

Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100–1700

Helen Parish

Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100–1700

This page has been left blank intentionally

Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100–1700

HELEN PARISH
University of Reading, UK

First published 2010 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 2010 Helen Parish

Helen Parish has asserted her moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Parish, Helen L.

Clerical celibacy in the West, c.1100–1700. – (Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700)

1. Celibacy – Christianity – History.

I. Title II. Series

253.2'524–dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Parish, Helen L.

Clerical celibacy in the West, c.1100–1700 / Helen Parish.

p. cm. – (Catholic christendom, 1300–1700)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-3949-7 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Celibacy – Christianity – History. 2. Clergy – Sexual behavior. I. Title.

BV4390.P37 2009

253'.2524–dc22

2009043768

ISBN 9780754639497 (hbk)

ISBN 9781315572390 (ebk)

Contents

<i>Series Editor's Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xi</i>
Introduction – 'For the sake of the kingdom of heaven': Shaping the Celibacy Debate	1
1 'If there is one faith, there must be one tradition': Clerical Celibacy and Marriage in the Early Church	15
2 'Preserving the Ancient Rule and Apostolic Perfection': Celibacy and Marriage in East and West	59
3 'A concubine or an unlawful woman': Celibacy, Marriage, and the Gregorian Reform	87
4 'In marriage they will live more piously and honestly': Debating Clerical Celibacy in the Pre-Reformation Church	123
5 'The whole world and the devil will laugh': Clerical Celibacy and Married Priests in the Age of Reformation	143
6 'Contrary to the state of their order and the laudable customs of the church': Clerical Celibacy in the Catholic Church after the Reformation	185
Conclusion – 'One of the chief ornaments of the Catholic clergy': Celibacy in the Modern Church	209
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>235</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>277</i>

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY

Series Editor's Preface

The still-usual emphasis on medieval (or Catholic) and reformation (or Protestant) religious history has meant neglect of the middle ground, both chronological and ideological. As a result, continuities between the middle ages and early modern Europe have been overlooked in favor of emphasis on radical discontinuities. Further, especially in the later period, the identification of 'reformation' with various kinds of Protestantism means that the vitality and creativity of the established church, whether in its Roman or local manifestations, has been left out of account. In the last few years, an upsurge of interest in the history of traditional (or catholic) religion makes these inadequacies in received scholarship even more glaring and in need of systematic correction. The series will attempt this by covering all varieties of religious behavior, broadly interpreted, not just (or even especially) traditional institutional and doctrinal church history. It will to the maximum degree possible be interdisciplinary, comparative and global, as well as non-confessional. The goal is to understand religion, primarily of the 'Catholic' variety, as a broadly human phenomenon, rather than as a privileged mode of access to superhuman realms, even implicitly.

The period covered, 1300–1700, embraces the moment which saw an almost complete transformation of the place of religion in the life of Europeans, whether considered as a system of beliefs, as an institution, or as a set of social and cultural practices. In 1300, vast numbers of Europeans, from the pope down, fully expected Jesus's return and the beginning of His reign on earth. By 1700, very few Europeans, of whatever level of education, would have subscribed to such chiliastic beliefs. Pierre Bayle's notorious sarcasms about signs and portents are not idiosyncratic. Likewise, in 1300 the vast majority of Europeans probably regarded the pope as their spiritual head; the institution he headed was probably the most tightly integrated and effective bureaucracy in Europe. Most Europeans were at least nominally Christian, and the pope had at least nominal knowledge of that fact. The papacy, as an institution, played a central role in high politics, and the clergy in general formed an integral part of most governments, whether central or local. By 1700, Europe was divided into a myriad of different religious allegiances, and even those areas officially subordinate to the pope were both more nominally Catholic in belief (despite colossal efforts at imposing uniformity) and also in allegiance than they had been four hundred years earlier. The pope had become only one political factor, and not one of the first rank. The clergy, for its part,

had virtually disappeared from secular governments as well as losing much of its local authority. The stage was set for the Enlightenment.

Thomas F. Mayer,
Augustana College

Acknowledgements

This project had its roots in a pleasant conversation with Thomas Mayer, rather longer ago than I would like to admit. At the time, and perhaps lulled into a false sense of security and optimism by the summer sunshine, the scale of the undertaking was perhaps less apparent than it should have been. As a result, friends, family, and colleagues have heard more about the history of the church, the discipline of celibacy, and the marriage of priests, than they might have thought necessary. Their forbearance is much appreciated. I am particularly grateful to staff in the History department at the University of Reading who have provided much encouragement and intellectual stimulation along the way, and to the numerous friends outside the university who have resisted the temptation to ask ‘but why?’ in response to a description of my research plans. Colleagues with interests in medieval and early modern history have tolerated with good humour my intrusions onto their turf, and provided a gentle guiding hand that has preserved me from many egregious errors. Any that remain are entirely my own work. I am particularly grateful to Frank Tallett, who read the later parts of the book in an earlier draft and provided many helpful suggestions for improvement, and to Felicity Heal, who cast an expert eye over the Reformation material.

I am indebted to the patience of staff in the Reading University Library, and to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the British Library for permission to use their collections. The text of this book was completed during a period of research leave funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council; I am appreciative of their financial support, and of the accompanying sabbatical provided by the Department of History at Reading. Tom Mayer and Tom Gray at Ashgate have offered friendly encouragement from the early days of this project, and provided valuable advice.

