

Celibacy: A Watershed of Religious Complacency and Hypocrisy under International Law

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Celibacy is a sacred vow connected with spiritual discipline and moral integrity, with practices dating into antiquity. In the modern era, however, there is intense scrutiny and widespread disapproval of the practice, following the emergence of hypocritical conduct and institutional complacency within several religious bodies. There is now a growing rejection of compulsory clerical celibacy as unscriptural and contrary to human nature. In the modern era, society has witnessed an expanding psychological discourse on, and growing concern about, the ethical implications of enforced celibacy, with reported cases of sexual abuse and scandal within religious institutions. This paper adopts the doctrinal method of inquiry, and it has revealed that celibacy evolved not merely as a personal spiritual discipline, but as a structural instrument within organized religion, becoming an emblem of authority and moral superiority — one that has now given rise to contradictions and hypocrisies. This paper submits that forced celibacy cannot stand the test of time, as it violates all human laws of survival. It is the suggestion of this paper that the priesthood in all religions ought to be practiced freely rather than under coercion. The restriction of sexual activity for priests negates a person's rights to freedom of thought, religion, and procreation as guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), among other instruments. Conclusively, perpetrators of concealed hypocrisy in religion are victims of institutional dogmatism, and the sooner compulsory celibacy is jettisoned, the better for religious adherents and for human rights.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Human Rights, Celibacy, UDHR, Religious Institutions, ICCPR.</p>
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Introduction

Celibacy is an abstinence from sexual activity or relationships such as marriage. It is a practice most closely connected with the religious commitments of individuals. It involves the denial of sexual pleasure for the sake of purity of the soul, regarded as a means of drawing closer to God.

Prominent religious organizations are known for this practice, notable among which are Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other traditional faiths. Particularly notorious in this practice within the Christian fold is the Roman Catholic Church, which observes clerical celibacy as an institutionalized canonical requirement for maintaining undivided loyalty and devotion to God — a practice visible in the Church as early as the twelfth century and still in force today, notwithstanding the revelations of reported abuses connected with the office of the priesthood.

Sexual scandals and the moral failure of the institution of celibacy within the Roman Catholic Church have given rise to serious concerns, in that the institution has been transformed from a symbol of holiness — the holy sanctuary of God's presence — into a source of abysmal disgrace, hypocrisy, and complacency within the system.

Under international law, celibacy has now raised a series of doubts concerning the freedom of religion as implicated in various human rights instruments. The imposition of celibacy as a prerequisite for entry into religious institutions undermines individual autonomy and the right to privacy.

Evolution of Celibacy in Religion

The origin of clerical celibacy in religion is traceable to ancient times, across various civilizations, as a means of

moral and physical control of sexual urges. The ability to subdue these urges was believed to prevent detachment from spiritual enlightenment and moral norms in the worship of God. Therefore, for the consolidation of power and intimacy with the Creator, one was expected to avoid the distractions associated with sexuality.

In early Christianity, celibacy was voluntarily chosen as a way of imitating Jesus Christ and in preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven. No known record connects Jesus with sexual activity; He remained celibate throughout His life, though He had many female companions — notably Mary Magdalene, who was prominent in the support of His ministry, followed Him to the place called Golgotha¹ where He was crucified, and was the first to witness His resurrection. Other female companions of Jesus included Joanna, the wife of King Herod's steward, Susanna, who also travelled with Jesus and supported Him financially, and Mary of Bethany, a close follower along with her sister Martha. These women were known as Jesus' women. They revered Jesus as a great teacher and master, yet He did not instruct them to remain celibate, nor did He require any of His twelve disciples to practice celibacy. Apostle Peter was the head of the disciples; he had a wife and children while remaining a disciple. Apostle Paul² chose celibacy as a preferred state of self-control to enable him to concentrate on God's word and mission, yet he did not mandate it as a norm for ecclesiastical work.

It was not until the fourth century that the issue of celibacy gained prominence, influenced by figures such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine, who viewed sexual abstinence as a prerequisite for holiness, believing that relations with women constituted a distraction from spiritual life. St. Augustine viewed celibacy as a higher calling than marriage and as a superior form of spiritual protection; however, he regarded marriage as honourable for the purpose of procreation. He frequently invoked the story of Mary and Martha³ as an illustration of the contrast between worldliness and holiness. To him, marriage was a worldly affair best avoided because it involved women. St. Augustine did not, however, deny the numerous temptations often associated with celibacy. Throughout this period, celibacy was not compulsory for priests in the Catholic Church.

It was in the twelfth century that clerical celibacy became mandatory. The Second Lateran Council required that every Roman Catholic priest forego marriage and sexual activity as a condition for participation in canonical

functions within the Church. This era marked the institutionalization of celibacy as a requirement for purity and ecclesiastical authority, also serving to control Church property and inheritance within Catholic society.

Other organizations, such as Hinduism, also practice celibacy in the pursuit of spiritual energy. In the ancient era, students and ascetics sought union with the divine. Buddhism also institutionalized celibacy through the monastic orders established by Gautama Buddha as early as the fifth century BCE. In these early traditions, the vows of chastity were an expression of complete detachment from sin and temptation, which were believed to emanate from sexual associations.

