



This essay first appeared in  
*CROSSCURRENTS Winter 2008*

Volume 57. NO 4

Asceticism Today

## CELIBACY TODAY:

### Mystery, Myth, and Miasma

*It was from sexual purity that the priesthood was believed to derive its power.*

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Celibacy, popularly understood, is the state of non-marriage and/or the abstinence from sexual activity.<sup>[1]</sup> The voluntary sacrifice of all sexual pleasure is an extreme form of religious asceticism when it is undertaken for a lifetime or even for very extended periods.

Celibacy is unlike other modes of asceticism—fasting, sleep deprivation, endurance of extreme temperatures, or even poverty—in that sexual pleasure or activity is not necessary for individual survival as are some measure of sustenance, recuperation, and protection from the elements. These modes of controlling natural desires have often been used as adjunctive, supportive, and protective of the dedicated celibate’s pursuit of his or her goal. Despite the fact that the ideal and the practice of celibacy exist in many religious traditions, it is not well understood.

**Celibacy is one mode of coming to terms with one’s sexuality.** While sexual desire is a natural drive it also raises natural resistances. Self-control or self-mastery is one of the essential developmental life tasks. Athletic, intellectual, or military conquests as well as and religious idealism all depend for success on the drive to conquer one’s self and modulate natural desires. Sigmund Freud insisted that psychoanalysis could take place only in an atmosphere of deprivation. Self-knowledge and insight are best gained not in acting out one’s feelings, but restraining action in favor of understanding. Religious contemplative life has incorporated this belief for centuries. This conviction about the value of restraint is a cornerstone of celibate motivation and achievement. The implications of this truth about the worth and need to control human “passions” far exceed the goal of personal growth and insight. Morality is not possible without the ability to restrain impulses and modulate and redirect desires. Culture and society in order to exist and flourish depend on an understanding and practice of restraint.

It is difficult, however, to get the real life story of a person who claims complete and perpetual celibacy. Autobiographical communications about celibacy are rare and perhaps not completely possible. The potential advantage of a first-hand view of celibacy is to have the celibate person's own vision of a relatively rare lifestyle. But whether the personal witness to celibacy is spoken or written, it is likely to be affected by the inclination to distance the image and ideal of celibacy from the person him or her self. One explanation for the scarcity of such accounts is the obvious necessity to deal with the concomitant sexual history involved in the development of the celibate decision and process beyond a terse admission similar to that of St. Francis of Assisi who confessed he lived a "wild youth" prior to his conversion at 17 years of age. Two prominent examples of celibate autobiography are those of St. Augustine and Mahatma Gandhi. Augustine's *Confessions* is a world classic and the frank account of his sexual life prior to his conversion. It led theologian Margaret Miles to conclude that the book reflects the admission of a sexual addiction.<sup>1a</sup> Gandhi devotes 2 chapters of his autobiography to explain his discovery and dedication to the process of celibacy—Brahmacharya.<sup>1b</sup> He does not shy away from recounting his sexual development and his celibate failures.

Any authentic autobiography of celibacy must fulfill certain criteria like these do. It must reflect basic elements of celibacy that include the following: First, such a narrative should record one's developmental relationship patterns, many of which precede any celibate intention. Nevertheless, early experiences vitally influence a person's eventual sexual/celibate pattern of adjustment. Family background, education, ethnic and cultural fixes, character traits, sexual preferences, unique talents, loves and hates all come into play. In addition, self-knowledge is fundamental to any successful celibate pursuit.

Second, celibacy is dynamic; it is a *process* of internalization and actualization of the celibate ideal from intention to achievement. Celibacy does not ordinarily begin with practice, but with the formation of an image of celibacy, often personified in one person believed to be a practicing celibate. This process involves the achievement of a degree of self-knowledge, measuring one's own capacity to live with the sexual discipline and deprivation necessary to be celibate. Having some degree of self-awareness readies a person to proceed further in seeking knowledge about the process of celibacy and what it involves in realistic terms. Because celibacy is neither abstract nor extraneous to the individual striving for it, these inevitable steps precede the experimentation and practice of celibacy. If, in time, celibacy takes personal root, it is often capped by a more or less formal vow. It is from a stable internal base that celibacy can be said to reach achievement once its integration is woven into the fiber of one's being. That is when celibacy becomes an integral part of one's sexual self. Self-revelation of such a process is never simple.

