

**CELIBACY:  
AN ECUMENICAL STUDY  
OF SELECTED AFRICAN CHURCH MINISTERS**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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**This is my original work**

**and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.**

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## ABSTRACT

Celibacy is something that distinguishes Roman Catholic priestly ministers of the Latin Rite from their colleagues of other churches. What do African church ministers, both Roman Catholics and ministers of other churches think about the law of ministerial celibacy?

Thousands of celibate ministers used to enter Africa from Western countries, but in the West organised religion is in a profound crisis, and the seminaries are nearly empty - prescribed ministerial celibacy being one of the main reasons. In Africa the Roman Catholic Church is growing rapidly in terms of numbers, but in the paramount worldview of sub-Saharan Africa vital interrelatedness and the continuation of the lineage are important and paramount values.

This ecumenical study has discovered what African church ministers believe about the law of ministerial celibacy. The thesis of this study is that for African church ministers celibacy is a major challenge.

Use was made of literature by especially African writers, and by field-research. For the latter one hundred and fifty church ministers, both men and women, married and unmarried, from a great variety of churches, selected by snowball sampling, were approached for a free flowing interview and for a survey. Matthew 19: 3-12, where Jesus of Nazareth distinguishes three types of eunuchs, was used as a catalyser.

The Nairobi area was chosen because it is the biggest metropolitan concentration of East Africa. Inhabitants are drawn in from all over the country, the continent and the world. They are exposed to the local and the global, the old and the new.

The research is framed by the opinions of John Mbiti and Jean-Marc Éla. The former believes that Africans live from a strong communal mindset, culminating in relationships and progeny. The latter argues that Africans should develop their own political, economic and ecclesial centres of gravity, without submitting themselves to new forms of colonialism and slavery.

The main exegetical finding is that the eunuch passage can be used both for affirming the passage that precedes it (marital faithfulness) and for explaining voluntary celibacy (remaining unmarried for the kingdom).

The main psycho-cultural findings are that having a family is expected in both traditional and contemporary Africa, that elders are usually married, and that marriage is seen as God-ordained. It is commonly believed that something must be seriously wrong with unmarried adults.

The main cultic finding is that most married ministers justify their times of sexual abstinence by spontaneously referring to 1 Corinthians 7:5, which is a text that has no cultic references, and not to pre-Christian African purity customs.

The main pastoral-ecclesiological findings are that ministers of other churches prepare themselves for ministry as (potential) spouses and parents, that future Roman Catholic clerics are formed to protect themselves as celibates, and that these states of life influence their (sexual) self-image. Although both forms of ministry have various advantages and disadvantages, celibacy is no guarantee for social acceptance, pastoral empathy or a more profound faith.

The main personal-therapeutic findings are that celibates are surrounded and affected by many sexual questions, that a high percentage of informants believes that one in every three African Roman Catholic priests would like to marry, and that ministers of all churches agree that it is good to talk about the painful side of celibate sexuality.

The main finding of the entire research is that celibacy is no challenge for (married) ministers of other churches, but more so for struggling celibates.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0. Introduction

This study has a background. The ministerial celibacy prescription was introduced to Africa by missionaries who came to plant the (European) church by catechising and baptising Africans Christians and by urging them to bring forth their own ministers. Gradually, and this was seen as a main reason for missionary activities, the clergy became indigenous. Celibacy was presented as a *fait accompli*. But is it? Does the numerical increase in priests mean that all accept celibacy intrinsically? Celibacy causes a mixture admiration and uneasiness. Many African Christians do not manage to understand celibacy. That celibacy is so much “in the air” makes the research timely and valid.

Especially five incentives have given rise to this research on the challenge of celibacy for African church ministers.

The first incentive is an earlier research in “African Studies” in which fifty-six percent of African “Religious” (these are Roman Catholic men and women who have vowed poverty, chaste celibacy and obedience in an intentional institute and not to a geographically defined diocese) declared that they experience their vow of celibate chastity as their real vow of poverty: having no wife or husband and having no children.<sup>1</sup>

The second stimulus is what happened a few minutes before nearly thirty young men were ordained deacons of the Roman Catholic Church at “Tangaza College” in October 2009. First subdued laughter broke out in the crowd when the moment arrived for them to promise lifelong celibacy. This stopped when presiding Bishop Norman King’oo Wambua said sternly that this promise was a serious moment, because for priests celibacy is not optional. However, once he thanked the men for their promise the laughter erupted loudly. What was happening under the surface?

The third event happened in February 2010, when the researcher had to spend some days in hospital for a knee surgery. A nurse asked him whether his wife and children were with him in Nairobi or in his country of origin. When he told her that he is not married because he is a Roman Catholic priest, she replied that she knows Roman Catholic priests who have a wife and children, and that she thought that celibacy was no longer an issue. She explained that for her, as an African woman, it is incomprehensible that a church can ask its leaders not to

marry. She authoritatively quoted Genesis where it says that it is not good for man to remain alone and said, "Please, do not continue to waste your life. It's too short for that!" She came across as being sincere in her attitude. Is this a general attitude? How does this female warmth affect African celibates?

And what to think of the many newspaper articles that continue to reveal that for many priests celibacy does not work? In May 2009, more than forty priests in the Central African Republic went on a one-day strike in support of Archbishop Paulin Pomodino of Bangui and of the President of the National Bishops' Conference, Bishop François Xavier Yombanje of Bossangoa. Both men were accused of not having taken action against the many priests in his diocese who were living openly with their wives and children. In June that year Emmanuel Milingo, the excommunicated former archbishop of Lusaka, ordained Daniel Kasomo as bishop of the Reformed Catholic Church. Kasomo had already married a year after his ordination as a Roman Catholic priest in 1992. That very month Archbishop Raymond Rodig flew over from the US to ordain Godfrey Shiundu as the leading bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Church of Christ in Kenya. Benedict Simiyu, who became his auxiliary bishop, said that time had come for the Roman Catholic Church to accept the failure of the celibacy doctrine because various bishops and priests do not practice the law of celibacy and have secret relationships and children. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, in their final draft of the African Synod in Rome, the participating bishops urged their priests to see chaste celibacy as a form of witness, whereas only a week earlier the media had paid much attention to Benedict XVI's decision to make it easier for married Anglican priests to be welcomed into the Roman Catholic community. Joseph Omole, a CUEA lecturer, asked what many think: why does this church not simply ordain her own married men for priestly ministry?<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, the researcher, who accompanies predominantly African Roman Catholic theology students who are preparing themselves for pastoral ministry as celibates, wishes to go beyond the narrow scene of a formation centre and to discover deeper drives and reasons from a broad and deep African and ecumenical perspective.

The issue of this research is not the *gift* of celibacy, which some people undoubtedly have, but opinions and attitudes of African church ministers to the *law* of celibacy, the prescription of celibacy as a requirement for all priests of the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Eastern Rite, to which only some two percent of Roman Catholics belong, married men can be ordained priest.<sup>3</sup> The word "imposition" is used in Vatican Two document "The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests." Here it is generously admitted that celibacy "is

not required by the nature of the priesthood,” and that there are also “many excellent married priests.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless Canon Law says:

A candidate for the permanent diaconate who is not married, and likewise a candidate for the priesthood, is not to be admitted to the order of diaconate unless he has, in the prescribed rite, publicly before God and the Church undertaken the obligation of celibacy, or unless he has taken perpetual vows in a religious institute.<sup>5</sup>

The history of the imposition of celibacy is a history of agreements and disagreements. Married priests were very common in the first and early second millennium. The Eastern Churches have always sanctioned the ordination of married men. Married Anglican and Lutheran priests who wish to become Roman Catholic ministers are allowed to continue their marital and sexual life as *exceptions* to “prove” the celibacy rule.<sup>6</sup> Churches of the Reformation and African Independent Churches do not know a law of celibacy for their ministers.

The study is presented in five chapters. The remainder of Chapter One introduces the research problem, the objectives of the study, the justifications of the research, the scope and limitations of the academic enterprise, the methodology, the definition of some terms, an introduction to what some other writers have written about the subject, a conceptual and a theoretical framework, the research hypotheses and the methodology. Chapter Two is a presentation of the history of the ministerial celibacy prescription. Chapter Three is biblical: an exegetic analysis of Matthew 19: 3-12, and its contribution to the celibacy debate. Chapter Four, based on field research, is an exploration of African reactions to prescribed ministerial celibacy. Chapter Five consists of short conclusions and proposals for the way forward. The work finishes with the list of references, the bibliography, and three appendixes: the research tools, a list of characteristics of representative informants, and a significant email of John Mbiti.

### **1.1. Statement of the Research Problem**

Celibacy is an issue that is in debate locally and globally. It has been tackled throughout the history of the church by various communities. The opinion of Africans demands a study on its own. Africans have a cosmology and value system that makes them unique in their approach to celibacy. It is not hard to observe that celibacy divides ministers in strong supporters and in those who question this prescription. The attitude of non Roman Catholic African men and women, may not have received enough attention. This study aims to fill that gap.

Officially celibacy is meant to be a way of total and loving dedication to God and neighbour, but most people interpret it as having no wife, and having no children. “Celibate” Roman Catholic priests who admit having a wife and who continue to procreate are suspended from their priesthood. Those who wish to maintain their relationship and to remain priests are forced to lead a double life. The recent global focus on sexual abuse in pastoral relationships also affects genuinely celibate priests. The fundamental thesis of this study is that for the selected African church ministers celibacy is a major challenge.

## **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

The study has five objectives:

1. To make an exegetic analysis of Matthew 19: 3-12;
2. To present the general debate and history of the ministerial celibacy law;
3. To explore African reactions to prescribed ministerial celibacy;
4. To make significant proposals for the way forward.

## **1.3. Rationale of the Research**

The justification of the proposed research has a Bible-hermeneutic, pastoral, ecclesiological, therapeutic and contributive character.

1. *Bible-hermeneutic*: the research wants to find out how African ministers interpret Jesus’ description of three types of eunuchs (Mt. 19: 10-12), and whether they deduce celibacy from it as the norm or as an option for Christian church ministers.
2. *Pastoral*: the research wants to find out how, according to their story, being married or celibate influences or hinders the African church ministers’ pastoral commitment.
3. *Ecclesiological*: the research wants to find out what African ministers think about the priestly ordination of wise, committed and knowledgeable married Christians.
4. *Therapeutic*: the research aims at discovering how being married or celibate influences African church ministers’ self-image in terms of well-being. Sharing can be wholesome because often people only discover who they are when they find words for their story.
5. *Contributive*: much has been written in the West on the prescribed character of celibacy for Roman Catholic priests in recent decades, both by adherents and opponents. This study wants

to discover, analyse and present how *African* church ministers relate to this law, and to add their voices and arguments to the debate.

#### 1.4. Definition of Terms

**Celibacy:** the Latin word *caelebs* means unmarried. In this context: a consciously chosen unmarried state of life, for religious or ecclesial reasons.

**Church(es):** this study makes no distinction between churches, denominations, congregations, fellowships, sects and ministries because the emphasis is on what individual ministers think.

**Contenance:** sexual abstinence. From the first centuries of Christianity there have been forces in favour and against ordained church ministers having marital and sexual relationships.

**Diocese:** a διοίκησις is a district of the Roman Empire under an officer. In this study: a territory, consisting of parishes, that is coordinated by a bishop.

**Eastern Churches:** since the split of the Roman Empire (395) occidental Christianity focused on Rome and oriental Christianity on Constantinople. Eastern Churches allow married men to be ordained priests.

**Ecclesial Law:** a law, like the celibacy prescription, that was made up by a church, but that is not a divine law, like *thou shalt not kill*.

**Eunuch:** the word ευνούχος consists of ἐννή (*bed*) and ἔχω (*I have*). Literally the word means *I have/keep the bed*. A eunuch is a castrated man who takes care of the bed or harem of his master.

**Minister:** someone who has been instituted or ordained to serve the community. In this study this word is preferred to the more cultic and denominationally loaded term *priest*. In this study, to compensate the woman ministers in other churches, the word “minister” includes the interviewed women-religious.

**Religious:** in this study “a religious” is a man or woman who has made the vows of poverty, obedience and celibacy/chastity in accordance with constitutions of a group.

#### 1.5. Review of Literature

What follows is a focus on focal thoughts of some Western and African and Africanist writers, in their relevance for the debate on celibacy.



### 1.5.1. Western Literature

In Western literature about the ministerial celibacy prescription there is a Pauline line (Paul was not married when he wrote his letters) and a Petrine line (this apostle was married).<sup>7</sup>

Representatives of the Pauline line are Charles Gallagher and Thomas Vandenberg, Kenneth Howell, Stanley Jaki, Thomas McGovern, Alphonse Maria Stickler, Peter Stravinskis and popes like Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In their book “Loving for Life,” Charles Gallagher and Thomas Vandenberg believe that sex is no need but a want, that unmarried priests can be more dedicated to the faith community because they do not have to divide their energy between their wife and their people, and that they should interpret their celibate relationship with the church in terms of a covenant more than as a contract, as a privilege more than as a privation. Celibate men should integrate their anima. Married and celibate Christians can inspire each other in their different vocations, and priests in crisis should ask for the grace of celibacy.<sup>8</sup>

In “The Teaching of Christ on Priestly Celibacy,” Kenneth Howell emphasizes the counter cultural dimension of celibacy. Although celibacy is canonical and not theological, Jesus’ invitation for people to follow him in an unmarried state was a cultural shock. What matters for celibates is their focus on the person of Jesus: just as eunuchs were attached to their master, eunuchs for the kingdom attach themselves to Jesus as his court officials. Celibacy is no arbitrary denominational prescription, but God’s gift. The call to priesthood is accompanied by the grace of celibacy. It makes a person available for mission.<sup>9</sup>

In his work “Theology for Priestly Celibacy,” Stanley Jaki tries to make clear that priesthood cannot be understood in human categories, because it is based on the divinity of Jesus. Priests who married and their unfortunate partners deserve compassion. Celibacy, curing the flesh, belongs to the divine pedagogy. Celibates should not focus on cultural reactions to their unmarried state but the sacrifice of Jesus. Celibate Jesus presented celibacy as the highest form of life and all the apostles were celibate. Suffering belongs to celibacy, just as it belonged to the sacrifice of Jesus. What is the small sacrifice of celibacy compared to Jesus’ sacrifice of consummation, cumulating on the cross? The sacrifice of the priest can best be understood in the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas McGovern, in his book “Priestly Celibacy Today,” believes that priests should interpret their celibacy from the perspective of their insertion in the mystery of Jesus Christ, and that they should avoid Old Testament functionalist approach of merely abstaining before

offering their sacrifices in the Temple. In Jesus the link between celibacy and priesthood was first established. Celibacy originates and is willed by Jesus. By his celibacy he was available for the will of the Father. Priests are bound to continence because of their consecration, their role as mediator in the administration of the sacraments and in ministry. They serve the church, the virginal spouse of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In his book “The Case for Clerical Celibacy. Its Historical Developments and Theological Foundations,” Alfons Maria Stickler utters his dislike for the discussion whether marriage or celibacy makes a minister more effective. He believes that celibacy cannot be understood by anthropological, psychological or sociological arguments; these sciences are profane and this-worldly. Because of its relationship to Jesus, the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church is a mystery, an ontological rather than a functional reality. The commitment to continence, necessary and indispensable for the priesthood, has a divine origin. Jesus urged the Apostles to be united with him and to leave behind their families. Councils are a written consolidation of a traditional obligation.<sup>12</sup>

In “Celibacy and Its Meaning for the Priesthood,” Peter Stravinskias warns against liturgical reductionism of the ontology of holy orders. A priest is what he is and not what he does. The life of Jesus was a priestly offering, but by allowing married ministers, Trullo and the Reformation reduced the priesthood to a liturgical role. As both priesthood and marriage are sacraments, receiving both the marital state and full-time discipleship will cause conflicts. The priest as *Other Christ* is a foretaste of heaven. Celibacy is no external norm but a divine gift that is not contrary to human nature.<sup>13</sup>

Pope Paul VI, Giovanni Montini, wrote in his encyclical “*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*,” that priestly celibacy is a brilliant jewel, a golden law, and courageous self-denial. Jesus was celibate and celibacy belongs and will belong to the church of the West. This obligation unites a priest to Christ and the church. Celibacy should be lived in purity and holiness. Those who do not live their promise are in a sad state and bring sorrow, dishonour and unrest to God’s church.<sup>14</sup>

In his work “*Pastores Dabo Vobis*,” John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, emphasizes that priests are men of communion, related to Christ and his church. Their relation to the church is spousal and they should give themselves without limits. Centre and root of priestly life is the Eucharist. Ministers should care for their personal sanctification. They must resemble Christ and are called to prolong his presence sacramentally. Celibacy means chastity: a gift of self and a sign of service. It is promised for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives. Celibacy

must be welcomed and continually renewed. It is a value that is profoundly connected with ordination. In his letter “*Mulieris Dignitatem*” he explains that women cannot be ordained to ministerial priesthood, because women cannot act “in persona Christi” in the eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

In his apostolic constitution “*Anglicanorum Coetibus*,” Benedixt XVI, Karl Ratzinger, writes that the creation of a *Personal Ordinariate* for Anglican married priests who want to become Roman Catholics should not be interpreted as a change in the discipline of clerical celibacy.<sup>16</sup> In his proclamation for the “Year for Priests,” he presents nineteenth century Tridentine parish priest Jean-Marie Vianney as the role-model and patron, emphasising his chastity. In his “Letter to Seminarians” he urged them to thank God for priests who are examples of human maturity, genuine celibacy and faith. About celibacy he wrote the students that they should discern seriously whether this is truly the most appropriate lifestyle for them.<sup>17</sup>

Representatives of the Petrine line are Jean-Paul Audet, Paul Bernier, Hans Küng, Geoffrey Parrinder, Richard Sipe, Edward Schillebeeckx, Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, and Wiesner-Hanks

In his work “Structures of Christian Priesthood. Home, Marriage and Celibacy in the Pastoral Service of the Church,” Jean-Paul Audet writes that in the first four centuries the emphasis was on pastoral services in base communities but not on states of life, like marriage or celibacy. The shift from spontaneous continence by married Christians to a law of celibacy was caused by dualism between the impure and the sacred, by asceticism, monasticism, the construction of basilica, a shift from the service of the word to that of the table and from ministries to a sacred cast of priests and an artificial aura of sacredness. The crisis in Christianity is an invitation to return to smaller base communities and to a new diversity of pastoral ministries.<sup>18</sup>

In his book “Ministry in the Church. A Historical and Pastoral Approach,” Paul Bernier explains that questions about ministry reveal an understanding of the church. Ministry is an historic and modifiable expression of the most basic mandates of the Gospel, rooted in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the Kingdom. Jesus did not ordain the first priests at the last supper and priestly ministry does not depend on an unbroken transmission of power from the Twelve to bishops through the ages. Dualism, monasticism and the institutionalisation of the church are the main reasons for the unnecessary celibacy law. The depreciation of the material and physical is more neo-Platonic than Christian.<sup>19</sup>

Life-perceptions change, writes Joseph Blenkinsopp in his book “*Celibacy, Ministry, Church: An Inquire in the Possibility of Reform in the Present Self-Understanding of the Roman*

Catholic Church and Its Practice of Ministry.” The cultic, dualistic, ascetical and eschatological reasons for celibacy in the first centuries make no sense to contemporary Christians. It is uncommon for people to choose a life-style for its sign-value; usually fundamental choices are made because it feels best, because it is the best way to realise potential. A high degree of conformity, required of Roman Catholic priests can make it hard for them to grow and mature as human persons. The New Testament makes no link between pastoral ministry and celibacy. Terms like *sacred ministry* and *priest* focus more on status than on tasks, and block reforms.<sup>20</sup>

“Why Priests?” is the question and book-title of Hans Klüng. Let the word be dropped, because the sacrifice of Jesus has abolished Old Testament priesthood. By offering their praises, the entire Christian people are priestly. The first Christians had a high degree of ministerial diversity. The monarchical church structure of bishop, presbyters and deacons was inspired by the subdivisions of civil servants class of the Roman Empire. In our days, when people have much free time, part-time ministry is an option. Church ministry does not have to be for life, and the leadership does not have to be celibate. The law of celibacy, a monastic tradition extended to secular priests, is medieval, purely ecclesiastical, and opposed by many Catholic clergy. Let individual ministers decide for themselves whether they want to marry or not. Marriage is a human right and efforts to defend celibacy for all ministers can only be called pseudo-theological.<sup>21</sup>

Sex and religion are often opposed, writes Geoffrey Parrinder in his book “Sex in the World Religions.” Christianity is a synthesis of Hebrew and Greek thought with other influences. The words of Jesus on sex and marriage arose in the Hebrew background: he interpreted the story of Adam and Eve as a divine wish for singleness and unity. The Gospel inspires families to be loyal to Christ. Pentecost was a spiritual ordination of men and women. The fact that celibacy was often talked about at councils proves that there was opposition. The Roman Catholic Church does what no religion does by insisting on compulsory celibacy for all priests.<sup>22</sup>

Richard Sipe interviewed many celibates as a psychologist, and sees celibacy as a way of searchingly dealing with one’s sexual energies. In his book “A Secret World. Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy,” he sketches a history of the law of celibacy: there have been many married priests, bishops and popes. What challenges contemporary celibate ministers is people’s greater sexual awareness and sexual explicitness, oral contraceptives, women’s rights, the gay movement and androgyny. He is very explicit about sexual orientations among

priests, masturbation, paedophilia, and sexual compromises. He accuses the Roman Catholic Church of romanticizing and legalising a lifestyle that many people rightly also associate with tensions and frustrations.<sup>23</sup>

In “Clerical Celibacy Under Fire,” Edward Schillebeeckx argues phenomenologically: if human behaviour makes no sense mundanely or secularly, it will make no sense religiously. Times and perceptions change. Cultic purity can no longer be the reason for ministerial celibacy. Celibacy is only healthy if a person is existentially unable to do otherwise, if it is an authentically intrinsic expression of social care. Church ministry should not be confused with outdated historical manifestations. Loving God and neighbour does not depend on being married or single. The pastoral emphasis should be on people’s pastoral needs, but there is no compulsory connection between ministry and celibacy.<sup>24</sup>

In “Celibacy, Gift or Law? A Critical Investigation,” Heinz-Jürgen Vogels writes that he respects and accepts that there are some adults who have the psycho-physical ability to live a celibate life, but for most people this is not the case. Many Roman Catholic priests do not promise celibacy because they want to be celibates, but because they want to be priests. If marriage is a natural right, how can a human law-giver demand abstention? It is better to focus on the common sense Council of Trullo (692) that allows married men to become priests, than on ascetic Elvira (306) that forbade them to have sexual contacts with their wives, and that launched further restrictions culminating in the unjust law of celibacy.<sup>25</sup>

Merry Wiesner-Hanks writes in “Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World,” that Jesus did not talk about sex but about marriage and eunuchry, but the history of Christianity can be seen as a history of sexuality. Paul played down the importance of sexuality by his focus on Jesus’ return. Due to Greek thoughts of dualism, Christians started to emphasize the spiritual more than the physical. As a result of underestimating the physical, sexuality was seen as sinful and repressed. Although monasticism was a manifestation of sexual sacrifice, many priests continued to marry until the Second Lateran Council (1139) forbade it. Luther promoted marriage as the best Christian life and promoted clerical marriage. Priests with a woman and children are nothing new, although opinions about this differ.

### **1.5.2. Africa-Focused Literature**

Examples of representatives of the Pauline line are Sylvester Igboanyika, Serapio Kabazzi-Kisirinya, John Kariuki wa Karega, and Rafael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki.

In his article “The history of priestly celibacy in the church,” Sylvester Igboanyika shows an obvious interest in church history. However, he only gives the western history of consolidation of celibacy, interpreted by him as consensus. He does not mention opposition to this consolidation; neither does he describe how celibacy landed among Africans.<sup>26</sup>

In his article “Shortage of priestly vocations in Africa,” Serapio Kabazzi-Kisirinya reacts against the statement that Africans are not celibate by nature. He emphasises that Africans are people of relationships, family, solidarity and togetherness. In contrast to the African Pater Familias, he sketches Europeans and Americans as individualistic and unattractive role-models. Africans cannot live celibacy in an individualistic manner. Isolationism is unbearable. His plea is that celibates should be brothers among brothers, that they should remain family-members and be involved with their people, clan and the larger society.<sup>27</sup>

John Kariuki wa Karega believes in “Priestly Formation: challenges, problems, prospects,” that there is a fourfold crisis in the priesthood at the moment: one of identity, intimacy, integrity and vision. He believes that a priest is a sacred and simultaneously limited person, who mediates God’s grace to people and their needs. Meaningful relationships, authentic intimacy and transcendence are important human needs. Attention to needs should already happen in the formation of pastoral agents. Celibacy is a call to intimacy. Although celibate intimacy causes problems worldwide, it is above all a transcendental, trans-cultural and trans-temporal value. It is valid always and everywhere, especially in the life of a priest. African pastoral agents should live their celibacy by incorporating important values like a sense of the sacred, the veneration of ancestors, a sense of solidarity, and respect for life.<sup>28</sup>

In articles like “The identity and ministry of priests today” and “Vocation and formation of priests,” Rafael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki, the former archbishop of Nairobi, does not treat priests as people set apart, but rather as fellow Christians at the service of the faith community. As fellow Christians these ministerial priests are presiders over the liturgy, instruments of reconciliation, and confidants. A reason why the formation period for ordained ministry takes such a long time is that the formation for celibacy cannot be hurried. He believes that celibacy is a gift for a few only, and frequently exhorts priests to practise the celibacy they promised. Having a child is no reason for leaving ordained ministry.<sup>29</sup>

Representatives of the Petrine line are José Chipenda, Adrian Hastings, Peter Kanyandago, Michael Kirwen, Laurenti Magesa, Immanuel Milingo, and Constantine Mwikamba.

In “The Church of the Future in Africa,” José Chipenda believes that African Christians should start theologising from the perspective of their tolerant worldview and not from that of imported churches with their theologies. The holistic African worldview was integrally religious and did not separate the sacred from the secular. African Christians should be very critical of imported, self-centred ecclesial institutions because denominations have divided rather than united them. This institutional dependency creates theological, financial and ministerial immaturity. For reshaping the church of the future, new metaphors and idioms are needed, that do not sprout from important doctrines but from Africa’s own cultural and religious heritage.<sup>30</sup>

In “Church and Ministry in Africa,” Adrian Hastings emphasizes that mission does not start with denominational self-interpretations, but with the life of Jesus Christ. Ministries are time- and culture-bound responses to the Gospel. African Christians should resist cultural, religious, ecclesial and Roman imperialism. It is not good to subject pastoral care to just one form of minister that has been made absolute. The Tridentine priesthood of unmarried men is a foreign body in African cultures. The starting-point should be ecclesiological: the whole church is the primary ministry. It is wholesome to see ministry as a response to local pastoral needs. In many African parishes the married catechists are the real ministers.<sup>31</sup>

Do existing ministries really contribute to the promotion, preservation and restoration of peoples’ life? wonders Peter Kanyandago in his article “Ordained and Non-Ordained Ministry in the Local Church of Eastern Africa.” A mysterious cloud has been created around celibate priests as being very special, but celibacy has caused much secrecy, alienation and misunderstanding. It is better to start with the needs of small faith communities than with those of celibate priests. That celibate men preside over the Eucharist does not mean that they therefore preside over the communities. For many Christians a priest is a stranger. The lay leaders, both men and women, are the real presiders.<sup>32</sup>

Michael Kirwen believes that fifteen “foundational themes” can be detected beyond the enormous variety of African cultures: the Creator God, ancestors, living dead, nominal reincarnation, lineage, leadership, adulthood and elderhood, bride-wealth, marriage, polygyny, herbalists, diviners, witches, witchcraft and death.<sup>33</sup> Every theme touches the reception, expression and continuation of life. People participate as mature adults in society by their marriage and they live for ever by their offspring. In “The Missionary and the Diviner,” he writes that, from the perspective of African cosmology, celibacy means permanent adolescence.<sup>34</sup>

In his article “Pastoral Care for the Clergy,” Laurenti Magesa disagrees with isolationist sanctity: ministers should not separate themselves from specific people and their specific needs. Most Roman Catholic bishops worldwide are in favour of optional celibacy for ministerial priests. Many of priests’ problems and frustrations are systemic, inherent to a clerical system that focuses more on duties of celibate Ministers than on their feelings and (sexual) needs as African men. Suppression causes fear, immaturity and flattery.<sup>35</sup>

In his article “End Mandatory Celibacy for Priests,” Emmanuel Milingo argues that both married and unmarried priests should be holy because God is holy. Adam and Eve were called and ordained in the Garden of Eden to sanctify their family. Their marital status did not prevent Jesus from calling married apostles. Married priests have not fallen, but they have shaken off the burden of celibacy. There have been many married priests, bishops and popes and at the moment there are one hundred and fifty thousand married priests worldwide. Mandatory celibacy should be ended because it misses the point: it is a possible appendage, but is definitely not the root of priesthood.<sup>36</sup>

In articles like “Changing Morals in Africa,” and “Challenges and Problems of the Clergy: Some Trends in Kenya,” Constantine Mwikamba makes clear that urbanisation causes mental and moral confusion, but that the traditional belief in the *sacredness* of sex is worth preserving and protecting. Many church ministers also find themselves between old and new. Illustrative are Roman Catholic priests with their vow or promise of celibacy. On the one hand celibacy disconnects them from their families and their expectations, but on the other hand modern Africans have their doubts about the chastity of most of these celibates.<sup>37</sup>

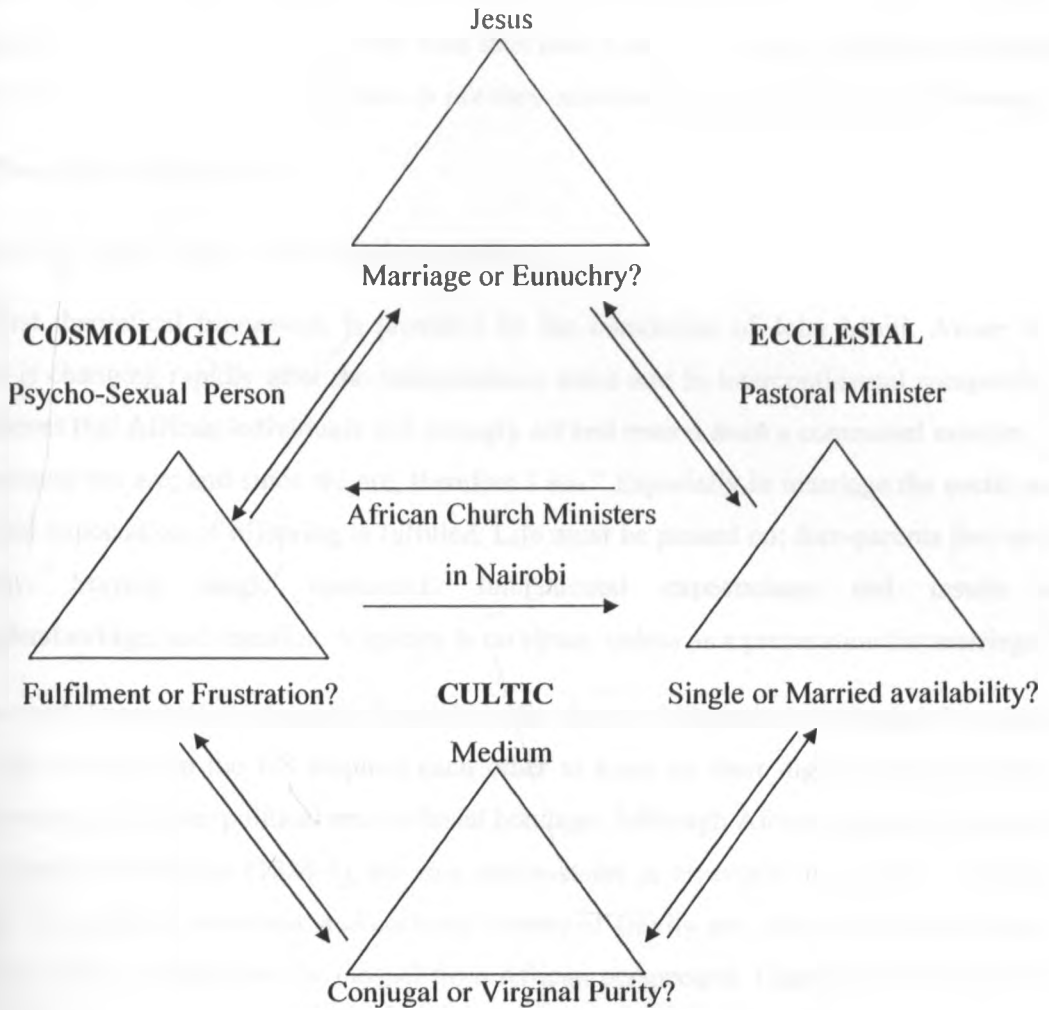
What is lacking in all books and articles referred to above, is an exegesis of the Eunuch passage, and a reasoning based on the discoveries. This research aims to fill up this gap.

