



# THE ORDER OF SAINT CHARBEL

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## THE MARRIED PRIESTHOOD AND CLERICAL CELIBACY

### **A Summary of Catholic Tradition both East and West**

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the issue of the married clergy in the Latin and Eastern Tradition from the time preceding the First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) until the Seventh Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.). Clerical celibacy was always part of Catholic Tradition and in the Latin Church it gradually gained ascendancy through subsequent General Councils with their corresponding canons. These canons dealt with the practical issues of a married clergy alongside a celibate clergy. A number of canons were written specifically to deal with various abuses — which were morally grave and scandalous as coming within the clergy. These abuses seemed to continually arise in the Church and thus were dealt with over several hundred years. However, the main body of canons were generally concerned with clerical jurisdiction, delegation and other organizational issues. By the time of the General Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) there were more than 500 canons which were considered as the primary laws of the Church.

The plan for this letter: **Part I** deals with the current teaching in the Church both East and West. **Part II** deals with the history and development of teaching as embodied in the official canons of the first General Council of the Church up to the Second General Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) Not all Councils are dealt with — only those whose canons seemed relevant and conclusive to the subject of the Married Priesthood. **Part III** is my conclusion.

### **PART I — The Catholic Church breathes with two lungs — the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches**

Pope John Paul II explained that the Second General Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) considered the large number of Canons from the six previous General Councils and local Synods to be a single body of ecclesiastical law *“and confirmed it as a ‘code’ for all of the Eastern Churches”* (John Paul II, *Sacri Canones*). At the time these developments of ecclesiastical discipline were debated — the Roman Pontiffs had always desired to maintain two separate disciplines. Pope John Paul II expresses the mind of the Church in this marvellous phrase: *“to promulgate two Codes: one for the Latin Church, the other for the Eastern Churches ... that the Church, gathered by the one Spirit breathes, as it were, with the two lungs of East and West, and burns with the love of Christ, having one heart, as it were, with two ventricles”* (Pope John Paul II, *Sacri Canones*). There is more significance to this concept than what meets the eye at first glance. For instance — this means that Sacred Tradition is composed of both elements — the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches.

Among the Eastern Churches, there are five traditions: Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinopolitan. The Second Vatican Council affirmed the complementary pluralism of such a rich diversity of Eastern liturgical forms and discipline: *“the diversity of the Churches united together demonstrates in a very clear fashion the catholicity of the undivided Church”* (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

### **Clerical Celibacy and the Married Priesthood**

The Second Vatican Council summarized the teaching of the Church. The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1990 have codified the Eastern tradition. We begin our journey with two important Scriptural citations:

Saint Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus:

*"It behoveth, therefore, a bishop to be blameless, married once only, sober, prudent, of good behaviour, chaste, given to hospitality, a teacher, not given to wine, no striker, but gentle, pacific, disinterested, but one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all chastity — for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he govern the Church of God? — not a neophyte, lest, being puffed up with pride, he fall into judgment of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good testimony of them who are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:3-7)*

*I left thee in Crete ... that thou shouldest ordain elders in every city, as I also appoint thee; if any be blameless, married once only, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly — for a bishop must be without crime, as the steward of God; not arrogant, not subject to anger, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but given to hospitality, a lover of goodness, prudent, just, pious, continent, embracing the true doctrine as it has been taught, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:6-9)*

Vatican Council II highlighted the two traditions:

*"It is true that it [celibacy] is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the primitive Church [1Tim. 3:2-5; Titus 1:6] 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 practiced 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." (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 16)*

Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO — 1995 Latin-English edition)

**CCEO — Canon 373:** *"Clerical celibacy chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and highly suited to the priesthood is to be greatly esteemed everywhere, according to the tradition of the entire Church; likewise, the state of married clerics, sanctioned in the practice of primitive Church and in the eastern Churches through the ages, is to be held in honour."*

**CCEO — Canon 374:** *"Clerics, celibate as well as married, should shine forth with the splendour of chastity; it is for particular law to establish suitable means to attain this end."*

**CCEO — Canon 375:** *"Married clerics are to offer an outstanding example to other Christian faithful in conducting family life and in educating children."*

**CCEO — Canon 376:** *"The praiseworthy common life among celibate clerics is to be fostered, insofar as possible, so that they may be mutually helped in cultivating the spiritual and intellectual life and may be able to collaborate more effectively in the ministry."*