A period as head of department in Reading allowed administrative matters to intrude into already precious research time, but perhaps also provided valuable insights into the machinations that might have underpinned the bureaucracy and conciliar discussions of the medieval and early modern church. The birth of my daughter, Ruth, in December 2007, presented an entirely different set of preoccupations, but for the very best of reasons. Already, at two years, she is capable of demonstrating in a multitude of ways that there are many things in life that are much more important than the history of clerical celibacy. Her response to the first complete typescript of this book was to enjoy the many possibilities for destruction and reconstruction that it afforded, but I dedicate the final product to her, in the hope that one day she will read and enjoy what follows.

Helen Parish, January 2010

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY

Abbreviations

AAS	<i>Acta apostolicae sedis</i>
CCCC	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
CIC	<i>Corpus Iuris Canonici in tres partes distinctum</i>
CJC	<i>Corpus Juris Civilis: Codex Justiniani</i>
<i>Corp. Cath.</i>	<i>Corpus Catholicorum</i>
<i>Corp. Ref.</i>	<i>Corpus Reformatorum</i>
Ep.	<i>Epistola(e)</i>
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> (American Edition)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PG	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina</i>
WA	<i>Weimarer Ausgabe: Martin Luther Werke</i>
WABr	<i>Martin Luthers Werke. Briefweschel</i>

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY

INTRODUCTION

‘For the sake of the kingdom of heaven’?: Shaping the Celibacy Debate

In February 1549, the passage of a bill through the upper house of the English parliament was secured against the objections of eight bishops and four secular Lords. It would be ‘better for the estimation of priests and other ministers in the church of God to live chaste, sole and separate from the company of women and the bond of marriage’ the Act declared, ‘that they might better attend to the ministration of the Gospel, and be less intricated and troubled with the charge of household’.¹ The English legislation was not, however, a defence of the discipline of obligatory clerical celibacy. Since, it was suggested, many of the clergy did not keep to this ‘chaste and sole life’, it would be to the good of the realm if those priests who could not contain were permitted to marry. Of all the acts of the Edwardian Reformation, the abrogation of the law of celibacy was perhaps the one with which cooperation was most evidently voluntary. However, this was no minor issue.² The legalisation of clerical marriage in England was a highly visible sign of doctrinal change, a tangible break with the discipline and laws of the Catholic church, and an act of iconoclasm which shattered both the medieval image of priesthood, and the established economy of sexuality and the sacred. Increasingly vocal demands for the abrogation of the law of celibacy spilled from the pages of printed books published in defence of the Reformation, and this polemical debate was conducted against a backdrop of the reality of clerical marriage in western Europe for the first time since the eleventh century.

Early Modern writing on clerical celibacy, both Catholic and Protestant, owed much in terms of content and structure to earlier manifestations of the same controversy. Each generation might have stamped its own considerations and concerns upon the discussion of clerical celibacy, but the fundamentals of the debate had, and have, remained remarkably consistent.

¹ 2 & 3 Edward VI c.21.

² For further discussion of the English context, see H.L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (Aldershot, 2000); E.J., *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994).

Questions of scriptural mandate, apostolic precedent, ecclesiastical tradition, sacramental function and pastoral role were repeatedly aired and analysed, and the rationale behind obligatory clerical celibacy, and the desirability or acceptability of a married priesthood, considered and contested. The nature of the debate reflects the breadth and complexity of the issue. As one recent commentator has suggested, ‘theology, scripture and history do not provide unambiguous arguments for the obligatory union of priesthood and celibacy’.³ The malleability of the evidence has created an enduring controversy, in which scripture and tradition become a palimpsest, as successive protagonists layer the experience of their age upon the texts of the past. Yet the history of clerical celibacy can be made, at one level, remarkably simple. Early Christians lived in an age in which family and fertility were prized, but in which it was also possible to lead a life that was so firmly centred on discipleship that marriage was not an option. Christ had spoken of those who ‘made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom’, and contemporary philosophy, both Christian and non-Christian, set great store by the prioritisation of the spiritual over the material and physical. As the faith spread, some believers found fulfilment in a life of withdrawal and isolation, while others assumed positions of leadership in the nascent Christian communities and churches. The development of a Christian ministry that was permanent and perpetual brought with it assumptions about the conduct and character of the presbyter, informed by Scripture, especially the Pauline epistles, but also by questions about the nature of ministry and the emerging sacrificial function of the priest. These assumptions provided the foundation for the insistence upon, first, clerical continence, and then clerical celibacy, in the Latin church, although it was only after the eleventh century that the discipline was universally enforced. The advent of the Reformation, and evangelical criticisms of the laws and traditions of the Catholic church, reawakened the debate over clerical marriage, and paved the way for the presence of a married ministry in the Latin church for the first time in half a millennium. The reassertion of clerical celibacy at the Council of Trent established the issue as a permanent marker of the divisions within Christendom, and defined a discipline for the Catholic church which has continued to the present day.

However, the history of clerical celibacy, both the ideal and the reality, has at times a Delphic ambiguity to it. What, exactly, does the phrase ‘clerical celibacy’ mean? Only by considering this question does it become apparent at what point, and with what consequences, practice became obligation. An understanding of the meaning of ‘clerical celibacy’ also

³ J.E. Dittes, ‘The Symbolic Value of Celibacy for the Catholic Faithful’, in W. Bassett and P. Huizing (eds), *Celibacy in the Church* (New York, 1972), p. 84.

helps to explain the basis upon which it has been possible for successive generations of protagonists, on both sides of the debate, to lay claim to 'apostolic' precedent, and what implications this has had for the understanding of history and tradition in the church. And, looking briefly beyond the discipline and practice of the Latin church, a consideration of the nature of clerical celibacy illuminates the apparently divergent traditions of East and West, and how it is that the church in East came to adopt a model of married priesthood and celibate episcopate. As Roman Cholij, writing in the context of praxis in the East, demanded, why can a priest be married, if it is wrong for a priest to marry? ⁴ The term celibacy, *caelebs*, in its literal meaning, indicates the single life; a celibate clergy is, therefore, an unmarried ministry, and in the twenty-first century Catholic church, clerical celibacy is evidenced in the ordination of men who commit to remain unmarried. No individual may be presented for ordination and service in a diocese until 'in a prescribed rite he has assumed publicly and before God and the Church the obligation of celibacy'.⁵ This is the form in which the term is most commonly understood in the equation of ordination to the Catholic priesthood with the renunciation of marriage.