## **1.6. Conceptual Framework**

The data reveals that there are especially four interrelated spheres: a Bible-Hermeneutic, a Cosmological, a Pastoral-Ecclesial and a Cultic sphere and every sphere has a bipolar tension. Church ministers interpret the Bible and their mediumistic role from an ecclesial and psycho-cultural sphere. However, the picture of all spheres changes drastically if one starts from an ecclesiological or from a psycho-cultural perspective. The picture also changes drastically if the perspective is one of married or single availability.



**BIBLE-HERMENEUTIC**



The general Roman Catholic emphasis is that Jesus was celibate, that he allows people to remain single for the kingdom, that this self-giving brings fulfilment, that a single minister can also counsel the married, and that the unmarried state unites the cultic medium more with God. The general emphasis in other churches is that Jesus rather sees people married than celibates, that marriage gives more fulfilment than frustrations, that married pastoral counsellors are preferred to singles, and that the sexual life of a medium is at the service of worship, personal wellbeing and ministry.

However, the research makes clear that both general emphases do not result in two clear cut blocks. On the contrary, although they are not in favour of the law of celibacy, some ministers of other churches do admire intrinsic celibates; and although many celibate Roman

Catholics try to practise what they promised, they are outspokenly in favour of a married clergy.

Ministers who cannot separate themselves from the perspective of their ecclesial prescriptions become apologetic; those who start from a psycho-cultural perspective interpret church laws from the question whether or not they contribute to genuine human well-being.

### **1.7. Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on two theoretical perspectives.

The first theoretical framework is provided by the conviction of John Mbiti. Aware that Africa is changing rapidly after the independence wave and in intercontinental competition, he believes that African individuals still strongly act and reason from a communal mindset: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." Especially in marriage the social and ancestral expectation of offspring is fulfilled. Life must be passed on; fore-parents live on in progeny. Staying single contradicts fundamental expectations and results in misunderstandings and rejection. Virginity is no virtue, unless as a preparation for marriage.<sup>38</sup>

The second theoretical framework is based on the views of liberation theologian Jean-Marc Éla. Just as slaves in the US inspired each other to keep up their dignity, Africans today should resist economic, political and ecclesial bondage. Although African countries, invented at the Berlin Conference (1884-5), became nation-states in especially the sixties of the last century, the political, economic and ecclesial centres of gravity are still outside the continent. Time has come to reinterpret the Gospel from African perspective. Churches should not start with imported structures but with Christian communities that develop ministries as a response to real needs. Celibate priests are an outdated, Tridentine export product. The above average lifestyle of many clergy and their priorities do not sprout from most Africans' daily struggle for survival.<sup>39</sup>

African scholars, as presented in the literature review, have not contradicted the view of Mbiti on a strongly relational identity, or of Éla's critical attitude to western interferences. However, as the literature review clearly shows, the sides part in a Pauine and Petrine camp as soon as the question is raised whether church communities may invent their own forms of eucharistic ministries. This pattern repeats itself in the field research.

## **1.8. Research Hypotheses**

From the main thesis that celibacy is a major challenge to African church ministers, from literature, from the conceptual and theoretical framework, the following research hypotheses can be derived:

1. Lifelong celibacy is no cultural value in Africa because there is a strong emphasis on marriage and procreation.
2. Most African church ministers believe that the Roman Catholic Church should cease to prescribe celibacy for their priestly ministers.
3. African Roman Catholic priests avoid publicly criticizing the law of celibacy for fear of sanctions; this fear leads to unnecessary secretiveness.

## **1.9. Methodology**

Data were obtained by literature, free flowing interviews and a survey. The quantitative (survey results) findings are given a place in the qualitative context (the data acquired by interviews). The tools can be seen in Appendix 1.

The literature research resulted in a collection of topic-related summaries, consisting of the researcher's own words and of quotes that found a place in the thesis.

The population consists of one-hundred and fifty sub-Saharan African church ministers. The variables are: Roman Catholic and belonging to other churches, men and women, married and unmarried.

The sample can be subdivided into categories. In terms of state of life, eighty informants have promised or vowed celibacy and seventy do not consider themselves celibate. In terms of churches: eighty-five officially Roman Catholic, and the other informants belong to other churches. Of the Roman Catholics there are fifteen diocesan and fifteen religious priests and twenty-five woman religious. Of ministers from other churches, there are twenty-five male ministers and twenty-five woman ministers. The married priests consist of men who have remained Roman Catholics but who are no longer active as church ministers, and men who are still ministers but who have left the Roman Catholic Church.

The representative informants, all acquired by snowball sampling, and therefore – unavoidably so - living all over especially the Nairobi area. More details are given in Appendix Two.

During every free flowing interview a condensed report was made, that was extended immediately after the interview.<sup>40</sup> The informants received a copy of this report. Already at an early stage the gradually growing total text was analysed by the principles of *Grounded Theory*: through an ongoing text-analysis underlying and unifying themes were discovered and presented.<sup>41</sup>

The results of the survey, inspired by the Likert Scale<sup>42</sup>, were put into a clear scheme, so that, per statement, the total of *yes* and *no* could be clearly and easily counted in the light of the variables. The final outcome was recalculated in percentages. The quantitative data are placed in a qualitative context.

### **1.10. Scope and Limitations**

The sampling population consists of one hundred and fifty African Christians who are directly involved in pastoral ministry in Nairobi and its immediate surroundings.

As the focus is on *African* church-ministers (in this study: black, sub-Saharan), a limitation is that candidates from other ethnic and geographical origin are left out. For example: it would be interesting to do the same research in a European country and compare the hermeneutic emphases.

A consequence of the focus on African church-*ministers* is that there is not much attention for the views of the majority of Christians who are not official and professional ministers in their churches: the faithful, the congregation, the common parishioners. This definitely deserves a special research. Also excluded are RC “ministers of the word” and “eucharistic ministers” because they belong to the common parishioners. Twenty-five pastorally involved nuns are included, although they have not received ministerial ordination, because there are also twenty-five woman ministers who do not belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

It is a limitation that two-third of the population consist of men and only one third of women. This is due to the ordination-criteria of the Roman Catholic Church for unmarried-men-only. For the same reason less than half of the informants are married.

The emphasis on Nairobi and its immediate surroundings is a limitation too, because Africa is much bigger; however, Nairobi is good for sampling because it is metropolitan: people live here from all over the continent, there are many churches, and there is a climate of both Africanness and modernity.

- <sup>1</sup> J.T. Wübbels. *The Paradox of Vowed Poverty to African Religions*. Nairobi: Unpublished Master's Thesis, Maryknoll Institute of African Studies of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Nairobi, Kenya. 2009: pp. 97.
- <sup>2</sup> See: J. Dreshenga. "Clergymen on strike." *AfricaNews*. May 27, 2009. [http://www.africanews.com/site/CAR\\_Clergymen\\_on\\_strike/list\\_messages/25091](http://www.africanews.com/site/CAR_Clergymen_on_strike/list_messages/25091) (accessed October 04, 2009); L.Barasa. "Milingo slaps Catholics in the face." *Daily Nation News*. June 24, 2009. <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/-/1056/615034/-/ukd17i/-/index.html> (accessed October 04, 2009); V. Bartoo. "We're not rebels, Catholic splinter group says." *The Standard For Fairness and Justice*. 05 30, 2009. <http://www.eastandard.net/InsidePage.php?id=1144015565&cid=4> (accessed October 20, 2009); V. Bartoo, and O. Obare. "Priests torn between love for spouse and celibacy vows ." *Rentapriest. A conversation about the married Catholic priesthood and Church reform* . June 28, 2009. <http://rentapriest.blogspot.com/2009/06/priests-torn-between-love-for-spouse.html> (accessed November 20, 2009); See: CISA. *Vatican: Part I of the Africa Synod Final Draft*. October 26, 2009. <http://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1#label/publicaties/124913ff1364a779> (accessed October 30, 2009); J.Omole. "Church still find it hard to shed double standards tag." *Sunday Nation* , October 25, 2009: 21.
- <sup>3</sup> M. Willkom. "A married priesthood the norm?" *Examiner.com the insider source for the local*. February 7th, 2011. <http://www.examiner.com/roman-catholic-in-minneapolis/a-married-priesthood-the-norm?render=print> (accessed February 19, 2011).
- <sup>4</sup> „Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests.” In A. Flannery (Ed.) (2004), *op.cit.*, p. 784.
- <sup>5</sup> The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland. *The Code of Canon Law*. 5th edition. London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983: canon 1037, p. 185.
- <sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI. "Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus." *Vatican: The Holy See*. November 04, 2009. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apc\\_20091104\\_anglicanorum-coetibus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apc_20091104_anglicanorum-coetibus_en.html) (accessed March 03, 2009).
- <sup>7</sup> See Mk 1: 29-31 and I Cor. 7: 8-11..
- <sup>8</sup> C. Gallagher, T. Vandenberg. *The Celibacy Myth. Loving for Life*. New York: Crossroad, 1987.
- <sup>9</sup> J.K. Howell. "The Teaching of Christ on Priestly Celibacy." In *Priestly Celibacy. Its Scriptural, Historical, Spiritual, and Psychological Roots*, by Peter, M. J. Stravinskaskas, 13 - 26. Mt. Pocono: Newman House, 2001.
- <sup>10</sup> Jaki, L. Stanley. *Theology of Priestly Celibacy*. Front Royal: Christendom Press, 1997.
- <sup>11</sup> T. McGovern. *Priestly Celibacy Today*. Princeton: Scepter Publishers, 1998.
- <sup>12</sup> A.M. Stickler. *The Case for Clerical Celibacy. Its Historical Developments and Theological Foundations*. Washington: Ignatius Press, 1995
- <sup>13</sup> P.M.J.Stravinskaskas. "Celibacy and the Meaning of the Priesthood." In *Priestly Celibacy. Its Scriptural, Historical, Spiritual, and Psychological Roots*, by Peter, M.J. Stravinskaskas, 45 - 63. Mt. Pocono: Newman House, 2001.
- <sup>14</sup> Paul, VI. "Sacerdotalis Caelibatus - Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Celibacy of the Priest." *Vatican: the Holy See*. June 24, 1967. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_24061967\\_sacerdotalis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis_en.html) (accessed October 02, 2009)
- <sup>15</sup> John Paul II. "Pastores Dabo Vobis." *www.vatican.va*. March 25, 1992. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis_en.html) (accessed November 7, 2009); II, John Paul. "Mulieris Dignitatem." *The Holy See*. August 15, 1988. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem\\_en.html#top](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html#top) (accessed April 11, 2010).
- <sup>16</sup> Reuters. "No change on celibacy, says Vatican." *Daily Nation*, November 10, 2009.
- <sup>17</sup> Benedict XVI. "Benedict XVI's letter to seminarians." *Zenit, the world seen from Rome*. October 18th, 2010. <http://www.zenit.org/article-30685?l=english> (accessed November 16th, 2010). Benedict XVI. "APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION ANGLICANORUM COETIBUS." *Vatican: The Holy See*. November 04, 2009. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apc\\_20091104\\_anglicanorum-coetibus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apc_20091104_anglicanorum-coetibus_en.html) (accessed March 03, 2009). Benedict XVI. "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary on the 'Dies Natalis' of the Curé of Ars." *WWW.Vatican*. June 16th, 2009. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20090616\\_anno-sacerdotale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090616_anno-sacerdotale_en.html) (accessed November 16th, 2010).
- <sup>18</sup> J.P. Audet. *Structures of Christian Priesthood. Home, Marriage, and Celibacy in the Pastoral Service of the Church*. London: Sheed & Ward Stagbooks, 1967.
- <sup>19</sup> P. Bernier. *Ministry in the Church. A Historical and Pastoral Approach*. . Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Blenkinsopp. *Celibacy, Ministry, Church: An Enquiry into the Possibility of Reform in the Present Self-Understanding of the Roman Catholic Church and Its Practice of Ministry*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1968.

- <sup>21</sup> H. Küng. *Why Priests?*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.
- <sup>22</sup> G. Parrinder. *Sex in the World's Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- <sup>23</sup> R. Sipe. *A Secret World. Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1990.
- <sup>24</sup> E. Schillebeeckx. *Clerical Celibacy under Fire*. London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1968, pp. 5, 79-82, 105, 134.
- <sup>25</sup> H.J. Vogels. *Celibacy - Gift or Law? A Critical Investigation*. Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1992.
- <sup>26</sup> S. Igboanyika. "The History of Priestly Celibacy in the Church." *AFER* 45, no. 2 (2003): 98 - 105.
- <sup>27</sup> S. Kabazzi-Kisirinya. "Shortage of Priestly Vocations in Africa." *Afer* (Gaba Publications) 11, no. 2 (April 1969): 131 - 143.
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## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORY AND DIMENSIONS OF THE CELIBACY LAW

#### 2.0. Introduction

Some church councils and individuals contributed significantly to the ministerial law of celibacy, and this prescription touches important dimensions: cosmology, cult, ecclesiology and ministry, and sexuality – both in the West and in Africa. This chapter is based on literature.

#### 2.1. General History of the Ministerial Celibacy Prescription

Councils and individuals are presented chronologically: the Elvira Council (306); the Nicene Council (325); Pope Siricius (384–399); Ambrose of Milan (338–397); Jerome (347–420); Augustine (354–430); the Council of Trullo (692); Gregory VII (1073–1085); Lateran II (1139); Martin Luther (1483–1546); the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and Vatican II (1962–1965).

##### 2.1.1. The Council of Elvira (306): Sexual Abstinence in Marriage

The Council in Elvira, during the great persecution, was very local: the nineteen bishops and some priests were nearly all from the region of modern Andalusia.<sup>1</sup>

This council prohibited church ministers to live with women who did not belong to their close relatives; they were allowed to share a house with a sister or a daughter who is a virgin.<sup>2</sup> Married ministers were allowed to relate to their wife, but if they did not abstain from sexual intercourse, their positions could be forfeited.<sup>3</sup> Canon 33 is chronologically the first law of continence for all clergy<sup>4</sup>:

It has seemed good absolutely to forbid the bishops, the priests, and the deacons, i.e., all the clerics engaged in the service at the altar, to have (sexual) relations with their wives and procreated children; should anyone do so, let him be excluded from the honour of the clergy.<sup>5</sup>

Supporters of this prescriptive canon state that three centuries of persecutions had made it difficult to write down orally transmitted regulations and obligations, but that this law really introduces nothing new: it merely formalises the already paramount practice of continuous continence among church ministers.<sup>6</sup> Opponents believe precisely the opposite: the fact that bishops thought that a law was needed to prescribe perpetual continence for church ministers shows not only that marriage had been the dominant lifestyle in pastoral ministry so far, but

also that sexual intercourse was part of this normality.<sup>7</sup> This council and the binding character of its decrees were local; the tendency to prohibit sexual intercourse for church ministers is more than local.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.2. The Council of Nicea (325): No Marriage Contract after Ordination

The number of Christians increased from approximately two million at the end of the second century to about four to five million at the end of the fourth, when Theodosius declared Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup> At the time of the Council of Nicea individual houses had already been replaced by Church-houses,<sup>10</sup> *clerus* (ordo) were distinguished from *laici* (plebs), the distinction between *presbyter* and *sacerdos* had disappeared and there was an increasing focus on liturgy.<sup>11</sup>

On this first ecumenical council there were only three or four bishops from the Latin West, less than twenty from Egypt and Palestine, about thirty from Syria-Phoenicia, and more than one hundred from Asia Minor.<sup>12</sup> Emperor Constantine convoked this council because Arianism sowed divisions in his empire.<sup>13</sup> The council proclaimed the famous *homoousios* that the Son is one in being with the Father.<sup>14</sup>

The council took place in a time in which the body, sexuality, and even marriage were frowned upon. Many Christians refused to marry.<sup>15</sup> There are even stories of voluntary castration.<sup>16</sup> In their resolve to speak positively about marriage, the bishops introduced the *apostolic rule* for their church ministers: married ministers could continue their marriage, but unmarried ministers, including widowers, had to live celibately for the rest of their lives.<sup>17</sup> This council even forbade bishops, priests and deacons to have a woman with them that could cause any suspicion. Only their mothers, sisters and aunts were exempted.<sup>18</sup> Attempts were made to make urban church ministers live in forms of a common life, based on monastic patterns.<sup>19</sup>

Mention should be made of a certain desert bishop, Paphnutius, who, according to Byzantine historian Socrates, would have spoken out against general obligations to sexual abstinence during the Council of Nicea.<sup>20</sup> He must have said that not all church ministers are ascetic enough for continence, that the marriage-bed is honourable, that marriage does not make people impure, and that the prohibition of remarriage was enough.<sup>21</sup> However, according to some theologians this incident was a later addition to the Nicene documents.<sup>22</sup> Not even the Council in Trullo of 692, that allowed married men to be ordained priests, refers to Paphnutius.<sup>23</sup> The Eastern Churches practice the *apostolic rule* until the day of today.<sup>24</sup>



Supporters of mandatory celibacy emphasize that church ministers were prescribed to carefully avoid contacts with women who did not belong to their closest relatives.<sup>25</sup> Opponents prefer to emphasize that most candidates for church ministry were wise enough to marry before offering themselves for ecclesiastical service.<sup>26</sup>

### **2.1.3. Pope Siricius (384–399): Lifelong Continence**

In the days of Pope Siricius married deacons, priests and bishops were quite common.<sup>27</sup> About eighty years after the Elvira Council, Spanish bishop Himerius wrote Pope Siricius on various issues, one of them being many married deacons, priests and bishops who lived sexually with their wives, and who justified this by referring to the Jewish priests. They said that Jesus had given them a license to satisfy their passions. Siricius' answer was that God wants his people to be holy, and that temple priests were to stay in the temple during their year of service. When their time was over they could return to their wives and were allowed to have sex for procreative reasons only, because the priestly tribe of Levi had to be continued. Jesus came to bring the law to perfection. His church must be pure and spotless by chastity.<sup>28</sup>

His decretal *Cum In Unum*, written after the 386 Synod of Rome, contains a passage on clerical continence. Referring to I Corinthians 7:5, he writes that Christian ministers should be free for prayer and ministry. If married lay people practice continence for intensifying their prayer, priests should practise complete celibacy. Carnal concupiscence soils a priest.<sup>29</sup> Church ministers who had married out of ignorance had to continue their marriage continently. Those who married for a second time should be laicised. Those who ignored his decrees were committing a crime and should be punished by expulsion from the clerical order.<sup>30</sup> Sexuality and liturgy were irreconcilable for him: how can venerable mysteries be handled by priests who cling to obscene passions?<sup>31</sup> He saw sex as “obscene”, both within and outside marriage and was driven by the notion of purity-impurity.<sup>32</sup> He excommunicated Jovinian, a monk who disagreed with celibacy for church ministers, and who believed that Mary, Jesus' mother, had lost her virginity at his birth.<sup>33</sup> Monks and nuns who did not live in accordance with their vow of chastity had to be expelled from the monasteries and convents and be thrown into jail.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.1.4. Ambrose of Milan (338–397): Consecrated Virgins**

This educated and eloquent son of a prefect of the praetorium of Milan was a civil governor of the province of Liguria and not a priest when he was spontaneously elected bishop by the

people.<sup>35</sup> Although he was an obvious aristocrat who did not even fear to refuse to celebrate the eucharist in the presence of Emperor Theodosius I until the latter had publicly apologised for executing seven thousand people in retaliation for popular unrest, he also stimulated withdrawal from the world.

Ambrose saw Jesus and Mary as two virgins who built the foundation of virginity for men and women.<sup>36</sup> Marriage is a good method for learning sexual self-discipline and continence.<sup>37</sup> Under his episcopacy monasticism flourished in Milan.<sup>38</sup> He pictured consecrated virgins as brides of Christ who can contribute to the holiness of all Christians; virginal chastity means being unstained from outside.<sup>39</sup> Even married clergy should practise no sex.<sup>40</sup>

You who have received the grace of the sacred ministry with an untouched body, an untainted modesty, to whom also all conjugal relations are unknown, you know that you must be sure of an unhindered and spotless ministry, which must not be profaned by any conjugal relation. (...) If the people of Israel were forbidden to take part in their offering without having washed their clothes, would you dare to offer for others with a defiled mind as well as a defiled body? Would you dare to act as their minister?<sup>41</sup>

#### **2.1.5. Jerome (347–420): Virginity Is Higher Than Marriage**

Jerome believed, rather outspokenly, that virginity was a higher state of life than marriage: marriage is silver, but virginity is gold!<sup>42</sup> What inspired him was a visit to the desert monks in Egypt.<sup>43</sup> He exhorted married men to give up sex, and to become “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>44</sup> The good thing about marriage is that it can produce virgins.<sup>45</sup> Jesus and Mary are the pattern of virginity for both sexes, as living principles of virginity and vocation for ministry. In the presence of the Body of Christ all sexual union is impure.<sup>46</sup> If married people are to abstain from sex for prayer, this certainly applies to a priest who daily must be able to present spotless offerings to God for his own sins and for those of the people.<sup>47</sup> Priests play an important role in the Eucharist as a sacrifice.<sup>48</sup> However, contrary to the orthodox ideal of his days, he admitted having erotic feelings.<sup>49</sup>

#### **2.1.6. Augustine (354–430): Sexuality and Original Sin**

His intelligence and gift of speech led Augustine from Tagaste to Carthage, Rome and Milan as an orator and teacher. He was a restless searcher with a great openness to new ideas. Later on he wrote that his youth had been undisciplined, greedy and filled with sexual lust. He already lived with a woman, her name is not known, when he was only sixteen. She got pregnant and gave birth to Adeodatus, who died young. From his nineteenth year, Augustine spent nearly ten years in a Manichean sect.<sup>50</sup>

Augustine became a catechumen of the Catholic Church after he heard Bishop Ambrose of Milan preach and, soon after his baptism, he started a monastic community in Tagaste, with an emphasis on asceticism and chastity.<sup>51</sup> He experienced life as a battle between God and Satan, Abel and Cain, heaven and earth, and – last but not least - spiritual and carnal desires. All people have sinned in Adam and Eve.<sup>52</sup> Sexual feelings are closely linked with original sin.<sup>53</sup> In the context of marriage sexual desire is less evil, because it can be at the service of procreation and it can stimulate fidelity.<sup>54</sup> Original sin has made human nature thoroughly perverted. Jesus, however, is different:

What priest is so just and so Holy as the only Son of God who needed no cleansing from his sins, whether original sin, or the sins of daily life? ... What so clean to cleanse the sins of men as the Flesh born without any contagion of carnal concupiscence, Flesh nourished in and born from a Virgin's womb?<sup>55</sup>

Augustine wanted ministers to live in continence because impure shepherds cannot make their flock chaste; so shepherd, so flock.<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.1.7. The Council of Trullo (692): Cultic Abstinence

Emperor Justinian II convoked this council in the Trullus Palace. Two hundred and eleven Greek speaking bishops attended. Sergius I, the pope at the time, refused to sign the council decrees, but Hadrian I, a later pope, did. The famous Canon 13 states that people should not separate what God has united, that marriage is better than divorce, that married men can become priests, that it is good to have moments of fasting and praying, that abstinence before presiding is required, but that lawful intercourse may not be forbidden.<sup>57</sup> Orthodox priests do not have to preside in the eucharist every day.<sup>58</sup> Eastern Churches that are united with Rome allow their ministers to continue their priesthood in accordance with Trullo until the day of today.<sup>59</sup>

Some advocates of mandatory celibacy believe that the Trullo Fathers misinterpreted documents of previous councils, and that the famous canonist Gratian, composing his famous and normative *Decretum* in the twelfth century, interpreted the particular Council of Trullo as ecumenical, although the Eastern Churches do interpret it as ecumenical.<sup>60</sup> Gratian wrongly thought that celibacy was introduced at a fairly late date.<sup>61</sup> Understandably, priests of the Eastern rite interpret these views indignantly as efforts to undermine their ancient and precious tradition of married priesthood.<sup>62</sup>

The above shows that the Trullo Fathers believed that marriage, including the marriage of church ministers, must be respected and protected. Married men who receive ministerial

ordination should therefore not be forbidden to continue their marriage; continence is required when they are involved in the Eucharist, but that is not every day. The policy of Eastern Churches is still built on Trullo.

Sipe produces an impressive list of married, or at least reproductive first millennium popes:

The list of popes who fathered future popes reads like an Old Testament lineage recitation: Anastasius I (399 – 401) begat Innocent I (401 – 417); Hormisdas (514 – 523) begat Silverius (536 – 537); Sergius III (904 – 911) begat John XI (931 – 935). Other popes were the children of lesser clergy: Theodore I (642 – 649) was the son of a bishop; Damasus I (366 – 384), Boniface I (418 – 422), Felix III (483 – 492), Anastasius II (496 – 498), Agapitus (535 – 536), Marinus I (882 – 884), and John XV (985 – 986) were the sons of priests, and Deusdedit (later Adeodatus I, 615 – 618) was the son of a subdeacon.<sup>63</sup>

#### **2.1.8. Gregory VII (1073-1085): The “Freedom” of the Celibate Church Minister**

The main concern of Cluny monk Hildebrand, who assumed the name Pope Gregory VII, was to keep secular rulers from the sanctuary.<sup>64</sup> He wanted to liberate the church from state-control, for example in the appointment of bishops, and to rule itself. In order to underline the religious authority of the church he focused on papal monarchy.<sup>65</sup> The church should be reformed from within by church ministers who were free from secular control.<sup>66</sup> The main sins of church ministers were financial corruption and disloyalty to celibacy.<sup>67</sup>

Influenced by Peter Damian (1007–1072), a monk who considered clerical marriage as heretic, and who called priests wives “whores” and their children “bastards,” Gregory VII issued clerical celibacy.<sup>68</sup> This means that priests who lived with a wife were barred from performing liturgical acts. They were no longer allowed to live on church property and they could no longer receive money as ministers. He told the faithful not to attend masses that were presided over by married priests. This implied that they no longer sustained these priests. These men lost everything: their function, their residence, their work and their remuneration.<sup>69</sup>

Gregory VII made celibacy law by treating clerical marriages as invalid. Protests were predictable. Thousands of priests vehemently opposed the decree in Italy and even more so in Germany, where only three bishops had the courage to promulgate it. They objected in their petition with the question whether the Pope had understood the important words of Jesus that not everyone can accept celibacy.<sup>70</sup> They wrote that people are not angels and that sex should not be forbidden.<sup>71</sup> Gregory VII comes close to Donatism, the heresy that taught that the value of the sacrament depends on the sanctity of the minister.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.1.9. Lateran II (1139): Clerical Marriages are Null and Void

Although Pope Innocent II had taken over Rome in 1133 from his antipope Anacletus II, he wanted to finish the repercussion of the Western Schism by a decisive council, and he also wanted to take measures against simony (the buying and selling of spiritual realities).<sup>73</sup> Last but not least he wanted to make clear that only he was the one – and not imperial power or lay-lords – to make clerical appointments.<sup>74</sup> There are no minutes of the meeting, attended by some five to six hundred bishops and abbots. Most of the thirteen canons merely repeat decisions of former councils.

