third, celibates were ascetics. They put down the flesh unlike married clergy who in effect gave into the lusts of the flesh and had to satisfy those lusts during Godly marriage.

Fourth, not having children, was a way to make sure that the priesthood was not inherited through the family and that church property and position not be confused with personal property and position. Also the cost of supporting a priest, especially one who had taken vows of celibacy and poverty, were much cheaper than supporting a married priest who had children.

Fifth, the destruction of Jerusalem and the eclipse of Jewish Christianity resulted in destruction of the concept of a married priesthood. The final eclipse of Jewish Christianity by Islam shut off any vestiges of married clergy except in the Eastern Church. The Eastern church still allowed priests to be married but cut off access of married priests from ascending to the hierarchy of the Church in the East by holding that you could have priests who were married but those who ascended to the level of bishop or above had to be celibates. Again this made clear to all that the married priesthood was inferior to the celibate priesthood.

Sixth, the moral contagion of the Roman Empire, encouraged many to rebel against the lax morals of the time and choose to embrace celibacy as opposed to the social immorality of the time.

Seventh, the philosophy of the time began to reward those who chose to be celibate. The Jewish view of the need to produce and the value of the family went into eclipse as the Jews were persecuted and Jerusalem destroyed. Instead, the philosophies of the time began to see the flesh as evil. Gnosticism saw secret knowledge as bringing salvation and that the flesh led to destruction. Manicheism and dualistic philosophies saw Good and Evil and Spirit and flesh as having no relationship. In short, the philosophies of the time saw the flesh as something to be controlled and as evil.

Eighth, during the first centuries there were two things which suggested that marriage might not be such a good idea. First there was an eschatology which embraced the imminent return of Christ. This is seen in Paul who said that those who had wives should be as they had none (1 Cor. 7:29) and those who owned businesses as those who did not own their businesses. Secondly, there was a very real expectation of persecution and perhaps going to death. It was not a time for romantic love and long future planning. Suffering was on the horizon.

All of these factors contributed to a quick growth of celibacy and a replacement of married clergy with single clergy. It would be the celibate clergy who would move ahead into positions of power. It would be the celibate clergy who would write the theology and who set the rules and write the histories. Step by step the married clergy would be marginalized in the Western Church and effectively eradicated. Those who remained married would need to emulate the celibate clergy. They would need to cease having sexual relationships with their wives after they were called into the ministry. Their wives would become chaste sisters. Eventually, the married priests (those who had married prior to ordination) would not be permitted to live in the same house with their wives.

At the same time as these developments were occurring, the Catholic Church developed the doctrines regarding the continuing virginity of Mary and other doctrines regarding Mary which will be discussed in a later article.

However, there was a price to be paid. Not every priest had been given the gift of celibacy, but to move ahead in ecclesiastical authority one had to take a vow of celibacy. Unfortunately, many desired to move ahead but did not have the gifting. Therefore you have a rise in sexual aberrance in the priesthood manifesting itself in adultery, the need for developing the confessional as opposed to hearing confession face to face, homosexuality and a host of implements put into place to assist those who were practicing in the priesthood but fell short in areas such as celibacy, chastity and continence.

Women became a temptation to those who were supposed to be celibate and a threat to their vows. They became the temptress, the Lilith, the Jezebel, the weaker vessel that tempted the men of God from keeping vows of celibacy which unfortunately many of them had taken to and not been called to. Married priests, would put aside their wives and force them into a religious celibacy. Although a wife had to consent to give up conjugal relations, it does not seem unlikely that those wives who were asked by their husbands do so, would refuse.

Women too took vows of poverty and chastity creating religious groups and orders which in many circumstances were preferable to their other alternatives. That being said, there was no doubt that women in the Catholic Church became second class citizens.

As negative as all of this sounds, there were many men and women who gave up sex, marriage and children for God as an act of obedience and worship and these great sacrifices I believe were well pleasing to God. To me the issue is not whether celibates should have been in the church and even even able to participate as priests and bishops. The issue is that the celibates, blocked the door for married priests and those who chose faithful marriage rather than celibacy. The celibates effectively blocked the door for much of the church from moving ahead and took a priesthood which was open to both to married and celibates and made it for celibates only. Along the way they built historical and theological arguments to buttress their position and to keep the door closed to those who were married.

