

On Marriage and Celibacy

Priests and deacons were always allowed to enter marriage before ordination. Since some time in the first millennium, Orthodox bishops were only chosen from the monastic rank. Subsequently appropriate Canons were changed from earlier ones which required bishops to be married. However, the canonical prohibitions of the later Canons are somewhat contrary to this early Orthodox tradition and Holy Scriptures. Additionally, the earliest Canons (including the New Testament) have never been rescinded. Obviously such Canons, taken directly from the Holy Epistles, would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rescind or replace! The statement in the Epistles is to the effect that the a bishop is entitled to a believing wife.

The fact of St. Peter's marriage (which is attested to in the Bible) and that his wife traveled with Jesus and His entourage makes it apparent that Christ had no provisions against married apostles. - In short, an unmarried episcopate is the concoction of men who adopted such a policy to serve their own ends. It is true that there were some errors of nepotism among the married bishops. It is equally true that some of the celibate bishops have their own brand of sins, which are perpetrated by and amongst their own kind.

Obviously, we cannot speak for Roman Catholics, but we sense that Rome in general is destroying itself over forced celibacy encouraging pedophiles and homosexuals (while discouraging others) the more they become the majority. Further, we find the manuals of moral theology to be quite naïve, relative to issues of marriage and family, labor and the like. They are written from an ivory tower, bought and paid for by an elderly, celibate church hierarchy.

How can Christians be "light" and "salt" if they confine themselves within monastic walls? There is a certain "mystique" about monasticism that attracts people to it. We are reminded of a priest who has established several monasteries here in the United States.

A cult of his persona soon developed, but such does not follow in the steps of Christ, but is wrapped up in ethnic superstition.

As a covenantal bond, Christian marriage is a holy Mysterion (Sacrament) of the union between Christ and Church (Ephesians 5:22-32). The Mysterion of Matrimony is also a decisive moment when the Church reveals itself as the Bride of Christ, as the sign that God is irrevocably committed to the human community in and through Christ. The marriage bond, therefore, is one of infinite compassion and infinite love.

Faith implies conviction, trust and commitment. Conviction connotes an inner disposition to the truth of love. Trust connotes an acknowledgment and acceptance-capability of God and of oneself to love and be loved. Commitment connotes a total self-surrender in active engagement in the service of the Kingdom of God.

If the couple had established the marriage bond, then, out of infinite compassion and love for one another, they would have realized the grace to discover in their human experience a resolution to their spousal relationship problem. Without judgment ("Do not judge, and you will not be judged," Matthew 7:1) and given the Principle of Divine Economy (Oikonomia), the Church solemnizes remarriages with joy and the peace of Christ.

An entirely different matter is when it can be determined that a marriage had no validity from the beginning. An annulment is then established (not granted) by the Church, since Orthodox Canon Law does not recognize, for instance, heterodox marriages, or marriage ceremonies performed with severe defects as defined by Orthodox sacramental Theology.

Regarding the issue of a revival of the married episcopate in the Orthodox Church, here is what we can summarize from a traditional Orthodox point of view (taken in part from a Treatise on the Married Episcopate as originally composed by Denis M. Garrison, yet extracted and adapted here):

In the Orthodox Church in the New World, since early in the twentieth century, the concept of the married episcopate has been an important and urgent issue. The question has arisen with increasing frequency and force: Is it allowable to elect and consecrate married Priests to the episcopate and to permit them to persevere in the episcopate although they continue their married lives full and complete while maintaining their marital relations with their wives?

Since the 6th Ecumenical Council (680 A.D.), the discipline of the Holy Church has been to prohibit the married episcopate, while still strongly maintaining the married Diaconate and Presbyterate. Such discipline has been adhered to, generally and uniformly, throughout history.