However, on celibacy the council was very stern. Religious sisters and monks were no longer allowed to pray the *Divine Office* together. The vow of chastity became an invalidating impediment to marriage, meaning that if religious decided to leave their congregation, they could no longer contract a valid marriage.<sup>75</sup> And all existing marriages of priests were declared illicit and invalid, null and void.<sup>76</sup> In other words: severing existing marriages became a condition for ministerial ordination.<sup>77</sup> The Second Council of Lateran passed the first universal law of ministerial celibacy.<sup>78</sup> Although the law of celibacy resulted in some campaigns against married ministers and their families, most local church authorities reacted mildly. They generally only sanctioned church ministers if they had committed public scandal like rape or abduction.<sup>79</sup>

Contemporary authors who agree with the Lateran II decision write that this council introduced nothing new; it merely declared invalid what had always been forbidden.<sup>80</sup> Opponents emphasize that, although marriages of church ministers had been regarded as forbidden, they had not been treated as null and void.<sup>81</sup> Families of church ministers were no longer allowed to live on church territory.

### 2.1.10. Martin Luther (1483-1546): Marriage is Normal

Pope Leo X needed money for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and decided to sell indulgences. People were told that buying indulgences would shorten their time in purgatory. This shocked Martin Luther, a God-fearing Augustinian monk, who already had difficulties with the ecclesiastical focus of his days on relics and saints. What had helped him to reorganise his faith was his doctorate at the University of Wittenburg, his dedication as a scholar and lecturer of Scripture, and his focus on a just God (Rom 1:17). In 1517 he hammered ninety-five statements against indulgences on the local notice-board, the door of Wittenburg's "All Saints' Church." Soon he was treated as a heretic, but he publicly burnt the

bull of his excommunication in 1521 and did not renounce his views at the Diet of Worms, a few weeks later. He continued to publish writings and translated the Bible into German.<sup>82</sup>

Luther, who married Catherine von Bora, a former nun, has written much about matrimony from the perspective of his celibate past.<sup>83</sup> He argued, contradicting the Council of Florence (1439), that the church does not have the right to call marriage a sacrament; it is simply a normal practice that can be found all over the world.<sup>84</sup> He underlined the opinion of Jesus that people should not put asunder what God has joined.<sup>85</sup> However, unlike Jesus or the church, marriage has no allegoric function; is the ideal state for nearly all people.<sup>86</sup> In the letter he wrote to his wife, four days before his death, he promised her that he would recommend her to God.<sup>87</sup> Luther raised the status of married people, who for long had been looked upon as second-class Christians.<sup>88</sup>

He believed that all baptised are priests without exception.<sup>89</sup> The three religious vows of poverty, chastity and celibacy are made by people, but God only commands fidelity in marriage.<sup>90</sup> By these vows one is not really bound.<sup>91</sup> He believed that celibates, with their fight against their invincible sexual urges, are wasting their time and energy, although they consider themselves to be better and holier than married people.<sup>92</sup> Evil desires can burn under a façade of virginity.<sup>93</sup> Priests who have a woman should marry, because they are already married from God's perspective.<sup>94</sup>

#### **2.1.11. The Council of Trent (1545–1563): Seminaries and Codes**

The Reformation resulted in violent conflicts and hostile divisions in European countries.<sup>95</sup> The Tridentine Council, set to reconstruct dogma and discipline, took place in three periods. The meetings focused on scripture and tradition, original sin, justification, and the seven sacraments.<sup>96</sup> Most of the bishops were Italians.<sup>97</sup> Interesting for the topic of celibacy is what historians write about the three officiating popes. Paul III, who convoked the Council, had made his teenage son a cardinal.<sup>98</sup> Julius III, who continued it, had a homosexual involvement with a boy of fifteen, whom he named a cardinal.<sup>99</sup> Pius IV, who ratified the Council, was the father of three children.<sup>100</sup>

As the Tridentine Council took place in a world, influenced by the Reformation, its resolutions are one-sided counter-positions.<sup>101</sup> Seventeen theologians were asked to share their views on two Protestant convictions: the superiority of marriage to chastity and whether priests can marry irrespective of their promised celibacy.<sup>102</sup> They admitted frankly that most of the clergy lived with a woman,<sup>103</sup> but the Apostles had left their conjugal lives for

following Jesus.<sup>104</sup> Trent introduced seminaries for a solid clerical formation.<sup>105</sup> Where Protestants emphasized the priesthood of all the faithful, Trent emphasized the hierarchy: first the pope, the bishops, the priests and the deacons and, far away, the faithful who were reduced to non-clerics.<sup>106</sup> Denial of the divine ordinance of the hierarchy means condemnation.<sup>107</sup> The emphasis on clerics caused clericalism.<sup>108</sup>

Emperors, like Charles V (1519-1556), Ferdinand I (1558–1564) and Maximilian I (1564–1576) asked Pope Pius VI for some clerical mildness, but King Philip II persuaded him not to give in.<sup>109</sup> The option was simple: renounce marriage or be excluded from priestly ministry.<sup>110</sup> In some parts of Europe lay Christians confronted priests with children, but elsewhere, even into the nineteenth century, people made no issue of their priest having a wife and children.<sup>111</sup>

During this council opinions differed on the question whether mandatory celibacy was a church law or willed by God.<sup>112</sup> Proponents of mandatory celibacy argue that the bishops refused to declare the law of celibacy as purely ecclesiastical.<sup>113</sup> Opponents start at the other end: why this “anathema” or condemnation if the bishops realised that the celibacy law was an ecclesial discipline?<sup>114</sup>

#### 2.1.12. Vatican II (1962–1965): Two Contradictory Principles

Only three months after his election, Pope John XIII, called for an ecumenical council to give the church a pastoral update.<sup>115</sup> After his death in 1963, Paul VI reiterated that this council should be pastoral. Fundamental questions were: in what world are we living, and who are we? *Gaudium et Spes* looks more at the mission of the faith community; *Lumen Gentium* focuses more on the church’s inner nature.<sup>116</sup>

As if the church fathers had listened to Martin Luther, *Lumen Gentium* first treats the faith community as “People of God” and “Pilgrim Church.” Only in that context there is room for a ministerial structure.<sup>117</sup> Collegiality among bishops is emphasized, the bishop of Rome being the first among equals.<sup>118</sup> Attention is given to an *apostolic line* in which bishops have ordained helpers, like priests and deacons.<sup>119</sup> Although there is a preference for celibates, this council also opened the way for married men to be ordained deacons.<sup>120</sup> This preference for celibate ministers is even more pronounced in the decree *On the Ministry and Life of Priests*,

It is true that it is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the primitive Church and the tradition of the Eastern Churches where in addition to those – including all bishops – who choose from the gift of grace to preserve celibacy, there are also many excellent married priests. While recommending

ecclesiastical celibacy this sacred Council does not by any means aim at changing that contrary discipline which is lawfully practised in the Eastern Churches. Rather the Council affectionately exhorts all those who have received the priesthood in the married state to persevere in their holy vocation and continue to devote their lives fully and generously to the flock entrusted to them.<sup>121</sup>

The emphasis then shifts to celibacy as service to people, undivided consecration to Christ and witness to heaven. Let those who freely promised celibacy, after Christ's example, persevere.<sup>122</sup> This Document explicitly and purposively calls the law of celibacy an imposition.

Understandably the continued prescription of celibacy gives rise to reactions. Some voices ask for faith: celibacy is a special dedication to Jesus who can only be understood in faith.<sup>123</sup> Some scorn at the fruitless efforts of those who want to abolish the law of celibacy.<sup>124</sup> Others find the emphasis on celibate priests inconsequent: how can the church selectively reject married people for priestly ministry if God obviously calls them?<sup>125</sup>

## **2.2. Dimensional Repercussions**

The history of the ministerial prescription touches important dimensions: cosmology, cult, ecclesiology and sexuality – both in the West and in Africa.

### **2.2.1. Dimensional Repercussions in the West**

#### **2.2.1.1. Cosmological**

Dualism and monasticism have contributed enormously to the birth and spreading of the ministerial celibacy law.

**Dualism**, the tendency to think in exclusive opposites, definitely contributed to the origin and continued imposition of the ministerial prescription of celibacy. Mentioned must be: Buddhism,<sup>126</sup> Jainism,<sup>127</sup> Neo-Pythagoreans,<sup>128</sup> Plato,<sup>129</sup> Aristotle,<sup>130</sup> Diogenes and his Cynicism,<sup>131</sup> Stoicism,<sup>132</sup> Neo-Platonism,<sup>133</sup> Encratism,<sup>134</sup> Gnosticism<sup>135</sup> and Manichaeism,<sup>136</sup> Essenes<sup>137</sup> and Monasticism.<sup>138</sup>

Judaism may have been influenced by Buddhism during the conquests of Alexander the Great, when it was brought into contact with Indian ways of thinking on asceticism. Excessive asceticism in Christianity, like sexual and vegetarian carnal abstinence are causally connected with Buddhism<sup>139</sup> Ascetic Pythagoras involved himself in voluntary celibacy.<sup>140</sup> Neo-Pythagoreans were dualistic, rigorously ascetic, and saw sex as defilement.<sup>141</sup>



Plato argued that people are caught between a superior invisible world, opposed by an inferior visible world: the human soul or mind is caught in the material body. The difficulty of Platonic friendships is that the soul has repercussions in the flesh. Aristotle saw men as the active principle of procreation and women as simply the material. Sexual passions can keep people from their quest for knowledge.<sup>142</sup>

Encratism was a very severe movement that discarded any contacts with matter. Encratists were principally vegetarians, practised various types of self-mortification, and saw marriage as a mortal sin. For this reason they were called “Abstinentes.”<sup>143</sup>

According to Diogenes, wise is the person who follows the laws of nature. He believed in open sex, because it is natural, but lived very ascetically. His Cynic movement saw sexual lust as a vice.<sup>144</sup> They influenced the Stoics, who believed in an attitude of indifference to anything that prevented them from the only good: living harmoniously with reason or nature. As families can be distractions, they rejected family-ties.<sup>145</sup>

According to Gnosticism, improper knowledge cannot help people to get away from matter or the flesh, but spiritual knowledge provides real insight. Many forms of Gnosticism condemned the flesh and saw marriage as fornication. Gnostics become powerful in early Christianity. Second century Gnostic Marcion condemned marriage and reproduction as works of the devil.<sup>146</sup>

Babylonian Manes, after whom Manichaeism is called, proclaimed that the universe knew only two primary elements: God (goodness) and matter (evil). There is a kingdom of darkness and a kingdom of light. The body with its sexual desires belongs to the dark, and the soul to the light. The soul takes part in God’s substance, but the body is a manifestation of the Evil Principle, and should be mortified. Manicheans taught that procreation incarcerated the soul and that sexual lust was an innate vice. Manichaeism had a strong impact on Augustine, who, as was said earlier, connected sexual feelings to original sin.<sup>147</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls, found in and after 1947 at Qumran, reveal much about the Essenes about whose existence writers like Josephus, Philo and Pliny had already testified. These were Jews who interpreted the social and political turbulence of their days as the beginning of the end of the world, and as a result they opted for a strictly ascetical lifestyle, including abstinence, especially in the holy city of Jerusalem, and celibacy. Some Essenes lived their spirituality of withdrawal in the desert, some lived in places like Qumran, and others lived in towns. Essenes may have been influenced by Gnostic dualism. This rejection of sexuality

comes from outside Judaism. Sometimes John the Baptist is associated with this eschatological movement.<sup>148</sup>

Once the persecutions of Christians were over, virginity replaced martyrdom as the highest state of perfection; asceticism gave rise to **monasticism**. The focus was on earthly mortification for eternal life in heaven. Anthony of Egypt (250–355), a prominent hermit in the depths of the deserts of Egypt, who lived an austere life and who fought with demons, is often considered the father of monasticism. Around the year 325, there were about five thousand desert-monks, both men and women, with a minimum of contact among themselves: they hardly ate or slept, locked themselves up in tombs and saw self-neglect as a virtue.<sup>149</sup>

Anthony's demons were libidinal projections.<sup>150</sup> Monks interpreted the struggle against their sexual temptations as participation in the eschatological battle of Jesus.<sup>151</sup> Virginity or celibacy can be a sort of permanent martyrdom.<sup>152</sup> Self-conscious abstinence from fundamental activities sleeping, eating, or making love can give a person a new social identity.<sup>153</sup> The shift of emphasis from outer world to inner world transformed the perception of *the kingdom* from a new social reality to eternal happiness with God in heaven.<sup>154</sup>

Hermits became monks, hermitages became monasteries, and monasticism spread swiftly. These centres of withdrawal also became influential centres of knowledge, skills, liturgy and celibacy. City clergy were urged to live celibately in groups. There were about seventeen thousand abbeys and priories in Europe by the eight century. They played an important part in technological and economic developments. Twenty-four monks became popes, more than two hundred became cardinals, and sixteen-thousand became bishops. Forty-three monks became emperors and forty-four became kings. Their influence was enormous.<sup>155</sup>

As a consequence the secular clergy were monasticised: they were urged to live a communal life with prayer and celibacy.<sup>156</sup>

The above shows that the importance of the dualist worldview and of monasticism should not be underestimated as contributive factors to the celibacy law. The separation of heaven and earth also had cultic consequences.

#### 2.2.2.2. Cultic

The history of the celibacy prescription has cultic repercussions. It is a primordial inclination to approach the sacred in terms of clean and unclean and to link sexual activity with

uncleanness; impurity results in archaic fear. Various mystery cults associated sexual intercourse with evil spirits. Members of Greek cultic communities, like the cults of Asclepius, the Eleusinian Mysteries, Isis and Dionysus, believed that they could be purified by repeating sacred actions. Control of libidinal energy and contact with reproductive fluids are linked with purity and can lead to a social position with corresponding functions. High purity requirements for religious mediums is common in non-Christian religions. Christianity is influenced by ritual purification and this can replace faith by magic.<sup>157</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2.1. Cultic Purity in Judaism

It is important to distinguish moral uncleanness from cultic uncleanness; sex in marriage may be morally right and ritually unclean.<sup>158</sup> Judaism had a basically good outlook on sexuality.<sup>159</sup> Jewish laws do not define chastity as having no sex, but as having illicit sex. Most major Jewish thinkers and rabbis were married.<sup>160</sup> Anti-sex drives in Judaism came from outside.<sup>161</sup>

Starting-point for ritual purity is the message of Exodus 19:6 “Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” Purity is related to the mysterious origins of life and death. What makes people unclean are contacts with blood, semen, ill and dead people, some animals – pigs for example - and objects like clothes that have been touched by the above. As a result cleansing the body, washing clothes and offering sacrifices were important activities. It is easier to become unclean than to remain pure. Abstinence and ritual purification were important before wars. Soldiers, encamped against their enemies, were told to guard against any impropriety. If one of the men had a nocturnal omission, he had to stay a day outside the camp and wash himself with water in the evening before he was allowed back in (Deuteronomy 23:9–10). When David ordered Ahimelech, a priest, to feed his men with holy bread, he gave David only one condition, that they must have kept themselves from women. David answered that his men never had sex with women when he went on an expedition (1 Samuel 21:4–6). Ritual uncleanness of married people is related to semen and blood. According to Leviticus (15:16–30), a nocturnal emission makes a man unclean until the evening; menstruation makes a woman unclean for seven days; sexual intercourse makes a couple unclean until the evening; and those who touch the unclean also become unclean. As a preparation for the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, when the priest sent a scapegoat, carrying all the iniquities of the people, into the wilderness, married people had to “deny themselves” (Leviticus 16:21–22; 23: 27). According to Leviticus 21:10,14, a priest is exalted above other people, he must remain extra pure because of his intermediary position, and he may only marry a woman who is still a virgin. Leviticus 8:33 teaches that

candidates for the priesthood have to abstain sexually for seven days previous to ordination in order to be ritually pure.<sup>162</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2.2. Cultic Purity in Christianity

When at the end of the fourth century, contrary to the Eastern Churches, the eucharist was celebrated daily abstinence became a lasting condition for married priests.<sup>163</sup> Some proponents of ministerial celibacy do not believe that this prescription is a result of ritual purity.<sup>164</sup> If this is true, argue opponents of the celibacy law, this prescription has lost its reason of existence and should no longer be imposed.<sup>165</sup> There is nothing impure about proper sex, so do not confuse moral impurity with cultic impurity.<sup>166</sup>

That which in earlier times had been the spontaneous expression of fervid zeal, or the joyful self-sacrifice of ardent asceticism, was thus changed into a law, bearing upon all alike, and taking no count of the individual idiosyncrasies which might render the burden too heavy for the shoulders of the less fiery though not less conscientious Christian.<sup>167</sup>

The above shows that Judaism distinguished cultic purity from moral purity. Because of their sacredness, semen and (menstruation-) blood can make a person unclean. Ritual impurity does result from cultural derision of genital contacts but it expresses the holiness of the divine Life-Giver. Christianity picked up Greek dualism; later justifications miss the point by denying the outdated origins.

#### 2.2.2.3. Ecclesiological

The history of the celibacy prescription has exalted the unmarried-men-only model, and this, in turn has ecclesiological consequences. The other model promotes faith communities to invent new ministries as reactions to pastoral needs.

Arguments of the **unmarried-men-only** line go like this: the Twelve who left “everything” behind to follow Jesus;<sup>168</sup> clerical celibacy existed normatively long before the first legislations of Elvira and Nicea;<sup>169</sup> celibate priesthood should not be interpreted functionally but relationally and based on Jesus whose bride is the Church;<sup>170</sup> celibate priesthood has an ontological and eschatological meaning;<sup>171</sup> celibate priesthood should be rooted in the virginity and divinity of Jesus;<sup>172</sup> Jesus himself instituted the priesthood for serving the Church, and that the gift of celibacy belongs to this vocation.<sup>173</sup>

Arguments of Christians who promote **ministerial pluriformity** refer to the New Testament lists of pneumatological ministries (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4: 11-16) the cultic word *hiereus* (priest) was still lacking.<sup>174</sup> let the ministry of Christ give rise to

many ministries;<sup>175</sup> do not identify historically developed expressions of ministry with its essence;<sup>176</sup> if the Church is continually being created by the Spirit, new gifts and ministries will emerge, prompted by new needs and situations;<sup>177</sup> the whole Church and every individual Christian is the basic apostolic succession;<sup>178</sup> what matters is the community that has the right to celebrate the Eucharist. In other words: move from hierarchology to ecclesiology and from substantialist ontology to community service.<sup>179</sup> do not focus on an exclusive elite that accumulates rather than integrates the gifts of all;<sup>180</sup> do not cease family-life, but reincorporate it into the Church;<sup>181</sup> is better to speak to use the participatory term “ministry” than the separationist word “priest and to consider part-time ministers.”<sup>182</sup>

Many writers support the ordination of women.<sup>183</sup> John Paul II describes the spousal relationship of Jesus with his church, and that in the eucharist only a male priest can act, “in persona Christi.” Counter arguments go as follows: the argument that ordaining women contradicts the will of Christ only emerged in the second half of the third century due to socio-cultural influences;<sup>184</sup> it is incorrect to believe that only men can act in persona Christi when the sacraments are administered, because women also baptise and marry.<sup>185</sup> times and circumstances have changed throughout history;<sup>186</sup> from the fourth century, there were deaconesses among the clergy;<sup>187</sup> an ordination will make women more effective in the pastoral ministry in which so many women are involved already;<sup>188</sup> celibate restrictions on ministry in the Roman Catholic Church were not invented by women, but by some clergy;<sup>189</sup> the celibate tradition has only exalted women as virgins, that is: as non-sexual beings.<sup>190</sup> Grateful reference is made to Paul, who wrote to the Galatians (3:28) that for the baptised in Christ there is no longer male and female.<sup>191</sup>

#### 2.2.2.4. Sexual

The history of the ministerial celibacy prescription is a sexual history. This section is built on Sipe’s view that celibacy is a way of living one’s sexuality.<sup>192</sup> What follows focuses on sexual feelings in general, usually for women, and on homosexuality and paedophilia.

In spite of Sigmund Freud and the “sexual revolution, it is common to find **spiritualisation of sexuality**. It is common to hear arguments like: remember that Jesus also found it hard to be lonely or misunderstood and that celibacy is intimacy with Christ;<sup>193</sup> love the church as the Spouse of Christ totally and exclusively;<sup>194</sup> just focus on Jesus as God’s fullness, and problems will pass;<sup>195</sup> do not think from human perspectives about a theological reality.<sup>196</sup> Priests who have problems with celibacy he should not blame celibacy, but rather look at their suitability for the priesthood.<sup>197</sup>

There is, however a strong counter-movement that more and more interprets **celibacy-as-sexuality**. Many seminarians thought that sexual feelings were to be repressed because there was no place for them in the life of a celibate.<sup>198</sup> Every (prospective) celibate priest should ask himself whether he has the internal sexual discipline for celibacy.<sup>199</sup> Ambivalence surrounds and characterises celibate church ministers: the priesthood is too good for sexual intercourse; and sexual intercourse is too good for the priest.<sup>200</sup> One of them wrote:

If I were not a priest, or if I were permitted as a priest to do so, I would certainly marry. Celibacy is a challenge and often a struggle, accepted willingly in order to enter the priesthood. Having accepted it for life, I can say that I am still learning to live with it as a fruitful, not always comfortable bed mate. I would rather be its hero than its victim.<sup>201</sup>

**Homosexuality** and paedophilia are food for sexual thought. At least one in every five North American clerics is homosexual, so are about half of clergy with severe alcohol problems, some clergy are overt gay-right activists, whereas their church officially describes homosexual acts as “intrinsically disordered.”<sup>202</sup> The sexual behaviour of many homosexual priests is surrounded by a *system of secrecy* and that this can give rise to a *cycle of addiction*.<sup>203</sup> In recent years **paedophile scandals** in the Roman Catholic Church belong to the world news headlines.<sup>204</sup> The paedophile scandals incentivise many priests to publicly raise their voice against the celibacy prescription.<sup>205</sup> Is the law of celibacy the most structural proof that the leadership of the Church has a neurotic attitude towards sexuality?<sup>206</sup> Or can this law not be blamed for all that goes wrong? There is a shift to paedophilia as something pathological.<sup>207</sup>

### 2.3. Dimensional Repercussions in Africa

Literature reveals that the law of ministerial celibacy also has an **African history**. The European missionaries who entered Africa, especially in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, were representatives of churches that had developed their identity after the Reformation. There were only two movements: missionary countries with giving or sending Churches and mission countries with receiving Churches.<sup>208</sup> Missiologist Pierre Charles saw the Roman Catholic Church as the Kingdom.<sup>209</sup> A diverse but also divided Christianity of competing churches was exported to Africa. The Roman Catholic Church sent especially *celibate* missionaries beginning with priests who belonged to a variety of clerical taskforces.<sup>210</sup> The main missionary model was that of the construction and maintenance of mission stations that consisted of a church, an educational centre and a medical centre. Catechists played an important role as informers and executives of the

celibate priests. Much emphasis went to the formation of local sisters and brothers, seminarians and priests.<sup>211</sup>

Africans who met pastoral agents of Protestant churches usually met married pastors, many of whom came to Africa with their partner and children. Those who got into contact with Roman Catholic priests, therefore, met men who were supposed to be celibate. Ministry offers work and social status.<sup>212</sup> The number of diocesan priests in Africa moved from two thousand five hundred in 1957 to twenty-three thousand in 2010.<sup>213</sup> Just as in the West, the ministerial celibacy prescription causes with significant cosmological, cultic, ecclesiological and sexual ripples in the African pool. .

### 2.2.3.1. Cosmological

Often African **interrelatedness** is opposed to western dualism and individualism. Expressions like the following and indicative of the African worldview:” relatedness,”<sup>214</sup> “human relationships,”<sup>215</sup> “webs of interrelationships,”<sup>216</sup> “network of vital relationships,”<sup>217</sup> “interpersonal and cosmic relationships,”<sup>218</sup> “multiplicity of relationships,”<sup>219</sup> “existence-in-relation,”<sup>220</sup> “corporate identity” and “corporate consciousness”<sup>221</sup>, “ontological interdependence,”<sup>222</sup> “interconnection of the vital forces,”<sup>223</sup> “spiritual ontology,”<sup>224</sup> “coexistence of all forces,”<sup>225</sup> “vital participation,”<sup>226</sup> “existential participation,”<sup>227</sup> “comprehensive approach,”<sup>228</sup> “communal bond,”<sup>229</sup> “the dialogical dimension of life,”<sup>230</sup> “brotherhood,”<sup>231</sup> “sense of solidarity,”<sup>232</sup> “community spirit,”<sup>233</sup> “corporate community,”<sup>234</sup> “community oriented,”<sup>235</sup> and “community harmony.”<sup>236</sup> .

Individuals are first of all family-members.<sup>237</sup> Decisions are made together by palavers in which all have a say.<sup>238</sup> The elderly and the deceased deserve respect.<sup>239</sup> Good is what is at the service of life; evil is what endangers or destroys life.<sup>240</sup> Promotion of communal well-being is the highest good.<sup>241</sup>

There is a strong emphasis on the **continuation of lineage**, and on **fertility**. The greatest felt need is the transmission of life,<sup>242</sup> in traditional Africa marriage for normal adults is obligatory;<sup>243</sup> procreation is a divine must;<sup>244</sup> important rituals emphasize the sexual organs and their procreative function;<sup>245</sup> sexuality in African cultures takes place in a context of social control and appreciation;<sup>246</sup> a person who does not pass on life does not live.<sup>247</sup> Childlessness is personal incompleteness and the end of family and clan.<sup>248</sup> In some ethnic groups initiated boys are stimulated to have sex.<sup>249</sup> Polygamy, although publicly despised, is privately appreciated.<sup>250</sup> Elders are married adults.<sup>251</sup>

**Temporary sexual continence** is not alien to (traditional) Africa, but **celibacy** is extremely rare.<sup>252</sup> The word celibacy is hard to translate in most African languages.<sup>253</sup> In Africa celibacy is no state of perfection.<sup>254</sup> Lumbala writes:

An elder of a chief without a family is unthinkable in our cultures because he must be like the ancestors – a symbol of the transmission of life. Since the symbol unifies in itself the life visible and invisible, it is not enough that the priest exhibit only spiritual fatherhood (i.e., invisible life). In the concept of the Church as family in Black Africa, priests and the bishops responsible to and for local Christian community must also be married and fathers of families. If the pastor is a person who has not transmitted life, he will be considered like a functionary who comes to a particular place for a certain period of time to perform a certain job. Even more, he will be considered as a kind of child, not as a full adult. It is enough to see how celibates are looked upon and treated in African traditions. No matter what their chronological age, they will never be able to sit in a meeting where the problems of life are treated. Marital experience is considered a requisite if a man is to exercise responsibility for guiding the human community.<sup>255</sup>

Being a eunuch is not respected among African men. Modern men with a low sex drive encounter derision.<sup>256</sup> Young men are stimulated and supposed to be experienced warriors.<sup>257</sup> Women who do not want children contradict the African ideal of fulfilled womanhood.<sup>258</sup> Premarital virginity is not virtue as such, but emphasizes the importance of sex in marriage.<sup>259</sup> A pastor like Liberian Chris Ojibani attracts tens of thousands of women who pray for a husband.<sup>260</sup>

In modern **urbanised Africa** lifelong abstinence is not plausible either.<sup>261</sup> In urban areas seventy to eighty percent of married couples have been involved in extra-marital sex.<sup>262</sup> Modern Africans grow up with the conviction that it is normal to have many sexual partners. About thirty-one percent of boys and fifteen percent of girls have had sex by the age of fifteen, half of the boys and four of ten girls have had sex before the age of nineteen, and eight of ten young men and seven of ten young women have had sex when they are twenty.<sup>263</sup>

### 2.2.3.2. Cultic

African Traditional Religion knows both celibate and married **priests** and in some cultures the latter must **abstain** from sex before they celebrate a rite.<sup>264</sup> Examples can be found among Ashanti, Baganda, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba and some other especially western African peoples. During their formation the trainees for priesthood must observe strict abstinence, but after their formation they may marry or resume their marital life. Trainees for medicine-men, mediums and diviners also abstain sexually. These priests rarely remain unmarried. A number of societies even know hereditary priesthood.<sup>265</sup> Sexual continence is underlined by African



culture, but basic African values oppose the idea of celibacy.<sup>266</sup> Celibate priests have no African cultural roots:

Clerical celibacy was part of the total package of Christian ideals imposed upon Africans by the early foreign missionaries. The traditional African priest enjoyed a totality of functions. He was a political leader, a respectable family man, an economist and even a lawyer. He had no qualms at all about associating himself with marriage, women and children. Celibacy in itself and as a distinct value was detestable. It was a waste of human value and worth as far as the African was concerned.<sup>267</sup>

The above makes clear that abstinence or temporary celibacy is not alien to African religious mediums, but that lifelong celibacy is rather exceptional. A real medium has to be a role-model of social participation, and this includes an exemplary marriage and well-behaved children.

### 2.2.3.3. Ecclesiological

This section is subdivided in a pre-Christian and a more ecclesial look at ministry.

#### 2,2.3.3.1. Pre-Christian Mediumistic Ministry

Mediumistic qualities were attributed to kings, elders, leaders, rulers, and headmen; they represent God and the ancestors.<sup>268</sup> The emphasis of a *nganga*, the most common Bantu-word for a priest, is not directly on God, but on the ancestors.<sup>269</sup> Various **liaison specialists** - seers, prophets, rain callers, herbalists, medicine men, diviners, ritual elders and traditional priests - highlight the margins between the visible and the invisible in their service of people's needs.<sup>270</sup> They can be present during important rites of passage: incision and puberty celebrations, weddings, reconciliation and funerals.<sup>271</sup> Priestly reality is multiple:

The role of a priest in African Religion, however, is not restricted to an individual. Religious matters are the responsibility of several religious leaders. These include rulers, ritual elders, diviners, mediums, seers, medicine men and women, and rain-callers. These religious leaders are the carriers of tradition and religious knowledge. They are men and women in society who mediate between their fellow human beings and the supernatural realm. Without such leaders, African Religion would disintegrate. The fact that African Religion is alive today can be attributed to the wise, intelligent, talented, and inspired individuals found in every community.<sup>272</sup>

Women can also be mediators, the carriers of life who connect the unborn with the born and the invisible with the visible.<sup>273</sup> They can be effective counsellors, especially for other women, with psychotherapeutic qualities and rituals.<sup>274</sup> They can obtain status by their religious leadership. In traditional Africa they functioned as priestesses, caretakers of shrines and temples of gods and spirits, mediums, medicine persons, herbalists, diviners,

prophetesses and goddesses.<sup>275</sup> As women are remarkably religious and devoted, and as they outnumber men in most (independent) churches, these have priests and priestess, prophets and prophetesses.<sup>276</sup>

Mediums are expected to be responsible members of society and **moral examples**.<sup>277</sup> They are to be spiritually sound, wise, disciplined, courageous, intelligent, talented, adequate, worthy, and inspired.<sup>278</sup> They should be carriers of religious knowledge and speak words of life-force and power.<sup>279</sup> The above makes clear that Africa knows a great variety of pre-Christian mediators between the visible and the invisible.