Next, I will cover a short history of the rise of celibacy in the church. I have, at the end of this chapter, included a timeline showing how celibacy became the standard practice in the Western and Eastern Church. During the first couple of centuries most of the elders, priests and bishops were married. Thereafter, the celibates began to infiltrate and predominate. It was the celibates who wrote the theology and wrote the rules as well as the history of the church. Also I have included a few of the views of the Patristic Fathers on celibacy. The majority of these men did not have wives; however, a few did. Those who had wives, had to pledge to be continent after ordination in effect putting

themselves on a par with the celibates. We, the celibates, do not have sex and now you, the married, if you want to be admitted to the club may not have it either even if you are married.

At first there was a mixture of celibates and non-celibates leading the church. Gradually the celibates took control. Married clergy were at first relegated to being second class clerics. Next candidates for the ministry were required to embrace celibacy before ordination. After that those priests, elders and bishops who were married were expected to abstain from sex prior to conducting mass. Next, married clergy were required to be as though they were celibate by not having sex after ordination. To make this easier, they next were required to put away their wives into separate dwellings. Finally, married clergy were absolutely prohibited.

This author should not be construed as despising celibacy or disrespecting those who made the sacrifice of continence in favor of Christ and the Church. However, in my opinion, a grave evil was done by excluding married men from the priesthood (in the West) and from being bishops or above in the East. I believe that both the Church theologians have been overzealous and have skewed history to justify their beliefs and practices.

I believe that the Western and Eastern Church have fallen into a legalistic trap which has done great damage to the cause of Christ by their exclusion of married clergy at all levels on a par with those who are celibate. The practices of asceticism and celibacy have resulted in a Pharisaical pride. I believe that the ascetics and celibates have become like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12 who prayed:

God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I possess.”

Instead, the celibates might pray:

God, I thank You that I am not like other men—those who are fleshly and have sexual relations with their wives and have not taken a vow of chastity and celibacy. I fast twice a week, stay away from women and give tithes of all I possess.

In short those who are married are like the publicans and the celibates and the ascetics look down their noses at them being certain that the sacrifices of married priests, including the saying of mass, would not be accepted by God.

These are hard words. Also Jesus made reference to the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4-9 which says:

For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all of their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces and to be called “Rabbi, Rabbi.” But you do not be called “Rabbi”; for one is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth, your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

A similar verse is found in Matthew 23:13-14 which says:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the Kingdom of heaven, against men; for neither go in yourselves nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.

The ascetics and celibates in the church laid a heavy burden upon men and women. They basically took the gift of celibacy and then stood in the doorway of the priesthood and demanded that any who would pass through that door would have to shoulder that heavy burden. Perhaps the burden was not that heavy to those called to celibacy but it was to those who were not so called. Further, the celibates then said that anyone could have that gift if they just called out to God. To me this is analogous to a faith preacher claiming that a person who is not healed has only themselves to blame because they did not have faith enough.

The laying of these burdens has resulted in people not entering the ministry, women being viewed as evil, temptresses and Jezebels, innumerable wives and children have been injured, and adultery, abortion and homosexuality has plagued the church.

TIMELINE
THE RISE OF CELIBACY IN THE CHURCH

62-64 A.D.--Death of Paul.

70 A.D.—Destruction of Jerusalem.

185 A.D.—Death of Tatian. Tatian became a Christian in Rome and opened a school. Eusebius claims that Tatian founded a Christian Sect called Encratites (“Self-Controlled”). This gnostic sect abstained from eating animal food, they only drank water and prior to being baptized they agreed to be celibate. Tatian believed that marriage, women and sex were of the devil. They rejected the writings of Paul. The Roman Emperor Thodosius passed an edict sentencing the Encratites to death in 382 A.D.

300 A.D. (Date uncertain 300-309)—Council of Elvira. This was a small local church council held in Elvira, Spain consisting of 19 bishops and 24 priests. Canon 33 of that Council states that “Bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and all other clerics having position in the ministry are ordered to abstain completely from their wives and not have children.” Those who refused would be expelled from the clergy.