Finally, celibate achievement is accountable and, to a degree, measurable. "By their fruits you shall know them." Although celibacy is capable of many faces, its moniker is also capable of wearing many masks. Out of all of its manifest variations, permutations, individualizations, frustrations, failures, or perversions, certain qualities measure its

authenticity: service, complete self-honesty, awareness of the oneness of the human condition, and the capacity to love.

There is a persistency to the practice. For centuries celibacy has been a logical and practical way for some men and women to live their lives and serve a family or clan; also, a celibate way of life has served many people well in their pursuit of and dedication to science, art, politics, or religious goals. It will always remain so. In this sense celibacy has proved itself to be a natural human phenomenon.

Because the sexual drive is so basic a component of human nature and because sexual pleasure is such an intense gratification, celibacy is rare as a life choice. When persons declare that they have chosen celibacy as an ascetic practice they often receive a measure of admiration because the discipline required to practice and achieve it is generally acknowledged as a monumental feat. When the sacrifice is coupled with religious belief, celibacy is regarded as heroic.

There is no question in my mind that healthy self-control and limitations on one's desires, including deprivations and self-sacrifice (especially in the pursuit of service and love) can lead to interiority of superior quality, and in religious terms, awareness of the Unseen. Beyond intellectual and spiritual awareness celibate process and achievement has wider practical implications related to appropriate restraint and proper use and development of nature and created reality. Alfred North Whitehead in his classic *Science and the Modern World* credits monasticism, so vital in the development of the Christian tradition of celibacy, of making fundamental contributions to the development of science. “We owe it to St. Benedict that monasteries were the homes of practical agriculturalists, as well as of saints and of artists and men of learning. The alliance of science with technology, by which learning is kept in contact with irreducible and stubborn facts, owes much to the practical bent of the early” monks.<sup>1c</sup> The fundamental respect for nature and the creativity released by celibacy is part of the record of celibate tradition, West and East.

### ***Mystery***

Celibate asceticism presents many puzzling facets—“mysteries,” if you will, beyond the sense of the word “mystery” as used in religious and theological writings. The history of religious celibacy is rich and diverse. It enjoys a trajectory of luminaries and sublime reflections in many religious traditions. Celibate ascetics constitute a firmament of shining stars and black holes—successes and failures. Every major religion has contributed to the panoply of the celibate universe. One is tempted to use a telescopic approach to catch the essence of the infinite glow of a reality that still offers many undiscovered dimensions.

I have chosen the opposite approach to examining religious asceticism. I have restricted myself to the sociological and psychological Petri dish and microscope to examine religious celibacy. That is, here I present observations about a limited population of publicly proclaimed celibates—all men, each ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood

in the United States over a limited span of time (the final fifty years of the twentieth century). After 40 years of observation of this group I was able to construct an operational definition of religious celibacy lacking in the literature:

***“Religious celibacy is a freely chosen, dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive.”<sup>2</sup>***

This definition eliminates the confusion in measuring religious celibacy that results from use of the looser definition that does not account for an unmarried person who is sexually active and a married person who sexually abstinent.<sup>3</sup>

Most religious commentators, however, are loath to address the more practical realities and difficulties of becoming celibate and maintaining its practice. Spiritual writers most frequently characterize the idealistic and positive aspects of celibate striving, emphasizing the elements of religious mystery in their tradition. “Mystery” is possibly the most frequently used word in literature about celibacy, at least in my experience.<sup>4</sup> Often, in this context mystery refers to the relationship to transcendent reality and to the “grace” without which celibate practice and achievement is impossible according to these theologians. In many ways the aura of mystery surrounding religious devotion, belief, and practice is justly deserved. Yet talk of mystery separated from its foundation in nature can effectively turn religious mystery into magical thinking and expression—mystification. The separation or disregard of the natural foundations of celibate asceticism is a serious flaw in its achievement.