### 2.2.3.3.1. Christian Ministry

There is agreement among African theologians that small Christian communities are breeding places and play-ground for new ministries.<sup>280</sup> From the very beginning of missionaries, catechists have played an historic role in these small communities.<sup>281</sup> However, these lay-leaders, cannot preside over the eucharist because they have not received an official ordination. About this fact there are two streams of thought: representatives of the unmarried-men-only model exempt the law of celibacy from cultural criticism, whereas the other stream interprets this law as yet one another example of western ecclesial domination.

Representatives of the **unmarried-men-only line** argue that sexual self-sacrifice helps a priest to better understand the sacrifice of Jesus;<sup>282</sup> that it is the Lord's gift, to be freely embraced;<sup>283</sup> that celibacy enables concentrated dedication;<sup>284</sup> that celibacy makes a priest distinct from other Christians,<sup>285</sup> that the problem is not celibacy but preventable isolationism and loneliness,<sup>286</sup> and that it healthily confronts the African worldview with its emphasis on procreation.<sup>287</sup>

Representatives of **pluriform ministry** reason as follows: Jesus did not oppose but encouraged the legitimate desires of the Ancestors: love and fecundity;<sup>288</sup> African culture highly values the experiences married people;<sup>289</sup> celibate African priests do not marry, not because they would not like to marry, but because the Church requires celibacy;<sup>290</sup> it is better to criticise than to Africanise Roman Church models;<sup>291</sup> the mission of the church calls for a structural revolution, including married ministers;<sup>292</sup> an appropriate theology of the ministry is needed that starts with an inventory of the pastoral needs of the faith community; public marriage is better than a double-life for priest, woman and child;<sup>293</sup> structural submission can destroy a person;<sup>294</sup> clerical celibacy is alien to African values and can only be interpreted as an outlandish cultural imposition.<sup>295</sup>

The prominent role of **women** in African faith communities is food for thought: the experience of women is emphasized by African women theologians;<sup>296</sup> the Anglican Church of Southern Africa even decided to elect women as bishops.<sup>297</sup> It is ironic that in many female majority congregations women cannot hold religious functions because they are considered inferior and unclean, whereas various male leaders use their income for secretly coerced sexual gratification.<sup>298</sup> Let there be more openness for women, because Jesus addressed both men and women and society is changing..<sup>299</sup> Excluding women from ministerial priesthood because of their sex is a form of injustice.<sup>300</sup> Supported and inspired by the two-thirds rule of the new Constitution, Kenyan women leaders told Church leaders that church laws should be reviewed: all obstacles that prevents women from equal participation in church leadership should be removed.<sup>301</sup>

#### 2.2.3.4. Sexual

Somehow it is easier to find negative stories about celibacy-as-sexuality than positive stories. It can be painful for an African priest to be asked where his children are. Many celibates experience serious pressure from parents, grandparents and others to first produce a child. Celibacy is nothing to brag about. Most African religious interpret their vow of celibacy as relational poverty. They feel and think what they often hear, “What is wrong with you?”<sup>302</sup> Conscious childlessness is seen as a waste. Celibates are seen as **people who opt out**. Unmarried people are seen as ignorant. The name must be passed on. Many relatives are proud of a family-member becoming a priest, but they find it hard to see the must of celibacy.<sup>303</sup> It is believed that the sex scandals, the disclosures of priests who get married, and the fear of a celibate life of temptations make celibacy unattractive.<sup>304</sup> The trust of faithful is rapidly disappearing because of the sexuality of its clergy.<sup>305</sup> There can be disrespect for pastoral boundaries.<sup>306</sup> It is believed that many women raise families for celibate priests,<sup>307</sup> that women who expect a child of a priest are forced to abort,<sup>308</sup> and that some women receive university education for silencing them.<sup>309</sup> Women ask piercing sexual questions from their perspective:

Do Catholics seriously believe that a man cannot love his wife and God? Am I to understand that as a wife I make it difficult for my husband to serve God with an undivided heart? Isn't this a sexist idea, perpetuating the myth that woman, since, Eve, is the cause of man's imperfection? (...) Isn't it possible for the Church to rethink the priesthood in the face of the worldwide sex scandals and put in place reforms that would ensure those who are called to the vocation are not unduly exposed to the temptation of living double lives?<sup>310</sup>

It is hard to place **homosexuality** in African cosmology, with its emphasis on fertility and lineage.<sup>311</sup> Homosexuality is interpreted as morally wrong and as nurture more than nature.<sup>312</sup> Newspapers usually speak about “sodomy” and “sodomising.”<sup>313</sup> In Uganda, the question was discussed whether homosexuals deserve the death sentence, and a tabloid published names and photographs of men who were alleged gay.<sup>314</sup> Often same-sex relationships take place in same-sex environments like boarding schools.<sup>315</sup> General Western tolerance versus general African resistance divides the Anglican Church.<sup>316</sup>

In Africa, there is a growing awareness and increase of **child abuse**.<sup>317</sup> The penalty for defiling a child ranges from life imprisonment for children under the age of twelve and minimally fifteen years for a child under eighteen. These offences are committed by both married and unmarried church ministers.<sup>318</sup> Newspapers often reveal clerical sexual offences against minors, mostly girls but also boys.<sup>319</sup> According to research, pastors commit two percent of the total of reported sexual abuse cases. Most of the abusers are between twenty-one and thirty years old and Nairobi is the most violent place for children to live; a third of the reported abuse cases took place in Nairobi.<sup>320</sup> Should the law of celibacy be blamed for sexual scandals of clergy, or the fact that some men are not able to live up to it?<sup>321</sup>

The above shows that the ministerial celibacy prescription touches and disrupts African cosmology, cult, and medium requirements. There is an unmarried-men-only line, and a line that is open for married priestly ministers, both men and women. Celibacy is food for thought for Africans, especially if cultural scripts on fecundity and procreation prove to be stronger than ecclesiastical doctrines on lifelong ministerial abstinence.

The general history of celibacy reveals a development from degrees of continence (Elvira, Nicea, and Trullo) to mandatory celibacy (Lateran II, Trent, Vatican II). Influential Christians emphasise the same: Siricius wanted lifelong continence, Ambrose focused on the virtue of virginity, Jerome considered virginity as a higher state of life than marriage, Augustine related sexual feelings with original sin, Gregory VII annulled all clerical marriages, but Martin Luther believed that marriage is a better starting point than celibacy. Roman Catholic missionaries imported ministerial celibacy into Africa, but ministers of other churches were usually married. The ministerial prescription continues to have profound cosmological, cultic, ecclesiological and sexual repercussions, both in the West and in Africa.

- <sup>1</sup> See: J. Daniélou, and H. Marrou. *The Christian Centuries - A New History of the Catholic Church*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964, p. 225.
- <sup>2</sup> See: C. Cochini. *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*. Ft. Collins: Ignatius Press, 1981: p. 159.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160; See: H.C. Lea. *The History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1957: p. 30.
- <sup>4</sup> See: C. Cochini, *op.cit.*. 1981: p.150.
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## CHAPTER THREE

### AN EXEGESIS OF THE EUNUCH PASSAGE

#### 3.0. Introduction

The history of the ministerial celibacy prescription shows that there is celibate and a married line for church ministers. If the eunuch passage is taken as a starting point, these lines are no problem, because exegetical study reveals that “this teaching” of Jesus can validly be interpreted in two ways, although they do not have to be interpreted as mutually exclusive.

As Brown proposes, use is made of a combination of textual, historical, form, source, redaction and narrative criticism.<sup>1</sup> The main translation used for text analysis is the ecumenical “Good News New Testament, Today’s English Version;”<sup>2</sup> the Greek text to which is frequently referred,<sup>3</sup> and the version of “The New Oxford Annotated Bible” for translation comparisons,<sup>4</sup> can be found in the endnotes.

#### 3.1. The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel

Diagram 2: The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel

Introductions 1:1-2:23	Blessings at the birth of Jesus		
Book One 3:1-7:23	Beginnings of Jesus’ ministry	First discourse	Sermon on the Mount
Book Two 8:1-11:1	Early ministry of Jesus	Second discourse	Sermon on mission
Book Three 11:2-13:53	Growing rejection by opponents	Third discourse	Parables of the kingdom
Book Four 13:54-19:1	Growing acknowledgment by disciples	Fourth discourse	Sermon on the church
Book Five 19:2-26:1	Ministry in Judea	Fifth discourse	Sermon on judgment
Conclusions 26:2-28:20	Blessings at the death of Jesus <sup>5</sup>		

The synoptic gospel according to Matthew has a general biographic structure of beginning, public life and end, and was written during the first decennia after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. More than eighty percent of the material is based on the story of Mark,<sup>6</sup> the material that it only shares with Luke is often hypothetically called “Q” (the German word “Quelle” or “source”), and text that is only found in Matthew (like Mat 19:10-12) is often called “M”. Matthew’s account is written in good Greek, and may be based on an

earlier version in Hebrew. Many scholars believe that the gospel was written in Syrian Antioch, one of the biggest trade-centres of the Roman Empire. It is estimated that toward the end of the first century as many as two hundred thousand people lived in Antioch, that there was a large Jewish community with a strong Pharisaic influence, and there must have been at least two synagogues.<sup>7</sup> Matthew's gospel was written to the Christian community of Antioch. The emphasis on Jesus fulfilling the Law, the more than fifty First Testament quotations, the assumption that Jewish customs and places were known by the audience, make clear that Matthew's story was especially written to fortify the Jewish Christians who gradually shifted from Moses to Jesus, and the growing number of gentile Christians with their own questions and customs.

The pericope on which the research is built, Mat 19:3-12, is preceded by characteristic transition verses that indicate that Jesus' mission in Galilee is over and that his activities in Judea have started.<sup>8</sup> He moves from the area of revelation to the area rejection and death.<sup>9</sup> The crowds that follow Jesus in faithful expectation and the many who are cured contrast the disbelieving Pharisees who are out to trap Jesus. In what follows the emphasis is on the script (text), on the Matthean community (context), and on explanations (pretext), though not always in that order.

### 3.2 Jesus and the Pharisees (19: 3-9)

*(3) Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him by asking, "Does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes?"*

That the Pharisees, who are resisting Jesus throughout the gospel, take the initiative and come to Jesus shows his authority.<sup>10</sup> They are not out for information, but for public conflict.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is addressed as a rabbinic Torah interpreter<sup>12</sup>. The Pharisees are presented as agents of the tester who emerged in Mat 4:1-11.<sup>13</sup> Matthew makes Jesus part of the first century debate about proper divorce grounds.<sup>14</sup>

The words *κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν*, "for whatever reason" refer to Deut 24:1, where a man divorces his wife because he finds "something objectionable" in her. The words are man-defined. The text in Mark 10:2, on which the Matthean pericope leans, does not have this specification and may reflect the Roman context that also allowed women to start a divorce.<sup>15</sup> The strict rabbinic school of Shammai interpreted "something objectionable" as a wife's shameful sexual misconduct, but for the school of liberal Hillel "something" could be "anything".<sup>16</sup> The question to Jesus can be reformulated as, "Do you agree with Hillel?"<sup>17</sup>

The polemic relationship between Jesus and “Pharisees” in Matthew’s gospel reflects the tensions that intensified a few decennia later between dominant Pharisees and the small Matthean minority community in Antioch, part of the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup>

*(4) Jesus answered, “Haven’t you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? (5) And God said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one. (6) So they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together.”*

This discussion has a rabbinic form: a question is answered by a Torah quote and elaborated by a personal commentary.<sup>19</sup> The literary genre of the pericope is a scriptural debate.<sup>20</sup>

The Pharisees seem ignorant by the question that starts Jesus’ answer: οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι (“have you not heard that...”?<sup>21</sup> He discards their closed trap-question,<sup>22</sup> expresses sympathy for neither Shammai nor Hillel,<sup>23</sup> and moves beyond all manmade jurisprudence<sup>24</sup> to ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, “from the beginning,” and this gives authority to whatever he wants to say next:<sup>25</sup> that the creation story reveals the Creator’s will,<sup>26</sup> and that precisely the unity and reciprocity between man and woman makes them human.<sup>27</sup> The preposition ἀπ’ is both temporal and normative.<sup>28</sup> Expressions like κολληθήσεται (“be joined / be yoked together”) and εἰς σάρκα μίαν (“are one flesh”) emphasize a new unity, meant to be indissoluble.<sup>29</sup> It is not a unity of domination and submission, but of oneness, equality and mutuality.<sup>30</sup> Marriage starts a new relationship.<sup>31</sup> Sex can be a profound expression and affirmation of this unity.<sup>32</sup> If man and woman are joined by God ἄνθρωπος (“man”) should not separate.<sup>33</sup> “Man” here does not mean a third party but – is Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ man-based question – first of all the husband.<sup>34</sup>

The answer of Jesus comes from the tenth century BC J (2:24) and sixth century BC P (1:27) creation stories.<sup>35</sup> The connective καὶ εἶπεν (“and said”) refers to the Creator and not to Jesus.<sup>36</sup> “Male and female” refers to the twofold creation of humankind (Gen 1:27), where no mention is made of marriage. The passage about “becoming one flesh” (Gen 2:23) is not connected to the twofold creation of male and female.<sup>37</sup> Ἐνεκα τούτου (“therefore”) refers to the man’s exclamation that the woman is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.<sup>38</sup> In Genesis 2:24 “therefore” is not given as a divine ordinance, but explains why man and wife leave their parents in order to start their own family.<sup>39</sup> Rabbinic exegesis does not understand Gen 1:27 in terms of marriage, but, just as the Qumran community, Jesus does.<sup>40</sup>

(7) *“Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?”*

Jesus’ biblical answer forces the Pharisees to justify divorce biblically.<sup>41</sup> The Pharisees answer by reiterating Deuteronomy; they saw the entire Torah as coming directly from God. They wonder whether Jesus will accuse Moses of contradicting the Creator’s intention of marital indissolubility.<sup>42</sup> By their closed question they are out to make Jesus oppose Deut 24:1, which they interpret as divorce “command.”

(8) *Jesus answered, “Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation.*

However, Deut 24:1 does not deal with divorce command. It merely describes a case-law: if a man dismisses his wife for having found “something objectionable” in her, he should not remarry his ex-wife once she has divorced from another man or once she has become his widow in the meantime.<sup>43</sup> Before the times of divorce bills, men could dismiss their wives even more easily; these bills presuppose a man’s serious reflection, meant to protect the woman.<sup>44</sup> Besides the point, in the light of modern exegesis: fourteenth century BC Moses could never have written this sixth century BC book.<sup>45</sup>

Jesus and the Pharisees agree that Moses allowed divorce, but Jesus does not accuse Moses of contradicting the Creator.<sup>46</sup> By reversing the verbs of the Markan text, where the Pharisees speak of “permission” (10:4) and Jesus speaks of “commandment” (10:5), Matthew directly contradicts the common interpretation of Deut 24:1-4 as a “commandment” for divorce. He blames his accusers for bending the Mosaic ἐπέτρεψεν or temporary “concession”<sup>47</sup> into a positive divorce-command.<sup>48</sup> It is incorrect to read this case-law as Moses “commanding” (ἐνετείλατο) divorce.<sup>49</sup>

Next Jesus gives their selfish and therefore sinful attitude as the cause for manipulating scriptures. The word σκληροκαρδίαν means “hard-heartedness,” and usually God responds angrily to Israel’s stubbornness, quite a popular topic among prophets.<sup>50</sup> Pharisees are presented as examples of hard-heartedness.<sup>51</sup>

The main point of Jesus is that the creation story precedes Moses, and is therefore more important, even if for most rabbis the entire Torah comes from God.<sup>52</sup> An adulterous relationship violates the mutuality of the creation story.<sup>53</sup> The divorce prohibition is not based



on the Kingdom of Heaven but on the order of creation.<sup>54</sup> Therefore Jesus only talks about divorce after having sketched the Creator's ideal of reciprocity and permanence.<sup>55</sup>

*(9) I tell you, then, that any man who divorces his wife, even though she has not been unfaithful, commits adultery if he marries some other woman.*

Matthew makes Jesus repeat what he said during the Sermon on the Mount (5:31,32). The words λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν (“and I say to you”) are typical of Matthew.<sup>56</sup> After having referred to the Torah Jesus now comes with his own authoritative words that reveal a non-compromising attitude.<sup>57</sup>

The “exception” clause μὴ ἐπὶ πορνεία (“except for unchastity”) is a Matthean addition to Mark 10:2, contradicts the ideal of verse Mt 19:6, and must reflect existing circumstances of his faith-community.<sup>58</sup> If πορνεία refers to the first part of Jesus' command, a second marriage is forbidden, but if it refers to the second part a second marriage is allowed.<sup>59</sup> The word πορνεία can be interpreted as concubinage,<sup>60</sup> prenuptial unchastity,<sup>61</sup> or as infidelity<sup>62</sup> or sexual misbehaviour on the woman's part.<sup>63</sup> However, as the usual word for “unchastity” is not πορνεία, but μοιχεία, it probably means marriage within kinship degrees (Lev 18:6-18),<sup>64</sup> which were accepted among gentiles, but prohibited in the Matthean community after baptism.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.3 Jesus and his Disciples (19:10-12)

*(10) His disciples said to him, “If this is how it is between a man and his wife, it is better not to marry.”*

The verses that follow can only be found in Matthew's gospel.<sup>66</sup> They are confusing, inconsistent, and may have stood in a previous context of self-denial.<sup>67</sup> Verse 10 may be completely redactional because Matthew uses οὕτως (“thus”) thirty three times, ἀνθρώπος is often used in the indefinite sense (“a person”, “one”), and συμφέρειν (“preferable”) is only found in the Matthean synoptic.<sup>68</sup>

The audience changes from Pharisees to disciples, who ask a strange statement because at least one of the disciples, Peter, is married.<sup>69</sup> They react rather drastically, from the man-defined angle that also characterised the Pharisees' test-questions, that strict divorce restrictions make marriage disadvantageous.<sup>70</sup> If neither divorce nor remarriage is allowed, marriage becomes an imposition, a tormenting burden.<sup>71</sup> They react like Essenes who also preferred ascetic celibacy to marriage.<sup>72</sup>

Matthew uses the story about Jesus for tackling a human and social issue of the faith community.<sup>73</sup> If the disciples represent the Matthean Christians, this section becomes part of a debate in the apostolic church about how to apply Jesus' radical approach to marriage, disputable in Judaism and unknown to the gentile world.<sup>74</sup> Paul also indicates that the absolute views of Jesus caused tensions among new Christians.<sup>75</sup> These marriages should be treated as if they had never been.<sup>76</sup> The confrontational dialogue between Jesus and Pharisees shows that Christianity slowly drifted away from Torah-centred Judaism.<sup>77</sup> The message is that if divorce is fully forbidden, and if old marriages of new Christians have now become illicit, not marrying at all becomes an option.<sup>78</sup>

*(11) Jesus answered, "This teaching does not apply to everyone, but only to those to whom God has given it.*

This verse is important because it is not clear whether Jesus points back or forward with τὸν λόγον [τοῦτον] ("this word" or "this saying").

If he refers back to his teaching on divorce (19:4-9 and especially 9), τὸν λόγον [τοῦτον] means that Jesus has high marriage standards for married followers.<sup>79</sup> Only those to whom God has granted it can χωροῦσιν ("make room for") the opinion of Jesus against Judaism in general and the Pharisees in particular that separation because of πορνεία is no permission for remarriage.<sup>80</sup> The pattern is that of the rich young man (Mt.19:23-26) and goes like this: (1) harsh words of Jesus; (2) stunned reactions by the disciples; (3) Jesus reiterating his harsh words and referring to divine grace.<sup>81</sup> However, if τὸν λόγον [τοῦτον] is meant to point forward, the meaning becomes quite different...

*(12) For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Let him who can accept this teaching do so."*

In that case Jesus gives an unexpected deeper meaning to the disciples' extreme reaction of verse 10: without undoing the ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (verse 8) of marriage,<sup>82</sup> he admits that remaining unmarried for the Kingdom of heaven can be an option.<sup>83</sup> That he speaks in plural, εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι, may mean that he referred to the Baptist, some disciples or Essenes.<sup>84</sup> He may also mean the need of temporary removal from family life and sex.<sup>85</sup> The preposition διὰ should not be interpreted finally (with a view to the Kingdom) but causally (for the sake of the Kingdom): it is not a condition but a conviction,<sup>86</sup> and it certainly is no guarantee to "heaven".<sup>87</sup> The words χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω ("make room for it if you can") show that only a few

can accept unmarried life for the kingdom. If τὸν λόγον [τοῦτον] of verse 11 refers to verse 12, it also refers to ἀλλ' οἷς δέδοται, that only those to whom “it is given” can understand it.<sup>88</sup> However, verse 12 may also be an independent saying that was inserted later by the connective γὰρ.<sup>89</sup>

It is not unlikely that this Matthean verse shows that Christianity caused marital problems among pagan converts: some spouses wanted to return to their pre-Christian situation, their partners wanted to remain in the radical Matthean community, and Matthew advised the latter to continue celibately for the kingdom.<sup>90</sup> In that case the imperative χωρεῖτω is not an abstract command but refers to abandoned husbands and wives in the Matthean faith-community, and εὐνοουχίσθησαν makes clear that continuous determination is needed for remaining unmarried.<sup>91</sup>

The word “eunuch,” five times it is used as a noun and as a verb in the same verse, must come from the lips of Jesus himself: the spiralling structure with a final punch-line is Semitic, it is too crude and offensive for being invented by the early Christians, Justin Martyr and Epiphanius also use the term, and it could not serve the apologetics of the early Church.<sup>92</sup> Jesus’ third category is unheard of in rabbinic literature.<sup>93</sup> The practice of celibacy was uncommon in ancient Judaism; Rabbi Eliezer said that a Jew without a wife is no man.<sup>94</sup> The word “eunuch” is unsettling and provocative. There was no room for eunuchs in the covenant (Deut 23:1; Is 56: 4-5).<sup>95</sup> Although eunuchs could have functions as mediators, tutors or androgynous lovers, people felt ill at ease in their presence due to their sexual oddness.<sup>96</sup> Did Jesus use this pejorative word because he transformed a personal insult into a virtue for himself and for unmarried and divorced followers?<sup>97</sup> Is the androgyny of a eunuch a reminder of the first human, who was neither male nor female before the first woman was created?<sup>98</sup> Jesus did not marry because of the kingdom and his celibacy became an invitation to his followers.<sup>99</sup> Full availability for the Kingdom can lead to celibacy.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.4. Contemporary Hermeneutic Polemics

Various contemporary Western writers zoom in on the marital state of Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul of Tarsus.

Most contemporary theologians agree that Jesus was probably unmarried.<sup>101</sup> Answers differ about his reasons: perhaps marriage was incompatible with his wish to start a new generation by a love that is universal;<sup>102</sup> perhaps his divine nature is complete holiness;<sup>103</sup> perhaps, like Jeremiah, the Qumran community and John the Baptist, he expected imminent eschatological

destruction;<sup>104</sup> may be he remained unmarried for the sake of his ministry;<sup>105</sup> he was totally and specially dedicated to a religious value, the kingdom.<sup>106</sup>

Little or nothing is known about Jesus' sexual life. What the Gospel-writers did not consider worth mentioning, they simply left out, and many questions of later generations will never be answered. Jesus said very little about sex and that what he said is contradictory: how can he say in the same conversation that marriage is ordained by God, but that people are also allowed to make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom?<sup>107</sup> The Gospels are silent on any sexual experiences that Jesus may have had, and many Christians do not appreciate this topic because of his divinity.<sup>108</sup>

It is important that no writer believes that Jesus ever imposed celibacy on his followers.<sup>109</sup> Opinions about whether some or probably most of **the Twelve** were married differ.<sup>110</sup> Opinions also differ about Paul's question: "Haven't I the right to follow the example of the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Peter, by taking a Christian wife with me on my travels?"<sup>111</sup> Should *γυναῖκά* be interpreted as sisters, helpers or wives?<sup>112</sup>

Interpretations on the word "eunuch" differ: leaving behind certain attachments did not stop the Apostles from continuing their marriage, including their sex-life;<sup>113</sup> this exclusively Matthean passage is not so important, because it did not receive much attention from the first Christians;<sup>114</sup> Jesus did not stimulate divorce because he spoke to the unmarried, to the divorced and to those whose partner had died;<sup>115</sup> living unmarried is only possible for a minority who cannot do otherwise;<sup>116</sup> not even Jesus left his family behind and he continued to have a house in Capernaum;<sup>117</sup> leaving behind should not be interpreted as abandoning or permanent desertion;<sup>118</sup> Jesus meant metaphorically that people should be as generously and strongly committed to the kingdom as eunuchs;<sup>119</sup> Origen, a disciple of Clement of Alexandria literally castrated himself, although he later regretted this;<sup>120</sup> Jesus did not link his words on eunuchs to celibacy because most of the Apostles were married.<sup>121</sup> Rephrased:

Be aware of wishing rather to stay unmarried! There are only a few capable of that. Some physically impotent may easily do it, and some spiritually endowed by God can do it for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. If you don't belong to one of these small groups, hands off, content yourself with the gift of marriage!<sup>122</sup>

Was **Paul** an exemplary celibate?<sup>123</sup> He seemed to prefer the single state to marriage;<sup>124</sup> he was not married when he wrote the letter to the Corinthians;<sup>125</sup> he could have been a rabbi, and these had to marry;<sup>126</sup> perhaps he had been married in his younger years because he tells Christians to be as he is and not how he was;<sup>127</sup> he may have been over forty when he

converted, because he had been educated by Gamaliel and he has had responsibilities as a Sanhedrin member.<sup>128</sup>

So, why was Paul not married at the time he wrote to the Corinthians? Perhaps it was for the sake of his ministry;<sup>129</sup> maybe he had ascetic tendencies;<sup>130</sup> possibly he was speaking from a missionary situation;<sup>131</sup> perhaps he felt that it was incompatible to be a married fulltime disciple.<sup>132</sup> Various writers place the convictions of Paul in an eschatological context: Paul expected the Parousia;<sup>133</sup> he was witnessing of the approaching kingdom by his personal celibacy;<sup>134</sup> Paul was so fixed on Jesus' return that even sex should no longer be important for Christians; living like virgins became the better option;<sup>135</sup> he may have believed that marriage and its responsibilities would distract Christians from the imminent second coming of Christ.<sup>136</sup> Paul merely advised celibacy for his fellow Christians.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.5. Conclusion

The pericope shows that the sexual outlook of Jesus and the Matthean community was firmly rooted in the creation story of Genesis: by combining Gen 1:27 and 2:24 Jesus makes clear that divorce contradicts the ideal of the beginning. Only πορνεία can be a reason for divorce (Mt 5:32; 19:9) and probably this does not primarily mean adultery (for this the Greek word is μοιχεία) but marriage within kinship relations that were allowed among gentiles but prohibited by Judaism. It is not clear from the pericope whether Matthean Jesus spoke about being a “eunuch for the kingdom” as advice for Christians who divorced because of πορνεία or whether he transforms the exaggerated reaction of his (married) disciples that it is better not to marry into a fundamental option, but he does admit that there are people who remain unmarried because of the kingdom – and he is one of them. The church tradition of celibate and married ministers does not contradict the eunuch passage because the words of Jesus can be interpreted both ways. Contemporary writers agree that Jesus was not married, but little can be said precisely about the marital status of the Twelve. In churches of the Reformation, the eunuch passage resulted in a “marriage interpretation;” Roman Catholic Circles, it gave rise to a predominantly “celibacy interpretation.” It may be better to read the text as and-and rather than either-or.

No exegetic and hermeneutic material on the eunuch passage by African scholars was found.

<sup>1</sup> R. Brown. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997: p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Good News New Testament. Today's English Version*. London: The Bible Societies / Collins / Fount, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> *The Online Greek Bible. Greek New Testament Resources*. <http://www.greekbible.com/index.php> (accessed August 15, 2011). The text is in line with: Aland, Barbara and others. *The Greek New Testament*. Münster, Westphalia: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001.

(3) Καὶ προσήλθον αὐτῷ Φαρισαῖοι πειράζοντες αὐτὸν καὶ λέγοντες, Εἰ ἐξεστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ ἀπολῦσαι τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ κατὰ πάσαν αἰτίαν; (4) ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι ὁ κτίσας ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς; (5) καὶ εἶπεν, Ἐνεκα τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ κολληθῆσεται τῇ γυναίκῃ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν. (6) ὥστε οὐκέτι εἰσὶν δύο ἀλλὰ σὰρξ μία. ὁ οὖν ὁ θεὸς συνέζευξεν ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω. (7) λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Τί οὖν Μωϋσῆς ἐνετείλατο δοῦναι βιβλίον ἀποστασίου καὶ ἀπολῦσαι [αὐτήν]; (8) λέγει αὐτοῖς ὅτι Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν ὑμῖν ἀπολῦσαι τὰς γυναῖκας ὑμῶν, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς δὲ οὐ γέγονεν οὕτως. (9) λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ γαμήσι ἄλλην μοιχᾶται. (10) λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ [αὐτοῦ], Εἰ οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τῆς γυναίκος, οὐ συμφέρει γαμήσι. (11) ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐ πάντες χωροῦσιν τὸν λόγον [τούτου], ἀλλ' οἷς δέδοται. (12) εἰσὶν γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήθησαν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνοχίσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνοχίσαν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. ὁ δὲ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω.