312 A.D.--Constantine wins battle at Milvian Bridge.

313 A.D.—Edict of Milan permits Christianity in Roman Empire.

314 A.D.—First Council of Aries. Canon 29 says:

Moreover, what is worthy, pure, and honest, we exhort our brothers (in the episcopate) to make sure that priests and deacons have no (sexual) relations with their wives, since they are serving the ministry every day. Whoever will act against this decision, will be deposed from the honor of the clergy.

325 A.D.--Council of Nicaea. At the Council of Nicaea, according to Socrates Scholasticus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, Chapter XI recounts that an effort was made to require bishops, presbyters, and deacons to have no conjugal intercourse with wives which they had wed before they took office. This motion was opposed by a celibate monk named Paphnutius who had lost an eye in the persecutions and who was a favorite of Constantine. Paphnutius said that such a decision would injure the Church by being too stringent and that all men could not bear the practice of rigid continence. Further he called intercourse of a man with a lawful wife to be chastity. He believed it appropriate to require those being ordained to be excluded from marriage but for those who were married prior to ordination, the marriage should be respected. Apparently the Council accepted his arguments and took no action allowing husbands who had wives prior to ordination to determine whether they should be continent or not.

330 A.D.—Constantine Moves to Byzantium (Constantinople).

352 A.D.—Council of Laodicea—Forbade the ordination of women (suggesting that some churches were ordaining women).

380 A.D. Theodosius I makes Christianity the State Religion of Rome.

381 A.D.—Council of Constantinople.

385-386 A.D.—Pope Siricius issues two Decretals. The *Directa Decretal* states that certain priests are married and have children and were justifying themselves that Levitical priests in the Old Testament had done this. Siricius says that Levitical priests had to be continent when serving in the Temple but that when Christ had come the old priesthood had been done away with and now priests had to be every ready to serve and had to be perpetually continent. In the second Decretal, *Cum in Unum*, Siricius dealt with Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus explaining that a person who was to be a priest had to be a husband of only one wife and would have not continued to have sexual relations with his wife after ordination. Further if a person had married a second time this demonstrated a person's inability to live the life of perpetual continence. Pope Siricius had previously left his wife in order to become pope.

390 A.D.—Local Council in Carthage, N.Africa. Canon 3 of this Council concludes that the Apostles had taught and that the bishops and priests were to abstain from "from conjugal intercourse with their wives, so that those who served at the altar may keep a perfect chastity." This would later become part of the Canon Law of the African Church in 419 when Augustine was the bishop of Hippo.

395 A.D.—Theodosius I splits Roman Empire into East and West.

431 A.D.—Church Council of Ephesus. At this council, Mary was declared to be "Theotokos" meaning Mother of God or Mother of Incarnate God. One faction wanted her to be called "Christokos" instead meaning Mother of Christ. Because Christ was truly God and truly man, the "Christokos" proposal was rejected. Those supporting the Christokos alternative later were called Nestorians.

440-461 A.D.—Pontificate of Leo I. Sometime during his Pontificate Leo wrote Letter XIV to Anastasius, Bishop of Thessalonica. Section V of that Letter demanded complete continence after ordination:

V. Continence is required even in sub-deacons. For although they who are not within the ranks of the clergy are free to take pleasure in the companionship of wedlock and the procreation of children, yet for the exhibiting of the purity of complete continence, even sub-deacons are not allowed carnal marriage: that both those that have, may be as though they had not, and those who have not, may remain single. But if in this order, which is the fourth from the Head, this is worthy to be observed, how much more is it to be kept in the first, or second, or third, lest anyone be reckoned fit for either the deacon's duties or the presbyter's honourable position, or the bishop's pre-eminence, who is discovered not yet to have bridled his uxorious desires.

In a letter from Leo to Bishop Rusticus of Narbone, Leo writes about the "law of continence":

The law of continence is the same for the ministers of the altar, for the bishops and the priests; when they were (still) lay people or lectors, they could freely take a wife and bear children. But once they have reached the ranks mentioned above, what was permitted is no longer so.