One puzzle encoded in this assertion of the ascetic mystery in religious practice is that according to Catholic theology every sexual thought, word, desire, and, action outside of a valid marriage between a man and a woman is sinful for anyone. The moral bar for every man or woman (or boy and girl) is “celibacy”—complete sexual abstinence—before marriage. And even in marriage the use of any contraceptive means renders the act sinful.

Theological writing about sex (and one cannot consider celibacy and disregard sex) is fraught with judgments of behavior that is labeled *intrinsically* evil. According to Catholic teaching masturbation, contraception, and homosexual acts are among the most “inherently evil” acts among the multiple choices a person can make. Although in theory all sex outside marriage is sinful, moral theologians pose that in pastoral practice there is room for “understanding and forgiveness.” But this pastoral understanding and forgiveness (as well as authoritative judgments on human sexuality) are in the hands of priests bound by celibacy—“perfect and perpetual continence.”<sup>5</sup>

There is another mystery, or puzzle. Priesthood and celibacy have been so wedded, over the last five centuries especially, that even recent popes (John Paul II and Benedict XVI) claim that it is not within their power to abandon the requirement that clerics bind themselves with the vow of perfect and perpetual celibacy before they are ordained. Part

of the puzzle this presents is that there is no scriptural evidence that Jesus practiced celibacy. The evolution of the moral teaching about sex—that it is rarely free from the taint of sin—*retrojected* from the fourth century back to the time of Jesus the theological presumption that Christ and most of the apostles of necessity “must have” practiced celibacy.

Celibacy, even on a natural level, does bespeak power, discipline, and control and can inspire awe and confidence in the authority of one who claims it. The reforming Council of Trent reasserted the celibate requirement for ordination and reinforced the bond between celibacy and the power of the priesthood. Bishops have been dedicated to preserve the image of the celibate priesthood before the public and in the minds of the faithful since celibacy is a fundamental source of power. That image of priesthood is defined in the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1545-1563); an image that can hardly be postulated without the presumption of celibacy:

*"Bishops and priests being, as they are, God's interpreters and ambassadors, empowered in His name to teach mankind the divine law and the rules of conduct, and holding, as they do, His place on earth, it is evident that no nobler function than theirs can be imagined. Justly, therefore, are they called not only angels, but even gods, because of the fact that they exercise in our midst the power and prerogatives of the immortal God."<sup>5a</sup>*

This image and the power that derives from it are so intimately bound to clerical celibacy that its demise would threaten the collapse of the entire clerical edifice. Sociologist Anson Shupe analyzes the essential social exchange in various religious traditions.<sup>6</sup> He claims that celibacy is *Le Don* (The Gift), that is, the basic contractual tie of the Catholic Church with its members. Clerical purity is the vital, inseparable core of the social exchange between the hierarchy/clergy and the members of the faith community. In theory and practice the assurance of the celibacy of Catholic clergy is exchanged for the trust, respect, belief, support, obedience, and allegiance of the faithful. The faithful in return receive comfort, forgiveness, and salvation. (In the Protestant ministry the *gift* is *servantship*. In the rabbinate the *gift* is *scholarship and interpretation*.)