<sup>4</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha. An Ecumenical Study Bible, Completely Revised and Enlarged*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

(3) Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (4) He answered them, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female,' (5) and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' (6) So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (7) They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" (8) He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (9) And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery." (10) His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." (11) But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. (12) For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

<sup>5</sup> J.R. Meier. *Matthew*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1980: pp vii, viii; L. Doohan. *Matthew. Spirituality for the 80's and 90's*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1985: pp. 100 - 103.

<sup>6</sup> R. Brown, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> W. Carter. *Matthew and the Margins. A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*. New York: Orbis Books, 2000: p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> D. Harrington. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1982: p. 77; G.A.S. Keener. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999: p. 462; U. Luz. *Matthew 8-20*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001: p. 486; D. Patte. *The Gospel According to Matthew. A structural Commentary on Matthew's Gospel*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1987: p. 261; D. Senior. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997: p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> D.J. Harrington *op.cit.*, 1982: p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p.378.

<sup>11</sup> Hobbs, Herschel, H. *An Exposition of The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1965: p. 225.

<sup>12</sup> De Silva, David, A. *An Introduction to The New Testament. Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*. Nottingham, England: Apollo, 2004: p. 234; W.F. Albright, and C.S. Mann. *Matthew, Introduction, Translation and Notes*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971: p. 226.

<sup>13</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 378.

<sup>14</sup> D.J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991: p. 274.

<sup>15</sup> D. Senior, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 146

<sup>16</sup> W.F. Albright, and C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p. 225; W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 378; G.E.P. Cox, *St. Matthew. Christ the Fulfiller*. London: Bloomsbury Street, 1952: p. 122; S. Freyne. *The World of the New Testament*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1980: p. 114; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 275; D. Hill. *The Gospel of Matthew*. London: Oliphants, 1972: p. 280; H. Hobbs, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 255; A. Jones. *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965: U. U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: pp. 213, 488; R.H. Mounce. *Matthew*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Ltd., 1993: p. 180; H. Offermann. "The Gospel According To Matthew." In *New Testament Commentary. A General Introduction to and Commentary*

- on the Books of the New Testament, by Herbert, C. Alleman, 153-237. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1944: p. 212; F.W. Beare. *The Gospel According to Matthew. A Major New Commentary with Translation and Notes*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981: p. 387.
- <sup>17</sup> A. Jones, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 213.
- <sup>18</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 29.
- <sup>19</sup> F.J. Moloney. "A Hard Saying" - *The Gospel and Culture*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001: p. 38.
- <sup>20</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 275.
- <sup>21</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 379.
- <sup>22</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 246.
- <sup>23</sup> J.R. Meier, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 215.
- <sup>24</sup> D. Patte, *op.cit.*, 1987: p. 265.
- <sup>25</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 489.
- <sup>26</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 273.
- <sup>27</sup> R.H. Mounce, *op.cit.*, 1993: p. 180. U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 490.
- <sup>28</sup> Cartner, p. 384
- <sup>29</sup> H.H. Hobbs, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 257; W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 379; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 273; A. Hill *op.cit.*, 1970: p. 280.
- <sup>30</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 379.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379
- <sup>32</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001, p. 489.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490
- <sup>34</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 274.
- <sup>35</sup> Gen 1:27 and 1:1-2:4a; F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 388; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991, p. 273.
- <sup>36</sup> W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p.226.
- <sup>37</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p.388.
- <sup>38</sup> Gen: 2:23; F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 388..
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.
- <sup>40</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 489.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 486.
- <sup>42</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 490, R. H. Mounce, *op.cit.*, 1993: p. 181.
- <sup>43</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 490.
- <sup>44</sup> H.H. Hobbs, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 258; Mounce, *op.cit.*, 1993: p. 181.
- <sup>45</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 387.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.
- <sup>47</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 492; W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 380; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 275.
- <sup>48</sup> W.F. Albright & C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p. CX; W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 378; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 274; A. Hill, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 280; A. Jones *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 215; G.A.S. Keener, *op.cit.*, 1999: p. 465.
- <sup>49</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 2000: pp. 378, 380.
- <sup>50</sup> W. Carter refers to Deut 10:12-22; Jer 4:4 and Sir 16:10 on *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 380; J.R. Meier, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 215.
- <sup>51</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 265.
- <sup>52</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 490.
- <sup>53</sup> A. Hill, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 280.
- <sup>54</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 501.
- <sup>55</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 380.
- <sup>56</sup> Mt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; F.W. Beare. *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 389.
- <sup>57</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 39; A. Jones, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 215.
- <sup>58</sup> Mk 10: 10-11; Lk 16:18. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p.226. A. Jones, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 215; U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 488; D. Senior, *op.cit.*, 1997: pp. 146, 147.
- <sup>59</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: pp. 492, 493.
- <sup>60</sup> A. Jones, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 217.
- <sup>61</sup> G.E.P. Cox, *op.cit.*, 1952: p. 123.
- <sup>62</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 380.
- <sup>63</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p.274.
- <sup>64</sup> R.Brown, *op.cit.*, 1997: p.194; Acts 15:20 ; Lev 18: 6-8; F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 39.
- <sup>65</sup> J.R.Meier, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 216.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>67</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 390.
- <sup>68</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 41; U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 488.
- <sup>69</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 390.

- <sup>70</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 390; A. Hill, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 282; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 274; H.H. Hobbs, *op.cit.*, 1965, p. 261; A. Jones, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 217; R. H. Mounce, *op.cit.*, 1993: p. 181.
- <sup>71</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 381; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 274; W. Trilling, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew." In *New Testament for Spiritual Reading*, by John, L. (ed.) McKenzie, Volume 2. London: Burns & Oates, 1969: p. 112.
- <sup>72</sup> W. Cartner, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 382; S. Freyne, *op.cit.*, 1980: pp. 108, 111; A. Hill, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 282.
- <sup>73</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 41.
- <sup>74</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 390.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 390; 1 Cor. 7:10-16.
- <sup>76</sup> R. Brown, *op.cit.*, 1997: p. 194
- <sup>77</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 40.
- <sup>78</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 42.
- <sup>79</sup> W.F. Albright, and C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p. 226; D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 274.
- <sup>80</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 499.
- <sup>81</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 43.
- <sup>82</sup> R. Brown, *op.cit.*, 1997: p. 194.
- <sup>83</sup> F.W. Albright, and C.S. Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p. 226; R. Brown, *op.cit.*, 1997: p. 194.
- <sup>84</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 51.
- <sup>85</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 488.
- <sup>86</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 47; J.R. Meier, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 94.
- <sup>87</sup> F.W. Beare, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 392.
- <sup>88</sup> H.H. Hobbs, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 261.
- <sup>89</sup> F.W. Albright and Mann, *op.cit.*, 1971: p.227.
- <sup>90</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 45.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- <sup>94</sup> D.J. Harrington, *op.cit.*, 1991: p. 276.
- <sup>95</sup> C.S. Keener, *op.cit.*, 1999: p. 471.
- <sup>96</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 383.
- <sup>97</sup> U. Luz, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 502; F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 50.
- <sup>98</sup> W. Carter, *op.cit.*, 1965: p. 384.
- <sup>99</sup> F.J. Moloney, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 51; J.R. Meier, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 216.
- <sup>100</sup> W. Trilling, *op.cit.*, 1969: p. 112.
- <sup>101</sup> S.L. Jaki, *op.cit.*, 1997: p. 35; H. Küng, *op.cit.*, 2010: p. 14; E. Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 1968: p. 98; R.A. Sipe, *op.cit.*, 1990: p. 36; R. Stern, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 80; R.A. Sipe, *op.cit.*, 1990: p. 36.
- <sup>102</sup> F. McGovern, *op.cit.*, 1998: p. 79.
- <sup>103</sup> S.L. Jaki, *op.cit.*, 1997: pp. 35, 39.
- <sup>104</sup> See: J. Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 1968: pp. 26-31.
- <sup>105</sup> H. Küng, *op.cit.*, 2010: p. 14.
- <sup>106</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 1968: p. 99.
- <sup>107</sup> See: M.E. Wiesner-Hanks, *op.cit.*, 2000: p. 22.
- <sup>108</sup> See: J. Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 1968: pp. 33, 31; G. Parrinder, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 210.
- <sup>109</sup> K.J. Howell, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 23; T. McGovern, *op.cit.*, 1998: p. 79; E. Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 1968: p. 99; H. Küng, *op.cit.*, 2010: p. 14; H. Küng, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 80; R.A. Sipe, *op.cit.*, 1990: p. 36; J. Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 1968: p. 18.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81; S.L. Jaki, *op.cit.*, 1997: pp. 4, 54; P.M.J. Stravinskias, *op.cit.*, 2001: p.50; J.P. Audet, *op.cit.*, 1967: p. 67; Mt 20: 23 – 29; Mk 10: 23 – 30; Lk 18: 24 – 30; J.P. Audet, *op.cit.*, 1967: pp. 47 – 49;.
- <sup>111</sup> 1 Cor. 9:5
- <sup>112</sup> C. Cochini, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 79; J. Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 1968: p. 36; G. Parrinder, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 211; J.P. Audet, *op.cit.*, 1967: pp. 73 – 75; H.J. Vogels, *op.cit.*, 1992: pp. 73, 87.
- <sup>113</sup> See: J.P. Audet, *op.cit.*, 1967: pp. 46, 69; C. Cochini, *op.cit.*, 1981: p. 79.
- <sup>114</sup> J.P. Audet, *op.cit.*, 1967: p. 51.
- <sup>115</sup> P. Southgate, *op.cit.*, 2001: p. 250.
- <sup>116</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 1968: pp. 13, 64.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- <sup>119</sup> R. Stern, *op.cit.*, 1972: p. 77.
- <sup>120</sup> G. Parrinder, *op.cit.*, 1980: p. 219.
- <sup>121</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, *op.cit.*, 1968: pp. 18, 21.
- <sup>122</sup> H.J. Vogels, *op.cit.*, 1992: p. 34.



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- <sup>123</sup> H. Küng, op.cit., 2010: p. 14.
- <sup>124</sup> G. Parrinder, op.cit., 1980: p. 213.
- <sup>125</sup> J.P. Audet, op.cit., 1967: p. 69.
- <sup>126</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, op.cit., 1968: p. 36.
- <sup>127</sup> R.A. Sipe, op.cit., 1990: p. 36.
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>129</sup> H. Küng, op.cit., 2010: p. 14.
- <sup>130</sup> G. Parrinder, op.cit., 1980: p. 213.
- <sup>131</sup> V. De Waal. "The married priest." *The Way Supplement* 47 (Summer 1983): 80.
- <sup>132</sup> P.M.J. Stravinskas, op.cit., 2001: p. 53.
- <sup>133</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, op.cit., 1968: p. 86.
- <sup>134</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, op.cit., 1968: p. 18.
- <sup>135</sup> M.E. Wiesner-Hanks, op.cit., 2000: p. 23
- <sup>136</sup> H.J. Vogels, op.cit., 1991: p. 26.
- <sup>137</sup> H. Küng, op.cit., 2010: p. 80; G. Parrinder, op.cit., 1980: p. 213; H.J. Vogels, op.cit., 1991: p. 26; J.P. Audet, op.cit., 1967: p. 86; E. Schillebeeckx, op.cit., 1968: p. 87; H.J. Vogels, op.cit., 1992: pp. 10; U. Luz, op.cit., 2001: pp. 498, 499.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AFRICAN REACTIONS TO THE LAW OF CELIBACY

#### 4.0. Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the field research findings from Bible-hermeneutic, cosmological, cult-related, ecclesiological and sexual perspectives. Attention is also given to question whether celibacy is an African value, what informants think about optional celibacy, and whether fear of sanctions is a reason for remaining quiet. Lastly the data will be related to the views of John Mbiti and Jean-Marc Éla, and some concluding thoughts are given.

#### 4.1. Bible-Hermeneutic Findings

Triggered by Matthew 19:3-12, informants shared their views on the stance of Jesus on marriage and divorce, on “eunuchs for the kingdom,” on Jesus being unmarried, and about celibacy as a prescription. .

##### 4.1.1. Jesus on Marriage and Divorce

According to the informants, Jesus did not say much about sexuality as such. He was not committed to sexology in his teaching but to love in general and outstanding morality. He was open to his own libido and lived with his disciples as a man. Jesus was a balanced and open person who treated women as equals and allowed them to touch him. He taught the importance of self-control: immorality starts in the heart. Jesus confirmed sexuality as put by God; it makes people men and women and is sacred. Sex was God’s idea: it is important and should not be abused. Jesus appreciated people as sexual beings. A religious sister said:

He was very positive and respectful. He had a great reverence for marriage. Therefore he did not want people to abuse it. He was born in a family. They way he handled the adulterous woman with compassion was non-judgmental. He had a close relationship with Martha. He valued friendship. He was patient with the woman who touched his feet.

Informants found it hard to talk about Jesus’ sexual views without making the immediate link with marriage. In spite of his unmarried state, Jesus referred to the Creator-God who intended people to marry from the very beginning. Jesus respected and facilitated marriage, and he admired people who marry. He told parables about wedding feasts, and believed marriage to be normal and lawful. Did he not start his first miracle at a wedding in Cana? Jesus saw marriage as God’s design from the very beginning and it transforms men and women into God’s co-creators. There is a direct link between sex and God: Jesus saw marriage as the proper setting for sexual feelings, intercourse and procreation. He wanted people to fulfil the

feelings they have for each other just as Adam and Eve did. Marriage is God-given and Jesus promoted lifelong faithfulness and commitment; therefore he disagreed with extramarital sex. He also discouraged divorce; it was not there from in the beginning. Only unfaithfulness is a reason for divorce. Spouses can grow by sacrifices and difficulties. In short: Jesus reasons about sexuality, marriage and family life from the perspective of the Creation Story.

#### 4.1.2. Jesus and “Eunuchs for the Kingdom”

Some informants interpret the term “eunuch for the Kingdom” allegorically: Jesus wants his followers to be as dedicated to his cause as eunuchs are to theirs. All others, of whatever church, interpret the term as people with unmarried dedication. They reason like this Protestant minister:

Some people are unmarried from birth because of physical imbalances; some have been made unable to marry by others, for example by a car accident or due to youth traumas; some do not marry because they enjoy being single, or they do so for religious purposes because they want to devote one hundred percent of their time to God.

Informants were asked to react to a survey statement, related to the Apostles.

Table 1: The Apostles and Celibacy

The Apostles left everything behind to follow Jesus; they became celibate.	yes	no	other
All Informants (N=148)	38%	51%	11%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	49%	39%	12%
All other ministers (N=63)	22%	68%	10%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	26%	53%	21%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	93%	7%	0%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	40%	60%	0%
- Religious seminarians (N=45)	60%	13%	27%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	36%	52%	12%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	23%	77%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	32%	60%	8%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	12%	72%	16%

Some informants believe that the word “celibate” is unfortunate here because how can married people be celibate at the same time? The Apostles simply continued their marriages, but for apostolic reasons they often had to travel. Those who opted “yes” apparently believe that by leaving *everything* behind, the Apostles also left their wives and family behind. They continued their lives as if they were not married. The percentages above and below show a

strong denominational influence: in the Roman Catholic Church celibacy is highly stimulated and this is projected unto Jesus.

Table 2: Jesus and “Eunuchs for the Kingdom”

Jesus rather sees his followers “eunuchs for the kingdom” than married.	yes	no	other
All Informants (N=148)	38%	49%	13%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	47%	38%	15%
All other ministers (N=63)	25%	63%	12%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	40%	46%	14%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	53%	40%	7%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	33%	47%	20%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	80%	7%	13%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	36%	44%	20%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	38%	46%	15%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	28%	64%	8%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	16%	72%	12%

That even twenty-five percent of ministers of other churches believe that Jesus rather sees his followers “eunuchs for the kingdom” than married reveals that they believe that Jesus expects commitment from his disciples and that remaining unmarried is an option. Jesus does not reject unmarried availability.

Roman Catholic celibates shared that their celibacy is based on that of Jesus: he invites people by his incarnation to become celibate role models; if celibacy were despicable he would have been forced to marry; he invites celibacy for service; celibacy is a response to his universal love; people can only live celibacy if Jesus touches the heart. Quite a number of celibates mention the element of sacrifice. That Roman Catholics and especially seminarians, have a high “yes” score, says something about their self-image.

Ministers of other churches focus on the high exceptionality of religious eunuchry. May we assume that Jesus was celibate because he was not married? Why call someone who never talked about his unmarried state *celibate*? If Jesus is Lord and was conceived by the Holy Spirit, nobody can live like him. Ministers of other churches are also less inclined to interpret the unmarried life of Jesus as a proposed lifestyle. Perhaps his unmarried state of should simply be interpreted as divine wisdom without drawing conclusions for his followers’ marital status. When Peter said the Apostles had left behind their wives, he did not mean that they had abandoned them but that they had nearly neglected them. Jesus does not want his followers to imitate him in everything and expects people to marry and to express their love

through a family. Jesus did not encourage his disciples to leave their wives but to follow him in their marital state. He did not stimulate unmarried life: he praised marriage. Jesus tried to show people that celibacy is possible with God's help; that is why there are not many celibates.

Some informants believe that eunuchry is good for those for whom starting and maintaining their own family is too difficult. Among both traditions there is consensus that religious eunuchry cannot be imposed: it has to come from within.

The above shows that although Jesus reasoned from the perspective of the Creation Story, he believed that some people have the gift of unmarried dedication to the Kingdom. According to the survey, forty-seven percent of the Roman Catholics and twenty-five percent of ministers of other churches believe that Jesus rather sees his followers "eunuchs for the kingdom" than married. Roman Catholic celibates are inclined to interpret the unmarried state of Jesus as a proposed lifestyle; most ministers of other churches interpret the words of Jesus as permission rather than as an invitation.

#### **4.1.3. Unmarried Jesus**

Informants believe that Jesus was not married because he was too absorbed by his mission of teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God. Some mention that he was too young, too old, or that he had the right marriageable age. He may have pondered marriage before he was baptised. He may have had presentiments about an early and violent death and did not want to leave behind a widow with children. His travelling around may have prevented him to give them the attention they needed. A diocesan minister said:

Jesus affirms marriage but remained unmarried because of the work ahead of him. He moved from village to village teaching. That must have been hard with a family. People followed him everywhere, even when he was praying on his own. People would say, "This man is preaching but he has no time for home."

They also mention that, as God, he had no need to marry, that the incarnation was God's "marriage" with humankind, and that the mission of Jesus was unique and reconciliatory. Jesus wants to show people how to live, but not in everything. A pastor said:

All people have a mission and are created as men and women for marriage, but the mission of Jesus was not for marriage. Jesus did not marry because his mission was different from other people: he came to reconcile human beings with God. It was specifically his mission; nobody else could do it. For Jesus the will of God was not the production of children, but the salvation of the world.

#### 4.1.4. Unmarried Jesus and the Law of Ministerial Celibacy

If Jesus does not reject unmarried availability, would he be supportive of the celibacy prescription in the Roman Catholic Church for ordained ministers?

Many informants believe that Jesus would be neither in favour nor against the celibacy law in the Roman Catholic Church. He would disagree with a law that prohibits church ministers to marry, but he would not object to a law that protects those who promise celibacy. Jesus allows the law for those who can accept celibacy but that it becomes a problem once a celibate changes his mind.

What follows are reasons why Jesus would *be in favour* of the law of celibacy: just as Jesus called married men to leave wife and children behind two thousand years ago, he would do it again today; Jesus is the head of the church and he would tell ministers that they have to remain celibate if they want to belong to his church; celibacy defines a priest; Jesus could have said, "Come along with your wife and children!"

These are reasons why Jesus would *not be in favour* the law of celibacy: Jesus focuses on the Kingdom and on values like love and service and not on marriage or celibacy. The law is unbiblical: Jesus is one with the Creator who believes in the law that it is not good for a man to be alone; if God had favoured celibacy he would never have created Adam his beloved Eve; even in the Old Testament priests were married; 1 Tim. 3:1-13 does not mention celibacy as a criterion for church ministers but loyalty in marriage; Jesus chose married men because marriage makes ministry more holistic. Jesus merely allows eunuchs, and they do not need a law: he appreciates both married and unmarried ministers in Christian churches; he wants ministers in spite of their state of life; he was very critical of oppressive laws in his own days; a prescriptive law for all ministers this prescription is too heavy and misses the point; Jesus would always allow the unmarried to marry. Jesus wants the successor of Peter to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying through the overseers of the other churches: if popes really want to be successors of Peter they should take the first Peter more seriously and change the ministerial structures of the Roman Catholic Church; Jesus did not tell Peter when he cured his mother-in-law to divorce his wife but said, "Let no one put asunder what God has united." This church-judicial prescription, that took thirteen years before it was issued, has nothing to do with Christ and says more about denominational interests of the Roman Catholic Church. This law has become an RC trademark that makes good people feel guilty; it is outdated and legalises hypocrisy, whereas God wants people to enjoy their sexuality to the full; a law that forbids sex creates sin.

This Bible-hermeneutic section can be summarised as follows: although Jesus was not married for some human and divine reasons, the way he dealt with men and women shows that he had well integrated his sexuality. The sexual theology of Jesus is deeply rooted in the Creation Story, and although he promoted marital faithfulness he admitted that some people remain unmarried for religious reasons. The question whether the Apostles became celibate and whether Jesus rather sees his followers married than “eunuchs for the kingdom” have a strong denominational stamp.

#### 4.2. Findings about the History of the Law of Ministerial Celibacy

Quite a number of ministers of other churches made clear that they are not familiar with the **history** of the law of celibacy of the Roman Catholic Church. Some refer negatively to **monasticism**. For example, one of them remembers a lecture on monks who wanted to submit themselves to suffering for the sake of Christ; they afflicted themselves as a way of becoming more acceptable to God. Another said,

Centuries ago many monks went into the forests and into the deserts because there was so much evil in the cities, there were so many sexual sins. They wanted to be away from it all and withdrew themselves from the interaction, so that their minds would not be distracted. But there were also sins in those monastic communities. We cannot run away from our sexuality. Those monks and nuns believed in their own strength and they wanted to save themselves instead of entrusting themselves to Jesus as their Saviour.

Most religious sisters, say that they never studied the history of this law. One sister said that she does not even want to know, because she is okay with her unmarried state and she believes in it. According to a few sisters the first sisters were no virgins but widows, who wanted to make a new commitment to the service of God. Although sisters refer more positively to monasticism, there is also an awareness of the derision of sex:

This law is something of later years only. First there were married clergy. The law of celibacy originated once people believed that sex would not be really holy. Religious life was presented as better than married life and this resulted in many exaggerations.

*Married* Catholic priests are more familiar with the history of the celibacy prescription; it is their main bone of contention with the Roman Catholic Church. Although monasticism, Luther, the Reformation and Trent, missionaries, the prevention of clerical careerism and pastoral negligence are mentioned, their main theme is the **heritability of benefices** – in other words, the prevention of priests’ wife and children privately inheriting public ecclesial property. Apart from mentioning availability and monastic chastity, this is also the major topic of the Roman Catholic priests and seminarians.

Informants are more familiar with the very recent and **actual history** of the law of ministerial celibacy. There is a strong awareness among informants of all churches that the celibacy debate is not limited to *African* soil; they see the sex scandals and the admission of Anglicans as the main global topics.

**Sex scandals** give rise to many questions and remarks. In the US children of celibates sue their fathers for neglect. How to explain the coloured children in the past near schools that were run by white priests or brothers? Some churches abroad must pay huge sums of money to victims of sex abuse. Are European priests more inclined to paedophilia than their African brothers? Does this law create or attract dysfunctional men? Do the stories of abuse scandalise or humanise the church?

The facilitated admission of **married Anglican priests** by Pope Benedict XVI is also food for thought: is he discriminating celibates who wish to marry? Why does he not welcome back Catholic priests who married? How did this regulation develop? Is it because of a decrease in celibates? Are they only accepted in intellectual circles? Will it cause double standards and confusion? Should parishes become smaller? Can the call to ministry and celibacy still be equalled? Is it the beginning of the abolition of the celibacy law?

### 4.3. Cosmological Findings

People are psychologically affected by fundamental cultural agreements. Cosmological urges are strong. What follows is a presentation of findings on the question how being married or unmarried affects people's well-being in a culture that highly stimulates marriage and offspring.

#### 4.3.1. Married Adults

Informants make clear that having a family is **expected and respected** in both traditional and contemporary African settings. Nearly all adults participate in society from the perspective of their marriage. When a person has reached the marriage age, he must marry or he will be disregarded. Age-mates stimulate each other to marry. If someone waits too long elders are sent to convince the person. Marriage consolidates the puberty rites of passage that make boys men and girls women. Married people receive trust and responsibilities. If you have no family to show you are less respected. People are socialised to start and to live their strongest feelings in their own family. Marriage enables complementarity with the opposite sex, and it helps to channel sexual energy. People prove who they are by the way they manage their own



family. By having one's own family, much seems to somehow fall into place: community, the morality of ancestors and physical immortality.

Ancestors used to be elders, and **elders are usually married!** In many cultures elders have grown up children and even grand-children. They deal with their families maturely. They have marital and parental knowhow. Although the wisdom and wealth of elders are based on experience and age, especially their family management makes them moral examples, judges, reconcilers, counsellors, leaders, and some elders offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the community. Although many informants spontaneously talk about men, women can also be elders.

The greatest reason for marrying is personal immortality by physical **progeny**. In every child the ancestors are remembered. African culture expects people to marry and procreate, to pass on their physical bloodline, their flesh, their blood, their seed. There is pride in having a large family. Parents do not want to die before seeing their grandchildren. Children want to pass their parents' gift of life to their own. Some babies stop crying once they are called after the proper ancestor.

Informants interpret their marriage as **God-ordained**. What follows are some quotes. "The attractions to my wife are healthy and divine; sexual attraction is an important aspect of God's design." "God created me as a potential man with all the potency." "Marriage gives the capacity for increasing offspring for God." "God made man and wife in order to be complete; now I am complete and it's the plan of God." "God gave me feelings, so I had to look for a partner to fulfil my feelings."

The above shows that people are strongly expected to start a new family: it brings people together, it perpetuates ancestral, parental and personal life in offspring, it is highly expected as the way to elderhood and ancestry. Family is a divine blessing. So what is the impact of the normality of marriage on those who remain unmarried and childless?

#### 4.3.2. Unmarried Adults

Nearly all informants, both the married and the unmarried, agree that unmarried adulthood was not very common before the coming of Christianity.

Table 3: Lifelong Celibacy for Men in Africa

Lifelong celibacy for men was common in African cultures before the coming of Christianity.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	5%	91%	4%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	8%	86%	6%
All other ministers (N=63)	0%	98%	2%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	7%	87%	6%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	0%	100%	0%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	7%	73%	20%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	0%	100%	0%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	20%	76%	4%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	0%	100%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	0%	96%	4%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	0%	100%	0%

People are inclined to think that **something is wrong** with an unmarried adult; there must be a serious problem. People are amazed, puzzled, concerned. Even modern people do not understand why a person wants to stay single. Unmarried adults are eyed suspiciously: where do they take their sexual energy? They may send a spy to find out why the person is not married. Age mates, parents, uncles, aunts or elders try to convince or even force the person to marry. Or they go to a witchdoctor for clarifications. By all means they prevent people to be alone. This male pastor shows that unmarried adults are surrounded by many questions:

Are you impotent? Can you not produce or conceive? Are you divorced? Do you run away from women? Are you not able to help a woman? Are you poor and unable to raise dowry? Do you cook for yourself? Do you do the woman's job? Are you shying away from taking responsibility?

Unmarried adults must cope with **many assumptions**. They are seen as impotent: they cannot reproduce life. They are considered to be immature, unknowing about the real things of life, irresponsible and unsettled, unreliable with the wives/husbands of others, selfish, or cursed by their ancestors. They are outcasts. They are a reason for embarrassment and shame in the family because they do not reproduce the life they have received and they do not name their life givers. Usually even their short funeral and their burial outside the compound shows that they are out of place. A not yet married woman-pastor shared that remaining unmarried feels like punishing her life-givers:

My family thinks that I have a problem on the issue of marriage, that I'm an infidel. They think I am not OK in the head, that I am not thinking straight. You're sort of abnormal. My parents are worried and think, "How will we handle you? With whom will you be?" My family feels ashamed, "Are we cursed? Do we have a problem? How can you give us

a name without children?" It will be a pride to my parents and grandparents to see me married.

The above shows that it is very common to think that unmarried adults must have a serious biological, psychological or moral problem, and they must therefore cope with many questions, assumptions and labels. That more than ninety percent of the informants believe that it is not normal in Africa to remain unmarried is an affirmation of what was shared spontaneously in the interviews.

#### **4.4. Cult-Related Findings**

Research makes clear that informants know that cultic abstinence exists or existed in African cultures, but opinions differ about Christian pre-cultic abstinence and about the link between the ministerial celibacy prescription and cultic purity.

Informants know that, before the coming of Christianity, there was cult-related sexual abstinence in African cultures. Mediators in shrines and cultural elders who prayed for ideal weather practised abstinence in their preparation because they were strongly aware that they represented the community and that they needed pure and undivided concentration. An elderly religious sister shared from her memory:

A sacrifice had to be respectable for the people and God, and it had to be clean. There was a rite before harvesting. An old woman who no longer had sex and a little innocent girl who was too young for it, planted seeds early in the morning, when the sun was rising. Everything symbolised life: the soil, the sun, the seed, the plant, the young girl and the old woman.

An informant shared that her father, who was a traditional priest, did not eat, speak and meet his wife when he had to do the sacrifice. Sex can affect people in their focus. However, there are also cultures that prescribe sex before planting something in the garden, before entering into a new house, before the marriage of a younger sibling, and around burials.

Not one informant believes that sexual abstinence in the marriage of married ministers should be prescribed: there may be guidelines, but let the two especially arrange this among themselves. That the opinions of diocesan seminarians are sometimes way above average will be explained later.

Ministers of other churches do not often refer to pre-Christian practises of pre-cultic abstinence; many refer spontaneously to I Corinthians 7:5, where it reads, "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-

control.” In other words: most married ministers think more spiritually than cultic about agreed sexual abstinence.