451 A.D.—Council of Chalcedon.

546 A.D.—Justinian Code. Justinian's Code provided that members of the priesthood could have living with them only daughters or sisters or wives who had been lawfully married to their husbands prior to marriage which had been allowed by Theodosius I. In addition in a Novel 123, c.14, the Code provides

that a person cannot be ordained a deacon unless he has no wife and promises that he can live chastely after ordination without a legal wife. If after ordination, a presbyter, deacon or sub-deacon married they are expelled from the clergy. In c.1, a bishop must neither have a wife or children. If a candidate formerly had a wife, she must be “the only one, the first one, not a widow nor separated from her husband, nor one with whom marriage was prohibited by the laws or the sacred canons...”

565 A.D.—Death of Emperor Justinian I—Justinian ordered that children born of priests, deacons and sub-deacons who had children with women who they were not permitted to cohabit with would be considered to be illegitimate. Further he prohibited the ordination of any bishop who had children or grandchildren.

567 A.D.—Second Council of Tours—Any clergy found having sexual relations with his wife would be reduced to being a layman and would be excommunicated for a year.

590-604—Pontificate of Gregory the Great—Gregory believed that all sexual desire was sinful.

630 A.D.—Mohammed conquers Mecca.

649 A.D.—Lateran Council of 649—Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is declared to be “ever-virgin” (“Aeiparthenos”) meaning that the Virgin Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus and did not have any children after she had Jesus. Pope Martin I said the following regarding Mary: “The blessed ever-virginal and immaculate Mary conceived, without seed, by the Holy Spirit, and without loss of integrity brought him forth, and after his birth preserved her virginity inviolate.”

692 A.D.—Council of Constantinople (Quinisext Council; aka Trullo Council; aka Penthekte Council). This Council was held under Emperor Justinian II and was attended by 215 bishops from the Eastern Roman Empire. The Council mandated that bishops of the Eastern Orthodox Church not be married. However the Eastern Church took a different approach than the West for those who were priests or had lesser orders. The differences in the approach of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church are illustrated by Canon 13 which permitted those at the level of priest to have relations with their legal wives. Canon XIII says:

Since we know it to be handed down as a rule of the Roman Church that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or presbyterate should promise no longer to cohabit with their wives, we, preserving the ancient rule and apostolic perfection and order, will that the lawful marriages of men who are in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives nor depriving them of their mutual intercourse at a convenient time. Wherefore, if anyone shall have been found worthy to be ordained subdeacon, or deacon, or presbyter, he is by no means to be prohibited from admittance to such a rank, even if he shall live with a lawful wife. Nor shall it be demanded of him at the time of his ordination that he promise to abstain from lawful intercourse with his wife; lest we should affect injurious marriage constituted by God and blessed by his presence....

800 A.D.—Charlemagne is crowned by Pope Leo III.

836 A.D.—Council of Aix-la-Chapelle—Discussed issues of clerics who did not practice celibacy. St. Ulrich argued that the problems of celibacy could be cured by allowing clerics to marry.

888 A.D.—Councils of Metz and Mainz. These two Councils prohibited living together with wives even though there were vows of continence by the parties to the marriage.

1074 A.D.—Pope Gregory VII requires those who desire ordination to pledge celibacy.

1075 A.D.—Pope Gregory VII forbids married priests or those who had concubines from saying Mass.

1076 A.D.—Synod of Winchester. Archbishop Lanfranc prohibits clerics from marrying and held that only unmarried candidates who were celibate could be ordained. He did not, however, require married priests to leave their wives.

1089 A.D.—Synod of Melfi—Pope Urban II stated at this Council, consisting of seventy bishops and twelve abbots, that secular princes could enslave the wives of clerics and abandon the children of clerics.

1096 A.D.—First Crusade Begins.

1099 A.D.—Crusaders conquer Jerusalem.

1108 A.D.—Council in London. Anselm says that for a priest to say mass he must first need to evict his wife and forego contact with her.

1123-1153—First Lateran Council. This Council mandated that those who had taken order were not to marry and all those who were married were to renounce their wives.

1123 A.D.—First Lateran Council—mandated celibacy for all clergy in the West.

1139 A.D.—Second Lateran Council—Canon 6 mandated that those who contracted marriage or have concubines be removed from their office. Canon 7 says: "...we decree that bishops, priests, deacons, canons, regular, monks and professed clerics who, transgressing the holy precept, have dared to contract marriage, shall be separated."