When applied to the history of the church, however, clerical celibacy thus defined is an inadequate concept. Since it is evident that the early Christian priesthood comprised both married and unmarried men, there is, with this definition, no obvious root for the law of clerical celibacy in the practice of the primitive church. By searching in the past for the modern discipline of the church, it is easy to conclude that the origins of clerical celibacy lie in the post-apostolic period, possibly as late as the eleventh century. Yet it is clear that there were not only unmarried men in the service of the primitive church, but also married men who, after ordination, led a life of continence within marriage. The practice of prohibiting marriage to men after they received holy orders, and denying the possibility of re-marriage to married priests whose wives pre-deceased them, raises the possibility that the rejection of such unions embodied an underlying principle of clerical continence. Marriage (or re-marriage) after ordination was rejected on the basis either that it implied an inability to live in continence, or that such unions would not be valid because the discipline of clerical continence required that they be unconsummated. The assumption that continence would be demanded of all who entered higher Christian orders might then provide a backdrop to the legislation of the Latin church which excluded married men from the ministry. It is this process of definition and redefinition which has reinvigorated the debate over the apostolic origins of clerical celibacy. Defined as 'unmarried', the celibate priesthood has been argued to

⁴ R. Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Worcester, 1988), preface.

⁵ CIC 132.2 and 132.3, *Code of Canon Law* 1037.

be an invention of the medieval church; defined as ‘continent’ the celibate priesthood has been presented as the practice of primitive Christianity.⁶

It is this seemingly semantic distinction that lies at the heart of some of the most violent printed exchanges on the history of clerical celibacy, and which has shaped the debate over clerical celibacy and marriage for centuries. The representation of clerical celibacy as innovation provided a springboard for critics of the ecclesiastical reforms of the eleventh century, while the view that clerical continence was the tradition of the church underpinned the assertions of the reformers that what they demanded was a rigorous enforcement rather than a new direction. The question of the apostolic origins of clerical celibacy was revisited by both Catholic and Protestant in the early modern period, each determined to locate evidence of departure from the traditions of the primitive church and the law of Scripture in the disciplines and dogmas of the other. Evangelical critics argued that clerical celibacy had its origins in the mind of the medieval papacy, and concluded that this was simply another example of innovation in the Catholic church, a sign of decay and disregard for the apostolic heritage, a departure from the scriptures, and evidence of the presence of Antichrist on the throne of St Peter. At the hands of Catholic propagandists, the first generation of evangelical clergy wives were depicted as no better than concubines, testimony to the lack of moral integrity that attracted individuals to the Reformation, and proof that Protestantism was little more than the reincarnation of earlier heresies already condemned by fathers, popes, and doctors of the church. Nineteenth century polemical and academic exchanges on the subject were again dominated by the question of whether or not the roots of clerical celibacy lay in the practice of the primitive church.⁷ The centrality of the ‘apostolic origins’ question to the celibacy debate in successive generations

⁶ The modern debate is most effectively played out in the pages of C. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (San Francisco, 1995); Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*; S. Heid, *Clerical Celibacy in the Early Church. The Beginnings of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West* (trans. Michael J. Muller) (San Francisco, 2001); A.M. Cardinal Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy. Its Historical Development & Theological Foundations* (trans. B. Ferme) (San Francisco, 1995); R. Gryson, *Les origines du celibate ecclesiastique* (Gembloux, 1970).

⁷ See especially G. Bickell, ‘Der Colibat eine apostolische Anordnung’, *Zeitschrift fur Katholische Theologie*, 2 (1878): 20–64; Bickell, ‘Der Colibat dennoch eine apostolische Anordnung’, *Zeitschrift fur Katholische Theologie*, 3 (1879): 792–9; F.X. Funk, ‘Der Colibat keine apostolische Anordnung’, *Tübinger theologische Quartalschrift*, 61 (1880): 202–21; Funk, ‘Colibat und Priesterehe im Christlichen Alterum’, in *Kirchengeschichtliche Abhandlungen und Untersuchungen*, I (1897): 121–55; E.F. Vancandard, ‘Les origines du Celibat Ecclesiastique’, *Etudes de Critique d’histoire religieuse* 1st ser. (Paris 1905; 5th edition Paris 1913) 71–120; ‘Celibat’ in *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*, 2 (Paris, 1905): 2068–88; H. Leclercq, ‘La legislation concilaire relative au celibat ecclesiastique’ in the extended French edition of *Conciliengeschichte* by C.J. von Hefele, vol. 2 part 2 (Paris

positions the consideration of the practice and precedents established in scripture and the patristic era as a necessary preamble to the analysis of the history of the controversy in the medieval and early modern church. Refracted through the prism of competing polemical concerns, biblical and patristic texts were open to a multiplicity of interpretations. The intention of the councils and synods of the church were readily obfuscated by the (at times) limited availability of accurate narratives, and this same process by which a narrative of the ecclesiastical past was constructed in the service of the needs and concerns of the present.