What follows are **reasons for practising sexual abstinence**, related to ministry: a minister who travels must practise sexual self-control; purification by abstinence gets a person closer to the Lord in the liturgy; alertness to the things of God diminishes after sexual contact; the closer a minister is to God as an individual, the stronger the need for time for spiritual development and prayer; reconciliation with someone a minister has hurt is more purifying than having no sex with his wife before giving people Holy Communion; sex is not impure, but intercourse takes energy and this can make a minister feel weak or drained. One minister said with a smile that he finds it hard to lead the prayers if he first has “morning glory” with his wife. Some ministers prepare themselves for the liturgy by an abstinence of one night, three days, or a week. The wife of a minister whose church is quite strict on pre-liturgical sexual abstinence, said,

You live together, sleep in the same bed and feel for each other. It’s hard to abstain. I cannot receive Communion because I had sex. If I were the church, I’d say: if you are married there are no limits, even in Lent. There is a lot of infidelity among Christians, especially when they have to fast. The sexual needs of a wife must be met too. Often people say that in an African context it’s always the man who is cheating, but it can also be the woman.

What follows are **reasons for not practising abstinence** because of ministry. Abstinence is related to fasting and prayer but not to the sacredness of worship; Old Testament ceremonial regulations no longer apply by the one sacrifice of Jesus; sex in marriage does not make a person ritually impure; holiness does not come from sexual abstinence; abstinence is unpractical to a married minister; sex does not prevent or hinder ministry; ministry and family life are not opposed and God likes sex in marriage; marriage requires full surrender; sex should not prevent married ministers from serving holy communion; procreation is an important ministry; having intercourse and saying mass are two ways of union with God; matrimonial sex is sacramental; having sex may make a married minister even a better minister. How can a minister preach love if he refuses to make love with his wife?

The above makes clear that opinions about pre-cultic abstinence differ strongly. Some ministers abstain before leading the prayers because sex affects their energy level and because community worship deserves full concentration; others make no point of having sex before worship. Although the informants know about pre-cultic abstinence before the coming of Christianity, compared to the celibates, married ministers prefer referring to 1 Cor.7:5.

According to literature research, body-despising dualism and cultic purity were important reasons for imposing ministerial celibacy. This gave rise to the question whether informants associate the law of celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church with a negative outlook on sexuality? The table below shows a predominant “no” on the Roman Catholic side and a predominant “yes” on the side of ministers of other churches.

Table 4: The Root of Celibacy

The root of the law of celibacy is a negative outlook on sexuality.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	40%	47%	13%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	20%	62%	18%
All other ministers (N=63)	67%	27%	6%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	20%	47%	33%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	13%	80%	7%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	20%	60%	20%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	20%	73%	7%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	24%	56%	20%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	77%	23%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	64%	24%	12%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	64%	32%	4%

The general trend of the percentages is explainable. Many ministers of other churches, nearly all of whom are married, interpret the celibacy prescription as a prohibition, but many celibates refuse to interpret their own sexuality, and therefore themselves, negatively. The guiding-question was based on literature and history, but the reactions were based on immediate associations and self-perceptions. Nevertheless it is quite telling that the main association of sexuality and celibacy is negative in one in every five Roman Catholics, and in sixty-seven percent of other ministers.

This section on cultic issues shows that the informants know that in pre-Christian Africa cultic abstinence was not uncommon, but that married ministers rather refer to 1 Cor 7:5 that does not deal with cultic abstinence but with the avoidance of sex in a context of prayer and fasting. That most *celibates* do not believe that the celibacy law is rooted in a negative outlook on sexuality says more about the positive outlook they want to have of themselves than about their historic knowledge; that most ministers of *other* churches disagree here reveals that they think predominantly negatively about celibacy.

#### 4.5. Pastoral-Ecclesiological Findings

This section answers the following questions. How do informants interpret the word *celibacy*? How do churches interpret the word *elder*? How is the reality of sexuality and celibacy treated in ministerial formation? What are pastoral advantages and disadvantages of both married and unmarried minister? Does celibacy make a minister more accepted or empathetic? What do informants think about the ministerial ordination of catechists?

##### 4.5.1. Two Emphases in Celibacy

Data analysis reveals that there are negative and positive interpretations of celibacy; the former specify what is not allowed and the latter focus on the goal. Only a few informants focus only on the negative: celibacy means not being married and having no sex. Most informants place the negative in a positive context. Celibacy means: not getting married and having no sexual intercourse for religious reasons.

Although one can formally be celibate and go for sex elsewhere, many informants spontaneously associate celibacy with chastity. Respect for other people's integrity applies to both married and unmarried people. Chastity means faithfulness, whatever one's state of life may be.

##### 4.5.2. Church Interpretations of Elderhood

As indicated earlier, many informants mention age and family-management as two important interrelated characteristics for elders. This is less the case in churches. Some churches have youth elders, other churches have both marriageable and married elders and the Roman Catholic Church has unmarriageable elders.

Many churches have “youth elders,” who focus on the youth of the community. Most youth elders are relatively young themselves. According to the research, probably among many others, they can be found in the Anglican community, in Good Shepherd Ministries, Nairobi Baptist Church, Cornerstone Faith Assembly, Christ is the Answer Ministries, the African Inland Church, the Africa Nazarene Church, and the House of Grace Church. All unmarried youth elders, just as the unmarried church ministers who are no longer so young, said that they experience much (playful) pressure for marriage from relatives, fellow ministers and church members, and they said explicitly that they do not consider themselves to be celibates but marriageable. A youngish minister who married recently said that the faithful now look at him with very different eyes. An elderly minister shared that in his church unmarried ministers have to work under the auspices of a married minister.

All other churches have **married elders**. Informants emphasized that this is in line with cultural and biblical expectations. As ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Free Pentecostal Fellowship, the Nairobi Pentecostal Church, the Greenhouse Church, the Independent Pentecostal Fellowship of Africa, the Deliverance Church, the Africa Gospel Church and the Prophetic Faith Church refer to 1 Timothy 3: 1-7, it is worth quoting this passage:

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of overseer desires a noble task. Now an overseer must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devils.

Every elder has to pass this test properly. By being married the minister is part of his tribal elders who were also supposed to help everyone: couples, children, and youth. Although a pastor is an elder, most elders are not ordained pastors, but they look at a pastor’s social needs, and provide his family with money for food and education. Elders work together with the pastor: they go for home visitations, they visit the sick in hospital and in their houses, and they pray with them and give them hope. Two ministers of the Coptic Church said that, although in their community both unmarried monks and married men can be ordained priests, it is almost a requirement nowadays for priests to be married.

Celibate priests and religious interpret themselves as **unmarriageable elders**. Important are people’s pastoral expectations of advice and mediation. A number of priests undergo a ritual that makes them cultural elders. According to a diocesan minister, becoming an elder feels like skipping a class in school:

Men and women who have passed childbearing age go through a special ritual. They get a more sacrificial role. Priests also undergo this rite. You must somehow convince them. We are like elders past childbearing age, although we are not past childbearing age. This rite is a good solution, but in spite of the similarities, there is also an obvious contradiction.

This section on the church-use of the word “elder” shows that the most plausible elders are those who have matured by age and marriage. However, there are youth elders, many of whom have not yet married, there are marriageable elders who are no longer so young, and in the Roman Catholic Church there are unmarriageable elders.

### 4.5.3. Sexual Formation in General

This section draws attention to the question how ministers of the Roman Catholic and of other churches were sexually prepared for their ministry. First the question is answered how they were sexually instructed at home.

Many informants share that in their culture premarital virginity was highly valued. Sexual freedom was definitely no permission for free sex. A male pastor said:

When I grew up as a teenage boy, we were initiated. During the period of healing, we were separated from the family. We were taught not to play around with our sexual life. There should be discipline. Long before the advent of Christianity, sexual discipline was already a virtue. Young men could sleep with girls without touching them. If you did touch her, and she lost her virginity, you would be put to shame. People would not allow you to marry their daughter. They would know you are not a disciplined person, and a bad name touches the whole family.

However, in other cultures and in many modern settings premarital virginity was/is no big issue. There was/is more emphasis on the virginity of women than that of men. Parents encourage their children to play with those of the other sex and troublesome boys are told to find a girl to “tame” them. Boys who do not have sex at a certain age are not understood by their people; they are even mocked by the girls; having sex is nothing exceptional because a boy must prove that he is virile and that he can do it. A woman minister shared:

My grandmother told me that in the old days, the first thing people did after initiation was to have sex. It was not only married people. The girl could go to boys and be raped, but this word is not used. It is something else: after circumcision the age group would cleanse you by sex. If you could not find a girl, they would help you. They looked for decent girls who had been circumcised. If a baby was born from it, it was for the grandparents, as a blessing. The man with whom a girl was to marry was not to have sex with her.

Nearly all informants shared that their parents found it very hard to talk about sexuality with their children. Sex is for the married, it is sacred, and talking about it with one's own children is embarrassing. Sex was not talked about in the more nuclear family. Usually sex education was/is delegated to grandparents, to uncles for boys and to aunts for girls. In some communities age groups were/are instructed by a community member. Often biology in school is information more than formation. Some teachers are immoral. Much is learnt from peers and movies. Urbanisation decreases the impact of the extended family but many parents continue to find it difficult to tackle the topic of sexuality with their direct offspring. Some send their children upcountry during holidays, others pay a trained counsellor for good advice, and churches organise workshops or Christian puberty rites.



The above shows that cultures differ about premarital virginity, that the emphasis in many families is shifting from extended to nuclear – and this influences the sex education of children. Many young people, including church ministers, received most of their sexual education from peers, biology classes and media.

#### 4.5.4. Sexual-Pastoral Formation

Sexual formation is a significant issue for church ministers: sexual self-knowledge is important in dealing closely with so many Christians. Answers to the guiding question how the topic of sexuality and celibacy was dealt with in ministers' formation years reveal that it makes quite a difference whether they are preparing themselves for ministry as (potentially) married or as intentional celibates.

Male and female ministers of other churches are strongly encouraged to marry. As a consequence they prepare themselves for ministry as (potential) parents and spouses. In theological colleges, Bible schools and other institutes there is emphasis on having a healthy marriage and on the avoidance of premarital and extramarital sex. Many ministers have a married mentor. There are courses like "Marriage and Family", "The Church Minister as Parent" and "The Church Minister as Husband." Nowadays sexuality is talked about more openly now than in the past. A married minister shared:

I trained for ministry when I was still single. We were told to get married early to avoid temptations. Be careful not to have sex with your church member; it will destroy your ministry. Sex is one of the strongest instincts in a man. You must be careful how to handle people with sexual problems; you can also be convicted. How to teach young people on abstinence and fornication? If you do not abstain from marriage, how will you remain faithful after marriage? We were taught in counselling how to have sex, how to keep it pure.

Most future ministers of other churches do not live in protected same-sex seminaries or convents and commute for part-time courses. When asked how one officially becomes a minister in their church, most informants of other churches said something like the following:

You ought to be identified as having a mature relationship with the Lord. Then you do theological studies. After that there will be an internship with a senior minister during one year. After that there will be an interview with you and your wife. She really has to agree and be supportive. Then you will serve two years as an unordained pastor. After that there will be another interview with the council of elders. Then you can be ordained and you become a reverend.

The story of Roman Catholic celibates is different; they must give their sexual drives a place without getting genitally involved at all.

Reasons why (former) celibates call their sexual/celibate preparation for ministry *good* are: the emphasis on all people being sexual; discovering sexuality as God's gift; psychological screening of students; courses, workshops, recollections and seminars on sexuality and sexual orientation; input by non-celibate men and women; the shift from repressing to discerning feelings; efforts in spiritual direction and one-to-ones not to make seminarians feel embarrassed about their sexual life; attention for sex scandals; discussions on new Catholic churches; and seminary-monitoring of a student's social behaviour during holidays.

Many (former) celibates do not speak very positively about their sexual preparation for celibacy. Reasons why they call their sexual preparation for ministry *poor* are the following: there was more emphasis on celibacy than on sexuality; sex was treated as something bad; celibacy was presented as better than marriage; women were only treated as temptations; many formators felt reluctant to talk about sexuality and they merely handed on what they had received in their own formation; much truth was hidden from students; there was no room for questions; honest questions by seminarians were interpreted as them having no vocation; students were told to punish their flesh by self-flagellation; many students had/have more experience than their formators; letters to seminarians were opened; the ideal of abstinence was disconnected from reality; incarceration makes brothels attractive; isolation makes adults immature; same-sex formation enhances homosexuality; the most eloquent formators were not chaste themselves; the "eleventh commandment" in Moral Theology is: "Try never to be caught;" A contemporary seminarian still has his doubts:

It has not been handled well. People have assumed a lot. Students have feelings, but many do not want to talk about it. It is assumed that most in the seminary know themselves well. Much attention goes to spiritual and intellectual life. They do not go deeply into sexuality. Maybe people who are lonely go to other orientations of paedophilia because of that. You cannot blame the church for people's orientation, but this should be addressed in formation. If I were to lecture on sexuality, I'd give the idea of integration. People should understand each other. I should understand myself when I am with a woman. She must be more than someone who can release me from the tension in my body. I must learn to relate to her as a person. I must know all about physiology, puberty, emotions et cetera.

This section on the formation of ministers shows that Roman Catholic seminaries and convents emphasize the unmarried state whereas students of other churches are discouraged to remain unmarried. In Roman Catholic formation centres there is much emphasis on the integration of feelings and emotions celibately; in centres of other churches students are stimulated throughout to think as spouses and parents. Although in both circles the inhibition to talk about sexuality and sex is diminishing, it is still there.

#### 4.5.5. Pastoral Advantages and Disadvantages of Married Ministers

Married informants were asked how their state helps and hinders them in their ministry. According to the married informants, being married has various pastoral advantages: emotional support, the value of personal marital experiences in ministry, the value of parenthood for ministry, the social respectability of marriage for ministry, and ministry to women as a couple.

Various married ministers feel energised by the **emotional support** of their partner. It can energise a minister to have a sound-board for new ideas and a listening ear for personal needs. Sharing ideas, praying together and reading the Bible together deepens staying together, and this again is a powerful witness to fellow believers. A wife can give feedback on pastoral performance and homilies. Some ministers see their wife as a confidant who shares in the professional secrets; if she breaks this confidence it will affect her own name and dignity and that of her husband. Some wives pray with and over their husbands and this can deepen their love and commitment to Christ. Emotional support also has a practical side:

My wife and I have been working together. She is not responsible in the church, but for me, so that I can be a responsible church minister. She cares for me and prays for me. She takes care of our children when I am away. She does the laundry and she cooks for me. She has become a great help for me. I am blessed.

The *sexual* dimension plays an important part in this emotional support. Sexual feelings are no longer interpreted as temptations once marriage provides a minister with the right context for sex. Sexual intimacy enhances spousal fondness and this can give a minister a sense of pride and identity by which other women feel unthreatened. A married minister has more relational freedom because everyone knows that he is married and the wife knows where he is. A happily married minister can soundly run a boarding school with teenage girls:

Being married helps me in my sexual outlet. I have a sexual partner with whom I procreate. My marriage is no hindrance but a reality that complements me. I just love to spend time with my family and I even take time off to be with them. I love my wife and children. It's an experience I would not want to miss for anything in the world.

**Spousal life-experience** is another advantage. Many ministers make clear that their own marriage can help them to understand families and sexuality. Their own relationship helps them to counsel married people. They do not speak about marital struggles from theory. In counselling, especially when it comes to sex and needs, a married pastor knows what he or she is talking about. Of course, care must be taken in personal examples not to expose what is private. A married minister's voice is more credible than an unmarried minister if he can tell

husbands to give money to their wives and not to beat them, or if he tells women not to shout to their husband. How can a pastor minister peace and love if it does not start in his own house?

When you are not married, you are not called for. When there is a conflict between husband and wife they mostly call a married person. If a husband cannot perform or is impotent, they want a counsellor who understands from his own experience and marriage. You cannot go to a deep level if you are not married.

Another advantage of married ministers is their **parental life-experience**. One learns much about children by having them. Children can challenge and correct a minister. A minister can only address other fathers about their relationship with their sons if he goes through his own struggles with his own sons first. An African can only speak about fatherhood if he has fathered a child himself. Their own children help married ministers to feel what other children want from them. It is easier for an unmarried woman to confide in a married woman than the other way around. Married ministers know, like all married people, how important it is to have quality time in the family. A burden married ministers and their married faithful share is the ever recurring difficulty of getting school fees. Being married and having children makes it easier for a minister to deal with children and youth as a father or mother figure. In short: ministry is dealing with family people.

Having a family contributes to a minister's **social respectability**. Being seen with his wife gives a married minister respect. Ministers are eyed very differently after their wedding day; they feel more acceptable and self-confident, and they are treated as adults. Ministers with a good marriage become moral authorities and role-models. Ministers who want to plant a new church must work under an older and married minister because one earns respect by the way they manage their family.

Another advantage of married ministers is **ministry to the opposite sex**. Married ministers do not need other women for their sexual needs. Their wives can sensitise a male minister to ways and needs of other women. A wedding ring is a symbol of commitment. Married Women-ministers can move around more freely than unmarried women-ministers. It is not wise for a man alone to visit certain women. The wife of a male minister can minister to women in women's groups or in areas where a man does not understand women very well. A minister and his wife can be efficient in husband and wife counselling. Marriage can change a man's perspective:

I've pastured as a single and as a married person. My community thought I'd probably be fornicating as a single person. My marriage has stabilised my ministry. Being married

helps me to focus. A single person is less focused. If I were unmarried, I'd look at all the girls in the congregation, looking for the best wife among them. I'd not minister to them the way I should. Some parents even approached me to marry their daughter. They confronted me and wrote letters. Now that I am married, my visitation of women and my ministry to them has become different.

However, what follows shows that family responsibilities can also *restrict* pastoral movements: the partner and children want attention too, the minister and his/her spouse can have a very different faith commitment, a woman-minister will first of all remain a housewife and mother, family responsibilities can restrict a minister's movements, and not every marriage of ministers is a success story.

**Family needs** can be demanding. Many people, like church ministers who are working on call, need to manage their time between family and work. The family can accuse a minister of neglect: "You must give us more time!" Family-conflicts affect the ministry. Community starts at home.

There can be **different faith-commitments** between a minister and his/her marriage partner. It is hard if a wife does not understand her husband's ministerial commitment, if she does not share his faith or if she pushes people away from him:

If my wife were not a believer, if she were not hospitable, or if I were struggling hard and she failed to share her salary with me, I could fall as a minister because people would confront me with the contradiction between my words and my own marital life. Sometimes people go to a different church because of a pastor's wife. Marriage could be a hindrance if I were not able to support and provide for my family. I would think about the way I left them hungry during my ministry. How could I say that Jesus is the bread of life if my family needs me for food?

Next to the pastoral work there are **domestic roles**. A male minister can relax when he comes home, but husbands of women-ministers expect food, a clean house, attention and time from their wife in spite of her pastoral agenda. A woman-minister can be divided between a baby that needs much attention, the ministry and her wishes to spend more time studying.

The need to stay with the family implies **travel restrictions**. Various married ministers mention that their family-demands prevent them from being absent for long.

There are times I want to go somewhere for ministry or mission for five days, but it is hard to be away from my family for so much time. If I want to develop myself for future training abroad for four years, it would be a huge sacrifice without taking my family. I do not have the strength to leave them behind. I already find it hard to do a few days' retreat. Sometimes I have to. If there is an issue with my wife that we have to sort out, or if I feel upset about the two of us, then this affects my ministry.

What can destroy both ministry and marriage is **unfaithfulness**. Although informants speak gratefully about being married, not every marriage of ministers is a success story. A married minister can also be unfaithful and this influences people's trust in him or her.

#### 4.5.6. Pastoral Advantages and Disadvantages of Unmarried Ministers

Unmarried informants were asked how their state helps and hinders them in their ministry. The greatest advantages of their life are freedom and availability.

Whether they are Roman Catholic or whether they belong to other churches, unmarried ministers often use the word **freedom**. There is freedom for pastoral work and travel at short notice and there is freedom from family responsibility.

The table below shows that *even* half of the ministers of other churches believe that unmarried ministers are more available for the community. Those who chose "other" indicated that availability depends more on the person than on being married or unmarried. Some married ministers are better in time-management than some unmarried colleagues. Moreover, celibates who belong to a religious community are as tied to internal or domestic obligations as married ministers.

Table 5: Celibates and Availability

Celibates are more available for the community than people who are married.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	70%	20%	10%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	85%	6%	9%
All other ministers (N=63)	49%	38%	13%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	80%	6%	14%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	93%	0%	7%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	87%	7%	6%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	87%	7%	6%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	80%	8%	12%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	31%	46%	23%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	56%	32%	12%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	52%	40%	8%

Not being married creates **availability**. Celibates describe themselves as available and dedicated: they can give all their strength, energy, love, time and happiness to the church, to the whole community, to God, to travel and to prayer.

I am totally dedicated to service. If I were married I could not take risks by working in certain areas like Sudan. My wife would say I'm committing suicide. She would prevent me to go: "Who will take care of the family if you die?" My ministry is not a paying ministry. I do not get enough finances for a family; sometimes there is hardly enough for myself.

What follows shows that disadvantages of unmarried ministers are: marital inexperience, inner emptiness and sexual vulnerability.

Unmarried ministers of *other churches* share that their **marital inexperience** can make it hard in pastoral contacts with unmarried Christians to focus on spiritual needs. They do not feel treated as adults by married people who are right to think that an unmarried minister does not understand them:

My not yet being married helps me to assist those who are not yet married. It hinders me to help those who are married. They do not open up to me in the pastoral life. They think that I do not yet understand them. Probably that is true.

Various *Roman Catholic* celibates agree that their ignorance is no advantage for dealing with married Christians. Not having lived marriage makes it hard to understand others and this can create suspicions and loneliness. They are told: "We need to educate you; we do not need you to educate us!" Sex scandals trigger the conviction that celibates are deeply selfish and that something is wrong with them. Although celibates are more accepted and understood in their own church than in others, many people believe that Catholic priests are injected or even cursed. Often women are more open to celibate men than men.

There is **an inner emptiness** that cannot be filled by kind colleagues, and even less by alcohol, masturbation, watching nudes, hidden girlfriends, or paedophilia:

Celibacy is difficult when I need close and caring assistance, when I feel lonely. Married people complement each other, but I lack it. I claim to know what I have not lived. There is much I know but there is no experience. I am ignorant: how can I counsel people if I am not living a similar life?

**Sexual vulnerability.** Some educated and financially independent women believe that priests have good genes for a good child. Some women specialise in tempting priests and seminarians. Women can be jealous of each other in terms of their closeness to a priest:

When a new priest comes many women try to claim him. They say, "That priest is my boyfriend." Soon there are rumours, "That is the girlfriend of Father." Nearly always women wonder, "Why is father closer to this one, and not to me?"

This section shows that married ministers have the following advantages: emotional support, the value of personal marital experiences in ministry, the value of parenthood for ministry,

the social respectability of marriage for ministry, ministry as a couple. Their disadvantages are: family claims, different faith commitment between minister and partner, domestic roles and less freedom for travel. The advantages of unmarried Ministers are freedom and availability, and their disadvantages are marital inexperience, inner emptiness and a high sexual vulnerability.

#### 4.5.7. Married/Unmarried State, Acceptability and Pastoral Empathy

With all the advantages and disadvantages of married and unmarried ministers at the back of the mind, does the unmarried state make a minister more acceptable?

Table 6: Acceptance of Unmarried Church Ministers

Unmarried church ministers are more accepted by Africans than married ministers.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=100)	31%	50%	19%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	47%	26%	27%
All other ministers (N=63)	9%	83%	8%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	67%	20%	13%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	67%	13%	20%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	33%	33%	34%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	27%	53%	20%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	44%	16%	40%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	8%	69%	23%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	12%	84%	4%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	8%	88%	4%

More than half of the informants believe that social acceptability does not depend on celibacy. However, how to interpret that forty-seven percent of the Roman Catholic ministers say “yes” and that eighty-three percent of ministers of other churches say “no?” Firstly, these percentages show a strong denominational stamp: celibates are more accepted in their own church than in other churches. Secondly, and this important for the discussion on the law of celibacy: married ministers obviously feel very much accepted as *married* ministers in their own circles.

The percentages below make clear that **pastoral empathy** does not depend on being married or unmarried, but on personal predisposition. One becomes sensitive to others and their needs by an open attitude in daily interaction. One does not have to be married for reading people’s eyes.



Table 7: Celibates and Empathy

Unmarried church ministers can understand people better than married ministers.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	20%	53%	27%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	29%	32%	39%
All other ministers (N=63)	6%	83%	11%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	26%	26%	48%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	46%	27%	27%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	13%	27%	60%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	20%	40%	40%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	36%	36%	28%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	8%	85%	7%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	12%	76%	12%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	0%	88%	12%

These are reasons for ticking “yes:” it can sensitize a celibate to belong to the whole community; understanding others begins with self-respect and self-knowledge and not with marriage; one’s own family background is important for understanding married people; formation is important for human growth; theoretical knowledge must not be underestimated; people know that celibates are open-minded and open-hearted, and that they specialise on loving and helping others. Moreover, celibates can encourage other celibates, and marriageable minister can help and understand other church members who are not yet married:

Because people come to me for help, even married people in difficulties, it has validated my ministry. The fidelity to the choice I’ve made is crucial. When people ask me how I live, they show their own problems. Does celibacy hinder me because I cannot talk about what I do not practise? A dentist needs not have a tooth ache in order to do his work. A deeper knowledge by relationships with families and married couples is very helpful; much of my advice is fed by my experience with family life. It is often presented as a difficulty, but that is not my experience.

These are main reasons of informants who chose *no*: being unmarried is a hindrance in understanding the psychology of married people; unmarried ministers can give no personal examples of married life; they claim to know what they have not lived; dryness as a result of celibacy can cause indifference and insensitivity; being unmarried can make a person more unstable than understanding. A male religious said:

Married people complement each other, but I lack it. I claim to know what I have not lived. There is much I know but there is no experience. I am ignorant; how can I counsel people if I am not living a similar life? Married people understand each other better. I use what I have seen and heard.

The first table above shows that, from their own experience and settings, both married and unmarried ministers feel a high degree of acceptance. The second table indicates that pastoral empathy depends more on the person than on him or her being married or unmarried.

#### 4.5.8. Ministerial Ordination of Exemplary Married Christians

What do the informants think about the priestly ordination of wise, committed and knowledgeable married Christians?

Table 8: Ordaining Married Catechists

Let committed, married catechists of sub-parishes be ordained to celebrate the Eucharist.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	43%	43%	10%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	22%	60%	18%
All other ministers (N=63)	71%	19%	10%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	26%	53%	21%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	0%	93%	7%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	7%	47%	46%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	34%	53%	13%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	36%	56%	8%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	54%	38%	8%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	76%	8%	16%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	76%	20%	4%

The statement above was inspired by the plea of Hastings and Kanyandago to make provisions for ordaining married catechists. The table shows that sixty percent of all Roman Catholic informants do not think it wise to ordain married catechists, whereas seventy-one percent of ministers of other churches are all in favour.

These are the main reasons why informants are against the ordination of married catechists: only a scarcity of celibate priests can justify the ordination of married men, but there is no scarcity of priests; in many African parishes there are not enough finances for paying an unmarried priest; many celibate priests do not want to share their power with a married colleague; there will be academic disparity between priests who have had a solid seminary formation and married men with a lighter training; and introducing shorter ordination programmes is not fair to those who had to go through years of philosophy and theology; the vocation of catechists and deacons is different from that of priests; it will cause divisions among the faithful.

Various Roman Catholic informants are not against the ordination of married men and even women, but they believe that the time for this has not yet come. Before talking about the priestly ordination of married catechists a debate on married ministers must be allowed:

It will come by itself. History will provide. At the moment people are not yet prepared for it. The set up of the society does not yet allow married priests and woman priests. There must first be a need and then it works. Do not force it. It will not come because theologians force it but because “kairos”, God’s time, has not yet come.

What follows are reasons for ordaining married men: after an unavoidable period of transition and adjustments the faithful will see the benefits of married priests; difficulties about the ordination of married men are simply invented by the status quo to block others; it makes no sense to believe that only unmarried men can serve the faith community as ministers; many catechists are hardworking and close to the people; married Christians with a profession do not depend financially on the church; there is no theological justification against the ordination of women; and the focus on celibacy is a wrong priority that keeps Jesus at a distance. A diocesan minister said:

There are some married people who are not catechists but faithful, committed and better role-models of lifestyle than certain priests. If they expressed the desire to become priests, I’d be in favour of ordaining them. We often talk about the subsistence of priests, their economic survival, but these people have regular jobs as teachers, doctors and lecturers. They are financially independent and can offer their talents to the church. If this is the way of the church, it will cause new scenarios, but we will learn to live with them.

In retrospect this focus on *catechists* of Hastings and Kanyandago is too narrow because there are more competent Christians who could be approached for more studies and ministerial formation. There is a considerable difference between a simple village-catechist and a well-read medical doctor or lawyer with a theological interest who is involved in catechetical activities.

Some ministers of other churches, and a number of them used to be RC, are not in favour of ordaining catechists: these have their own vocation; they are not well trained; there is not enough money; this group is too narrow; faith is more important than marriage.

The researcher informally asked three Roman Catholic bishops why there are no permanent and married deacons in East Africa. One said that this topic was discussed in the early seventies and that he was all in favour, but that his colleagues presumably feared that this form of married clergy would diminish the importance of celibacy for priests. The second bishop said that, apart from their permission to assist at weddings, catechists already do what deacons can do, that ordinations are interpreted as permanent power, that it is easier to

dispose of dysfunctional catechists than of dysfunctional deacons, that deacons will want more money, and that religious sisters may interpret the appreciation of married clergy as a depreciation of chaste celibacy. The third bishop said that the time has come for openly re-discussing the possibility of ordaining married men from the perspective of pastoral needs.

The above shows that fear of depreciating celibacy, it not being a pastoral need, limited finances, reluctance to power-sharing, the distinction between vocations, and academic disparity, are the main arguments against ordaining married men. The main reasons in favour are the appreciation of married men, experiences with good catechists, more financial independence of church ministers, a different focus on Jesus and on women. A discussion on *catechists* is too limited because there are more people who qualify for studies and priestly ordination. Ministers of other churches, most of whom are married men and women, do not understand why the Roman Catholic Church continues to focus so much on unmarried men.