1187 A.D.—Saladin captures Jerusalem.

1453 A.D.—Mahomet II captures Byzantium. The Eastern Roman Empire falls.

1492 A.D.—Columbus sails for the New World.

1517 A.D.—Martin Luther Posts 95 Theses on Wittenberg Church door. Various leaders of the Reformation criticized the views of the Catholic Church on celibacy for clerics. In 1522, Zwingli got married. Luther got married in 1525 and John Calvin in 1539. In 1533, Thomas Cranmer, who was married, was made Archbishop of Canterbury.

1545 A.D.-1563 A. D.—Council of Trent. Marriage of any clergy after ordination was determined to be invalid. The Council believed that if anyone wanted to have the gift of chastity they only needed to ask God for it. Further God would not allow them to be tempted beyond what they were able to bear. The Council of Trent believed that celibacy was superior to marriage.

1869 A.D.—First Vatican Council.

1917 A.D.—1917 Code of Canon Law Published. This was known as Codex Juris Canonici. It was also known as the Pio-Benedictine Code.

1962-1965 A.D.—Second Vatican Council. The Council upheld the historic position of the Catholic Church on celibacy. In 1965 Pope Paul VI issues his Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests called *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. In Section 16 of that decree he writes:

(Celibacy is to be embraced and esteemed as a gift). Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, commended by Christ the Lord and through the course of time as well as in our own days freely accepted and observed in a praiseworthy manner by many of the faithful, is held by the Church to be of great value in a special manner for the priestly life.

Paul VI in the same document states that priests show themselves as “chaste virgins for Christ” and help to illustrate the mystery of faithfulness of the Bride of Christ to Christ. Also, Paul VI says that priests should pray for fidelity and continence and that God will not “deny those who seek it.”

1967—Pope Paul VI issues *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. This statement on celibacy by the Pope affirms the historic position of the Catholic Church on Celibacy.

1983 A.D.—The 1983 Code of Canon Law Published. This Code replaced the 1917 Code. The current Canon relating to celibacy for clerics is found in Book I, Part I, Title III, Chapter III relating to “The Obligations and Rights of Clerics”. Canon 277, Section 1 says:

Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are bound to celibacy which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and are able to dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and humanity.

PATRISTIC FATHERS
SELECTED VIEWS OF THE PATRISTIC FATHERS ON CELIBACY

Clement of Rome (died in First Century)—

The womb of a holy virgin carried our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and the body which our Lord wore, and in which He carried on the conflict in this world, He put on from a holy virgin. From this, therefore, understand the greatness and dignity of virginity. (*First Epistle on Virginity*, Chapter 6).

Ignatius of Antioch (d. circa 108 A.D.)—

“if anyone is able to remain continent, to the honor of the Flesh of the Lord, let him persistently avoid boasting.”

Justin Martyr (d. 165 A.D.)—

“And many, both men and women, who have been Christ’s disciples from childhood, have preserved their purity at the age of sixty and seventy years; and I am proud that I could produce such from every race of men and women.” (*Apology 1*, n.15)

Tertullian (d. 220 A.D.)—Tertullian was married to a Christian wife. Tertullian did not believe that women should preach or teach in the church, but they could prophesy.

Thou therefore that art a Christian , do not imitate such women; but thou wouldst be a faithful women, please thy husband only. And when thou walkest in the street, cover thy head with a robe, that by reason of thy veil thy great beauty may be hidden. And adorn not thy natural face; but walk with downcast looks, being veiled. (*Didascalica Apostolorum*, Chapt. III).

Do you not realize that Eve is you? The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil’s gateway, you desecrated that fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child’s play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die! (*De Cultu Feminarum*)

Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 A.D.)—

But chastity maintains the first rank in virgins, the second in those who are continent, the third in the case of wedlock. Yet in all it is glorious, with all its degrees. For even to maintain the marriage-faith is a matter of praise in the midst of so many bodily strifes; and to have determined on a limit in marriage defined by continency is more virtuous still, because herein even lawful things are refused. Assuredly to have guarded one’s purity from the womb, and to have kept oneself an infant even to old age throughout the whole of life, is certainly the part of an admirable virtue; only that if never to have known the body’s seductive capacities is the

greater blessedness, to have overcome them when once known is the greater virtue; yet still in such a sort that virtue comes of God's gift, although it manifests itself to men in their members. (*Of the Discipline and Advantage of Chastity*, 4).