A situation came to be of particular importance after the Russian Orthodox Archbishop Aftimios Ofiesh (of blessed memory) married Miss Mariam Namey in 1933, many years after he was consecrated to the episcopate. Abp. Aftimios acted out of conviction that the married episcopate is truly scriptural; furthermore, he was reacting to great scandals in the Orthodox Church involving celibate clergy (such scandals are still common today!). Abp. Aftimios also was moved to marry by his desire to force the issue of the married episcopate to consideration by a Pan-Orthodox Council – a wish which was thwarted then, but may yet be fulfilled. While Abp. Aftimios thereupon retired from the hierarchy of the Church, the remaining bishops of his jurisdiction made it clear that they thought his expressed belief (the episcopate should include married men) was correct and scripturally sound. Since that time, a number of bishops succeeding Abp. Aftimios have been elected from the married Presbyterate and remained married as bishops. This discipline – the election of married priests to the episcopate without requiring them to separate from their wives – is also followed in a number of the smaller Orthodox jurisdictions around the globe. However, the later discipline, i.e. the prohibition of the married episcopate, is still maintained in other parts of Orthodoxy, as well as by traditionalist ethnic jurisdictions. Thus, the married episcopate is not universally accepted again in the Orthodox Church as it once was.

Marriage Before Ordination

“No bishop, presbyter or deacon shall put away his own wife under pretext of reverence. If, however, he put her away, let him be excommunicated; and if he persists in so doing, let him be deposed from office” [Canon V of the Holy Apostles].

In accordance with the most ancient tradition, the consolation of the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony should not be denied to men who wish to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders at a later date. In accordance with Canon V of the Holy Apostles (as cited above), it seems obvious that a man, married to an Orthodox woman, may be tonsured and ordained as a Cantor, Hypodeacon, deacon or priest, if he is otherwise qualified. Likewise, a priest, married to an Orthodox woman, should be allowed to be consecrated to the sacred episcopate, if he is otherwise qualified.

Ordination Impediments

“Whoever has entered into two marriages after baptism, or has possessed himself of a concubine, cannot be a bishop, nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor anything else in the sacerdotal list” [Canon XVII of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles].

“No one who has taken a widow, a divorced woman or a harlot, or a house maid, or any actress as his wife, may become a bishop or a presbyter or a deacon or hold any other position at all in the sacerdotal list” [Canon XVIII of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles].

A man who has married a second time cannot be ordained a Hypodeacon, a deacon, a priest or a bishop, according to Canon XVII as cited above. "Whoever has entered into two marriages after baptism" (Canon XVII) reflects the fact that, under the very strictest understanding, for a man to marry twice is adultery of a sort on his part. The rules about "a widow or a divorced woman" (Canon XVIII) do not disparage those women's morality; rather they were already married once, and therefore, again under the

strictest understanding, to marry such a woman is adultery of a sort (cf. Matthew 5:32 and 19:7-9.) While second (and even third) marriages may be allowed to the laity – for the weakness of the flesh – clergy are called to be irreproachable, and therefore the clergy are not allowed to marry widows or divorced women.

We rarely use the word "concubine" (Canon XVII) in these days; we interpret "concubine" to refer to any woman with whom a man has entered into illicit sexual relationship. Also, in this modern age, we interpret "a harlot or a house maid or any actress" (Canon XVIII) to refer to any woman of infamous reputation or who is known for her moral turpitude. The occupations of domestic servants and actresses in the modern world cannot honestly be generically maligned as immoral. Rather, it is marriage with a woman who is in an occupation that can honestly be characterized as immoral (for example, prostitution), thus being prohibited. As Canons XVII and XVIII both plainly imply, a man who has married within the guidelines of these Canons and who is otherwise qualified may indeed be ordained "a bishop, presbyter or deacon".

Marriage After Ordination

"As to bachelors who have entered the clergy, we allow only Anagnosts (Readers) and Psalts (Chanters) to marry, if they wish to do so" [Canon XXVI of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles]. (Similarly, see also Canon XIV of the 4th Ecumenical Council and Canon VI of the 6th Ecumenical Council).

