

“...better to marry than to burn”: **Boston and the Catholic troubles**

“Sex, shame and the Catholic Church” was *Newsweek*’s cover story for March 4th, 2002, subtitled “and new soul-searching across America.” Hopefully, Roman Catholic teaching on virginity and celibacy would have been exposed and discussed rather than simply a quoting some facts and figures, and who says what, with no reference to the official stand of the Roman Catholic Church. Since what has happened is of a most serious nature, it would be in order that some reference be made to the teaching of the Lord Christ Jesus on the abuse of children. The pastoral teaching of the Apostle Paul regarding marriage and ministry ought also to be brought to bear on the issue.

Because of outrages of Boston and similar scandals and across the world, the Vatican has been asked for a response. Pope John Paul II approved some new rules. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, through the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published these rules, namely that

“pedophile cases were subject to pontifical secrecy and that only priests should handle such cases, including those serving as judges, prosecutor, or defense advocate in church tribunals...[and] victims must make their accusations within 10 years after turning 18.”¹

Had such principle of “pontifical secrecy” been produced in any other forum, an outcry would be heard. The temptations of priests judging their fellow priests—and that with “pontifical secrecy”—would be similar to a decree of Enron’s executives claiming the right to judge Enron’s executives subject to executive secrecy.

All of this is totally shocking especially in light of the Lord Christ Jesus’ principles on this very matter. The Lord Christ Jesus spoke some of His harshest words against those who offend one of the little ones who believe in Him, *“but whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.”*²

Marriage and Ministry

In the Scripture, marriage is honored. The Scriptural qualifications of a pastor or minister are that he is to be the husband of one wife, knowing how to manage his own home first and then God’s church. *“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”*³ *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior...one that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”*⁴ The gift of celibacy is spoken about by the Lord Christ Jesus as a gift that is given only to a few. On the very topic, *“it is not good to marry”*⁵, Christ Jesus said, *“All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”*⁶ It is therefore in the context of speaking about marriage that the Lord speaks of the eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. It is to

¹ Associated Press, 1/9/2002 http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/geoghan/010902_vatican.htm

² Matthew 19:6-7.

³ Hebrews 13:4

⁴ I Timothy 3:2-5

⁵ Matthew 19:10

⁶ Matthew 19:11-12

be noted that the Lord does not speak of an institution of celibates; rather He says, *"He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."* It is a personal matter between the Lord and the individual. It was not a universal counsel for all believers in ministry. What the Lord did NOT say was this: "for this cause shall a man also leave father and mother and join himself to a group of other celibates, and their way of life shall be established." No such form of life was ever established by the Lord; rather celibacy is only for certain individuals, and that is a personal matter between the Lord and each individual. Had the Lord envisaged Master Generals and monasteries, and Mother Superiors and convents, He would have said so in this context. In the New Testament, however, there is no hint of the Apostles and those who were to follow them as pastors being celibate. Rather in Christ's teaching and that of the Apostle Paul, marriage is an ordinance from which no profession is barred, *"Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?"*⁷ Forbidding marriage is one of the erroneous doctrines of the antichristian church. In I Corinthians 7:8-9 and vv. 32-38, the Apostle Paul say it is permissible to be celibate if one so chooses, but it is never to be commanded, it is never law. In the Apostle's words, *"But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn."*⁸ Priestly celibacy has been the root cause for sexual immorality among priests, women, and boys, as priests sexually proposition women for fornication and boys for sodomy.

RC law on the Clerical State

The Roman Catholic teaching regarding marriage and ministry heads in a totally different direction, away from the individual in his intimate relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and towards his total servitude to the Roman Catholic system. The marriage of a priest for the Church of Rome is not *"honorable and undefiled"*^{3/4} rather it is called a scandal. By Roman Catholic Church law, bishops and priests are forbidden to marry. Their *Code of Canon Law* states,

Canon 1394, Sec. 1 ". . . a cleric who attempts marriage, even if only a civilly, incurs an *latae sententiae* suspension; if he does not repent after being warned and continues to give **scandal**, he can be punished gradually by deprivations, even by dismissal from the clerical state."⁹

Celibacy in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is solely for the individual who can receive that gift. Canon 1394 clearly contradicts the Lord Jesus Christ's teaching.

Boldfaced enough to admits that her iron laws are not based on the Bible but on her own tradition, the Vatican teaching reads,

"In any case, the [Roman Catholic] church of the West cannot weaken her faithful **observance of her own tradition**. And it is unthinkable that for centuries she has followed a path which, instead of favouring the spiritual richness of individual souls and of the People of God, has in some way compromised it, or that she has with arbitrary juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace."¹⁰

It is brazen arrogance that same Pope and his Church, while freely admitting that their laws of celibacy came not from Lord Christ Jesus Himself nor from the Apostles but rather from "her own tradition", yet state that it is "unthinkable" that the Roman Catholic Church "has with arbitrary juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace." How can a church that recognizes that ecclesiastical celibacy is not from Christ and the Apostles, still make such teaching her law? Her own official explanation begins benignly enough,

⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:5

⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:9

⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Latin-English Ed., New English Tr., 1999 (Washington DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983). All canons are taken from this source unless otherwise stated. Bolding in any quotation indicates emphasis added in this paper.