The core *gift* of any religion is essential to maintain the commitment of faith within communities between the clergy elite and the faithful. Clergy misconduct in the form of celibate violations within the Catholic Church is a betrayal of the kind most destructive to the structure of Catholicism. Celibate violations, like no other, obliterate the core commitment and threaten to invalidate the trust, respect, support, belief, obedience, and allegiance that the faithful willing exchange for what they have perceived as the ultimate sacrifice of their clergy—celibacy. Whether or not related to the abuse crisis in the United States, the Pew forum on Religions and Public Life reported that in 2008 ten (10) percent of the US population is ex-Catholics. (March 8, 2008)

Sexual betrayal by Catholic clergy destroys the social exchange. This is becoming apparent currently. All betrayals of the *celibate gift* involve power inequities, conflict, emotional-physical harm, and often crime. No amount of religious forgiveness can heal the rift. **Only renegotiating the exchange can bridge the fracture.** Only the most

profound religious reformations have been able to deal with any past crisis of the magnitude that the Catholic Church now faces. At core, the crisis in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and worldwide is a celibate/sexual crisis. Seen from the perspective of institutional power and control the “mystery” of celibacy (in the sense that it is super-human and intrinsically connected with the divine, to use a clerical term) must be preserved at all costs.<sup>7</sup> In this way the myth of clerical celibacy is born.

### *Myth*

In the study of religious myth there is a legitimate and important function that leads to the deeper truths of religion. Myth represents a way out of the impasses of logic and point of view, but not as a superior logic disclosed by the dialectic. Myth presents reality as an immediate totality. Some scholars almost lose themselves in the *mystagogical* dimensions of religion and celibacy. (Cf. Robert Barron, 1999)\*

The function of mythic discourse is profound. Myth eschews objective language for a coherent narrative that involves the speaker directly in a personal relationship with the universe. Its intent is not mere entertainment. The ancient mythmakers did not intend to provide intelligible explanations of natural phenomena. They were recounting events in which they were involved to the limits of their very existence. Their narratives reflected what they experienced directly. The images of myth are products of the imagination, but they are not merely fantasy. “True myth presents its images and its imaginary actors, not with the playfulness of fantasy, but with a compelling authority. It perpetuates the revelation of a thou.”<sup>8</sup>

Mythic assumptions even underlie all scientific approaches. The biologist, E.O. Wilson acknowledges that the philosophers of science call these assumptions paradigms. In the physical sciences these paradigms tend to be very much reduced, so that almost anybody can supply the suppositions: cause must precede effect; an object is identical only with itself; no object can be in two places at once; the speed of light sets limits to time, etc. The myths underlying the physical sciences are abstract enough that researchers seldom have to worry about them. In the case of the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, questions of paradigm tend to be less obvious and more complex. Religion poses its perennial challenge to reason. But Wilson, in his search for a synthesis of ways of knowing reality points out that doctrine draws on the same creative springs as science and the arts, and its aim being the extraction of order from the mysteries of the material world. To explain the meaning of life it spins mythic narratives.<sup>9</sup>

I affirm the importance of mythical exploration in understanding religions, religious practice, and religious truth—but here, for the purpose of clarity I am also using myth in another of its rich definitions: **the sense of something untrue**, imaginary, or a figment. The myth, or paradigm, that distorts reality and in fact undermines the effectiveness of celibate power is the fallacy that *priest equals celibacy*. Media accounts frequently use ‘priest’ and ‘celibate’ interchangeably. Much of sociological literature and survey studies

make this same equation.<sup>9.a.</sup> Vatican and local church documents repeatedly solidify this mythical presumption that "priest equals celibacy" and foster the idea that cultic purity is a seamless reality. History elegantly demonstrates the consolidation of power via the perpetuation of the myth: the assumption that clergy are celibate (that is, sexually abstinent) ascetics.

This is, of course, a myth that believers, too, want to preserve. Any alternative is frantically destabilizing to personal belief and to the power structure of the entire institution. Believers find it hard even to imagine that their bishops and priests who symbolize celibate purity are "fooling around" sexually—much like children who find it hard to realize that their parents are sexual beings.

**In reality, *religious celibacy equals celibate practice.*** Genuine religious celibacy is the actual practice of sexual abstinence, rather than the image that constitutes the myth.

Currently, the nature of celibacy constitutes a hotly contested debate in the Catholic Church. I believe that the contest and the confusion result from the dearth of open discussion about the reality of celibacy in practice and achievement. Much of the debate is not on the nature and function of the practice of celibacy, but of its requirement for priestly ordination.