The question of the 'origins' of clerical celibacy is not confined to chronology alone. The debate over the foundations of the principle of clerical continence or clerical celibacy in any age has revolved around the fundamental question of why it was that abstinence from sexual relations and marriage carried with it a reputation for holiness, or implied characteristics that were necessary to the priesthood. Two routes to this question are readily identifiable. The first is the argument that freedom from marriage equipped the priest with the ability to devote himself to the service of God, the service of the church, and the service of his flock. This practical value accorded to clerical celibacy was given expression in the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* at the Second Vatican Council, but also in the 1549 Act which legalised clerical marriage in England: it was preferable that priests remained unmarried so that 'they might better attend to the ministration of the Gospel, and be less intricated and troubled with the charge of household'. The second approach argues from the assumption that purity, by which is understood sexual purity, is a necessary companion to the sacred function of the priest. Drawing upon the precedent of the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrificial role of the priest at the altar, continence, or celibacy, emerged as a requirement for all who would fulfil such duties in the church.⁸ The function of the priest as mediator between God and man has certainly been used to justify the demand for continence from clergy in higher orders in both East and West. J.P. Audet, for example, concluded that the decisive factor behind the law that imposed continence upon the clergy was 'the encounter, within the same pastoral consciousness, of the double perception of impure and sacred, the first being present in the shadows, under the form of sexual activity, and the second, in full light, under the form of service of the *sacramenta*'.⁹ The

1908), appendix 6 1321–48; 'Celibat' in *Dictionnaire d'Archeologie chretienne et de liturgie*, 2 (Paris, 1908) 2802–32; discussed in Conclusion below.

⁸ For a discussion of the 'cultic purity' question, see B. Verkamp, 'Cultic Purity and the Law of Celibacy', *Review for Religious*, 30 (1971): 199–217.

⁹ J.P. Audet, *Mariage et celibat dans le service pastoral de l'Eglise, Histoire et Orientation* (Paris, 1967), p. 114.

defence of clerical celibacy on the basis of the ‘cultic purity’ demanded of those who serve at the altar dominated the literature on clerical marriage in the period of the eleventh century reforms, and continued to be debated in the early modern period. The path to Donatism was repeatedly blocked by the medieval church, in the assertion that the moral conduct of the priest made no difference to the efficacy of the sacrament. However, evangelical polemicists in the sixteenth century capitalised upon the vocabulary of Catholic devotional and disciplinary writing to argue that the concubinary priest who handled the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements did not only dishonour himself, and commit an act of sacrilege, but also called into question the theology and sacramental structure of the church.¹⁰ The argument from ‘cultic purity’ has become rather less dominant in the modern church as the value of clerical celibacy is commonly articulated on the basis of the relationship of the priest with Christ, and in particular the function of the priest *in alter Christus*. *The Code of Canon Law* (1983), for example, describes priests as those who ‘are consecrated and deputed to shepherd the people of God, each in accord with his own grade of orders, by fulfilling in the person of Christ [*in persona Christi*] the Head the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing’.¹¹ The sharing of the ordained priest in the office and priestly function of Christ requires the commitment and character that celibacy manifests, and this spiritual union and rejection of material concerns is presented as a fundamental part of the identity and nature of the priesthood.

The issue of clerical celibacy is, at its narrowest level, a debate over the ordination of married men to the priesthood, and the marriage of men once they have received higher orders. It is an issue, however, which is rarely seen or understood in this narrow definition; the history of clerical celibacy is more than a narrative of the evolution of a discipline. The capacity for the debate to spill out into areas of sacraments and sexuality, priesthood and politics, history and hermeneutics, has imbued the issue with a life which is still vigorous and active. Each generation has brought its own context to the controversy, even where the basic principles and preoccupations have remained remarkably consistent. Questions of scriptural interpretation, apostolic precedent, the nature and order of the priesthood, the value of celibacy to the faithful in practical and symbolic terms, and the desirability and attainability of a celibate priesthood feature as prominently in modern writing on the topic as they did in the literature

¹⁰ See chapter 5 below.

¹¹ M.J. Scheeben, *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (Mainz, 1931), pp. 543–6; *Code of Canon Law* (1983), c.1008; see also John Paul II, *Da Vobis*, 25 March 1992 c.29; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Zur Gemeinschaft Gerufen, die Kirche heute verstehen* (Freiburg, 1991), pp. 98ff.

of the medieval and early modern periods. The contributions of each era to the debate rapidly became part of the corpus of material available to successive generations, as the history of clerical celibacy was remodelled and reworked in light of contemporary pressures and emergent concerns. Critics of obligatory clerical celibacy in the eleventh century, for example, provided evangelical polemicists in the sixteenth century with a vocabulary and framework for an assault upon the papal church and its laws, and the lexicon of Reformation debate was to shape the content and approach of nineteenth century controversy. But more immediate, personal, or local concerns could also intrude into the debate. The radical rhetoric of Peter Damian in defence of a specific image and form of church and clergy, the proclivities and preoccupations of princes and popes, the turmoil that faced the clerical estate in post-revolutionary France, and the personal concerns of individual authors have all done much to shape the historical controversy.

English-language writing on the history of clerical celibacy continues to be dominated by the work of the nineteenth century American author, Henry Charles Lea. Despite the opening assertion that 'it has been my intention to avoid polemics', Lea's work remained determinedly critical of the law of celibacy in particular, and indeed of the Catholic church more generally. It remains, however, the starting point for many modern investigations of the subject. His *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy* was, perhaps, the product of Lea's outlook and environment. Philadelphia in the civil war era was a city with a large Catholic immigrant population, and one in which the position of the church was already hotly disputed. The priest William Hogan had been excommunicated after falling foul of the bishop, Henry Conwell, in the 1820s, but resurfaced after two marriages and a stint on the public lecture tour, putting his criticisms of the church into print in the middle decades of the century in strident criticisms of the history of 'popery', and its pillars, auricular confession and monasticism.¹² Perhaps encouraged by the atmosphere in the city, Lea the publisher became Lea the historian, and turned his energies to the history of the Christian church and canon law.¹³ It was, he believed, in the history of its laws that the nature of an institution was best understood, and this principle guided the composition of Lea's massive *History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, and the later *History of the Inquisition in Spain*. The first edition of the *History*

¹² W. Hogan, *A Synopsis of Popery as It was and Is* (Hartford 1847) and *Auricular Confession and Popish Nunneries* (2 vols, Hartford 1847).