¹⁰ Vatican Council II Documents No. 95, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 24 June 1967, *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, Ed. First Edition (Northport, NY: Costello Publ. Co., 1982) Vol. II, Sec. 41, p. 297.

“Let us look openly at the principal objections against the law that links ecclesiastical celibacy with the priesthood. The first seems to come from the most authoritative source, the New Testament which preserves the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. It does not demand celibacy of sacred ministers but proposes it rather as a free act of obedience to a special vocation or to a special spiritual gift. Jesus himself did not make it a prerequisite in his choice of the Twelve, nor did the Apostles for those who presided over the first Christian communities.”¹¹

She states that the principal objections “seem” to come from “the most authoritative source”, the New Testament. Yet, clearly the Scripture is not “the most authoritative source” for her! While recognizing that virginity is not of the nature of ministry in itself, Rome is bold enough to declare that, based on “her faithful observance of her own traditions”, priestly celibacy is still for the Roman Catholic Church a “sacred law”,

“Virginity undoubtedly, as the Second Vatican Council declared, ‘is not, of course, required by the nature of the priesthood itself. This is clear from the practice of the early Church and the traditions of the Eastern Churches.’ But at the same time the Council did not hesitate to confirm solemnly **the ancient, sacred and providential present law of priestly celibacy.**”¹²

Clearly, in terms of authority, Roman Catholic tradition stands above the Holy Scripture!

In the face of all of this, the Holy Spirit had warned of such absurd teaching and practice in the New Testament. “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*”¹³ This text plainly applies to the Roman Catholic Church, which has put her traditions above the Holy Scripture. Forbidding to marry was one of the steps towards that great apostasy, which is and has been for centuries enshrined in her paying veneration to the relics of martyrs, erecting altars, burning incense, consecrating images and temples, making prayers and praises to the dead departed, and generally deceiving those who have not received the love of the truth. Such demon-worship also includes forbidding marrying, and commanding to abstain from meats. The same priests, who are forbidden to marry, are the ones who also are commanded to abstinence from meats on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The Vatican freely admits that what has happened and is happening is saddening; and it might appear that the solution would be to allow the Roman Catholic clergy to marry. The official stand of the Church of Rome recognizes this as an option,

“There are those who are convinced that a married priesthood would remove the occasions for infidelity, waywardness, and distressing defections which hurt and sadden the whole [Roman Catholic] Church. These also maintain that a married priesthood would enable Christ’s ministers to witness more fully to Christian living, by including the witness of married life, from which they are excluded by their state of life.”¹⁴

While Rome officially admits this, in practice she does nothing; rather she continues to insist on her laws of celibacy. The laws of Rome are *de rigueur*, enforced, and unchangeable. In the words of the Pope and the Vatican Council II, the Roman Catholic Church imposes celibacy by law. Her official words are,

“. . . based on the mystery of Christ and his mission, **celibacy**, which at first was recommended to priests, was afterwards in the Latin Church, **imposed by law** on all who were to be promoted to holy Orders. **This sacred Council approves and confirms this legislation.**”¹⁵

¹¹ No. 95, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Sec. 5, p. 286

¹² *Ibid.*, Sec. 17, p. 290

¹³ I Timothy 4:1-3

¹⁴ No. 95, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Sec. 9, p. 287

¹⁵ No. 63, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 Dec. 1965, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery, Ed. ((Northport, NY: Costello Publ. Co., 1975) Vol. I, Sec. 16, p. 893

Given such rash disregard for the Holy Scripture, is it really so “unthinkable” that “she has with arbitrary juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace”? And what is the fruit of her instituting tradition over Scripture?

The Boston Disgrace

Since the mid-1990s, more than 130 people have come forward with horrific childhood tales about how former priest John J. Geoghan allegedly fondled or raped them during a three-decade spree through a half-dozen Greater Boston parishes. Almost always, his victims were grammar school boys. One was just 4 years old. Then came last July’s disclosure that Cardinal Bernard F. Law knew about Geoghan’s problems in 1984, Cardinal Law’s first year in Boston, yet approved his transfer to St. Julia’s parish in Weston. Wilson D. Rogers Jr., the Cardinal’s attorney, defended the move last summer, saying the archdiocese had medical assurances that each Geoghan reassignment was “appropriate and safe”. But one of Cardinal Law’s bishops thought that the 1984 assignment of Geoghan to St. Julia’s was so risky, he wrote the cardinal a letter in protest. The archdiocese already had substantial evidence of Geoghan’s predatory sexual habits. That included his assertion in 1980 that his repeated abuse of seven boys in one extended family was not a “serious” problem, according to an archdiocesan record. And the St. Julia’s assignment proved disastrous. First, Geoghan was put in charge of three youth groups, including altar boys. In 1989, he was forced to go on sick leave after more complaints of sexual abuse, and spent months in two institutions that treat sexually abusive priests. Even so, the archdiocese returned him to St. Julia’s, where Geoghan continued to abuse children for another three years. Why did it take a succession of three cardinals and many bishops 34 years to place children out of Geoghan’s reach?¹⁶