**CCEO — Canon 180:** *"In order for a person to be considered suitable for the episcopate, he must: (1) be outstanding in solid faith, good morals, piety, zeal for souls and prudence; (2) have a good reputation; (3) not be bound by a marriage bond; (4) be at least thirty-five years old; (5) be constituted in the order of presbyter for at least five years; hold a doctorate or licentiate or at least have*

*expertise in some sacred science.”*

**CCEO — Canon 285:** *“In order for a presbyter to be named pastor it is necessary that he be of good morals, sound doctrine, zealous for souls, endowed with prudence and the other virtues and qualities required by law in order to fulfil the parochial ministry in a praiseworthy manner. (2) If the presbyter is married, good morals are required in his wife and his children who live with him. (3) ...”*

**CCEO — Canon 390:** *“(1) Clerics have the right to suitable support and to receive a just remuneration for carrying out the office or function committed to them; in the case of married clerics, remuneration must be adequate for the support of their families, unless this has been otherwise sufficiently provided. (2) They also have the right that there be provided for themselves as well as for their families, if they are married, suitable pension funds, social security as well as health benefits. In order for this right to be put into practice effectively, clerics are obliged on their part to contribute to the fund mentioned in canon 1021,(2) in accord with the norm of particular law.”*

**CCEO — Canon 769:** *“The authority who admits a candidate to sacred ordination should obtain: (1) ... (2) if the candidate is married, a certificate of marriage and the written consent of his wife; (3) ... (6).”*

## **PART II — History of the Teaching as it developed through the Canons of the first seven General Councils of the Church.**

It is helpful to look at some of this history in order to see some of the precedent and scenarios which so occupied the Bishops in the early Church. The purpose for the exposure is to simply show that the married clergy were a reality in the life of the faithful at the grass-roots level.

The following extracts are taken from the **Volume VII** of the large collection: *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. I have highlighted the Canons relating to this topic:

### **The Council of Ancyra (314 A.D.)**

**The capital of Galatia during the time of the Emperors Constantine and Licinius. About 12 Bishops were present. However, being so few in number, they represented nearly all of Syria and Asia Minor. Thus this Council had considerable weight. It is primarily known for having to deal with the lapsed Christians after the persecution ended. Many canons dealt with this subject.**

**Canon 10:** *“They who have been made deacons, declaring when they were ordained that they must marry, because they were not able to abide so, and who afterwards have married, shall continue in their ministry, because it was conceded to them by the bishop. But if any were silent on this matter, undertaking at their ordination to abide as they were, and afterwards proceeded to marriage, these shall cease from the diaconate” (page 67).*

The reason for this Canon was the example cited by the commentator Van Espen — when two candidates for the Diaconate were presented for ordination — one candidate protested that he intended to get married — the other candidate was silent. After ordination, both deacons entered into marriage — how was this matter to be resolved? This Canon is also remarkable in that it allows for marriage after ordination for a deacon or priest.

**Van Espen Commentary on Canon 10:** *“The synod ruled that he who had made protestation at his ordination should remain in his ministry ‘because of the license of the bishop,’ that is that he might contract matrimony after the reception of the diaconate. With regard to him who kept silence the*

synod declares that he should cease from his ministry. The resolution of the synod to the first question shows that there was a general law which bound the deacons to continence; but this synod judged it meet that the bishops for just cause might dispense with this law, and this license or dispensation was deemed to have been given by the bishop if he ordained him after his protestation at the time of his ordination that he intended to be married, because he could not remain as he was; giving by the act of ordination his tacit approbation. Moreover from this decision it is also evident that not only was the ordained deacon allowed to enter but also to use matrimony after his ordination” (page 67).

Later, at the Council of Trullo (Quinisext) in 692 A.D. it was decided in Canon 6 that marriage after ordination would be allowed only if the candidate for ordination had made known his intention to marry at the time of his ordination. The commentary reads: *allows a deacon and even a presbyter to marry after ordination and continue in his ministry, provided at the time of his ordination he had in the presence of witnesses declared his inability to remain chaste or his desire to marry.*” (page 364).