One highly placed religious superior stated in 1991, "two or three sexual acts in a year do not constitute a violation of celibacy." He may be correct according to his idiosyncratic definition of celibacy. But this theologian must take under consideration that, according to his logic, a man could impregnate three women in a year and still maintain that he is a "celibate," or what is more to the point in public awareness, that priests and bishops can sexually abuse minors several times a year and still think of themselves and present themselves as celibate.

So persistent is this myth that celibacy is simply defined by being a priest and not by celibacy as an ascetic commitment, that ten years later, after the public exposure of multiple celibate violations by clergy, the chief spokesperson for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Sr. Mary Ann Walsh, asserted on national television that she was "convinced that 99 and 44/100 percent" of priests in the United States were practicing celibacy. When the interviewer expressed incredulity, she repeated that she was "convinced."<sup>10.</sup> At times the denial of sexual/celibate reality becomes preposterous. In a November 24, 2004 deposition, Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles said that he had "never" known of a priest who had violated his celibacy.

At other times comments about celibate practice become mysteriously contradictory to church moral doctrine. A bishop, who is being accused by an adult man of sexually abusing him when he was a fifteen-year-old boy, said in deposition about another situation in his diocese, that masturbation "does not constitute a violation against celibacy."<sup>11.</sup> This bifurcated and deceptive way of understanding religious celibacy separating **its** practice into non-marriage and (merely) sinful behavior led a priest to

protest to a New Jersey newsman, “I am a celibate. I have been ordained for twelve years and I have had sex with only ten women and four men.”

Some Vatican spokesmen appear to be more realistic about celibate practice than popes who speak only in idealistic and regulatory terms about celibacy. In 1993, Cardinal Jose Sanchez, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Clergy faced an interviewer from BBC television who asked his opinion on studies, recent at that time, that claimed that, at any one time, 45 to 50 percent of Catholic clergy were not practicing celibacy. The cardinal’s response was, “I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of those figures.” Even earlier—in the 1970 synod of Rome—the question about the requirement for celibacy came up for discussion and a vote of the bishops. Pope Paul VI announced that the assembly had voted 55 to 45 percent to preserve the requirement. When the subject of mandatory celibacy came up for discussion again on a Vatican level in 1971, Cardinal Franjo Seper, Archbishop of Zagreb said, “I am not at all optimistic that celibacy is in fact being observed.”

A recent headline announced, “Pope Benedict XVI re-affirmed the value of a priest choosing to be celibate in accordance to the Catholic tradition.” The requirement for priests to be celibate was proclaimed before the heads of the nine congregations (Dicasteries) and eleven pontifical Councils that make up the administration of the Vatican.<sup>12</sup> That marks a statement as official policy. The salient defect of the pope’s re-affirmation is in “the value of a priest *choosing* to be celibate.” Choices made under stress or duress (or subordinate to corporate advantage) are inimical to the achievement of celibacy. Celibacy is an individual, personal commitment. It involves the use and disposition of one’s sexual instinct, drive, and desire.

Some men (and women) who wish to dedicate themselves to celibacy as a way of life do tend to band together with others who share the same goal. Group support can aid the development of celibacy, but it always remains an individual achievement. A personality deficiency can attract a person to a discipline and a system that he hopes will control his sexual instinct. This is the great danger of the obligatory vow connected with the Catholic priesthood—confusing the power and prestige of an institutional office with the intrinsic power of self-mastery.

Propagating the false equation—priest equals celibacy—distorts reality and inhibits the understanding of, and research into this important ascetic discipline. In practical terms this misrepresentation fosters and tolerates sexual violation by individuals and has led to the revelation of corruption of epic proportions within the institution that is currently being exposed.

It is principally these two factors—the *mystification* of celibacy (making it super human—only priests can do it), and the *mythification* (absorbing and suborning celibate identity into an institution)—that constitute the toxic cultural core that contaminates celibacy in both theory and practice in the Catholic Church today.