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 A.D.)—

“It is fitting, according to Scripture, that a bishop be the husband of an only wife. But this being understood, it behoves consecrated men, and those who are at the service of God’s cult, to abstain thereafter from conjugal intercourse with their wives. (*Evangelica* I, (3 15-325).

Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386)—

While you maintain perfect chastity do not hold vain counsel against those who walk a humbler path in matrimony. Let those who are married and use their marriage properly be of good cheer who enter marriage lawfully and not out of wantonness... who recognize periods of continence so that they may give themselves to prayer... who have embarked upon the matrimonial estate for the procreation of children, not for the sake of indulgence. (*Catechetical Lectures*)

Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389)—

We do not dishonor marriage because we give a higher honour to virginity. I will imitate Christ, the pure Groomsman and Bridegroom, as He both wrought a miracle at a wedding and honors wedlock at His Presence.

Interestingly Gregory was converted to Christianity by his wife Nona and had three children by her all who became saints of the church. One of the sons of Nona and Gegory Nazianzen was Gregory the Theologian who wrote this about his mother: “My mother was a worthy companion for such a man [as my father] and her qualities were as great as his. She came from a pious family, but was even more pious than they. Though in her body she was but a woman, in her spirit she was above all men... Her mouth knew nothing but the truth, but in her modesty she was silent about those deeds which brought her glory. She was guided by the fear of God.”

Gregory of Nyssa (d. circa 395)—

Gregory of Nyssa wrote a treatise on virginity entitled “*De Vergenite*”. In Chapter 3 of his His work he deals with the pains of marriage. In Chapter 4 he concludes that all vices are found in marriage. In Chapter 12, he propounds that the rejection of marriage is the first step back toward an Edenic state. In Chapter 20 he concludes that one can not pursue a happy married life and the spiritual relationship with God at the same time. Gregory had been married before he renounced marriage.

Ambrose (d. 397)—

But you know that the ministerial office must be kept pure and unspotted, and must not be defiled by conjugal intercourse; you know this, I say, who have received the gift of the sacred

ministry, with pure bodies, and unspoiled modesty, and without ever having enjoyed conjugal intercourse. (*Duties of the Clergy*, Bk. I, Ch. 50, par 258).

Epiphanius (d. 403)—

“ Since the Incarnation of Christ, the holy Word of God does not admit to the priesthood monogamists who, after the death of their wives, have contracted a second marriage, because of the exceptional honor of the priesthood. And it is observed by the Holy Church of God with great exactitude and without fail. But the man who continues to live with his wife and to generate children is not admitted by the Church as a deacon, priest, or bishop, even if he is the husband of an only wife... (GCS 31, 367; see Cochini, 229)”.

Jerome (d. 420 A.D.)—

Jerome wrote a treatise called “The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary.” The purpose of the treatise was to oppose the views of Helvidius, who wrote a lost work some time before 383 which was opposed to the perpetual virginity of Mary and which took the position that the “brothers” and “sisters” of Christ were exactly that as opposed to half-brothers and sisters or cousins.

But we might say regarding Peter, that he had a mother-in-law when he believed, And no longer had a wife. (*Against Jovianus*, Book 1, Par. 26).

But where there is something good and something better, the reward is not in both cases the same, and where the reward is not one and the same, there of course the gifts are different. The difference, then, between marriage and virginity is as great as that between not sinning and doing well; nay rather, to speak less harshly, as great as between good and better. (*Against Jovianus*, Book 1.)

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 A.D.)—

“...we also admonished and warned the virgins of Christ that they must not because of the superiority of the more perfect gift which they have received from on high, despise, by comparison with themselves, the fathers and mothers of the people of God; and because of that, because by divine law continence is preferred to matrimony, and holy virginity to wedlock.” (*De Sancta Virginitate*)