## The General Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)

**This is the first General Council of the Church. The Emperor Constantine was in power at the time. Pope Silvester was on the Throne of Saint Peter. There were 318 Bishops assembled together. They formulated 80 canons. Their purpose was to hand on the Deposit of Faith with honesty and in an integral fashion and to condemn the Arian Heresy which directly attacked Nature and Divinity of Christ. The Nicene Creed is the major fruit of this General Council.**

**Canon 66:** “... If any priest or deacon shall put away his wife [ *a long list of possible causes is given here: for fornication; for external goods; change her for another; out of lust; to contract a second marriage* ]... let him be deposed ... But if anyone falsely defames his wife ... he shall be deposed if a cleric.”

**Canon 78:** “Of presbyters and deacons who have fallen only once into adultery ... all the while having their own wives ...”

This General Council also dealt with many issues related to the role and functioning of Bishops, Priests and Deacons including jurisdiction and delegation of authority. The problems surrounding the married clergy were forced upon the Council Fathers because of the repercussions generated by immorality among the clergy. The above two Canons highlight the fact. Thus the Council dealt with proposed actions concerning clerical celibacy. The commentary by Hefele highlights a very important concept in favour of a married clergy. He brings up the important intervention by a well respected Egyptian Bishop who offers his intervention into the debate on the subject. It is worthwhile to read the relevant parts of his commentary:

**Hefele commentary on the “Proposed Action on Clerical Celibacy”:** “Socrates, Sozomen, and Gelasius [Historians] affirm that the Synod of Nicaea, as well as that of Elvira (canon 33), desired to pass a law respecting celibacy. This law was to forbid all bishops, priests and deacons (Sozomen adds subdeacons), who were married at the time of their ordination to continue to live with their wives. But, say these historians, the law was opposed openly and decidedly by Paphnutius, bishop of a city of the Upper Thebais in Egypt, a man of high reputation, who had lost an eye during the persecution under Maximian. He was also celebrated for his miracles, and was held in so great respect by the Emperor, that the latter often kissed the empty socket of the lost eye. Paphnutius declared with a loud voice, *‘that too heavy a yoke ought not to be laid upon the clergy; that marriage and married intercourse are of themselves honourable and undefiled; that the Church ought not to be injured by an extreme severity, for all could not live in absolute continency: in this way (by not prohibiting married intercourse) the virtue of the wife would be much more certainly preserved (viz: the wife of a clergyman, because she might find injury elsewhere, if her husband withdrew from her married intercourse). The intercourse of a man with his lawful wife may also be a*

*chaste intercourse. It would therefore be sufficient, according to the ancient tradition of the Church, if those who had taken holy orders without being married were prohibited from marrying afterwards; but those clergymen who had been married only once as laymen, were not to be separated from their wives (Gelasius adds, or being only a reader or cantor).'* This discourse of Paphnutius made so much the more impression because he had never lived in matrimony himself, and had had no conjugal intercourse. Paphnutius, indeed, had been brought up in a monastery, and his great purity of manners had rendered him especially celebrated. Therefore the Council [Nicaea] took the serious words of the Egyptian bishop into consideration, stopped all discussion upon the law, and left to each cleric the responsibility of deciding the point as he would." (page 51)

### **The Council of Gangra (Armenia)**

**This Council took place after the Council of Nicaea and before 381 A.D. The Emperor in power was Constantine. It was held under Papal authority and was primarily involved with the condemnation of Bishop Eustathius of Sebaste in Armenia. This Bishop held many heretical opinions. His followers also opposed the veneration of the Martyrs and maintained that married persons could not be saved. Thus they renounced marriage as evil and their wives separated from their husbands and refused subjection to their husbands — symbolized by cutting their hair short. The conjugal union of husband and wife was considered as unlawful. They required that women dress in male clothing. They rejected the married clergy and maintained their own unmarried clergy with separate services.**

**Canon 4:** "If any one shall maintain, concerning a married presbyter, that is not lawful to partake of the oblation [Holy Eucharist] when he offers it, let him be anathema."

This Canon clearly indicates the married priests were meant to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass just like the celibate priests. This clear teaching is a result of the Canons and teaching of the earlier Council of Nicaea.