#### 4.6. Findings on Celibacy-as-Sexuality

Celibacy is a way of living sexuality. This section gives an answer to the following questions. What sort of questions do people have for unmarried church ministers? What is needed to keep celibates focused? How do suspicions around women, homosexuality and paedophilia affect them? What kind of discernment questions come up if fatherhood becomes biological? Is it good to talk about celibacy-as-sexuality?

##### 4.6.1. Sexual Questions for Celibates

Married informants were asked what they would like to ask celibates. The questions zoom in on having no offspring, the attraction of women, physical urges, inner emptiness, intrinsic or extrinsic celibacy, the law of celibacy, ministry and God. The exclamation of this pastor is quite representative:

How do you do it? In this day and age we struggle so much with sexuality. The whole idea of being childless... Oh my God!!! It's not having your lineage and name continued! How do you *make* a decision like that? How do you *live* it? How do you *function*?"

Questions that are related to **having no offspring** go as follows. Do you have the need to have posterity? Who will take care of you when you grow old? Would you like to have your own family just like your parents, and have a woman you can call your wife for life? Do you not miss having children? Do you not miss being called "Daddy?" What gave you the permission not to take the responsibility to create life coming from you? How do you survive celibacy: living without a companion and blessing other people's children?

Questions that deal with the **attraction of women** go like these. How do you relate to the opposite sex? Do you have any feelings for any lady or not? What are the challenges you face as a celibate minister if you counsel a beautiful lady? How do you behave if you feel attracted to a particular woman? How do you deal with women who can be very mysterious and tempting? Do you miss a partner? Do you miss someone to comfort you, to cherish you, to work with you and to give you ideas?

Many married ministers focus on the **physical urges** of their celibate colleagues. Do you not feel you need sex with a lady? Do you burn? Are the feelings no longer there because of the vow? How do you respond to your sexual desires that cannot be fulfilled in the expected way? Does your body always agree with celibacy? How do you discipline your sexuality? What about the *young* men, how do they manage? Can you be holy if you live in perpetual sin of the flesh? Do you feel able to live in chastity until death? Do you take drugs or eat food that will stop their sexual urges? Is prayer really enough? Why punish yourself unduly? Why do you want to sacrifice the pleasure that comes with sex? Is celibacy possible as an African priest? What is better of a celibate: molesting boys or women? What makes you chaste? Do you really consider yourself to be celibate? Are you truly faithful to your celibate life? Have you been true to your celibate decision or vow? If not, what have you done about it?

Some focus on **inner emptiness**. Do you feel content with your situation? What challenges are there if there are only you and your life? How do you cope with loneliness? What challenge do you have when you are alone in your big presbytery? Do you feel you are missing something? Do you never have moments of doubts or regrets? Do you sometimes feel like dropping celibacy and have a wife and children? How passionate and genuine are you? How do you handle all the suspicion in society? If God has created us with that love, why not do it? How can I help you to prepare for marriage?

Some wonder whether celibacy is **intrinsic or extrinsic**. Why do you practise celibacy? How long do you plan to hold on to celibacy? How did you get into it? Are you convinced even now that the choice is good? Is celibacy your choice or something you must abide with? If you were asked to choose again, would you make the same choice to live a life of celibacy? If the Pope declares celibacy null and void, what would you do? Are you really a celibate? Why not be an honestly married priest instead of an uncommitted celibate? Why do you continue to destroy your church?

Some focus on the **law of celibacy**. Have you explored other churches with an open mind? Have you read the Scriptures well or have you only crammed the laws of the Roman Catholic

Church? Who instituted the law of celibacy and why? What makes you think that celibacy is better than married life? Do you believe that celibate ministers can have children? Would having your own family be a better option for you if the law of celibacy had not been there as a requirement for your priesthood?

Some link celibacy with **ministry**. Why be a priest if you decided not to marry? Does having no sex help or hinder you to understand others? How do you view a married minister? How do you deal with marital problems and counselling when Africans have so many questions, and it is not your real life experience? How can an unmarried minister give advice if he is not married? How do you feel about working with married priests, especially sharing the same parish house? Many people think about changing career, some time in life. What about you?

Some mention **God**. Are you able to keep to your vow and live a holy life before God or are you betraying your vow in secrecy? Does celibacy make you holy? How did celibacy start with you: was it because of God or because of people who pushed you into it? Sexual desires were created by God; do you have them? Does celibacy strengthen or weaken your faith in God? Do you have total self-surrender?

The questions above of married ministers to celibates live in many Africans' minds. In the interviews celibates made clear that they are very much aware of this. They are often questioned by relatives, friends and people they meet. So, what motivates them to live such a different life?

#### **4.6.2. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Ambiguous Surroundings**

What informants say about their surroundings is rather *ambiguous* because celibacy is not valued everywhere and the way surroundings are interpreted also reveals something about the interpreter. What follows are some examples.

Relatives can be *stimulating* and *rejecting*. Some relatives do not pressurise the celibate to marry; they want someone of their own to be a priest or a sister and they consider this to be a blessing. Other relatives make clear that the sexual organs of a celibate continue to belong to the clan, and that the unmarried simply have no voice: "What do you know about having a wife and child?"

Living together with celibates can be *great* and *terrible*. Other celibates can be experienced as real communities, safe havens of equals in a misunderstanding world. Even diocesans live

in communities of two or three people. However, not every cleric is pleasant to get on with and parishes consist of people with a diversity of ideas and interests.

Christians both *spoil* and *mistrust* celibates. On the one hand people love to see celibate priests and they encourage them by creating a good environment for them to live with a presbytery, transport and good food. On the other hand celibacy is less understood now that society is becoming more permissive. When celibates meet their former classmates who have a wife and children, they wonder, "Am I normal?"

In the public opinion celibates are both *admired* and *rejected*. On the one hand those who are faithful to their calling are highly respected. Catholics are protective of their priests as long as they do not wobble. On the other hand Roman Catholics who cannot live celibate lives themselves expect their priests to be celibate. Many priests and bishops disagree with the law of celibacy in private, but not in public.

Missionaries can be interpreted as *good* and as *bad* examples of celibate life. In the first case they are impressive inspirations; in the second case they are impositions of cultural superiority and sexual frustrations.

History can be interpreted *affirmatively* and *discouragingly* too. The first interpretation emphasizes that the general acceptance of celibacy is influenced by the length of the history of the Roman Catholic Church in an area, and that it must have been much harder for the first African priests. The second emphasizes that it is frustrating that in so many places where Christianity has been for more than one hundred years, people know but still do not understand why Catholic priests do not marry. The further celibates move away from the inner Roman Catholic circle, the more they will experience the broader cultural conviction that celibacy is uncommon, not to say abnormal:

People who are traditional still believe that something is wrong with you, but if you go deeper even modern people have their questions. Priests and religious sisters are still questioned a lot. We explain but it is not always understood. Even at home, when people are Christians, they think there is something you have missed. You are an elder because of the faith, but you'll not be involved in traditional things and values like family and sexuality. You are seen as someone who is young and who does not know much. You are not living the real life.

#### **4.6.3. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Women**

Many seminarians and priests talk freely about their attraction to women and girls. There are many single women and single mothers. A number of priests and seminarians mention

educated and financially independent single women who want a child from a priest without further obligations. A seminarian said:

There are many clubs in Nairobi. Many young people are not interested in commitment to marriage or priesthood. Money buys. The climate is an enormous challenge, "God does not need your celibacy!" This generation does not understand celibacy for God. Many rich women look for religious, and many religious have good genes and are educated. There are many young women at University who do not care about God. A lady told me, "To stay without sex at night for me is torture." Sex is like breakfast for them. If these women are at my disposal, and they are, I can just approach them. You're free and welcome... Many African priests are financially dependent. In my congregation, for example, benefactors are dying out and their children are no longer interested. Many ministers have no resources. They rely on the people around. Society is very fluid. It is easy to become an object of a woman and to enter her trap. I must be very serious if I want to remain celibate.

#### **4.6.4. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Homosexuality**

A number of seminarians and priests also mention homosexuality. Some people do not marry because they are homosexual; the celibacy law attracts gays or causes homosexuality; it is known that there are priests with homosexual contacts; in seminaries homosexual intimacy is strictly forbidden; there are stories of both expatriate and African lecturers who are involved with men; if women are not allowed into a seminary, this will have sexual consequences for the young men; some celibates become homosexuals because they are not allowed to marry; some seminarians or priests have a relationship with women because they do not want to be labelled as gays; if nature is pushed too far by celibacy this results in masturbation, homosexuality or bestiality; priests who are involved with youth are easily accused of involvement with girls or of homosexuality; there is a "hide-and-seek ministry:" priests who rape, abuse or have homosexual contacts confuse the word "vocation" with "orientation;" homosexuality is against the plans of God. A seminarian shared:

I have a friend who will soon be ordained a priest. Just before he became a deacon he dared to admit to himself that he is gay. He does not dare to talk about this with anybody in his community. He hardly dared to tell me. It confuses me. If it is discovered in his community it will be awful and cause a major uproar. He may be expelled because they are not ready for this. It was said that homosexuality is something Western. I know as an African that it is not. It also exists in Africa. I am worried about this friend. If he hides his orientation now it will definitely come out after his ordination, but how?

#### **4.6.5. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Paedophilia**

Some seminarians and priests mention paedophilia. Most priests have grown up in fear and find it later hard to relate sexually to someone of the same age of the opposite sex. In a few cases formators or lecturers were sent away because they did not respect boundaries.



Paedophilia is a big sin. I was never approached by any priest. It is because of the crisis of faith and spirituality. In many places a priest may no longer be alone with children in the sacristy and in other places. There are always married people around to keep an eye on the priest. Priests who no longer pray and meditate as they should endanger their friendship with Christ.

#### 4.6.6. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Inner Focus

The motivation to be and remain celibate must come from within. A **strong personal determination** is needed: celibates are celibate because they want to. Quite a number of them talk about physical exercises: building up a good personal condition is necessary for winning the match. Walks and working in the garden are better than idleness. A solid clerical self-identity and supportive meetings of equals help to remain focused. A strong pastoral self-image is needed and the avoidance of self-pity. Women cease to be lust objects if they are seen as one's sisters. Married men also have to control themselves. Many celibates talk about the power of the mind: with which thoughts is it fed?

I have sexual feelings, but that it is not in the genitals. We do not jump on every female, as animals do. I have committed myself and want to dialogue with my mind. I am not unhappy. Happiness cannot come from intercourse only. This is a misconception. I am happy in the life I've chosen, in spite of the difficulties, because of the goal: my final communion with God by my universal love.

Spirituality is an important ingredient of this personal discipline and determination: the awareness that celibacy is more than a personal achievement, but that it is also a gift. Celibates are called by God to a life of holiness for the Kingdom. It is important to be prayerful and spiritual. Celibacy is a noble sacrifice for the Gospel.

For me, abstaining from sex has a value. You have a natural urge and abstain for spiritual reasons, for a higher good, for the Kingdom of God. In abstention, the sacrifice is something very central. People can live it and be happy. Compromising celibacy affirms what people think: that celibates are unhappy because they are not married.

Is it correct to assume that celibates are more united with Jesus than married ministers? The strong "no" shows that there are no two clear blocks. Celibates believe that married people can also be close to Jesus; many ministers of other churches, in fact nearly a third of the women, believe that celibacy can get people close to Jesus. Closeness to the person of Jesus does not depend on celibacy and celibacy is not needed for this closeness.

Table 9: Celibates and Unison with Jesus

Celibate ministers are more united with Jesus than ministers who are married.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	20%	61%	19%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	22%	51%	27%
All Other ministers (N=63)	16%	76%	8%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	34%	47%	19%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	33%	40%	27%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	13%	40%	47%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	27%	60%	13%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	12%	60%	28%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	8%	84%	8%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	28%	68%	4%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	8%	80%	12%

The above makes clear that a very strong and personal motivation is needed for living an uncompromised celibate life. This inner determination must be fed by consonant thoughts, constant discipline and a conscious spirituality. There are happy celibates!

#### 4.6.7. Celibacy-as-Sexuality and Physical Fatherhood

Not one informant denied that there are celibate ministers with children. Some male celibates were hesitant in giving examples or numbers. The most reluctant answers went like this: "Many priests do live celibacy faithfully." "I hear stories about priests who are not very celibate." "If we face reality, it is there." "I know only one and he died." Those who shared unreservedly spoke like this: "A classmate had three children. At last the bishop asked him to take care of them." "I know some and suspect many." "I know some six priests with children who are still in the ministry, but rumour has it that there are many more." "I know some of them, but it's hard to give a number. Let me count.... I know about ten." Celibacy is something small that the church has made so big. A priest with a child said without any reluctance:

The law of celibacy is a big joke. So many priests wonder why I am out. They say, "We have done it so many years ago and we are still here!" Some ask, "The Bishop suspended you because you have only *one*?" The culture of silence around priests with children is enormous. Often people asked me, "You are a priest? So, you do not have a kid?" I never told the big public that I have. My relatives knew. My brothers said that it was the right thing to do. Instead of condemning me, they said I'm a man.

Most RC sisters and male and women-ministers of other churches spoke unreservedly about celibates with children and they spontaneously gave numerous examples. Some Protestants

shared stories about close Roman Catholic family members who are supposed to be celibate, but who are not. Apparently the informal ethnic circuit does not correspond with formal ecclesial appearances. A married priest who is no longer active as such said that most of the priests he knows have children or are in a relationship with a woman.

Most eager to talk about this topic were the ministers of the new Catholic churches. This eagerness is understandable because their main bone of contention with the Roman Catholic Church is precisely the law of celibacy. One of them said that the children of priests and bishops are known to them, but that nothing would be gained by going to the press. Another said that, once these children grow up, most of them speak freely about their fathers being Roman Catholic clerics.

How to interpret the fact that a good number of Roman Catholic priests have one or even more children? If they were allowed to marry, would many of them do it?

Table 10: Celibate Priests and Marital Desires

One in every three African Roman Catholic priests would like to marry, but they are not allowed.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	55%	20%	25%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	44%	29%	27%
All other ministers (N=63)	72%	6%	22%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	34%	26%	40%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	27%	46%	27%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	47%	20%	33%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	60%	34%	6%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	48%	24%	28%
- Married Catholic ministers (N=13)	93%	0%	7%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	72%	12%	16%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	60%	4%	36%

Informants who opted for “other” and who gave a verbal comment said that they simply do not know whether the statement is true or not. One priest said, “Make it one in every five” and another, “Make it one in every two.” Probably the score of the religious seminarians is higher than their diocesan colleagues because the former are highly exposed to women in an international and relatively liberal colleges where they can have and observe many friendships, whereas most diocesan seminarians live in a more secluded single-sex setting.

One of the guiding questions is what a celibate priest should do if he fathers a child. A celibate with a child causes a clash between two worldviews. The mildness of many celibate

men toward “celibates” with one or even more children reveals the strength of their dual communal mindset: just as celibacy does not prevent them from being African, having a child should not prevent them from remaining a Roman Catholic priest. Getting a child was a mistake for which the priest should not suffer the rest of his life. Look at it from case to case. Is it lust or love?

If a priest has fathered a child by choice, he has a great responsibility. However, he may also have been tempted or influenced by his association, by bad company, or by friends. In this case it is no premeditated choice, but caused by pressure. In that case the responsibility is for the clan or the parents. It also happens to many young people and is more an accident. Look at it per case.

From the perspective of a Roman Catholic priest with a child there are many dilemmatic questions. How to care for the child? Parenthood implies lifelong responsibility. How to continue with the mother? Perhaps she is poor, perhaps she is rich, and perhaps she will pressurize the priest. Should the family be informed? Predictably, there will be a mixture of reactions, and family pride may become family shame. Should the bishop/superior be told? There may be understanding because some of them also have children, and there may be punishment. Should fellow priests be informed? Some are celibate, some are not, and this has been so since the seminary:

One or two formators were genuine in their vocation, but the others were not. We met our spiritual directors with their girlfriends and they continued to tell us exactly what the church teaches and requires. They gave us a divided example. Many priests have a regular visitor with whom they drink and enjoy themselves. Some formators spent the whole night in a night club. In the morning they said, “Do not copy me!” and continued to teach us how it should be. Some came home at five in the morning and we had Mass at six. Parish priests are eve worse.

How will the Christians react? It may cause a scandal, loss of moral authority, harsh judgment, but also understanding and acceptance. Blame the law of celibacy or the priest?

The law fails because so many priests have a wife. Many priests try to cover it up, but we all know they have mistresses. Many priests go off to the women on their Monday off, but not everyone. I believe that twenty percent are living a celibate life. It can be verified.

Is laicisation the best option now? But even a laicised priest remains a priest for ever. How to earn a living? Little can be done with philosophy and theology in civil society.

Seminaries do not give you the courses that can help you when you go out. This is a deliberate dependency. You are chased away; you are not helped. Seminaries should help those who leave to survive; they should offer courses like accounts or counselling.

Many priests with a child wonder whether they should continue ministry in a church that allows married ministers:

The Bible does not demand preachers to be eunuchs. It is a secondary choice. Celibacy is a non-issue for ministry. If you take vows you promise to God; but if you promise celibacy it is for the church, represented by a bishop. You say: "As long as I am working under you, I will remain unmarried." It is not the Kingdom of God that requires church ministers to remain unmarried; it are the interests of the church as an institution.

Most *sisters* want a priest with a child to leave the ministry because sisters also have to leave the convent when they get pregnant. Informants have no approval for abortion. More than the male celibate ministers, women-religious focus on a man's responsibility for child *and* mother. A sister shared:

He should be honest enough and leave the priesthood and take care of the child. The whole issue of life is serving. Fatherhood is a responsibility. It is better to be a good father who can lead his child into eternity than to be a priest and neglect a child. He loses his authority in his mission, preaching and ministry if he speaks about love and neglects the child and its mother. Sisters have to leave because of their biological make up and take care of the child before and after it is born. In society many children suffer for lack of a father figure in the family. It touches men less than women to have a child. Men like to wash their hands in innocence. This has a reverse effect on the child. He should say, "Let both of us go because we are in this together! I am rather faithfully married than an unfaithful celibate!"

Ministers who used to live as celibates strongly argue that in spite of diverse social reactions, being honest and open about having a wife and children is healthier than pretending celibacy. Apart from the general counsel to marry the mother of the child, ministers of other churches propose a minister with a child to be frank and open with the church authorities whatever the consequences; to tell the people, and either to leave the ministry in the RC Church, or to continue ministry in a different church.

I know a senior bishop who has a family. Every time I hear his name, I think of his family. God sees the heart and therefore the family. Are celibates with children cheating God, society or especially themselves? If the desires move the heart, they have already abandoned the priesthood ethically; abandon it now officially. If a priest does not stay with his woman and his children, this will haunt him the rest of his life.

The above shows that more than half of all the informants believe that one in every three African RC priests would like to marry, that it is generally known that a good number of "celibate" ministers have one or more children, and that biological fatherhood gives rise to many fundamental questions.

#### **4.6.8. The Need to Talk about Celibacy-as-Sexuality**

Most informants noticeably appreciated the interest in their story, convictions and attitudes. Many informants, both married and unmarried, thanked the researcher for his interest and time, and said something like, "That was great!" "It feels so good to share!" "Give me a copy

of your work once it is ready!” “I wish more people came with questions like these!” “This should have happened much earlier!” This is what a seminarian said:

I think that we should spend a whole day on celibacy as a forum. We should not discuss it from a high academic level, but from one of sincerity and experience. Perhaps this could be organised in the year of St. Paul. He was celibate. We often link priesthood with celibacy but we rarely share how we live celibacy consciously. As celibates we should not shy away from the issue of sexuality.

A number of celibates used the interview encounter as an occasion for sharing that they feel happy in their unmarried state. Others shared freely how hard they find this state of life.

Pain was found among Roman Catholics who used to work as ministerial priests, but who requested laicisation because of their incapacity to live a celibate life. The quote that follows is representative:

My suspension hinders me very much. I still consider myself to be a priest. I could still do it well. I feel too Catholic to become an Anglican. I am now helping slum children. The Roman Catholic Church tells me that I am a priest. I am obliged to hear confession and to administer the sacrament of the sick in times of need. I must lead a quiet life and live my marriage in a quiet way. I am not allowed to teach in a Catholic institution. I signed these conditions as a condition for my suspension. I would be a very good and fitting person as a priest. Nothing hinders me to celebrate Mass. My marriage would even help me a lot. Although the church continues to promote celibacy, in real society people see priests as strangers to life.

There is also pain among a number of priests of the new Catholic churches all of whom have gone through the complete seminary system of the Roman Catholic Church. It means much to them that they were validly ordained by bishops who received their authority through apostolic succession. It affects them to be excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church they love. It hurts when the parents of a married priest participate in his mass, but refuse Holy Communion for fear of excommunication. These ministers hope that, just as the Pope is presently welcoming married Anglican priests, a time will come when validly ordained married priests of other churches will also be welcomed back. It hurts those who continue as married priests when Roman Catholics see them as a fiasco:

Due to their ignorance by indoctrination the verdict of many lay people is that married priests have failed. The church does not want to change. People are hypocritical. They say that we want to destroy the church of Christ, that we are doomed to be failed and to be cursed. I believe that those who have not declared their marital status have failed. Priests know that Christians will talk; they lead a “holy” life because they do not want to be judged by Christians. It is better to be judged by God.

It may be called therapeutic that *marriageable* ministers of other churches, like the woman below, shared their pain about not being able to find their right life-partner and about the social pressure they have to put up with:

I am unmarried, but I want to marry deep in me. Many men fear me. They want to control me, but I am out of control. The higher you go, the more men fear. People ask, "Why is she like that? What is her problem?" It is even more challenging in the church; every pastor wants me to marry. They do not want me to open a church. I cannot face myself. Sometimes I am approached by men who are at least ten years younger than me. There is much condemnation. I know many women-ministers, age-mates, who are not married. When we talk we discover that we face the same reactions.

Last but not least it may be called therapeutic that so many married ministers of *other* churches obviously enjoyed sharing how their marriage and ministry interrelate, and what they think about prescribed ministerial celibacy as African Christians. Their questions on having no offspring, on attractions, urges, loneliness, on the questionability of the law and its impact on ministry and faith, express a genuine therapeutic concern for their celibate colleagues.

#### **4.6.9. Some Concluding Thoughts on Celibacy-As-Sexuality**

This ecclesiological section reveals that churches give a new meaning to the world *elder* by relativising the age factor and by openness to marriageable and unmarried ministers. Celibacy can be interpreted negatively as not being married and positively as single-minded dedication to the Kingdom of God.

Although African cultures differ about premarital virginity, sexuality and especially sex are usually not talked about by parents to their children; it is usually delegated to uncles, aunts and grandparents; and in various cultures age mates are instructed collectively by elders. Modern influences stimulate sexual freedom, and this forces especially parents who live with their nuclear family in urban areas, to speak more frankly about sexuality and even sex.

Sexuality was not easily talked about in the past in formation centres of whatever church, but especially in seminaries it was a taboo topic. The main differences between the formation of celibate Roman Catholic and other ministers is that the former are trained to remain unmarried whereas the latter are training as (future) spouses and parents. Whereas the celibates usually live in same-sex communities with various degrees of seclusion, the latter have more freedom of intermingling with the complementary sex.

Advantages of married ministers are that they have emotional support, personal experience of marriage and parenthood, that marriage is socially respected and that being married can

enable more freedom with the opposite sex. Disadvantages of married ministers are that the family can claim attention; especially women-ministers must deal with domestic expectations. The partner of the minister may not have the same faith commitment and there is a restriction in movements. Advantages of celibates are their freedom and availability and their disadvantages are that they have no personal marriage experience, that they may experience loneliness in their many pastoral contacts and that this can make them sexually very vulnerable.

Although all ministers agree that there are celibates with a child, celibates themselves are most reluctant to talk about this. A priest with a child needs much discernment about whom to tell, about how people will react, and about what to do next: continue as a celibate, ask for laicisation, and how to earn a living. Compared to celibates, who have most to loose, religious sisters, former celibate ministers and other ministers of other churches propose openness and marriage rather than cover-ups and secretiveness. Most informants enjoyed the interviews; they said in one way or another that it is good to talk.

#### 4.7. No African Cultural Value

The table below shows that remaining unmarried is definitely no *African* virtue.

Table 11: The Virtue of Unmarried Life

It is a virtue in African culture to remain unmarried.	Yes	no	other
All Informants (N=148)	3%	91%	6%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	4%	87%	9%
All other minister (N=63)	2%	96%	2%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	6%	87%	7%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	0%	93%	7%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	7%	73%	20%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	7%	87%	6%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	0%	92%	8%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	0%	100%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	4%	92%	4%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	0%	100%	0%

Although nearly all informants said that lifelong celibacy was most uncommon, a Ugandan Bagwe, Batoro and Banyankole, a Nigerian Ibo, and a Zambian Bemba, and only celibates share these stories, said that some African cultures knew unmarried adults who served a king or a shrine in a (temporary?) unmarried state. One informant said from hearsay:



Nobody should shy away from marriage, but some mediators between the living and the spiritual world, diviners, witchdoctors, were unmarried; they intervened in calamities, in infertility, by proper rituals. The spiritual world chose mediators and told them not to marry. Some great-grand parents, but they were very, very rare, never sired children because of battles and the spiritual world.

Lifelong celibacy is definitely of no value in modern Nairobi. The biggest temptations are in the biggest city: urban anonymity has replaced rural social control; traditional culture and structures lose impact; the climate is intercontinental and open; nightclubs are more attractive than “Resurrection Garden.” A seminarian said:

Nairobi has so many opportunities. It is a fast growing city with people from all over the world. The climate is very permissive. Girls are constantly assaulted. Most priests have no capacity for making good friends, not even among themselves. Many go to a woman if they need consolation. There are many single women in Nairobi, who believe that the best kind of children are from priests, because they will not follow them. At “Jubilee” most of the biggest cars belong to single women. Sometimes seminarians are seduced by a woman and when they come back here, they are very critical about celibacy. It is a big issue in a city environment. The city climate massages the will power to be chaste and celibate. You do not have to go for the women; they come for you. That changes the whole thing.

#### 4.8. Optional Celibacy

Do most African church ministers believe that the Roman Catholic Church should cease to prescribe celibacy for her priestly ministers?

Table 12: If I were the Next Pope

If I were the next pope, I would continue to promote the law of celibacy for all priests.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	36%	49%	15%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	58%	22%	20%
All other ministers (N=63)	6%	84%	10%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	53%	34%	13%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	87%	0%	13%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	40%	27%	33%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	53%	34%	13%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	56%	20%	24%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	0%	100%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	12%	72%	16%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	4%	88%	8%

The table shows an extra-proportional support of diocesan seminarians. It is telling, especially compared to the thirty-four percent of their religious colleagues, that *not one* of them would discontinue the celibacy prescription! Will they keep this up, or will they also shift to thirty-four percent or higher after a few years, like the diocesan ministers? Are doubts

about the issue, at this stage, interpreted as personal doubts and should even the appearance of having doubts be avoided? Is there a fear of being expelled from the seminary? Perhaps the diocesan seminarians are sincere. Perhaps they confirm the opinion of this former seminarian who is now a married priest:

We often talk about “tunnel theology” meaning that you are only focused on being a priest. You hide and focus on the light at the end of the tunnel. You play the game and say “yes Father” to your formators. You hide that you were a thug and you hide your girlfriends. Hiding in the seminary is very easy. Just spend seven years in the library, in your room and in the chapel. Pretend to pray. The provisions and the studies are very sweet. The seminary does not result in maturity. After ordination they are free men, even if they decide to marry. God has called me!

What follows are reasons for *continuing* the celibacy prescription: there is no mandatory celibacy because one freely chooses it; every job has its own rules and everybody knows that celibacy belongs to the Roman Catholic priesthood; priests can be released and then they are free to go; once celibacy is chosen, the law is no burden but the protector of a value; celibacy facilitates the priesthood; the worldwide character of this law for Roman Catholic priests makes celibacy trans-cultural; let there be only married or only unmarried priests, but not both.

Catholic priests should not marry. It belongs to the identity of our church and priesthood. There must be a common denominator in the priesthood. I see the Vatican II text, that celibacy is not required by the nature of the priesthood and that there are also good married priests, as a loophole. If it is not required, why leave it open? There must be a common face of priesthood. We should avoid creating qualities of priests. Charismatics tend to say that priests who do not drink are better than priests who drink. The same will happen if there are married and unmarried priests.

Informants who want to *discontinue* the ministerial celibacy prescription, focused on Jesus, on the manmade character of this church law, on its contradiction with African values, and on hypocritical consequences.

Those who focus on **Jesus** argue that the self-sacrifice-theology that accompanies celibacy is not healthy: Jesus made the sacrifice and his followers are just ministers. Why require what is not required by Jesus?

The celibacy prescription is not in line with **African cosmology**: the celibacy law carries away many passionate Catholic men who feel both drawn to the ministry and to continuing their lineage; encouraging priests to marry is better than urging them to remain unmarried; Africans rather believe in polygamy than in celibacy and sex is important; do not focus on marriage before or after ordination, but on marriage; God does not impose celibacy on

Africans but only a church that, as a result, will attract a wrong kind of people for ministry; Africans are always referred back to the question: how can you teach or train others if you have no life experience?

For an African, celibacy is not going to be taken very well. They look down on you because it is marriage that gives you status in society. This prescription forces a group of people in a position in which society does not respect them. As a Christian I would agree with celibacy, but not with a law that prescribes it. I find no grounds for the law of celibacy in Scripture.

Those who focus on the law being **manmade** reason thus: the celibacy prescription is a church creation that adds no value to the priesthood; the very fact that only the Roman Catholic Church has this law makes it dubious; the church has made a very serious mistake by equating priesthood with celibacy; ministry does not oppose marriage; neither marriage nor celibacy can be imposed as a condition for ministry; many married priests are doing very well in their ministry; the law of celibacy degrades marriage to an impediment; let ministers cooperate with God from within so that the unmarried can marry if celibacy has become too difficult for them; only false teachers tell people not to marry (1 Tim. 4:3); let the welcome to married Anglicans open the door for optional celibacy; let's go the way of the Eastern Churches that only prescribe monks and bishops to remain unmarried. Two priests of the Coptic Church said that their church knows both monk-priests and married priests, but that all sub-Saharan African priests of this church are married.