In accordance with ancient tradition, the clergy in Holy Orders should not feel free to marry at will. The Church may exercise discipline in this matter, as seems prudent and expedient at the time and place. An Anagnost or a Cantor who was a bachelor when he was ordained has the right to marry an Orthodox woman, in accordance with Canon XXVI of the Holy Apostles and Canon XIV of the 4th Ecumenical Council (451 A.D.). A Hypodeacon, deacon, priest or bishop who is a bachelor, once he is ordained, is not permitted marriage thereafter by Canon XXVI. Yet, traditionally, we may make exceptions: A Hypodeacon or deacon who announced before his ordination to his ordaining Bishop that he plans to

marry may be dispensed from this prohibition, by the same bishop or his successor, to marry after ordination, in accordance with Canon X of Ancyra. Thus, the principle of allowing, by the exercise of Oikonomia (Divine Economy), ordained clergy to marry and remain clergy is well established in ancient precedent. We duly honor the ancient tradition, which discourages men already in holy orders from marrying and encourages special caution regarding the marriages of ordained clergy. However, in light of the permissive precedents established by Canon XXVI of the Holy Apostles, Canon XIV of the 4th Ecumenical Council, and Canon X of Ancyra (and considering a footnote to Canon V of the Holy Apostles which states that "the custom prevailed of not letting those in holy orders marry ..." - showing that this was a custom rather than a necessary discipline), we cannot absolutely condemn marriage after ordination.

Examples

The occasional married bishop throughout history was not officially approved by the Church, but was tolerated and kept at a low key. Once the issue was publicly raised, such as in archbishop Aftimios' case, the discovery of the scriptural truth and the reaffirmation of the apostolic teaching in this regard became more possible.

The continuing existence of several Orthodox jurisdictions with married Bishops, give us hope that the facade of ecumenical unanimity amongst Orthodox Churches on banning the married episcopate will one day fall away and the anomalous and anti-scriptural practice of an exclusively-monastic episcopate will be finally overcome.

Holy Scripture

The holy apostle Paul gave explicit and clear directions in his epistles: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife..." - (I Timothy 3:2); and again, "ordain elders in every city.... If any be blameless, the husband of one wife,...for a Bishop must be

blameless...." (Titus 1:5-7). (The word "blameless" is best translated as "irreproachable", according to The Rudder (Pedalion). The Orthodox Church agrees, as attested by St. John Chrysostom (noted in the Interpretation of Canon XII of the 6th Ecumenical Council), that the word "elders" in the original means "bishops"). How should bishops deal with their wives? - "Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed." - (I Corinthians 7:27) "Defraud (deprive) ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." - (I Corinthians 7:5) "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled:..." -(Hebrews 13:4); for a Bishop to shun his wife would make it apparent that he dishonors marriage, and that he thinks of intercourse to be impure, but the Apostle calls marriage "honorable" and intercourse "undefiled". During His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said, "I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." - (Matthew 5:32; see also Matthew 19:7-9). The Lord also said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." - (Matthew 19:6). By the clear testimony of Holy Scripture, a man who is married to one woman may be a bishop, and he is in most grave error if he shuns her bed or divorces her for any reason other than fornication.

Therefore, only the unlearned could argue that Holy Scripture forbids the married episcopate. Indeed, the manner in which the Apostle Paul writes in his epistles, I Timothy (3:2) and Titus (1:5-7), suggests that the married episcopate was even normative. Further, the other Scriptures cited above make it unmistakably clear that any married man, including a Bishop, must respect and honor his marriage, including intimate relations with his wife, and that it is a grave error to divorce his wife or to entirely shun intimate relations with her. It is impossible to enforce, as having doctrinal significance, any Canon which actually contradicts the clear meaning of the Holy Scriptures. Hence, the Canons to which we subscribe are those which are only and truly consistent with the Holy Scriptures.

The Sacred Canons

These 85 Canons of the Holy and Renowned Apostles, collected in the Pedalion (Rudder), are those which are considered by many to have been promulgated by the Holy Apostles themselves (either by all of them together or perhaps only by Saint Paul and Saint Peter) through Clement, the Bishop of Rome. These Canons are of the highest degree of importance to us, being apostolic in origin.

First and most importantly, Canon V of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles, which was cited earlier, makes it explicit and clear beyond any honest argument that the ancient tradition of the Holy Church recognized, valued, and positively promoted the married episcopate.

