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Discontinuation of Celibacy Implementation Among Catholic Priests

Today, Christianity is known as the largest religion and is practiced among more than two billion people around the world (Oxtoby et al. 153). Christianity is broken down into thousands of distinct denominational groups; the most popular denomination being Catholicism. With the catholic church having a prominent role in the belief of Christianity, many topics relating to Catholicism have come into question over recent years. There is much controversy between the historical catholic church and the growth of modernization within society. This controversy is especially highlighted when discussing celibacy within the catholic priesthood and how this ideal is prohibiting the catholic church from growing in a modern way. Celibacy is known around the world as the act of refraining from sexual relations as well as marriage. It is also most often used when referring to catholic priests. Therefore, when describing the catholic priesthood, many refer to the idea of celibacy as being “unnatural and a harmful frustration of instincts” (Taylor 484). Celibacy is often deemed in a negative sense as it is a term that originated during the historical period of the Roman Catholic Church and has not been altered to align with the changing society. Thus, due to the modernization experienced by the catholic church as a result of changing religious culture, the catholic church should discontinue the implementation of celibacy among priests.

With the world becoming more and more modern, the discontinuation of the celibacy requirement would allow for a larger candidate pool when choosing a priest. The required oath of

celibacy among catholic priests deters many well-qualified potential candidates thus, contributing to the priest shortage experienced today. When challenging “young men to a religious life that is demanding, countercultural, sacrificial, and loyal to the Holy Father,” it is often near impossible to find valid candidates (5 Arguments Against Priestly Celibacy). By encouraging catholic priests to marry, the catholic church would gain an abundance of rightfully suited candidates for priesthood. Furthermore, with the world becoming increasingly modern, the strive to marry and/or partake in sexual relations with one of the opposite sex is also becoming more prominent in society. Thus, by allowing catholic priests to participate in such activities, and not take an oath of celibacy, more young men will likely take an interest in the catholic priesthood. Likewise, the idea that the catholic church “links celibacy with ministry” and therefore, “insists on the inseparability of celibacy and priestly ministry” discourages potential men from becoming priests in fear of having to become celibate; an unmodern idea that most men do not support (Dorr 138). Furthermore, many men choose to become priests before beginning their college studies or likewise, at an early time in their lives. One of the major downfalls to priesthood, in the eyes of many young men, is becoming celibate. Men tend to believe that once the oath of celibacy is taken, the “celibate becomes ‘dried up’, no longer open, trusting, sensitive, and vulnerable” (Dorr 140). At a young age, most men are looking to find their partner and possibly start a family. These words that one relates to becoming celibate do not pave the way for a long, healthy life. Therefore, most men choose not to become priests solely on the fact that most disagree with becoming celibate. Thus, by discontinuing the implementation of celibacy among catholic priests, many more men would choose this as a profession and the pool for well-qualified priests would increase.

With society becoming more modern each day, the increase in desire to start a family and/or be relatable to families becomes more prominent as well. A priest allowed to marry would be more relatable to families and their difficult situations oppose to a priest that was celibate. A married priest, especially one with a family, could relate to marriage and family problems and provide knowledge through his own experience. In general, it is often difficult for members of society to take advice from one who has not experienced their same hardship. This is also relatable when discussing catholic celibate priests and marriage. Marriage, one of the seven sacraments in Catholicism, is a topic that can cause much hardship and strain on the persons involved. More often than not, these hardships lead to divorce; an action not accepted by the catholic church. Although many couples do attend marriage counseling led by a priest before a legal divorce, it would be beneficial if the priest was not celibate and could be more relatable to the topic through prior experience. As the world becomes more modern and society starts to slip away from historical references, many people side with the view that “celibacy is based on a devaluation of marriage and the vocation to family life” (Manuel 280). Many view celibacy and the catholic priesthood as one choice and marriage as another. This should not be the case. Due to an increasingly modern society, a man should be able to be a catholic priest as well as engage in marriage and/or a family life if he chooses. By being in a committed marriage, a catholic priest could potentially prepare a sermon relating to the hardships of marriage, yet dwell on the importance to learn from these struggles by providing examples of real life experiences. Likewise, a priest would be able to provide accurate counseling to married couples as well as engage in activities with other families. This would add to the characteristics of a catholic priest in a positive way. If the oath of celibacy among catholic priests was not required, there would be a greater so-called “return rate” when it came to priests. In the United States, since 1960, more

than two thousand catholic priests have left the catholic ministry to pursue a marriage and further a family life (Sipe 9). These facts further exemplify the need catholic priests have to commit to a marriage. By allowing catholic priests to marry by discontinuing the implementation of celibacy, the denomination of Catholicism as a whole would benefit. Less priests would leave the field to pursue a marriage since having a marriage and being a priest could simultaneous. Furthermore, with the world becoming more and more modern, many people today believe “the usual way of doing so [channeling love] is through love of a partner and family” (Dorr 139). This further exemplifies the idea that priests need to channel their love not only in the catholic church, but through the love of a significant other and family as well. By portraying their love in this way, priests are able to provide guidance to all members of the congregation through experience in the marriage and family departments.

Furthermore, the act of being celibate as a male priest is deemed unnatural in the eyes of many. As society becomes more modern, fewer people can relate to celibacy because it is viewed as a historical and ancient idea. With society constantly growing and maturing, young men, more often than not, feel the urge to partake in sexual activity especially during their years as a young adult. This realization is due to modernization and the fact that our society is leaning more towards the ideal that sexual relations before marriage are modern and therefore, widely accepted. Also, the sacrifices made and the strain celibacy puts on one’s life can become unbearable for most catholic priests. Similarly, authors and researchers who do not agree with the oath of celibacy believe “celibacy makes one less than fully human” (Dorr 140). By stripping one’s right to marry and engage in sexual relations, celibacy alters humans and makes them property of the catholic church. Taking an oath of celibacy requires a priest to be accustomed to a permanent abstinence from genital activity. Thus, taking an oath of celibacy is viewed as an

older, ancient idea that should not be required for catholic priests today as it is viewed as unnatural.

Moreover, due to modernization, priests have become more and more inept to be associated with the stereotype relating to pedophilia. By allowing celibacy among catholic priests to be optional, this stereotype can begin to subside. Although the majority of people believe this is such as it is stated, a stereotype, many others greatly associate pedophilia with catholic priests. Although this is not a true statement regarding all priests, “a number of priests use their power and position to seduce women, children, and men who are led to expect from their priest the care of a loving father” (Sipe 10). By not requiring a priest to be celibate, one could potentially reduce the number of pedophilic catholic priests, or at the very least put a stop to the worldly rumors. In fact, most people believe “celibacy is at the root of the sexual abuse crisis” (Lewis). Thus, by not requiring catholic priests to be celibate, the stereotype of pedophilic catholic priests could be resolved as well as the .3 percent of pedophiles among the world’s catholic clergy (Five Arguments Against Priestly Celibacy).

With the catholic church growing in modernization every day, the ideals implemented during the founding years of this denomination will continue to come into question. Celibacy is a term that has been deemed controversial within the catholic church and will remain a disputable topic until its implementation is discontinued. With the growth of new ideas and new improvements to the catholic church, the implementation of celibacy among catholic priests should be discontinued. As the catholic church becomes more modern, ideas such as celibacy will become less influential and thus, should be viewed as an option not a requirement. In the eyes of many devote Catholics, “celibacy has been part of a tradition of the Church, part of a discipline of the Church, but it’s something that in theory could change” (Lewis).

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