Those who focus on **consequences** of imposed celibacy argue as follows: the ban on sex creates unnecessary secrecy and scandals; the law of celibacy does not make one holier but it makes many ministers unholier; it affects healthy men's dignity if they are forced to live as if they were impotent; this law is so difficult to keep that people end up cheating. A Diocesan said:

It is unfortunate that the Roman Catholic Church imposed that law on Africa. The church did not operate from Mt. 19:12 where celibacy is presented as a free choice. This legalism says much about the psychological state of the Roman Catholic Church. For many suitable men, celibacy is the reason for not becoming priests. I remember a younger brother who became a priest because his older brother could not cope with celibacy and left the seminary. I remember a mother who killed herself when she heard that her son wanted to be a priest. Due to celibacy the African value of starting a family is thrown out of the window. Why interfere with God's plan? Required celibacy prevents candidates for ministry to make an honest choice. For many, celibacy is more a concession than a conviction. It is very African to abstain from sex for a few days before religious ceremonies, but that did not require celibacy for life. In ministry mandatory celibacy can hinder the development of one's talents, especially if one feels inclined toward marriage. Sometimes the tradition is unfortunately regarded as the law of God. Jesus never imposed

it on his disciples. Do not say that it is the tradition; it is only a tradition! This law is not the life of the church.

Table 13: Fight the System or Join a Different Church

If you disagree with the law of celibacy, do not fight the system, but join a different church.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	39%	49%	12%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	31%	54%	15%
All other ministers (N=63)	51%	41%	8%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	47%	34%	19%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	33%	46%	21%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	20%	73%	7%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	34%	34%	32%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	24%	72%	4%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	31%	62%	7%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	64%	28%	8%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	48%	44%	8%

Thirty-one percent of the Roman Catholic ministers and more than half of the ministers of other churches see disagreement with the law of celibacy as a good reason for joining a different church. Every church has the right to promote its own laws; so, why fight the system? However, fifty-four percent of the Roman Catholics and forty-one percent other churches chose “no” and this makes clear that even more ministers believe that disagreement with the law of this church should be no reason for leaving the church of this law: let there be room for different opinions and discussions; changes can only take place from within.

How to interpret that nearly half of the diocesan ministers and only a fifth of the religious ministers has chosen “yes?” A married priest explained that for diocesans their *promise* of celibacy, made to their bishop, is work-related availability, although this can be spiritually motivated or justified, whereas the *vow* of chastity of religious has nothing to do with priesthood but with membership of a fraternity of unmarried brothers/sisters. If a diocesan openly disagrees with celibacy, this can easily be interpreted as him being on the way out. Religious who disagree with the promise of celibacy do not necessarily disagree with the vow of chastity; not every religious brother is a priest. This is what a religious sister said:

There are two things that should not be confused. First, in the Roman Catholic Church, celibacy has become a church discipline for the mission, but it is no command of Jesus. Peter and the others were married. Secondly, celibacy is a call to religious life; clergy should not be made Religious! Let there be married clergy!

The above shows that, extra-proportionally boosted by diocesan seminarians, most Roman Catholic ministers would continue to promote the ministerial celibacy prescription if they were the next pope, but that for Roman Catholics more than for ministers of other churches, disagreement with the prescription has to be no reason for joining a different church. In other words: there is room for discontentment and resistance.

#### 4.9. Fear

The percentages in the survey below indicate that many African Roman Catholic priests are afraid to publicly criticizing the law of celibacy.

Table 14: Fear of Sanctions

Most Roman Catholic priests do not criticise the law of celibacy for fear of sanctions.	Yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	61%	19%	20%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	51%	26%	23%
All other ministers (N=63)	76%	10%	14%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	47%	26%	27%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	40%	40%	20%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	53%	40%	7%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	60%	7%	33%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	52%	20%	28%
- Married catholic ministers(N=13)	93%	0%	7%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	72%	20%	8%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	72%	4%	24%

More than half of the Roman Catholics believe that the fear of punishment is an important reason for keeping quiet. One priest shared that “fear” is not the best word; “powerlessness” would be better because, in spite of one’s opinion, this law is simply forcefully there. Another, referring to paragraph 1395 in the 1984 Code of Canon Law, where is written that a cleric who lives in concubinage risks suspension and even dismissal from the clerical state, said that playing with the duties of priesthood equals playing with the privileges like residence and of sources of income. Touching the football results in a penalty. A religious minister said that priests like their privileged lives so much that even those who are sexually involved with women do not want to marry. Although many priests come from poor families, a good number of them have built or bought their own house somewhere, or have their own business.

Many celibates spontaneously refer to married ministers of the new Catholic churches in a mixture of fear, disapproval and admiration. These churches warmly welcome priests who cannot live celibacy:

Do you think it a happy meeting if I meet a priest of the Redeemed or Reformed Catholic Church? No! It will be a fight because all sides will try to defend their position. Do not underestimate the Redeemed Catholic Church. These men are intelligent, reasonable and very clear in their argumentation. Some have doctorates and are lecturers who can defend themselves. Are we wrong? Are they right? Are we right? Are they wrong? The discussion is an enormous challenge.

A former Roman Catholic minister, who has gone through it all, who married, and who is now a university lecturer, said the following:

My students tell me about priests with women and about children of priests. Economic power is an important reason for the full seminaries. Economic instability provides vocations. Many priests have a house, a car and this is what young people want. Even if you do poorly academically, it is no problem. Some priests are afraid to speak the truth because the only way to get money from Rome is to keep up this relationship. If you are a priest or nun and leave, the church wants you to suffer; you have nothing and are nobody. People are tamed by dependency. There is a strong climate of control in the church. The maturity of clergy is highly questionable because others make decisions for you; it destroys the human mind.

The above shows that there is obviously a climate of fear of reprimands and punishments among Roman Catholic ministers that prevents them to publicly criticise the celibacy prescription. Their greatest fear is the loss of their clerical status. The sacrifice of celibacy is a huge price for the privileges of the status. As an informant said, "Celibacy defines a priest."

#### **4.10. John Mbiti Revisited**

When the informants speak about issues like married and unmarried adults, they reason from a clear we-perspective, and an obvious communal mindset emerges. This confirms the view of Mbiti that everyone is expected to marry and procreate and those who abstain are "rejecting society and asking for a rejection by society."

However, just like Mbiti nearly half a century ago, the contemporary informants are strongly aware that Africa is changing fast and that the past will never come back. Education, urbanisation and globalisation bring about a shift from the crumbling rural extended families to more nuclear families and from a collective to a more individual identity. Social life in metropolitan and industrial Nairobi is different from that in isolated agricultural villages or nomads. Although African blood is still thicker than the waters of Christian baptism, people are neither Westerners nor traditional Africans.

When Professor Mbiti gave an exceptional lecture in Tangaza College for the University of Nairobi on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2010, the researcher gave him a piece of paper with the question why so many Africans believe in Jesus, who abstained from marriage and procreation. He replied by email:

We accept it that Jesus was UNMARRIED, and nobody wants to get him married just because Africans consider marriage to be so important. Other societies, including the Jewish society, also consider marriage to be very important, and on average (nearly) everyone gets married but there are a few who do not get married. The unmarried persons do not necessarily degrade the importance of marriage.

These words show that Mbiti continues to emphasize the importance of marriage, but he does not use his earlier terminology of “rejecting society and asking for a rejection by society.” Has he changed? He married a Swiss woman and has lived abroad with her for decades. Is Africa changing? Although the childless are reproductively dead, it is hard to deny that many “eunuchs for the Kingdom” are very much at the service of family-life, for example in the medical or educational world. One of the many examples that can be given from the field research is this religious sister who studied “Couple Sex Therapy” and who is a professional counsellor:

I am free for the ministry. My community is very much my family and supports my ministry. I am like a doctor who treats cancer but who had never had it. I learn so much from the experiences of others, although I have never experienced it. My knowledge can be stronger than that of married people. There is so much that I understand and they do not. When people think I have no experience they are wrong, although I have promised celibacy I know from books, from listening to people, from psychology and interaction although I do not have sex myself. We are born and raised in families to which we belong. We bring up more children than those who are married. I have studied and listened so much that I have full confidence when I talk. Why do married people come to us when they have problems? Many confide in us more than in married counsellors. They know that we do not have the physical experience, but they come for help. Eighty percent of counselling problems are marriage problems. Half of the ones I referred to married counsellors come back. There is something in a religious counsellor that may not get from married counsellors. People know that I do not just listen, but that I also pray for them. They see me as their sister more than as a counsellor. They come with so much confidence.

There is a tension here: although it is obvious that celibates are biological dead-ends of their ancestral family trees, they “do not necessarily degrade the importance of marriage” or family.

#### **4.11. Jean-Marc Éla Revisited**

The informants who participated in the research did not talk about themselves as “spiritual colonies of foreign religion.” On the contrary... The architecture and design of many other

churches is obviously western. Some pastors pride themselves of having studied in America, or they long to do so. The same can be said about nearly all Roman Catholic churches: they have an obvious western pattern. Many priests speak highly of foreign missionaries. Nobody spoke in terms of the “Africanisation of Roman ecclesiastical models.”<sup>1</sup> On the contrary: many dream about visiting or studying in Rome.

Table 15: More Western than African

The law of celibacy is more something Western than something African.	yes	no	other
All informants (N=148)	60%	28%	12%
All Roman Catholic ministers (N=85)	48%	34%	18%
All Other ministers (N=63)	76%	19%	5%
- Diocesan ministers (N=15)	47%	47%	6%
- Diocesan seminarians (N=15)	40%	33%	27%
- Religious ministers (N=15)	40%	47%	13%
- Religious seminarians (N=15)	47%	34%	19%
- Religious sisters (N=25)	60%	20%	20%
- Married Catholic ministers(N=13)	80%	15%	0%
- Women-ministers of other churches (N=25)	72%	20%	8%
- Married male ministers of other churches (N=25)	76%	20%	4%

In spite of this admiration, nearly half of the Roman Catholics and sixty percent of all informants believe that the law of ministerial celibacy is not “made in Africa.”

At the same time, the discussion on the ordination of married ministers in general and catechists in particular shows that most Roman Catholic informants find it impossible to think outside the box of the important Roman church structures. The language used by this seminarian shows that it feels self-undermining to think outside the structural box:

It is not good to ordain catechists because they have not followed the procedure: they must be single and not married, they must be serious about the work, and they will have to go through philosophicum and a theologicum. They should really follow the proper procedure. It would be a bit of a scandal if a bishop ordains a catechist. It is not fair to those who must go through years of philosophy and theology. If the Bishop wanted to ordain me now that I have not yet finished my theology I'd be a bit worried because I have not yet completed the system.

Not many Roman Catholic informants are willing to rethink their entire ecclesial structure, because this is where they have their place and derived identity. Only one diocesan priest said spontaneously that secular clergy are still living according to the missionary church model, and that time has come for them to develop their own model. A sister said passionately:



Women are very marginalised! The Roman Catholic Church is a clerical church, but the real people on the ground are women. There is a prophetic voice going on that is not listened to. The church is holding on to what must be let go off; otherwise we'll not move forward. It is a question of power, as everywhere in politics in Africa, and it is financed. This power has empowered us as priests, brothers and sisters, and instead of empowering the laity we want to have our authority felt. There is not enough emphasis on service, on diakonia. The church will collapse, just as the government collapses. The laity are fed up with priests and sisters. If women are not empowered we are heading for problems. The church wants people to say "yes, yes" and to confirm the power of the clergy.

As long as there is no room for married priests in the Roman Catholic Church, there will definitely be no room for the priestly ordination of (*married*) women for ministry. The quote that follows shows that the structures are not in line with what many think. A sister said:

Let women also be ordained who love to be priests. I am sure that Jesus would love me to be a priest. Some sisters always call the priest for Mass, for confessions and for anointing the sick. The priest of our parish thinks that we are out to control him, and that he can never work hard enough. Suppose the sisters could do it... We would no longer need a priest. Many women would be priests for service and not for pride. Priests are there but we have few who are responsible. Are they ordained to sleep? "Say I am not in!" "Father is resting!" Are they tired or lazy? Is prestige more important than service?

Éla believed that the church should be reinvented from the perspective of the poor. Whereas various other churches preach the gospel of prosperity, the lifestyle of many Roman Catholic ministers does not look like an option for the poor. Few spoke like this sister who lives in Kibera and who vowed radical poverty:

What challenges me in Nairobi, are the major needs of people. Celibacy is only a political and media problem. It is no big issue for people who want ugali, school fees, employment, house-rent et cetera. Believe me: celibacy really is no issue for them.

#### **4.12. General Conclusion and Emerging Issues**

The research findings can be summarised from the perspective of the conceptual framework, as sketched in the first chapter: looking at life from the perspective of single or married availability influences or determines one's contact with the psycho-cultural, bible-hermeneutic and cultic spheres.

As *Africans* the informants, including the celibates, find it very easy to talk elaborately about important African themes: the Creator-God, ancestors, the importance of naming, leadership, adulthood, marriage, being an elder, blessings and curses, and death.<sup>2</sup> As *Christians* the informants find it equally easy to talk about Jesus, the Bible and about the church of which they are members. In many ways Christianity is a continuation rather than a contradiction of these pre-Christian themes.

As long as there are children, married ministers of other churches experience no breach in terms of marriage expectation between the African worldview and the Gospel. However, celibacy, and even more so as an ecclesial prescription for priestly ministers, does contradict profound African and biblical longing for descendants.

The celibacy law is questioned by all the basic and vital themes above. How can the Creator of sexuality stimulate people not to be procreative? How can the ancestors be in favour of progeny that refuse to pass on the received life? Is it not ungrateful to one's life-givers not to name them? How can an unmarried adult possibly be a leader? How can someone who was initiated for adulthood willingly continue as a child? Why abstain from marriage? How can someone who contradicts these vital themes be an elder? How can people who are like a curse in most cultures mediate blessings? How can one die in peace without having transmitted life?

This study makes clear that celibates have apologetic answers to the questions above: the Creator of sexuality is the Father of Jesus who allows "eunuchs for the kingdom; "the ancestors know that celibates will get spiritual children; the names of ancestors are remembered because some people call a child after a celibate; celibates can become elders too in special rites of installation; a person is much more than his or her reproductive capacity; family detachment enhances attachment to the Kingdom; unmarried adults become elders by people's respect for them and many relatives feel honoured and blessed by a celibate in the family; celibates are not called to live selfishly; do not focus on traditional cultural values but on making a sacrifice for God.

The main **cosmological finding** is that in both traditional and more contemporary Africa people are expected to start their own family. What New Testament and African elders have in common is that they are moral examples by their marriage. Marriage is interpreted as wanted by God. It is generally thought in African societies that something must be fundamentally wrong with unmarried adults.

The main **cult-related finding** is that most married ministers do not refer to pre-Christian African purity customs for justifying their times of sexual abstinence but to 1 Cor 7:5, and this text does not refer to cultic purity but recommends a place of God in a marital relationship.

The main **pastoral-ecclesiological findings** are that it is quite different if theology students prepare themselves as (potential) spouses and parents or as celibates. Although both

ministerial lifestyles have various benefits and hindrances, remaining unmarried for the Kingdom does not guarantee social acceptance, pastoral empathy or a deeper faith.

The main findings on celibacy-as-sexuality are that unmarried adults are escorted and influenced by many sexual questions, that many informants believe that one in every three African Roman Catholic priests would like to marry if allowed, and that ministers of all churches think that it is therapeutic to talk about the painful side of celibate sexuality.

The biggest finding is that celibacy is only a major challenge for celibates; for ministers of other churches the topic is even irrelevant, especially as a prescription.

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Éla. *African Cry*. New York: Orbis Books, 1986: p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> See: M. Kirwen, *op.cit.*, 2005: p. ii.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0. Introduction

After the analytical presentation of literature and field research findings, it is possible to draw some conclusions and to present recommendations

#### 5.1. History

**Conclusion:** Christian theologies and church structures that were introduced of Africa have profound, centuries old, Western roots. This cannot be emphasized enough. One of the elements of the Roman Catholic church-structure is the “indissoluble” link between ministry and celibacy. Other churches of Christianity do not have and do not want this prescription.

**Recommendation:** a deeper awareness is needed in the Roman Catholic Church that its European roots (for example the law of celibacy) should not be normative for other continents. The world moves on, as the contemporary rapid de-institutionalisation of organised Christianity in the West clearly shows. It is not correct to impose on Africa what has obviously lost its appeal in Europe. The church should become more Catholic (universal and ecumenical) and less Roman (European and deductive).

#### 5.2. Hermeneutics

**Conclusion:** the eunuch passage does not qualify for solely justifying unmarried dedication to the kingdom; exegesis shows that the passage is preceded by Jesus' emphasis of marital dedication. Both a Petrine (married) and a Pauline (unmarried) line can refer to this passage, without excluding each other.

**Recommendation:** it is good for Christians of other churches to see that unmarried dedication to the kingdom can be a respectable option; it is also good for Roman Catholics to welcome the ecumenical fact that married church ministers can dedicate themselves inspiringly to the kingdom.

#### 5.3. African Worldview

**Conclusion:** dualist asceticism, with its focus on souls in heaven, is outdated in the West and has never been in line with the African world-focused cosmology of human

interconnectedness and relatedness. World-denial and mortification contradict the African creed that starts with abundant earthly life.

Recommendation: it is good for African theologians to radically rethink faith in Jesus of Nazareth from the perspective of the African worldview of vital interrelatedness. Africa has its own cosmological story to tell, from its own fountains and not from a derived identity.

#### **5.4. Cult**

Conclusion: pre-cultic sexual abstinence can help a medium to focus on God, and this intuitive practise exists all over the world, including in many African cultures. The law of ministerial celibacy perpetuated situational abstinence into lifelong celibacy. From an ecumenical perspective this makes no sense; it is better to refer to 1 Corinthians 7:5 and to the sexual maturity of married ministers.

Recommendation: undo celibacy once and for all as a lifelong cult requirement.

#### **5.5. Pastoral-Ecclesiology**

Conclusion: ecclesiology and theology of ministry interrelate. The unmarried-men-only model is not only the result of a patriarchal ecclesiology, but it also reiterates it. Ecumenical research reveals that both married and unmarried ministers have their advantages and disadvantages; it is incorrect to structurally canonise one model at the expense of the other.

Recommendation: creative theologians and open-minded overseers are needed, with an ecumenical attitude, to study the question what the biggest needs are of their faith communities, and which committed Christians could be formed and ordained to respond to these needs, irrespective of their marital state.

#### **5.6. Celibacy-as-Sexuality**

Conclusion: this ecumenical research reveals that married church ministers have many profound questions to their celibate colleagues, that there is an obvious need to share these questions sincerely and that celibates frankly admit that it is not easy to remain focused. There is willingness, openness and even a need to talk about the sexual side of celibacy.

Recommendation: it is important to remove unnecessary secretiveness. It will be helpful to make the implicit explicit by meetings, and by (sexual) supervision of church ministers. Further, churches need to report ministers who have committed a sexual crime to the civil authorities.

## **5.7. Contradictions**

Conclusion: the research hypotheses and the survey show that most Roman Catholics ministers want to continue the celibacy prescription, knowing that it is no African cultural value; that a third of celibate priests would like to marry; that the prescription is more Western than African; that fear for sanctions creates silence and secretiveness; that celibacy does not make ministers more accepted, more empathetic or more united with Jesus; and that disagreement with this prescription is no reason for joining another church. From an ecumenical perspective the wish to continue the prescription simply makes no sense.

Recommendation: more ecumenical research is needed about the many contradictions that surround the ministerial celibacy prescription.

## **5.8. Dual Mindset**

Conclusion: literature and field-research findings support the conceptual framework, which explicates that it makes a fundamental difference whether Jesus, liturgy and culture are viewed from the perspective of married or unmarried African ministers, especially when this view is structurally prescribed.

Recommendation: more ecumenical study is needed about the enormous impact of African church ministers' single or married status on their cultural, ecclesial surroundings, and on their liturgical and theological views.

## **5.9. John Mbiti**

Conclusion: Mbiti's email, which contains the statement that "unmarried persons do not necessarily degrade the importance of marriage," makes clear that the question whether they might or might not degrade depends on specific persons and on their specific family-circumstances.

Recommendation: needed are real-life stories of (former) celibates and their significant others; no stories of spiritual rationalisation and celibate propaganda, but about belonging and rejection, loneliness and longing, pride and shame, joys and frustrations. Needed are stories about living in cultural and ecclesial worlds which do not always agree.

## **5.10. Jean-Marc Éla**

Conclusion: Éla was a critically loyal theologian who emphasized social analysis, and African resilience and resistance to foreign impositions. In many countries celibates declare

openly that they disagree with celibacy as a ministerial prescription, but in Africa there is silence. Only priests who have married and joined another church speak out about this ecumenically questionable topic.

Recommendation: more research is needed on the question why there is this culture of silence when it is generally known that for many celibates their celibacy just does not work. Is the main reason, as Éla would put it, economic dependency?

### 5.11. General Conclusion

Ministerial celibacy is neither a challenge to (married) ministers of other churches, the prescription does not count for them, nor for intrinsic celibates, because they are, as Schillebeeckx put it, “existentially unable to do otherwise.” It is only a challenge to the many celibates who try to interpret the ministerial prescription as their vocation, knowing from the depth of their being that, for them, it is only a condition for ministry and an unnecessary burden.

The real major challenge is not *intrinsic* celibacy, but the external ministerial *church-law*: from the perspective of all-pervasive African cosmology because it terminates both the ancestral lineage and vital human dreams of personal progeny; from an ecumenical perspective because this manmade prescription does not exist in other churches and overemphasizes and unnecessarily mystifies ordained ministers; from a cultic perspective because liturgy does not require sexual abstinence; from a ministerial perspective because celibacy is not required by the nature of the priesthood; from a pastoral perspective because, in spite of theoretical excellence and counselling skills, celibates lack fundamental personal experiential knowledge; from an economic perspective because married ministers are also provided for and manage to survive; from an historical perspective because the imposition only dates from the year 1138 and has continuously been fundamentally questioned; from a therapeutic perspective because celibacy is obviously not healthy for many healthy ministers; from an ecclesiological perspective because this ministerial blueprint suffocates new forms of ministry and degrades married Christians to laypeople; from the perspective of many Roman Catholics who are celibates because they want to be priests, but who are not priests because they want to be celibates; from a women-defined perspective because many feminist theologians experience and question the unmarried-men-only model as discriminatory; from the perspective of celibates’ women-friends: because of all the secrecy; from the perspective of celibates’ children because they may not know or reveal their father; from the perspective of so many Christians whose faith is affected by the double life of their ministers; from the

perspective of authentic celibates because even they are affected by the many celibates who do not have the gift; and probably from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth who made no ministerial allusions when he spoke about “those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.”

ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω



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## APPENDIX ONE: RESEARCH TOOLS

For gathering data, use was made of two research tools: twenty carefully formulated guiding questions, based on Matthew 19: 3-12 and a list of fifteen survey statements to which the informants could tick “yes,” “no,” or “other.”

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: GUIDING QUESTIONS

(3) Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him by asking, “Does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes?” (4) Jesus answered, “Haven’t you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? And God said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.’ (6) So they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then what God has joined together.” (7) The Pharisees asked him, “Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?” (8) Jesus answered, “Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation. (9) I tell you, then, that any man who divorces his wife, even though she has not been unfaithful, commits adultery if he marries some other woman.” (10) His disciples said to him, “If this is how it is between a man and his wife, it is better not to marry.” (11) Jesus answered, “This teaching does not apply to everyone, but only to those to whom God has given it. (12) For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Let him who can accept this teaching do so.”

1. Who is an elder?
2. Are elders usually married? Why? / Why not?
3. How do most Africans look at adults who consciously remain unmarried?
4. According to you, what does Jesus mean with the passage that we have just read?
5. In your opinion, what did Jesus think about sexuality in general and marriage in particular?
6. Why was Jesus probably unmarried?
7. What is meant with “celibacy”?
8. Are you married? Why? / Why not?
9. How does your married / unmarried state help and hinder you in your ministry?
10. Does the ministry of married church ministers require sexual abstinence? Explain.
11. How was the topic of sexuality / celibacy dealt with during your formation years?

12. What is your opinion on prescribed celibacy as an African and as a Christian?
13. What should a celibate priest do if he fathers a child?
14. As you see it, would Jesus be in favour or against the law of celibacy? Explain.
15. How does one officially become a professional pastoral minister in your church?
16. What is the history of the law of celibacy?
17. What is your opinion on the view of some theologians that committed and well-trained married catechists of sub-parishes should be approached for ministerial ordination?
18. Question to married ministers: what would you like to ask celibate ministers?
19. Question to celibate ministers: what would you like to ask married ministers?
20. Is celibacy a major challenge to African church ministers in Nairobi? Why/why not?

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: SURVEY STATEMENTS

Every interview finished with a short survey. In the light of the interview, the informants were requested to indicate their approval, disapproval, or a longer comment, to fifteen statements.

Table 16: Survey Statements

	yes	no	other
1. Jesus rather sees his followers rather “eunuchs for the kingdom” than as married.			
2. The apostles left everything behind to follow Jesus: they became celibate.			
3. Lifelong celibacy for men was common in African cultures before the coming of Christianity.			
4. It is a virtue in African culture to remain unmarried.			
5. Unmarried church ministers are more accepted by Africans than married ministers.			
6. Unmarried church ministers can understand people better than married ministers.			
7. Celibate ministers are more united with Jesus than ministers who are married.			
8. Celibates are more available for the community than people who are married.			
9. One in every three African Roman Catholic priests would like to marry, but they are not allowed.			
10. Let committed, married catechists of Small Christian Communities be ordained to celebrate the Eucharist.			
11. The root of the law of celibacy is a negative outlook on sexuality.			
12. Most Roman Catholic priests do not criticise the law of celibacy for fear of sanctions.			
13. The law of celibacy is more something Western than something African.			
14. If you disagree with the law of celibacy, don't fight the system, but join a different church.			
15. If I were the next pope, I would continue to promote the law of celibacy for all priests.			

## APPENDIX TWO: LIST OF REPRESENTATIVE INFORMANTS

The research instruments were applied to informants who represent various countries of origin, ethnic groups and religious organisations.

**The informants come from the following countries of origin:**

Burkina Faso

Democratic Republic of Congo

Ethiopia

Ghana

Kenya

Nigeria

Tanzania

Uganda

Zambia

Zimbabwe.

**The informants belong to the following ethnic groups:**

Bachama

Baganda

Bagwe

Baluba

Batooro

Bayangore

Bayankole

Bemba

Bete

Bwisha

Chagga

Chewa

Embu

Ewe

Hutu

Ibo

Jinkenda

Kamba

Kalenjin

Karamojong

Kipsigis

Kisii

Kikuyu

Kivu

Kongo

Lozi

Luhya

Luo

Memba

Meru

Mosse

Nandi

Ngoni

Pokot

Shona

Tigre

Taita

**The male-religious and seminarians belong to the following institutes:**

Contemplative Evangelisers

Society of the Divine Word

Apostles of Jesus

Franciscans Order

Comboni Missionaries

Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament

Kiltegans

Missionaries of Africa

Pallottines

Salesians of Don Bosco

Rosminians

Society of African Missions

Spiritans

**The women-religious belong to the following institutes:**

Assumption Sisters of Eldoret

Assumption Sisters of Nairobi

Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd  
Evangelising Sisters of Mary  
Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Assisi  
Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Saint Joseph  
Holy Rosary Sisters  
Little Sisters of St. Joseph  
Little Sisters of Jesus  
Medical Mission Sisters  
Nazareth Sisters of the Annunciation  
Precious Blood Sisters  
School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Sisters of Mary

**The secular seminarians and priests belong to the following (arch-)dioceses:**

Archdiocese of Nairobi  
Archdiocese of Kisumu  
Diocese of Eldoret  
Diocese of Garissa  
Diocese of Homa Bay  
Diocese of Kakamega  
Diocese of Machakos



**Ministers of other churches belong to the following communities and ministries:**

African Brotherhood Church

Africa Gospel Church

African Inland Church

Africa Nazarene Church

Anglican Church of Kenya

Apostolic Fellowship Church

Coptic Church

Cornerstone Ministries

Deliverance Church of Kenya

Ecumenical Catholic Church of Christ

Free Pentecostal Fellowship

Friends

Jubilee Christian Church

Good Shepherd Ministries

Greenhouse Church

Healing Evangelistic Prophetic Ministries

Hebron Church of Africa

House of Grace Church

Independent Pentecostal Fellowship of Africa

Legio Maria Church

Lutheran Church

Nairobi Baptist Church

Pentecostal Church of East Africa

Presbyterian Church

Prophetic Faith Church

Reformed Catholic Church

Reformed Church of East Africa

Rivers of Joy Faith Christian Church

Trusting in God Alone Ministry

### Appendix Three: E-Mail from John Mbiti

John  
Mbiti john.mbiti@besonet.ch

[hide details](#) 30/05/2010

to twigamfupi@gmail.com

date 30 May 2010 16:13

subject Question about Jesus

Dear Mr. Theodor Wubbels,  
Greetings.

We met at the recent African Spirituality Conference at Tangaza College, Nairobi. You placed on my hand a slip of paper in which you posed a question about Jesus not being married. I do not think that African Religion poses your question: "What does it mean that Jesus was probably unmarried?" It is you who is posing the question and I cannot answer it from what you call "this perspective" of marriage being "very important" in African life. Of course there are unmarried persons in African society, and it is not Africans who pose your question. We accept it that Jesus was UNMARRIED, and nobody wants to get him married just because Africans consider marriage to be so important. Other societies, including the Jewish society, also consider marriage to be very important, and on average (nearly) everyone gets married but there are a few who do not get married. The unmarried persons do not necessarily degrade the importance of marriage.

Best wishes for your proposed doctoral studies.

Yours sincerely,

John

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30 May 2010