Again, "No bishop, presbyter or deacon shall put away his own wife under pretext of reverence. If, however, he put her away, let him be excommunicated; and if he persist in so doing, let him be deposed from office." - This Canon reflects the equally explicit and clear directions of the holy apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus. Only a simpleton could argue that Canon V of the Holy Apostles can be interpreted, in any manner whatsoever, to forbid the episcopate to married men. A footnote to Canon V of the Holy Apostles in The Pedalion (Rudder) explicitly states: "Please note that in old times it was permissible for bishops to have wives." The footnote gives then several cases in point. The same footnote goes on to state that it was Canon XII of the 6th Ecumenical Council which sanctioned the custom of the married clergy except that "bishops alone should not be allowed to have wives".

Those who now forbid the episcopate to married men cite other Canons as the bases for their discipline in this matter. Therefore, we must ask ourselves if Canon V of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles was ever rejected by the Ecumenical Councils and rendered ineffective. The answer is quite inescapable: both Canon II of the 6th Ecumenical Council and Canon I of the 7th Ecumenical Council explicitly accept and ratify all of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles. Moreover, Canon XIII of the 6th Ecumenical Council

verifies verbatim Canon V of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles, but unjustifiably excepts Bishops from its applicability. Canon V of the Holy Apostles always was and still is a Sacred Canon of Holy Church.

Again, "Whoever has entered into two marriages after baptism, or has possessed himself of a concubine, cannot be a Bishop, or a Presbyter, or a Deacon, or anything else in the Sacerdotal List;" and "No one who has taken a widow, or a divorced woman, or a harlot, or a house maid, or any actress as his wife, may be a Bishop, or a Presbyter, or a Deacon, or hold any other position at all in the Sacerdotal List." - These two Canons, XVII and XVIII, also cited earlier, both imply that a man, who is married in an accepted manner, can be "a Bishop, or a Presbyter, or a Deacon, or anything else in the Sacerdotal List".

Canon XL of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles directs that the difference between the property of the Bishop and the property of the Church be publicly known, and it prohibits a Bishop both from leaving the property of the Church to his wife and family and from depriving his wife and family from their rightful inheritance by leaving his own property to the Church through there being confusion as to whose the property really is. This Canon plainly takes for granted that some Bishops will have wives, whose inheritance could be at issue.

If any bishop or presbyter or deacon or anyone at all on the sacerdotal list abstains from marriage or meat or wine, not as a matter of mortification but out of an abhorrence thereof, forgetting that all things are exceedingly good and that God made man male and female, and blasphemously misrepresenting God's work of creation, either let him mend his ways or let him be deposed from office and expelled from the Church. Let a layman be treated similarly. [Canon LI of the Holy Apostles]

This Canon 51 plainly assumes that there will be men who do not abstain from marriage who will be Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons. It is those who have refused to marry who are at risk of deposition from the clerical state and expulsion from Holy Church

under this Canon. This Canon is an eloquent witness to the high regard that the Apostolic Church had for marriage, and explicitly for the marriage of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons. It witnesses to the Orthodox and unchangeable truth of the Christian Faith that "all things are exceedingly good", and that it is blasphemous to misrepresent God's work of creation by holding that certain things (including lawful sexual relations, meat, and wine, which are simply those things about which errors arose early on) would be in themselves unclean, and that it would be blasphemous to abhor them.

The Heresy of Neo-Manichaeism

Neo-Manichaeism refers specifically to heretical doctrines within Orthodox circles mirroring the particular heresy of the Manichees, who combined Zoroastrianism, Gnostic Christianity, and pagan elements.

The Manichees' fundamental dualistic theological concepts, of a spirit of good and a spirit of evil, on an essentially equal footing, that is, of two contending principles of good (light, God, the soul) and evil (darkness, Satan, the body), are antithetical to Orthodox Christianity which holds the fundamental monotheistic belief in One God, Who is all-good and all-powerful, and Who is opposed by Satan and the other fallen angels (i.e., the demons), all of whom are inferior to God in every respect. Canon LI of the Holy Apostles, cited above, confirms the Orthodox Faith: "that all things are exceedingly good, and that God made man male and female" and that abhorrence of marriage is a "blasphemous misrepresentation of God's work of creation".