¹³ E. Sculley Bradley, *Henry Charles Lea. A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1931); E. Peters, 'Henry Charles Lea 1825–1909', in H. Damico and J. Zavadil (eds), *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies in the Formation of a Discipline. Volume One: History* (New York, 1995), pp. 89–100; J.M. O'Brien, 'Henry Charles Lea: The Historian as Reformer', *American Quarterly*, 19 (1967): 104–113; see also W. Ullmann's historical introduction to the Harper Torchbook edition of *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (1969).

of *Sacerdotal Celibacy* was printed in 1867, and, for all its flaws, was based upon extensive research in the primary sources, including the newly available volumes of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. Indeed Lea, responding to his critics, asserted the primacy of such materials over the subjective interpretations that were presented in recent writing, and defended his decision to present the facts as he found them, rather than engaging in the polemic that had characterised the mid-century debates.¹⁴ The *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy* was an account of the theory and practice of clerical celibacy across a broad chronological sweep from the primitive church to the Christianity of Lea's own day, drawing upon the laws of the church, the criticisms of its opponents, and a range of authoritative and more minor sources that lent substance to the narrative and colour to his criticisms. The history of clerical celibacy, through Lea's pen, was presented as a history of the expansion of an institution, a history of decay and decline, and a history of ecclesiastical immovability in the face of clerical immorality. The Catholic church, he concluded, had long been in error in its insistence that a priest must live in celibacy, and although radical change was necessary, it was not, in any likelihood, imminent.

Lea's sense that the sources should be allowed to speak for themselves has parallels in the work of the Hungarian theologian Augustin de Roskovány, although it is immediately apparent that the sources in question spoke with little unanimity on the subject of clerical celibacy. Roskovány, bishop of Neutra, had compiled a massive collection of 'monumenta' and literature devoted to the history of clerical celibacy, from which he adduced that the law of the church had its origins in the age of the apostles. For each era in the history of the church, a list was provided of works and commentaries written in favour of, or against, the law of celibacy, in a summary of scholarly and popular literature that ran into the thousands. Roskovány's compilation amounts to an extensive if not exhaustive bibliography for the history of clerical celibacy until the late nineteenth century, and despite its flaws and shortcomings, the weight of the volumes alone is testimony to the capacity of the subject to inspire debate and controversy. It is possible to chart through its pages, for example, the rising tide of criticism and complaint in the sixteenth century as the evangelical assault upon the laws and traditions of the medieval church sought to erode the edifice of half a millennium of clerical celibacy, while Catholic churchmen and propagandists mounted a spirited defence of the necessity and narrative of the discipline. In Roskovány's eyes, the sources that he presented exposed the roots of the law of celibacy in the precedent of the primitive church; for Lea those same sources provided evidence of disunity, innovation, and infidelity in Catholic history.

¹⁴ O'Brien, 'Henry Charles Lea', 108–10.

These themes of tradition and innovation have continued to guide modern scholarship on the history of clerical celibacy. The battleground, and indeed the armoury, was still remarkably similar nearly a century after the publication of Lea's work. Georg Denzler, in his *Das Papsttum und der Amstzolibat* (1973) promised an annotated bibliography of papal laws and literature that would correct some of the misconceptions and misrepresentations that had marred the works of Lea and Roskovány. Again, it was argued, the intention was to allow the sources to speak for themselves. But Denzler clearly regarded clerical celibacy as a post-apostolic innovation, and one that had done untold damage to the morality and reputation of the Catholic church. There was no biblical warrant, he suggested, for the assumption that celibacy was necessary to the fulfilment of the obligations of Christian ministry, even if such a ministry were taken to require some form of ritual purity. The law of celibacy, as the second part of the work was clearly intended to prove, was imposed at the instigation of the papal, not the primitive church, and the repeated efforts that were necessary to enforce the discipline were testimony to the dangers inherent in such innovation.¹⁵ Jean Paul Audet, in his study of the *Structures of Christian Priesthood*, argued that a married priesthood was an accepted aspect of the life of the church well beyond the apostolic era, undermined only by the false equation of holiness with chastity that characterised the thought of the early Christian centuries. Clerical celibacy was the natural consequence of the assumption that abstinence presented a path to purity, but this was not, he argued, a natural assumption. To permit clerical marriage would be to restore the discipline and tradition of the church of the apostles. Roger Gryson, similarly, took issue with the 'apostolic origins' thesis, arguing that it was in a negative, and flawed, view of sexuality in which the origins of the law of celibacy were to be found. Such attitudes, he suggested, came from outside Christianity, setting the discipline of the church on a collision course with the views on marriage contained in scripture and apostolic tradition.¹⁶

The evolution of the law of celibacy in the primitive church and beyond has continued to command substantial attention. By far the most comprehensive contribution to the modern analysis of the legislation is Martin Boelens' *Die Klerikerehe in der Gesetzgebung der Kirche unter besonder Berücksichtigung der Strafe*, from which obligatory celibacy

¹⁵ G. Denzler, *Das Papsttum und der Amstzolibat. Erster Teil: Die Zeit bis zur Reformation; Zweiter Teil: Von der Reformation bis in die Gegenwart* (Papste und Papsttum, Band 5 I, II: Stuttgart, 1973, 1976).