**Hefele commentary on Canon 4:** "As is well known, the ancient Church, as now the Greek Church, allowed those clergy who married before their ordination to continue to live in matrimony." (page 93)

### **The Council of Carthage (African Code of Canons) 419 A.D.**

**There were 217 Bishops assembled at Carthage which was was formerly the head of all of Africa. There were 16 Councils held here and many canons were promulgated. Al together, the African code of canons comprised 138 canons.**

**Canon 3:** "Aurelius the bishop said: 'When at the past council the matter on continency and chastity was considered, those three grades, which by a sort of bond are joined to chastity by their consecration, to wit bishops, presbyters, and deacons, so it seemed that it was becoming that the sacred rulers and priests of God as well as the Levites, or those who served at the divine sacraments, should be continent altogether, by which they would be able with singleness of heart to ask what they sought from the Lord: so that what the apostles taught and antiquity kept, that we might also keep.'"

This canon favoured celibacy and linked it to the worthiness of the prayer offered by God's ministers. The Bishops of this Council believed that the efficacy of the Sacraments was dependant upon the continency of the clergy. That this alone fostered the singleness of heart in the clergy.

**Canon 4:** "Faustinus, the bishop of the Potentine Church, in the province of Picenum, a legate of

the Roman Church, said: ‘It seems good that a bishop, a presbyter, and a deacon, or whoever perform the sacraments, should be keepers of modesty and should abstain from their wives ...’

**Canon 25:** “Aurelius, the Bishop, said: ‘We add, most dear brethren, moreover, since we have heard of the incontinency of certain clerics, even of readers, towards their wives, it seemed good that what had been enacted in divers councils should be confirmed, to wit, that subdeacons who wait upon the Holy Mysteries, and deacons, and presbyters, as well as bishops according to former statutes, should abstain from their wives, so that they should be as though they had them not: and unless they so act, let them be removed from office. But the rest of the clergy are not to be compelled to this, unless they be of mature age. And by the whole Council it was said: ‘What your holiness has said is just, holy, and pleasing to God, and we confirm it.’” (page 454)

It is clear from these canons from the Council of Carthage — which is of the Latin Church (the West) — that the western Bishops held strongly the tradition that the married clergy must abstain from conjugal union with their wives if they were planning to celebrate the Holy Mysteries — especially the Holy Mass. This was not the case for the Eastern Bishops who — for the married clergy — upheld the dignity of marriage and conjugal union simply.

### **The Council of Trullo (Quinisext Council) in 692 A.D.**

**This Council was called by Emperor Justinian II. It was attended by 211 Eastern Bishops. The West was virtually not represented. This Council promulgated 102 canons but never intended that they be accepted by the Western Churches. These canons were not initially ratified by the Pope Sergius. However, later Pope Hadrian I accepted all those canons and ascribed them to the Sixth General Council.**

**Canon 6:** “Since it is declared in the apostolic canons that of those who are advanced to the clergy unmarried, only lectors and cantors are able to marry; we also, maintaining this, determine that henceforth it is in nowise lawful for any subdeacon, deacon or presbyter after his ordination to contract matrimony but if he shall have dared to do so, let him be deposed. And if any of those who enter the clergy, wishes to be joined to a wife in lawful marriage before he is ordained subdeacon, deacon, or presbyter, let it be done.”

As mentioned earlier, this Canon 6 is interesting because it annuls a previous Canon 10 of the Council of Ancyra (314 A.D.). Thus marriage after ordination was stopped unless there was a declared intention to marry at the time of ordination. The commentary brings this out: “*Aristenus points out how this canon annuls the tenth canon of Ancyra, which allows a deacon and even a presbyter to marry after ordination and continue in his ministry, provided at the time of his ordination he had in the presence of witnesses declared his inability to remain chaste or his desire to marry.*” (page 364)

**Canon 13:** “Since we know it to be handed down as a rule of the Roman Church [West] that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or presbyterate should promise no longer to cohabit with their wives, we, preserving the ancient rule and apostolic perfection and order, will that the lawful marriages of men who are in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives nor depriving them of their mutual intercourse at a convenient time. Wherefore, if anyone shall have been found worthy to be ordained subdeacon, or deacon, or presbyter, he is by no means to be prohibited from admittance to such a rank, even if he shall live with a lawful wife. Nor shall it be demanded of him at the time of his ordination that he promise to abstain from lawful intercourse with his wife: lest we should affect injuriously marriage constituted by God and blessed by His presence, as the Gospel says: ‘What God hath joined together let no man put asunder’; and the Apostle says: Marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled”; and again, ‘Art thou bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed’. But we know, as they who as-

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sembled at Carthage (with a care for the honest life of the clergy) said, that subdeacons, who handle the Holy Mysteries, and deacons, and presbyters should abstain from their consorts according to their own course (of ministration). So that what has been handed down through the Apostles and preserved by ancient custom, we too likewise maintain, knowing that there is a time for all things and especially for fasting and prayer ...”

