

# History Of Celibacy In The Catholic Church

## THE HISTORY OF CELIBACY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

According to A.W. Richard Sipe, the concept that the offerers of a sacrifice should remain untainted by sexual encounters goes back to ancient civilizations. He provides such examples as the yellow-capped Lamas of Tibet, the ascetic hermits of Egypt, the virgin priestesses of Thebes, the Astorte cult of Syria, the primitive worshipers of Dodona, the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome, and the temple priests of the Aztecs. (page 35)

David Rice presents a comprehensive historical look at celibacy in his book about resigned priests entitled, *Shattered Vows*. Rice credits Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx in *The Church with a Human Face* with asserting that clerical celibacy originated in "a partly pagan notion of ritual purity," as Sipe indicates with the aforementioned examples. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, a proposal to require celibacy for all priests was defeated and at the Council of Trullo in 692, marriage rights for priests were reasserted. (Rice page 161.)

Schillebeeckx says that, first in the fourth century came a law that forbade a married priest from having sexual intercourse the night before celebrating the Eucharist. However, when the Western Church began celebrating a daily mass, abstinence became a permanent factor for married priests.

"At the origin of the law of abstinence, and later the law of celibacy," said Schillebeeckx, "we find an antiquated anthropology and ancient view of sexuality." (ibid) Rice follows with a quotation from St. Jerome which expressed the views of both pagans and Christians at the time that, "All sexual intercourse is impure." (ibid)

Because the resulting implication of a priest living with his wife like a brother led many priests into "deplorable situations," in 1139, the Second Lateran Council forbade the marriage of priests altogether and declared all existing marriages involving priests null and void. (ibid)

"One does not approach the altar and consecrated vessels with soiled hands," had been the pagan view and then became the cornerstone for compulsory Christian celibacy. (ibid) Other not-necessarily concurrent or chronological developments also contributed to the establishment of the celibacy requirement for catholic priests. More bishops began to be chosen from the ranks of monks who had already taken monastic vows of chastity. Another factor was an economic development as the Church began

**History of celibacy in the Catholic Church** is a fascinating journey that spans over a millennium, intertwining religious beliefs, socio-political factors, and theological developments. Celibacy, the commitment to abstain from marriage and sexual relations, has played a crucial role in shaping the identity of the Catholic clergy. This article will explore the roots of celibacy within the church, its evolution through different historical periods, and its implications for the clergy and the faithful.

## Early Christianity and the Roots of Celibacy

The practice of celibacy has its origins in the early Christian community, where many followers sought to emulate the life of Jesus Christ, who remained unmarried and devoted

himself to his ministry. The New Testament reflects this sentiment:

- In Matthew 19:12, Jesus speaks about those who choose to remain celibate for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Saint Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, discusses the merits of remaining single, emphasizing that an unmarried person can focus on serving God without the distractions of family life.

These early scriptural references laid the groundwork for the value placed on celibacy within the church.

## **The Development of Celibacy in the Early Church**

During the first few centuries of Christianity, the concept of celibacy began to take shape more formally. As the church grew and became more organized, various church leaders and councils began to advocate for celibate clergy.

### **The Role of Church Councils**

Several key councils contributed to the establishment of celibacy as a norm for clergy:

1. Council of Elvira (c. 306): This council in Spain issued one of the earliest canons that prohibited clergy from marrying.
2. Council of Carthage (c. 390): This council further enforced the idea of celibacy among clergy, leading to the establishment of stricter rules regarding the conduct of priests.

These early regulations were motivated by a desire for purity and the belief that celibacy allowed for a deeper spiritual commitment.

## **Celibacy Becomes Mandatory**

By the 11th century, the Catholic Church began to impose mandatory celibacy for all priests in the Western Church. This shift was influenced by a combination of theological, societal, and political factors.

### **The Gregorian Reform Movement**

One of the most significant influences on the enforcement of celibacy was the Gregorian Reform, initiated by Pope Gregory VII in the late 11th century. The reform movement aimed

to address issues of clerical corruption and the influence of secular leaders over the church. Key elements included:

- Establishing ecclesiastical independence from secular authorities.
- Promoting moral integrity among clergy, where celibacy was seen as essential for a life dedicated to God and the church.
- Combating simony, or the buying and selling of church offices, which was often tied to familial connections.

These reforms culminated in the First Lateran Council of 1123, which officially decreed that all priests must remain celibate.