Boston affair only tip of the trouble

“Last March, the National Catholic Reporter (NCR), a U.S.-based Catholic weekly, ran a series of stories on internal reports in the Vatican about the sexual abuse of nuns and other women by priests and bishops around the world. The Vatican acknowledged that the problem existed. The internal reports said some priests and missionaries had forced nuns to have sex with them, and had in some cases committed rape and forced the victims to have abortions. The reports cited cases in 23 countries, including the United States, the Philippines, Ireland and Papua New Guinea. In July, about 150 Catholics protested at the Vatican’s United Nations mission, demanding an independent commission to investigate alleged violence against nuns by priests. In a petition to the pope they called for punishment for priests who engaged in violence and reparations to nuns who were victims”¹⁷

The Roman Catholic response

In face of these and other facts the official Roman Catholic teaching declares,

“Life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which [the] faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God...”¹⁸

The words “more closely” therefore, contrast to the vows of marriage. The meaning is that the consecrated life of priests and nuns is a closer following of Christ than is marriage. Clearly, God has never declared this to be so, rather the opposite, “*For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.*”¹⁹ The marriage contact is the most tender and endearing of all human relations, more tender than even that bond which unites a child to a parent. The word “cleave” denotes a union of the firmest kind. Further, Ephesians 5 explains the duties of marriage

¹⁶ “Church allowed abuse by priest for years” <http://www.boston.com/globe/metro/packages/geoghan/> By Globe Staff, 1/6/02

¹⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/22/pope.apology/>

¹⁸ No. 28 *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, Flannery, Vol. I, Para. 44, p. 404.

¹⁹ Matthew 19:5

partners so as to make visible one of the primary purposes of marriage, which is to help the believers understand the relationship of Christ and His Church. Marriage seen in this light is clearly a gift of God, and most understandable that the Lord should also say, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife.”²⁰

Marriage is honorable. The understanding that a pastor should be the husband of one wife has full Scriptural backing. The agony, misery, and morality of thousands of Roman Catholic priests notwithstanding, the Roman Catholic Church continues to enforce her own law on her followers. As Scripture says, those who teach such things have departed from the faith in order to propagate their demonic doctrine. Rome has departed from the faith commending and enjoining celibacy and virginity to the office of a Pastor that God has never commanded. What they consider “Holy” turns out to be unholy, and what is in fact “Holy”, Rome absolutely prohibits. The present crisis of the Roman Catholic Church show what a disaster may come when the Bible is set aside as the basis of all truth, and in its place is set the inane Tradition of fallible man. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”²¹

The Vatican solution

The Pope’s and Vatican’s resolution to the problem is “pontifical secrecy”, a new stress on the law of celibacy, and the turning to psychology also for help. On March 4^h it was announced that gay men should not be ordained as priests. *The Boston Globe* reported on the announcement made by Joaquin Navarro-Valls, a chief spokesman for Pope John Paul II, followed by comments by a former priest,

“If they were to eliminate all those who were homosexually oriented, the number would be so staggering that it would be like an atomic bomb; it would do the same damage to the church’s operation,” said A. W. Richard Sipe, a former priest and psychotherapist. Sipe has been studying the sexuality of priests for 25 years and has written three books on the subject. ‘It would mean the resignation of at least a third of the bishops of the world. And it’s very much against the tradition of the church; many saints had a gay orientation, and many popes had gay orientations,’ Sipe said. ‘Discriminating against orientation is not going to solve the problem.’”²²

The Real Solution

By nature, every person is born a sinner destined for Hell. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. The real call of Scripture is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ alone, for it is by grace alone through faith alone that a person is born again to new life in Christ. “*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*” This call is made to all but in a special way to the sincere American Catholic of our day for whom are these words of comfort and of warning, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*”²³ “*Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.*”²⁴

The Gospel message is central to every true revival in the body of Christ, even as it was in the Reformation. Literally hundreds of thousands of Catholics are saved each year as they see the finished work of Christ redemption and the stupidity of the traditions, laws and trappings of the Church of Rome. The continual theme of scripture to the believer is “*In the LORD have I righteousness and strength*”²⁵, or in the words of the Apostle, “*That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is*

²⁰ I Timothy 3:2

²¹ Matthew 7:20

²² Michael Paulson, Globe Staff, 3/4/20http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/sexabuse/related/030402_vatican.htm

²³ Acts 16:31-32

²⁴ Revelation 18:4-5

²⁵ Isaiah 45:24

of God by faith."²⁶ The believer totally accepted in Christ on this basis moves forward. Thus God's grace flows abundantly and God alone is glorified. The great wisdom of the Apostle Peter comes to the sincere Catholic, downtrodden by scandal, tradition and shame in the words of Scripture, "*Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*"²⁷ This is the only sound and lasting answer to "the new soul-searching across America" of which *Newsweek* speaks. In the counsel and command of the Lord Christ Jesus, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*"²⁸ ♦

Berean Beacon Ministry: www.bereanbeacon.org

²⁶ Philippians 3:8-9

²⁷ 1 Peter 1:18-19

²⁸ John 6:29