## *Miasma*

For a classicist, like Marianne Mc Donald, professor at the University of California at San Diego, *miasma* is a technical term. **It means pollution**—particularly a religious stain for which one has to find a spiritual remedy. I find this a precise and evocative description of the state of celibate non-practice in the Catholic Church today.

The sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic bishops and priests has, even in the estimation of the Catholic hierarchy, reached the status of a “crisis.”<sup>13</sup> Concern over the sexual misbehavior of clergy is not a new subject for attention.<sup>14</sup> One of the classic attempts to deal with the sexual violations by supposed celibate clergy was written a millennium ago<sup>15</sup>. The essence of this Eleventh Century treatise remains timely despite its focus on “clerical homosexual practices” as understood at that time. What is timeless and relevant is Peter Damian’s analysis of the *clerical culture* that establishes a clear vision of celibacy as a valuable form of asceticism as personal responsibility, but also recognizes what constitutes institutional failure that calls for accountability.<sup>16</sup>

Heated debates about the requirement of mandatory celibacy for men who are ordained to the priesthood rage on every level of society. A common sinecure is found in the statement, “let priests marry.” Marriage is not a cure for the institutional denial, depravity, and deceit demonstrated by a culture that has used the “celibacy” of its clergy as proof of its spiritual authority.

The influence of the clerical culture has been seriously compromised by the reports of clergy who violate their celibate commitment by abusing minors—up to 11.5 percent in some areas.<sup>17</sup> The priest population in the United States that numbered 50,320 in 1994 was reduced to 43,406 in 2004.<sup>18</sup> As of 2003 the Vatican claimed to have 410,695 Catholic clergy worldwide.<sup>19</sup> (But it also realizes that at least 125,000 priests worldwide have left the ministry, most of them to marry, over the past fifty years.) The Catholic Church assumes, at least for public purposes, that all of its men are practicing celibacy as is required for ordination (*al la* Cardinal Mahony). One can only speculate on the genuine spiritual force that would be generated if celibacy were a reality among such a large number of men. But the preservation of the myth of clerical celibacy is crucial to the church’s claim to power and domination, and deemed essential to maintain the *bella figura* of the institution and the ability to deny any hint of scandal. But this myth is inimical to the achievement of celibacy in spirit and truth. **Hypocrisy is the greatest religious sin.** Perpetuation of the celibate myth is a pollutant with destructive force

The Catholic Church has lost credibility even though the same degree of exposure accorded to sexual abuse of minors in the United States has not been recorded in other and varied kinds of celibate violation here or globally. The clerical culture is under suspicion and scrutiny unmatched since the time of the Protestant Reformation. One 1994 survey conducted by a Catholic priest found that in a parish that has experienced an abusive priest “only 44 percent of the lay respondents felt priests could be trusted.”<sup>20</sup> Again referring to the Pew Forum—it reported that 31 percent of men and women who

had been raised Catholic had left the faith. That is the largest shift of any faith group. The percentage of lay people who mistrust clergy has doubled in the decade since Rossetti finished his study. The trust with which the presumption of a celibate clergy endowed clerical culture is essentially gone. More significantly trust in matters about sexual morality and teachings are equally widely rejected. This rejection and distrust of the clerical system has extended to its financial dealings—now a crisis on the cusp because of the more than two billion dollar cost to date of dealing with the sex crisis and the questionable financial practices exposed by fighting civil law suites and filings for bankruptcy protection.<sup>21.</sup>

Much is at stake in the rediscovery and rededication to celibacy—the ascetic practice and discipline. Whether or not the Catholic priesthood can be the site of this renewal is still a matter of serious doubt. Presumed authentic clerical celibacy was the rope that secured the stability, power, and prestige of the Catholic clerical culture. It is also the thread that is unraveling, dismantling the cloak that has covered corruption and hypocrisy, and holds in check toxic contamination. The pollution of celibacy-violated is far more serious than most observers are willing to admit. It is truly miasma—a poisonous atmosphere caused by decomposing matter that in turn causes illness and “a foul smell.”

