

## **Why Celibacy? Evangelization, Evil, Eschatology, and Ecclesia**

*David Pence MD*

It is a common refrain. “Why doesn’t the Church just let priests get married?” This is not a question to be answered by secular psychologists. It is answered by the “definitive direction and wider horizon” that Christ has introduced into human history.

Our imaginations have been so polluted by scandal that we have lost the capacity to see the priesthood as the icon that Christ formed 2000 years ago when he called the Twelve. Let us learn from another masculine fraternity formed 200 years ago.

### *Evangelization*

The first law of universal national conscription in Europe (1793) was enacted in France shortly after the revolution. It included all unmarried males and widowers who had no children. The new democratic French army had a mission—to fight across Europe against all forms of monarchy and despotism and to defeat the armies of “slaves” with a new fraternity of men both free and equal. In revolutionary art, France and liberty were always depicted as a woman but the famous drawing of the republican army of 500,000 was an army of males defending a constitution symbolized by two stones looking a lot like the tablets that Moses brought from the mountain. The best of the French revolutionaries felt they were undertaking a great historical project which could only be achieved with the evangelical zeal of unmarried males bound in a sacrificial democratic fraternity. They were a body of men on a mission. Catholic priests deliberately forgo the domestic life as they answer the conscription of Christ to fulfill their common mission. Priests form the true fraternal army of light by preaching the good news of Christ to a world enslaved by the despots of darkness and the tyranny of sin.

## *Evil*

When Christ entered history, an Evil creature still roamed and ruled. He had been there at the beginning to trick our first parents. In Jewish literature\* the foe has three forms: 1) the cosmic Evil of the Leviathan, 2) the historical forms of Amalek—nations or tribes set to destroy Israel and 3) the impulse in every man -- the evil inclination of *yeser hara*.

The church confronts the horror of evil—the contentious character of cosmos, history, and fallen human nature. For all who fear and tremble, for the homeless and the prisoner, the priesthood of fathers appears as a saving communion of protection. The priest has no wife and children because he is responsible for the widow and orphan. The Church extends her maternal comfort inside a ring of fathers. The Bride of Christ is flanked by the band of brothers.

Celibacy cultivates the discipline needed to confront a world beset by evil. The priest shows that the evil inclinations can be controlled as he harnesses the tempestuous passion of *eros* by living the celibate life. The all male priestly body is a sacramental form inspiring laymen and non-Catholics to form the protective temporal fraternity of citizenship as tribes, cities or nations needed to fight Amalek. When Christ ascended into heaven, he left mankind in the shape of a church in the shape of an army. He came in a world ruled by the Evil One whom he dethroned. He left us in military vigilance against the snares of the devil who has been dethroned but not yet vanquished.

### *Eschatology-Ordering the Affections to the coming of Christ*

As a mystical body, the Church is a virgin awaiting the bridegroom -- but as a corporate body on earth we are an army in

waiting. Priests are not domesticated men safe at home—they watch for the enemy; they wait for the Commander to return as the King. And yet the soldier knows a great hunger he is not allowed to slake. There is a yearning that men have for the female—the intoxicating desire that can deepen all the colors of nature and drive a man crazy. Catholics from Dante to Pope Benedict make poetic note of that raging force. For Catholic laymen we purify that desire in the love for one woman in marriage. For a priest though, that natural unsatisfied *eros* points him to a deeper yearning which when filled can quiet both his romantic heart and his life seeking loins. A priest does not redirect sexual *eros* **toward** Christ. His fire for woman is never fully quenched. Other desires must be more pronounced. He cannot control *eros* simply with his head and reason. It is the chest that will control the loins. It is the Will that shall order the desires. The athlete forgoes the pleasures of the bed and table to win the glory of the contest. It is the hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice—the desire to be at Christ’s side as a fellow warrior—which overrides the desire for woman. It is man’s desire for battle that allows the fire in his chest to outburn the fire in his loins. The Will itself is a yearning for person—for communion with God. The battle under Christ the King employs the chest in reigniting the Will to a filial communion with the Father that is the ultimate love.

Our desires are not disordered simply because we have too strong a love for food or too indiscriminate a lust for the female. Our bodily desires grow too hot because our most fundamental human desire has turned too cold. It is true that the soul thirsts for God but the nature of human frailty is that the desire for God has been severely truncated. Original sin darkens the intellect—just as disastrously it has **weakened the will**. Celibacy drives a man to whet his desire for God that is fulfilled only in prayer, worship and living the Christian life. A man who does not pray will not be celibate. Christ and His priestly friends have reordered the affectional life. They have purified the love of *philia* to enjoy the *agape* of the Eucharist. Their priestly friendship excludes many of us in order to save all of

us. By seeking first the things that are above, the priests bless the laity to purify *eros* in the Eucharistic atmosphere of *agape*. Their sacrament of brotherly love provides the larger horizon against which the laity transform *eros* into the sacrament of marriage. The priest knows the affection of his brothers in communion. He is warmed by the gratitude of the widows and orphans, and by the pride of his mother and his sisters. The priest is the opposite of the emotional cripple painted by a sex-saturated, love-starved cult of death. He has a rich and orderly affectional life because he and his priestly brothers have found the greatest treasure- their wills abide in the Father.

### *The Adelphos Meal as Heavenly Banquet*

In the kingdom of heaven, Christ said there will be no marriage. The celibate priesthood announces the kingdom of God by suggesting its final realization. The male fellowship banquet is the great public banquet of victorious warriors. In the Eucharist, priests draw us into the fellowship of Christ and his disciples. This form of communion has a public character not shared in the marriage bed. It is the ultimate sacrament of the communal love which we shall know after the final battle is won.

### *Forgo the desire for Familia. Answer the call of Ecclesia*

To preach the gospel to the whole world, to battle the Evil One, to await the coming King,—this is why the Twelve have become a male celibate communion of bishops with the pope. The priest is inspired by the man who left no unguarded family as he mounted the gibbet of the cross to do his Father's Will. He left no widow as he descended into hell to dethrone the Evil One. He left no orphans as he departed the earth to send the Paraclete. The priest forgoes the warmth of a hearth for he must dare the fire of hell. Drinking the cup which Christ drank, the joyous celibate priest lives out what Christ prayed - that all might be one in the Father.