## **Celibacy in the Middle Ages**

The 12th to the 15th centuries marked a period of solidification for celibacy within the Catholic Church. During this time, the church's authority grew, and celibacy became a symbol of the clergy's commitment to spiritual life.

## **Impact on Clergy and Society**

Celibacy had profound implications, both for the clergy and for society:

- Clerical Identity: Celibacy became a defining characteristic of the priesthood, reinforcing the idea that priests were to be spiritual leaders rather than family heads.
- Social Dynamics: The separation of clergy from familial responsibilities allowed for greater mobility and involvement in church affairs, but it also led to tensions, as many priests faced challenges related to loneliness and emotional isolation.

## **The Reformation and Beyond**

The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century brought significant scrutiny to the practice of celibacy. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin argued against the requirement, asserting that it was not biblically mandated. They believed that marriage could be a holy state and that clergy should not be barred from it.

## **Responses from the Catholic Church**

In response to the Reformation, the Catholic Church reaffirmed its commitment to celibacy during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). This council emphasized:

- Theological Justifications: The Church defended celibacy as a way for priests to imitate Christ and devote themselves entirely to their pastoral duties.
- Discipline and Reform: The council sought to improve the education and moral integrity of

the clergy, reinforcing the idea that celibacy was integral to spiritual leadership.

## Modern Perspectives on Celibacy

In recent decades, the topic of celibacy in the Catholic Church has come under renewed scrutiny. Various factors contribute to the ongoing debate:

### Challenges and Critiques

- Clerical Abuse Scandals: The sexual abuse scandals that have emerged over the years have led many to question the celibacy requirement. Critics argue that mandatory celibacy may contribute to unhealthy psychological outcomes for some clergy.
- Calls for Reform: Some theologians and laypeople advocate for re-evaluating the celibacy vow, suggesting that married priests could lead to a more relatable and pastoral approach to ministry.

### The Church's Position Today

Despite the debates, the Catholic Church maintains its stance on celibacy for the Latin Rite clergy. However, there have been exceptions, such as the ordination of married Anglican clergy who convert to Catholicism. This reflects a nuanced approach to the celibacy requirement, suggesting that the church is open to dialogue and potential reform.

## Conclusion

The **history of celibacy in the Catholic Church** is a complex tapestry woven through centuries of theological, social, and political threads. From its early roots in the teachings of Christ and the apostles to its mandatory status in the modern era, celibacy has shaped the identity of the clergy and the church itself. As society continues to evolve, the Catholic Church faces new challenges and opportunities in its understanding and application of this ancient practice. The conversation surrounding celibacy is likely to continue, presenting an ongoing reflection of faith, commitment, and the changing dynamics of church life.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the historical origin of celibacy in the Catholic Church?

The tradition of celibacy in the Catholic Church dates back to the early centuries of Christianity, where it was seen as a way to emulate Christ and dedicate oneself fully to God.

The Council of Elvira in 306 AD is often cited as one of the first formal recognitions of clerical celibacy.

## **When did celibacy become a mandatory requirement for priests in the Catholic Church?**

Celibacy became a mandatory requirement for Latin rite priests at the First Lateran Council in 1123 and was reaffirmed at the Second Lateran Council in 1139.

## **What were the main reasons for the enforcement of celibacy among clergy?**

The primary reasons include the desire for priests to fully devote themselves to their spiritual duties, the belief that celibacy allows for greater piety, and the avoidance of potential conflicts of interest regarding church property and inheritance.

## **How did the Eastern Catholic Churches differ regarding clerical celibacy?**

Eastern Catholic Churches generally allow married men to be ordained as priests, although bishops are typically chosen from celibate clergy. This reflects different theological and cultural traditions compared to the Latin rites.

## **What role has celibacy played in the scandals within the Catholic Church?**

Celibacy has been a point of contention in discussions about clergy sexual abuse scandals, with critics arguing that enforced celibacy may contribute to unhealthy behaviors, while defenders claim that the issues are rooted in individual failures rather than the vow itself.

## **How has the perception of celibacy evolved in modern times?**

In contemporary discussions, the perception of celibacy is mixed; some view it as an outdated practice that may deter potential priests, while others see it as a vital aspect of spiritual commitment and identity within the Church.

## **What historical figures have influenced the discourse on celibacy?**

Figures such as Pope Gregory VII, who enforced clerical celibacy in the 11th century, and St. Paul, who advocated for celibacy in his letters, have significantly shaped the discourse on celibacy in the Church.

