

TIMELINE

THE RISE OF CELIBACY IN THE CHURCH

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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, 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 because 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 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 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, then 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 orders 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.