¹⁶ Audet, *Mariage et celibat*; Gryson, *Les Origines*; for an assertion of the 'apostolic origins' thesis, heavily informed by Bickell's nineteenth-century work, see H. Deen, *Le Celibat des pretres dans les premiers siecles de l'Eglise* (Paris, 1969).

emerges as a harsh discipline, subject to vigorous enforcement, but based upon erroneous assumptions about the relationship between celibacy, purity, and sacramental function.¹⁷ Samuel Laeuchli's study of the Council of Elvira did much to re-establish the place of the fourth century synod in the history of clerical celibacy, but also argued that the imposition of sexual discipline upon the clergy was not simply a reflection of ascetic trends in Christian and non-Christian thought, but a manifestation of the determination of the church in Spain to exercise and extend its authority.¹⁸ A rather longer chronological sweep is taken in Charles Frazee's account of the 'Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church', which encompassed not only the legislation of the fourth century, but also the vigorous attempts to impose clerical celibacy in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries.¹⁹ The importance of this latter period, long recognised in the more polemical histories of clerical celibacy, has received rather more even-handed analysis and interpretation in recent studies of the medieval reforming popes, and the church as a whole. Vacandard's study of the early history of clerical celibacy encouraged a reappraisal of the discipline of the medieval church, and exerted a profound influence over Augustin Fliche's investigation of the so-called *Reforme Gregorienne*.²⁰ The most lucid study of the literature on marriage and celibacy in the 'Gregorian' era remains Anne Llewellyn Barstow's *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy*, but understanding of the priorities and scope of the reforms has been further enhanced by more recent contributions, particularly the series of essays contained in Michael Frassetto's *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*.²¹ The breadth and depth of debate over the issue is here immediately apparent, ranging from questions of cultic purity and monastic spirituality, to the history of

¹⁷ M. Boelens, *Die Klerikerehe in der Gesetzgebung der Kirche unter besonder Berücksichtigung der Strafe: Eine rechtsgeschichtliche bis zum Jahre 1139* (Paderborn, 1968); see also Boelens, 'Die Klerikerehe in der kirchlichen Gesetzgebung zwischen den Konzilien von Basel und Trent, *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* 138 (1969): 62–81; M. Dortel-Claudot, 'Le Pretre et le Mariage: Evolution de la legislation canonique des Origines au XIIe Siecle', *L'Année Canonique*, 17 (1973): 319–44.

¹⁸ S. Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: the Emergence of canon law at the synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia, 1972).

¹⁹ C.A. Frazee, 'The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church', *CH* 41 (1972).

²⁰ A. Fliche, *La reforme gregorienne* (Paris and Louvain, 1924–37).

²¹ A.L. Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy, The Eleventh Century Debates* (Lewiston, NY, 1982); M. Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York and London, 1998). See also, J. Brundage, 'Sexuality, Marriage and the reform of Christian Society in the thought of Gregory VII', *Studia Gregoriana*, 14 (1991): 69–73; F. Liotta, *La Continenza dei chierici nel pensiero canonistico classico da Graziano a Gregorio IX* (Milan, 1971).

doctrine, canon law, and the understanding of both marriage and clerical status in medieval society. The assertion that the origins of the law of celibacy lie outside the first Christian centuries has certainly sharpened appreciation of the Gregorian reforms, and positioned the debates over clerical celibacy in this period more firmly within their wider context.

Images of clerical celibacy as ideal, clerical celibacy as tradition, and clerical celibacy as obligation have continued to shape writing on the subject throughout its history. Attempts to locate the origins of the modern discipline in the constraints of Levitical law, the model of the Old Testament priesthood, the life of Christ, or the practice of the apostles have positioned the consideration of Judaeo-Christian attitudes to sex, marriage, and the body as the starting point for debate. Speculation over the apostolic origins of clerical celibacy has secured for the primitive church, patristic writings, and the councils and synods of the first Christian centuries, a position of pre-eminent authority in discussions of the relationship between ministry and marriage in the church. The following chapter presents an overview of the texts and contexts that were to prove so critical to subsequent participants in the celibacy debate. The intention is not to attempt to prove that clerical celibacy is (or is not) 'apostolic' in its origins – the abundance of literature on this topic exposes both the heat of polemical controversy and the apparently irreconcilable differences in approach and outcome – but to establish the practices and precedents that were to be so central to later writers. The seemingly divergent traditions of East and West, on occasion sharpened and polemicalised, shared, in many respects, the same inheritance. In theory and in practice, the example of the Greek church has rarely been ignored in the Latin west, and recent scholarship, particularly that of Roman Cholij, has restored the analysis of clerical celibacy 'in east and west' as a necessary precursor to the understanding of either tradition. The basic assertion that the married clergy of the Greek church amount to a conclusive argument against the law of celibacy that obtains in the west is too simplistic, but still a commonplace in medieval and early modern debate, and indeed in some later scholarship. A consideration of the origins of Greek praxis, and perhaps particularly of the representation of that practice, has the potential to shed light upon the debates within the Latin church.²²

The forceful imposition of celibacy upon the Latin clergy in the eleventh century provided a more definite assertion of the principles that were argued to underpin the unmarried priesthood, presented a history of the early church in which ascetic values were tied to the service of the altar, and embedded the image of the celibate, rather than simply continent, priest in the minds of the faithful. The Gregorian era was significant in its own

²² See chapter 2 below.