## **Analysis**

The epic consequences of the sex abuse crisis by clergy in the United States have only begun to play out in the structure and culture of the Catholic Church. The impending restructuring will go to prove celibacy's inherent value and power. The real force of celibacy is going to be proven in the monumental outcome of celibacy-betrayed.

Already mentioned is the precipitous decline in clergy vocations that is predicted to continue. The exposure of the widespread failure of celibacy (especially in the criminal mode demonstrated in abuse of minors) by those who staked their power, validity, and ministerial prestige on the perception of perfect sexual abstinence has raised questions of gigantic proportions. Is vowed celibacy an efficacious mode of ministry? Is the Catholic Church's teaching about human sexuality true? These questions are of Copernican proportions partially because the conclusion is apparent. The Church's teaching about sex and marriage are wrongheaded and lack the scientific and common sense justification to sustain them any longer. Recently a Catholic bishop, Geoffrey Robinson stated what many Catholics think, “Sexual abuse of minors by a significant number of priests and religious, together with the attempts by many church authorities to conceal the abuse, constituted one of the ugliest stories ever to emerge from the Catholic Church. It is hard to imagine a more total contradiction of everything Jesus Christ stood for, and it would be difficult to overestimate the pervasive and lasting harm it has done to the Church.”<sup>22.</sup>

Harm to the church of the past, but hope for the church of the future. The secret and subversive way the church manipulates its members and wields its power even in the secular society is no longer under protective wraps. Obedience—even blind obedience—to the power structure of the church is difficult if not impossible for educated and devoted

Christians. Honesty, sex and love are too intimately bound up with the daily lives of the average person to believe and conform to the celibate standard imposed on everyone when the reality of sexual betrayal by those presented as celibate is so tenuous and dishonest.

What Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong says of Christianity, as a religious movement, is clearly true of the practice of celibacy within the Catholic tradition today—it must change, become real, or die.<sup>23</sup> That means that clerical celibacy must find its true base in human nature, profound self knowledge, and in relationship to all createdness. As Antony of the Desert responded to the philosopher’s inquiry about his deprivation of the solace of books, “My book, philosopher, is nature, and thus I can read God’s language at will.”<sup>24</sup>

Celibacy must be what it claims to be—sacrifice of sexuality, restraint for a purpose. It is not an instrument of institutional power and control; it never should have been used for those ends. Saint Antony of the Desert (d. 355) is a prime example when he refused to lend his celibate power and status to the political conflicts even when emperors wrote. The interior reality of celibacy has a power of its own and that does count immensely.

For reasons I have tried to explain, much of this power has been lost in large part because religious authority does not take the practice or violation of celibacy seriously and dismisses transgressions as “slips” or “understandable human failures” to be buried in secrecy wherever possible. But the world, as Gandhi said, is in great need of authentic religious celibacy today. It is indispensable for the reformation of the Catholic priesthood. If the power of mature and authentic celibacy can be rediscovered and renewed, the creative contributions it has to offer are immeasurable. Its demise in the priesthood has already taken a heavy toll on faith and confidence in American Catholics.

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<sup>1</sup> de Jong, Mayke, (1998). "Imitatio Morum. The Cloister and Clerical Purity in the Carolingian World" in *Medieval Purity and Piety*. Michael Frassetto, Ed. New York: Garland Publishing. See Note 3, below.

<sup>1a</sup> Cf. Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's "Confessions."* Crossroad, New York: 1992.

<sup>1b</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: the Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Beacon Press. Boston: 1993. Chapters VII and VIII are devoted to his account of celibacy; they are immediately preceded by a chapter "Spirit of Service." Brahmacharya literally means that mode of life that leads to the realization of God; a realization that is impossible without restraint. Ordinarily it is understood to mean complete control over the sexual instinct and the sexual organs.

<sup>1c</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, (1925 Lowell Lectures) Free Press edition, 1967. P.15.