The Council of Trullo (Quinisext) in the Eastern tradition — marks a further divergence between the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches. The Latin Church (West) maintained the need for the married Deacon and married Priest to promise that they will no longer live with their wives (Canon 13). The Bishop’s of this Council — all Eastern Bishops — chose to maintain firm in their adherence to the ancient rule of apostolic perfection — not dissolving lawful marriages and not prohibiting conjugal union of husband and wife. The Bishops only recommended that the Priests abstain from conjugal union when they are offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

### **PART III Conclusion**

#### **My purpose in writing this letter**

In tracing some of the history of this subject — it is clear that the first three centuries were where most of the difficulties were encountered. After that, the Latin Church became more settled in its determination that celibacy would become the norm. In the Eastern Churches, the married clergy were maintained along with the celibate clergy. A good summary is given in the “Excursus on the Marriage of the Clergy”:

*“Marriage was no impediment to ordination even as a Bishop; and Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, equally with other men, were forbidden to put away their wives under pretext of religion. The case was different when a man was unmarried at the time of his ordination. Then he was held to have given himself wholly to God in the Office of the Holy Ministry, and he was forbidden to take back from his offering that measure of his cares and his affections which must necessarily be given to the maintenance and nurture of his family. In short, the married man might be ordained, but with a few exceptions no man was allowed to marry after ordination.” (page 365)*

This principle was something good and part of the Plan of God for His Church — however, human weakness and a lack of virtue in some Bishops, Priests and Deacons caused the interventions by the Council Fathers to establish suitable corrections in the form of sacred canons. It was not because of a failure of the married priesthood in principle — rather it was because of the immoral abuse and scandal provoked by some of the clergy which forced the issue.

In the West, even before the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) — the issue was discussed in Spain at the Council of Elvira (305 A.D.) where it was decided that all the clergy of Spain ought to be celibate. This marked the beginning of the development of an official division between East and West on this disciplinary matter.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

1. In the early Church: Deacons and Priests who were married: they must have been married before Ordination and not afterwards (historically, with a few exceptions). If any were married after Ordination they were deposed from their ministry.
2. In the early Church: each candidate was free to decide his vocation. The married clergy were completely free to live a normal conjugal union with the wife.
3. In the early Church: the married Bishops and Priests were permitted to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the same way as the celibate clergy.

4. In the twentieth century: the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, promulgated by Pope John Paul II establishes the link with Sacred Tradition — in the Eastern Churches and maintained over many centuries. These canons are normative for the Eastern Churches.
5. The Order of Saint Charbel — although in the Western Tradition — when approved by the Apostolic See is capable of being one of the instruments of God to bring forth the unity between East and West. What better way to bring about unity than through the Priesthood — both married and celibate — embracing the diversity of rites and traditions under the umbrella of the Order's Rule and Constitutions.

### Concerning the Order of Saint Charbel

The Order embraces the traditional teaching and discipline of the celibate Priesthood in the Latin tradition alongside the married Clergy of the Eastern tradition — both to be valued and promoted through the Rule and Constitutions — Part V which codifies the regulations for the Order. Currently, this is a work in progress. In the next edition of the Rule and Constitutions — Part V will be included as part of the Order's essential identity. All of this is subject to the approval of the Roman Pontiff.

Finally, along with the Founder and Moderator of the Order — Mr. William Kamm it is to be hoped that the Holy See will look favourably upon the Rule and Constitutions — granting approval and right to exist as a new form of Consecrated Life (Canon 605). We entrust the charism of the Order of Saint Charbel to the Pope for his pastoral care.

May all who read these pages gain an insight into the richness of Sacred Tradition — both East and West.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ Malcolm L. Broussard, Jr.*

+ Bishop Malcolm L. Broussard, Jr.  
General Superior

Signed and Sealed: July 3, 2003