## **Are there any movements within the Church advocating for the option of married priests?**

Yes, there are movements within the Church advocating for the ordination of married men, especially in response to the shortage of priests in many regions, particularly in the

Western Church.

## **What impact has celibacy had on the recruitment of new priests?**

The requirement of celibacy has been cited as a significant factor in the declining number of individuals pursuing the priesthood, leading to ongoing debates about the future of clerical celibacy.

## **How do other religious traditions view celibacy compared to the Catholic Church?**

Other religious traditions, such as Buddhism and certain sects of Hinduism, also practice celibacy, often viewing it as a means to achieve spiritual purity. However, the specifics and cultural implications of celibacy can vary widely across different faiths.

Find other PDF article:

<https://soc.up.edu.ph/24-mark/pdf?trackid=spV90-0449&title=fundamentals-of-biostatistics-bernard-rosner-solution-manual.pdf>

## **History Of Celibacy In The Catholic Church**

### **Check or delete your Chrome browsing history**

Your History lists the pages you've visited on Chrome in the last 90 days. It doesn't store: If you're signed in to Chrome and sync your history, then your History also shows pages you've visited ...

### **Delete your activity - Computer - Google Account Help**

Delete your activity automatically You can automatically delete some of the activity in your Google Account. On your computer, go to your Google Account. At the left, click Data & privacy. ...

### **Access & control activity in your account - Google Help**

Under "History settings," click My Activity. To access your activity: Browse your activity, organized by day and time. To find specific activity, at the top, use the search bar and filters. Manage ...

history herstory -

From Middle English, from Old French estoire, estorie ("chronicle, history, story") (French histoire), from Latin historia, from Ancient Greek ἱστορία (historía, "learning through research, narration ...

### *Find your Google purchase history - Google Pay Help*

Find your Google purchase history You can get a list of your charges and transactions for Google purchases and subscriptions. Find transactions for Google products Go to ...

### *Manage your Google Maps Timeline*

Timeline helps you go back in time and remember where you've been by automatically saving your visits and routes to your Google Maps Timeline on each of your signed-in devices. You ...

## **View or delete your YouTube search history - Google Help**

You can manage your search history by deleting individual searches or clearing or pausing search history. Learn more about your data in YouTube and managing your YouTube activity.

### *Update billing and payments for YouTube TV*

If you signed up for YouTube TV through a mobile carrier or internet provider, you'll be billed by them. Learn more about how integrated billing works. To review your payment history, follow ...

## **Find & manage your recent chats in Gemini Apps**

On your computer, go to [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com). If your chats are hidden, at the top, click Menu . On the side panel, find your pinned and recent chats.

edge

History WebAssistDatabase db Navicat ...

## **Check or delete your Chrome browsing history**

Your History lists the pages you've visited on Chrome in the last 90 days. It doesn't store: If you're signed in to Chrome and sync your history, then your History also shows pages you've visited ...

## **Delete your activity - Computer - Google Account Help**

Delete your activity automatically You can automatically delete some of the activity in your Google Account. On your computer, go to your Google Account. At the left, click Data & privacy. ...

### *Access & control activity in your account - Google Help*

Under "History settings," click My Activity. To access your activity: Browse your activity, organized by day and time. To find specific activity, at the top, use the search bar and filters. Manage ...

history herstory -

From Middle English, from Old French estoire, estorie ("chronicle, history, story") (French histoire), from Latin historia, from Ancient Greek ἱστορία (historía, "learning through research, narration ...

## **Find your Google purchase history - Google Pay Help**

Find your Google purchase history You can get a list of your charges and transactions for Google purchases and subscriptions. Find transactions for Google products Go to ...

## **Manage your Google Maps Timeline**

Timeline helps you go back in time and remember where you've been by automatically saving your visits and routes to your Google Maps Timeline on each of your signed-in devices. You ...

## **View or delete your YouTube search history - Google Help**

You can manage your search history by deleting individual searches or clearing or pausing search history. Learn more about your data in YouTube and managing your YouTube activity.

### *Update billing and payments for YouTube TV*

If you signed up for YouTube TV through a mobile carrier or internet provider, you'll be billed by them. Learn more about how integrated billing works. To review your payment history, follow ...

## **Find & manage your recent chats in Gemini Apps**

On your computer, go to [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com). If your chats are hidden, at the top, click Menu . On the side panel, find your pinned and recent chats.

*edge* ...

History WebAssistDatabase db Navicat ...

Explore the history of celibacy in the Catholic Church

[Back to Home](#)