right, but also within the narratives of clerical celibacy constructed in the early modern period and beyond. Viewed through the mirror of evangelical history writing, this period in the history of church emerged as a defining moment in the evolution of sacerdotalism and papal power, but also in the history of false faith and doctrine, innovation and invention, and the rise of Antichrist within the medieval Catholic church. The legislation and debates of the eleventh and twelfth centuries provided evangelical writers in the sixteenth century with a vocabulary, and a version of events that fitted their polemical and, at times, political needs.²³ Reformation dialectic on marriage, ministry, and the sacraments imbued the celibacy issue with a broader, and popular significance, but calls for change in the law had been articulated a century before the division of Christendom, in the polemical exchanges of the fifteenth century, particularly in the dialogue between Sagnet and Gerson.²⁴ It was with the advent of Protestantism, however, that the debate over clerical celibacy was conducted once again in a context in which a married priesthood was not only argued to be legitimate, but was rapidly becoming a practical reality in parts of the Latin church. Clerical marriage was for many a highly visible sign of the rejection of Catholic discipline and practice, for some a badge of confessional affiliation, and for evangelical polemicists both a solution to the ills of the church and a manifestation of the authority of biblical precedent over medieval practice.²⁵ The Catholic church was strident in its response, but the simple *anathema sit* at the Council of Trent did not bring to an end the debate over clerical marriage and celibacy.²⁶ Criticism and crisis were not, in themselves, sufficient grounds to change Catholic tradition, and political and pastoral pressures in the centuries that followed did not force a universal modification of the law of the church.²⁷

The debate over clerical celibacy and marriage had its origins in the early Christian centuries, and is still very much alive in the modern church.²⁸ The content and shape of controversy remain remarkably consistent, but

²³ See chapter 3 below.

²⁴ See chapter 4 below.

²⁵ See chapter 5 below.

²⁶ See chapter 6 below.

²⁷ See Conclusion below.

²⁸ Recent contributions to the debate have been both academic and more personal in tone and content. See, for example, C. Fairbank, *Hiding Behind the Collar* (Frederick, MD, 2002), and P. Jenkins, *Paedophiles and Priests* (Oxford, 2001), which use personal testimony in the consideration of what is portrayed as the moral crisis of modern Catholicism. Similarly, R. Schoenherr, *Goodbye Father: The Celibate Male Priesthood and the Future of the Catholic Church* (Oxford, 1997) examines the future of the celibate priesthood in the light of current challenges, but gives little attention to the historical origins of clerical celibacy. A fuller discussion of the modern debates may be found in Conclusion.

each age has selected and shaped the sources that underpin its narrative, and imbued an ancient issue with an immediacy and relevance. The basic question of whether, and why, continence is demanded of those who serve at the altar has been asked, and answered, in much the same terms, but the implications of that question, and of the answer given, have changed with each generation. Concluding his study of the history of sacerdotal celibacy, Henry Charles Lea expressed his hope that the Catholic church would modify the obligation to celibacy expected of its priests, but also his belief that in order for this to happen, ‘the traditions of the past must first be forgotten; the hopes of the future must first be abandoned’. However, the debate over clerical celibacy and marriage demonstrates the extent to which the traditions of the past have not and, on this issue, cannot, be forgotten. Continence and celibacy, tied to the sacramental and pastoral function of the priest, imposed by the law and authority of the church, has remained a historical issue. To ground the unmarried Christian ministry in the priesthood of the Levites was to lay claim to the traditions and history of the Hebrews. To debate the origins of clerical celibacy in the primitive church was to revisit the history of the apostles and Fathers. To represent clerical celibacy as innovation was to turn to the records of the councils and synods of the church and the pages of papal history. To defend the marriage of priests as the restoration of the church to its former purity was to reconstruct and rewrite the narrative of the medieval past. Celibacy and marriage are intensely personal and private matters, but in the context of the Christian priesthood, very public, and at times polemical statements. The commitment to a life of celibacy demanded of the Catholic clergy reaches to the heart of the individual, but also to the heart of the history of the church that he serves, and clerical celibacy continues to be defined in relation to Scripture, apostolic tradition, ecclesiastical history, and papal authority. ‘The Latin Church has wished, and continues to wish’, Pope John Paul II reminded the priests of the church, ‘referring to the example of Christ the Lord himself, to the apostolic teaching and to the whole Tradition that is proper to her, that all those who receive the sacrament of Orders should embrace this renunciation “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”’.²⁹

²⁹ Holy Thursday, 1979.

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY

‘If there is one faith, there must be one tradition’: Clerical Celibacy and Marriage in the Early Church

Central to the medieval and early modern debates surrounding the legitimacy and necessity of a celibate priesthood was the issue of whether the origins of clerical celibacy were to be found in the church of the apostles. The significance of biblical and apostolic precedent turned the example of the first centuries of the Christian era into a hunting ground for churchmen and protagonists on both sides of the debate. This focus is equally evident in modern scholarship, with recent studies of clerical celibacy returning to the theme of the inheritance of the primitive church, either as a necessary preamble to an understanding of the present and historical discipline, or as a topic in its own right.¹ As Stefan Heid has demonstrated, this approach is not without its problems; there are dangers in any attempt to read backwards from the modern discipline in an attempt to find an identical praxis in the early history of the church, not least if the apparent absence of a universal obligation to remain unmarried is read as an equal absence of any motivation or inclination towards a celibate clergy.² The assertion that there was no coherent and binding prohibition of marriage to the clergy of the early church becomes, in this approach, a validation of the assumption that compulsory celibacy in the modern church is the culmination of the erosion of clerical freedom by an

¹ See, for example, R. Chohij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster, 1988); C. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (San Francisco, 1990); Stefan Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church. The Beginnings of a Discipline of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West* (San Francisco, 2001); R. Gryson, ‘Dix ans de recherches sur les origines du célibat ecclésiastique’, *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 11 (1980): 164–5; Gryson, *les Origines du Celibat Ecclesiastique du Premier au Septieme Siecle* (Gembloux, 1970); L. Legrand, ‘St Paul and Celibacy’, in J. Coppens (ed.) *Priesthood and Celibacy* (Milan, Rome, 1972), pp. 427–50; E-F. Vacandard, *Celibat Ecclesiastique* (DTC 2, 2068–88); Vacandard, *Les Origines du Celibat Ecclesiastique* (Paris, 1905); Charles A. Frazee, ‘The origins of clerical celibacy in the Western Church’, *Church History*, 41 (1972): 149–67.

