



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 31, 2010

Catholic Church Sex Scandal & Celibacy

After getting in my car the other night, this writer turned on a radio show hosted by a man renowned as a rare moderate in talk radio, although he's most notable for only moderately deep thinking. He was talking about the Catholic Church sex scandal, and he fielded a caller proposing a unique solution: allow priests to have concubines. This prompted the host to chime in and opine that perhaps the discipline of celibacy should be revisited. After all, said he, it's only the Catholic Church that has "these problems." It's the kind of shallow analysis that passes for social commentary today.



First, the notion that only the Catholic Church "has these problems" is a media-generated fiction. In fact, a recent AP [investigation](#) found that sexual misconduct — and cover-ups to avoid scandal — are rampant in the government school system. It discovered 1,801 educators who were found guilty of sexual misconduct with youths *between 2001 and 2005 alone*. Moreover, reports the AP, this is the tip of the iceberg, as most cases go unreported.

Then, Wapedia adds perspective, [writing](#), "*A Perspective on Clergy Sexual Abuse* by Dr. Thomas Plante of Stanford University and Santa Clara University states that 'available research suggests that approximately 2 to 5% of priests have had a sexual experience with a minor' which 'is lower than the general adult male population that is best estimated to be closer to 8%.'" Thus, it's clear that it isn't only the Catholic Church that has these problems.

Returning to celibacy, the idea that it lies at the sex scandal's heart is a common one. It's also an uncommonly silly one. Let's examine it.

Here, I suppose, is the theory: Absolutely normal men, bursting with sexual energy, say to themselves, "That's it! The passion is just too much — I can contain myself no longer! Where are the altar boys?"

It sounds ridiculous because it is. Obviously, if it were just a matter of men with untamable libidos, the transgressors would have had affairs with women. This not only is what would appeal to men with normal sexual desires, they also would not have created the same kind of scandal or risked total personal destruction and serious prison time.

Clearly, the celibacy theory is much like saying that all we had to do was find Jeffrey Dahmer a good wife and he would have stopped killing and eating people. As any psychologist will tell you, a homosexual attraction to boys — or any sexual perversion, for that matter — is a deep-seated problem. It is not something ameliorated by a change in venue, lifestyle, or career. The only thing that can change is where the individual finds his victims.

It's also interesting how many everyday folks, many of whom aren't themselves Catholic, behave as if they have some personal vested interest in overturning celibacy. If I didn't know better, I'd suppose these people were thinking of joining a seminary and found the practice the only impediment to their



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aims. But since I do know better, I'd say that the attitude reflects today's libertine priorities. Moderns are raised with the idea that sex is the end-all and be-all and that people — especially men — are supposed to be in a perpetual state of heat. (I'm sure you've heard that famous "statistic" stating that the average man thinks about sex every 20 seconds. Well, I'm glad I'm not average because I'd never get any writing done.) Thus, they think there is something bizarre about someone who doesn't indulge the flesh.

Even more significantly and as funny as it sounds, there's the matter of misery loving company. People are often made very uncomfortable by standards to which they cannot measure up, so they tend to want to bring them down. It's the same factor that causes children to tease the "goodie-goodie" and try to lower him to their level.

Jealousy factors into this equation, too. People tend to be envious of those in possession of good things they lack, and virtue, holiness, is a good thing. Many will scoff at this analysis, especially since those plagued by these motivations usually aren't fully aware of them (knowing thyself is rare). But I have seen this firsthand during the course of my life.

Whatever the psychology, however, there is a simple fact here: There is nothing unusual about celibacy. To the best of my knowledge, every major religion places value on asceticism, which involves denial of the flesh in all ways. And the irony here is that, for all their scoffing, most moderns do have a sense of what holiness should be.

Just consider the matter of Eastern holy men. When we think of such people, we not only accept celibacy, we expect it. When a long-haired Westerner imagines an Eastern monk, he perhaps envisions a bearded fellow adorned in robes sitting in the Lotus position. And if he ventured to the Far East in search of such a man, took a long trek into Tibet on foot and instead found the monk blasting rap music, dining lavishly and imbibing copiously amidst his harem, the disappointment would be intense. The Westerner may be hooked on decadence, he may ultimately seek designer religion and enlightenment without effort. But just like someone who doesn't really have the discipline to master golf but nevertheless wants the best teaching pro, he wants the real McCoy.

Yet, ironically, what is revered in the Eastern holy man is reviled in the Western one. The modern looks at the Eastern monk's asceticism and supposes the fellow has something he does not, yet he looks at the Western priest's asceticism and supposes that he has something the fellow should. It truly is a prejudice, an example of how "Familiarity breeds contempt."

In fact, it has bred so much of it that the Catholic Church is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. It is condemned when a few of its officers exhibit the vice of the wider society — and when virtually all of them exhibit the virtue it possesses not.



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