If anyone discriminates against a married Presbyter, on the ground that he ought not to partake of the offering when that Presbyter is conducting the Liturgy, let him be anathema. [Canon IV of Gangra (340 A.D.)]

This venerable Canon condemns the heresy of the Eustathians, the Manichees, and others who forbade the married priests to celebrate the Liturgy.

It has been decided that as regards these three ranks which have been conjoined by a certain bond of chastity and sacerdocy (I am referring particularly to Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons), as befits devout Bishops and Priests of God, and Levites, and those ministering to divine institutions, they must be continent in all things, so as to be able to obtain whatever in general they ask God for, in order that we too may likewise keep what has been handed down through the Apostles and has been held ever since the early days. [Canon III of Carthage (419 A.D.)]

Canon XII of the 6th Ecumenical Council is, at best, anomalous. While I will not condemn Canon XII nor any jurisdiction which continues to follow that Canon, we as Orthodox believe should remain unhindered to follow the still-standing, never-revoked, God-pleasing Canons V and LI of the Holy Apostles, and Canon IV of Gangra, which promulgate the discipline which is consistent with the Holy Scriptures: Qualified married Priests must be admitted to the sacred episcopate and must be allowed to keep their marriages whole and complete, as intended by God.

Church Divorce for Episcopal Candidates

What the 6th Ecumenical Council intended for the wives of bishops is made clear in Canon XLVIII of the 6th Ecumenical Council. That Canon provides that women who are wives of Priests about to become Bishops and their husbands must first divorce by common consent and, after his consecration, she is to enter a convent; if she is worthy, she may be ordained a Deaconess. This is in clear contradiction to the Gospel.

Remembering that our Lord said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," we should not actively promote this practice, lest Priests abuse the right and coerce their wives into entering convents. In fact, remembering that a married couple are one flesh in the eyes of God [Genesis 2:24], even truly voluntary divorces for this purpose should not be permitted at all. Nonetheless, because there are those rare married couples who honestly and piously both wish to enter into the Angelic vocation,

and where the prayerful discernment of the Bishop may find that, for that particular couple, such a course would more likely work toward their ultimate salvation, we ought to allow, very rarely, an exception so that husband and wife may become monastics. The bishop examining such a case should be extraordinarily attentive to the real motivations of the wife and to the likelihood of coercion by the husband.

In summary, the hierarchy should admonish the clergy of every rank that they must keep their marriages whole and complete, honorable and undefiled, as intended by almighty God, and that they must not harm their marriages in any way on the pretext of reverence because they are in priestly rank.

Genuine Christian Witness

The few married bishops and their wives now remaining in the Orthodox Church are, in fact, the first line of embodying the Christian truth, that God made man male and female and that all things God made are exceedingly good. They show what a heresy it is to say that the body is evil and that a woman defiles a man. They are witnesses of God's plan for the propagation of the race of mankind, the sexual relationship of husband and wife. An exclusively-monastic episcopate never could and cannot now make this witness.

The issue of the married bishops is far from being a minor matter of Church discipline, as in long-since resolved and no longer relevant or important. To the contrary, this is a very urgent matter of the greatest importance to the survival of the Church of Jesus Christ. If such fundamental tenets of the new Testaments and the teaching of the Holy Apostles cannot be reinstated; if false concepts of scriptural, patristic and canonical ideas continue to seduce the minds and hearts of most Orthodox hierarchs, then the visible Church will one day be found apostate. The visible Church will be a heretical super-church organization, no better than the Manichees, no better than the Gnostics, fit only as a bride for Anti-Christ. The Church has been in the catacombs before, in the beginning of the Christian era, and more recently in Russia in the 20th century. The true Church may walk in the shoes of the

catacombs again, if that is the only way where genuine Christianity can survive. If this becomes true (as it is prophesized at many places), one can be assured that the bishops will be married men again - like their holy predecessors.