<sup>2</sup> A.W. Richard Sipe, "Celibacy" *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Ed. Adrian Hastings, Oxford University Press. 2000, P.104.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Catholic Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, Extension Press, Chicago: 1906. Clinical reviews and legal depositions of bishops and priests repeatedly demonstrate that clergy are using an unsophisticated and ambiguous definition of celibacy. As recently as September 11, 2007 Tod David Brown, bishop of Orange, California declared in a deposition that masturbation was not a violation of the vow of celibacy.

<sup>4</sup> I make many declarative statements in this version of this essay without citations. I chose to do this to save the reader unnecessary encumbrances.

<sup>5</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, The Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C.: 1984. Canon 277 #1. 1983 Revised Edition states. "*Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are obliged to observe celibacy, which is a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind.*"

<sup>5a</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*. First published in 1566. English trans. Fr. C Callan, 1923.

\*“*Celibacy is unreasonable, unnatural, and excessive, which is why it has been chosen, across cultures and throughout history, as one of the ways in which lovers of God have traditionally expressed their love.*”p.99  
He contends that it is pointless to try and understand or explain this self-gift.

<sup>6.</sup> Anson Shupe, *The Spoils of the Kingdom: Clergy Misconduct and Social Exchange in Religious Life*. The University of Illinois Press, Champlain: 2007.

<sup>7.</sup> Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972.

<sup>8.</sup> H. & H.A. Frankfort, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 15.

<sup>9.</sup> E.O. Wilson, *Consilience*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998, p. 257

<sup>9.a.</sup> Cf. Andrew M Greeley, *Priests: A Calling in Crisis*, University of Chicago Press. Chicago: 2004

<sup>10.</sup> 20/20, an ABC television production, February 2001.

<sup>11.</sup> Cf. the Los Angeles Times, September 15, 2007.

<sup>12.</sup> Catholic News Service, November 16, 2006.

<sup>13.</sup> Cf. *A Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States*. Written by The National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People / and published along with a statistical survey prepared by the John Jay School of Criminal Justice. Both segments of the study were established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and published February 27, 2004.

<sup>14.</sup> Cf. *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church's 2000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse*, Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, Volt Press. Los Angeles: 2006.

<sup>15.</sup> *Book of Gomorrah*, Peter Damian, Translated by Pierre J. Payer, Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Ontario, Canada: 1982.

<sup>16.</sup> Cf. C. Colt Anderson, "When Magisterium becomes Imperium: Peter Damian on the accountability of Bishops for Scandal." *Theological Studies*, Vol. 65, 2004.

<sup>17.</sup> This figure is of the clergy active in the Los Angeles Archdiocese in 1983. It was researched and reported by Jean Guccione in the LA Times.

<sup>18.</sup> *The Official Catholic Directory*, P.J.Kennedy & Sons, New Providence, N.J: 1994 and 2005.

<sup>19.</sup> The 2003 Vatican publication *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae* gives the worldwide figures as of 2003: 405,058 priests; 4,695 bishops; 745 archbishops; 190 cardinals; and 7 patriarchs.

<sup>20.</sup> Stephen Rossetti. *A Tragic Grace: The Catholic Church and Child Sexual Abuse*. Collegeville, MN: the Liturgical Press: 1996.

<sup>21</sup>. Five American Dioceses have filed for bankruptcy protection since 2000—Tucson, AZ; Portland, OR; Spokane, WA; Davenport, IA; and San Diego, CA. “The church will not change until it is threatened with bankruptcy.” This was the judgment rendered by Fr. Stephen Rossetti to 6 of Fr. James Porter’s abuse victims in 1992 when they asked him what it would take for the church to change. He, 4 abuse victims, I and Frank Fitzpatrick, who had traced Porter and got him to admit that he had abused 200 children, appeared on a Boston TV talk show together.

<sup>22</sup>. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*. Victoria Australia: John Garratt Publishing, 2007.

23. John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*, Harper Collins, San Francisco: 1998.

24. J Quasten, *Patology* Vol III, p.149, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960.