² Heid, *Celibacy*, p. 14.

increasingly institutional papal church in the centuries that followed.³ Such an approach has been substantially undermined by the contributions of Christian Cochini and Roman Cholij to the debate. Rather than searching for complete parallels between ancient and modern, Cholij and Cochini have suggested that the presence of a continent, if not unmarried, higher clergy in the primitive church requires that we ask a rather different question of the history of clerical celibacy. The issue, they suggest, is not whether a married man might be ordained as a priest (as many undoubtedly were) but whether enduring and exclusive continence was required of all those, married and unmarried, who entered higher orders.⁴ In whatever form the question is posed, however, it is clear that the precedent provided by the primitive church remains a critical component of the argument over the origins and history of clerical celibacy.

The debate over the ‘apostolic origins’ of clerical celibacy does not limit the chronology and polemical geography of the controversy to the immediate post-Christian era. It is, for example, evident that continence and celibacy had been prized among certain pre-Christian groups, and it was not just the primitive church, but also Jewish tradition that was used to provide fuel for subsequent debate and legitimation for later legislation. The Judaic precedent was to become particularly important as an argument for clerical celibacy developed from the principle that the Christian priesthood was a continuation of the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament.⁵ The requirement that the priests of the Old Law abstain from their wives during their period of service in the temple (Lev. 8:33) coupled with, for example, the expectation that the same demand was made of participants in a holy war, lent weight to the assertion that there was a link between sacred function, the encounter with the divine, and moral purity. Thus, for the duration of the revelation of God on Mount Sinai, Moses instructed that the Israelites refrain from sexual intercourse (Exodus 19:15). When David led his troops against the Philistines, the fact that they had abstained from intercourse permitted them to partake of the consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:4–6). Yahweh would abide with his troops, it was promised, if the holiness of the camp was maintained (Deut. 23:10–15).⁶ The obligations imposed in the Pentateuch were underpinned

³ This is the natural conclusion to be drawn from, for example, J-P Audet, *Mariage et Celibat dans le service pastoral de l’église* (Paris, 1967); A. Franzen, *Zölibat und Priesterehe in der Auseinandersetzung der Reformationszeit und der katholischen Reform des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Munster, 1969), and Gryson, *Les Origines*.

⁴ Cochini, *Apostolic Origins*; Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy*.

⁵ See, for example, Peter Lombard, *Libri Quatuor Sententiarum*, IV.d.24, 9 [PL 192].

⁶ The demand for purity extended beyond conjugal activity to include skin disease, contact with a corpse, and nocturnal emissions (Deut. 23:10, Lev. 15:16–19).

by the assumption that the priest occupied a sacred sphere, and reinforced the sense of separation between priest and layman. A priest was set apart from his people by divine mandate: 'Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine' (Num. 8:14; Deut. 10:8). This separateness extended to laws which constrained the marriage of priests. It was forbidden for a priest to marry a woman who had been divorced, or who had been a prostitute, 'for he is holy unto his God' (Lev. 21:7). The sons of Aaron were deemed to be ceremonially unclean and not permitted to handle the sacred elements at the tabernacle until they had washed in the evening (Lev. 22:4–6), and it was unlawful for an individual to approach the sacred in a state of uncleanness. The demands placed upon the priests, and the constructs of purity upon which they were based, established the requirements of the state of holiness in which the priests dwelled, separate from the life of the people. Entry to that state was made possible by ritual purification, usually through washing, which has led Gerard Sloyan to suggest that the purity required of the priestly legislation was not contingent upon ethical virtue; rather, Sloyan suggests, the ritually fit person is not the one who has abstained but the one on whose body or clothing there remains no trace of such engagement.⁷

However, these stringent regulations did not amount to a complete deprecation of the physical, nor to a total rejection of the value of marriage. The universal nature of marriage in Jewish custom, the assertion in Genesis that it was not good for man to be alone, and the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:28) suggested that marriage and procreation were part of the divine plan. Indeed, inherent in the limitations placed upon the marriage of the Levites, for example in the obligation that a priest marry a virgin of his own people (Lev. 21:13–14), was the existence of the married priesthood itself, in which the office of the priest was hereditary. Sexuality was thus undoubtedly an important element in human life, but one that was to be controlled in proximity to the holy. Sacred and sexual activities were regarded as mutually exclusive, but the expectation was that continence and ritual purity would be practised for a specific time. The abstinence required of a priest before he served at the Temple was temporary rather than perpetual; there was, it has been argued, no sense in which marriage itself was 'morally contaminating', and no sense in which virginity was expected to be a permanent state.⁸ The legacy provided to the

⁷ Gerard Sloyan, 'Biblical and patristic motives for the Celibacy of Church Ministers', in W. Bassett and Peter Huizing (eds), *Celibacy in the Church* (New York, 1972), pp. 13–29, especially pp. 15–16.

⁸ W. Phipps, *Clerical Celibacy. The Heritage* (London and New York, 2004), p. 9; there is, Phipps notes, no Hebrew word for perpetual virginity.