Within Judaism, between the second century BCE and the first century CE, the practice of celibacy among certain Jews was connected with the anticipation of a coming messianic age, which emphasized the purity of body and soul⁴.

Celibacy as such did not exist in Islam; marriage was essentially valued in the religion, although some mystics temporarily practiced celibacy as a form of discipline and closeness to God⁵. In African traditional religion, celibacy was observed for specific purposes: priests and diviners were expected to observe periods of sexual restraint, but this was neither a lifelong commitment nor a mark of devotion in the same sense.

Celibacy and International Law

The approach of international law to celibacy is grounded in the principles of fairness and equity, and in the freedom that is strongly emphasized in all international human rights instruments. The balance between religion and freedom, with respect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is the central concern of this discussion.

The experience of World War II led to the recognition of individuals as subjects of international law. International law could no longer remain silent on the affairs of humanity, positioning the human person as the very subject matter of legal regulation⁶. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR⁷) established the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This provision represents a balance between human freedom and belief, religion, and the manifestation of such beliefs. International law also guarantees the right to be free from coercion; therefore, the enforcement of celibacy upon adherents and the clergy in the form of compulsory clerical celibacy creates profound

¹Matthew 27:33.

²1 Corinthians 7:7–8, Holy Bible.

³Luke 10:38–42, Holy Bible.

⁴See generally Vermes, G. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. London, Penguin Classics, 2012.

⁵Ernst, C. *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Boston, Shambhala, 1997.

⁶Shaw, M.N., *International Law*. Cambridge University Press, 5th ed., 2005, p.232.

⁷See Article 18 of the UDHR.

conflicts with a person's right to privacy, autonomy, and mental health.

At this juncture, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides the foundation of equality, the right to life and liberty, and freedom from slavery and torture. The following provisions are particularly noteworthy:

- (i) Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the UDHR, without distinction of any kind, such as race, sex, religion, or national origin.⁸
- (ii) Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.⁹
- (iii) Everyone has the right to be free from slavery and servitude.¹⁰
- (iv) No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.¹¹

Therefore, the enforced abstinence from sexual life by reason of celibacy constitutes an erosion of one of the most essential aspects of human existence. Sexual health encompasses both physical and mental well-being. Sexual intercourse provides stress reduction, improved cardiovascular health, better sleep, a boosted immune system, lower blood pressure, and may even assist in reducing the risk of prostate cancer in men. A healthy sexual life for women can also be beneficial in increasing longevity, and in improving physiological and psychological well-being. A woman without a sexual partner is at greater risk of high blood pressure and poor sleep. Sexual activity provides orgasm, which is essential to the general well-being of women; it may relieve menstrual cramps through the release of endorphins and neurotransmitters. Studies also show that orgasm in women assists in maintaining oestrogen levels in menopausal women, reduces pelvic contractions, and increases immunoglobulin levels, thereby boosting the immune system.¹²

The deprivation of these sexual benefits by reason of celibacy amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of the Convention Against Torture¹³. The practice of celibacy is an Herculean task for adherents; and, while it may represent the highest form of self-sacrifice, the height of hypocrisy lies in the pretence surrounding this struggle — the secrecy, the moral duplicity, and the pervasive doubt that characterizes celibacy in religion.

⁸See Article 2(2) of the UDHR.

⁹See Article 3 of the UDHR.

¹⁰See Article 4 of the UDHR.

¹¹See Article 5 of the UDHR.

¹²See Lloyds Pharmacy Online:

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Celibacy

This human rights instrument is concerned with unlawful interference with one's privacy and guarantees the right to privacy¹⁴. In its Article 18, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is emphasized. In the light of this Covenant, celibacy must be a matter of personal choice and not a compulsory requirement to fulfil any institutional obligation. Against this backdrop, religious leaders and institutions that advocate celibacy as a path to spiritual enlightenment and freedom from worldliness, yet conceal internal operations riddled with scandal, violate the spirit of celibacy itself. Clerical celibacy has become a betrayal of all fundamental human rights requirements. Regrettably, the public defence of sacred vows of celibacy while privately desecrating those same vows is a widespread phenomenon within the Catholic Church. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in 2014, explicitly criticized the Vatican for the systemic protection of perpetrators of such misconduct and for failing to cooperate with investigations established to expose those responsible.

Remarkably, many Catholic priests have been found complicit in acts of infidelity. Theodore McCarrick, a high-profile cardinal, was found guilty by a Vatican tribunal in 2019 of sexual crimes against a minor, with numerous cases of sexual harassment and abuse of children within his congregation. Many priests and nuns of the Catholic Church have been engaged in child molestation, an act that has brought the institution of chastity within the Church into disrepute and infamy. The Vatican has, to some extent, denied that its celibacy requirement for priests is the root cause of the clerical sex abuse scandals that have engulfed the Church in Europe and America.

Though the Vatican publicly defended itself against the physical and sexual abuses recorded against its priests for decades, it has not consistently failed to sanction priests suspected of abuse. In many instances, however, it has responded merely by transferring them to other locations, or by asking them to take full responsibility and pray to God for forgiveness.

To this end, Pope Francis in 2018 acknowledged that sexual abuse was rampant within the Roman Catholic Church. The case of Fernando Karadima was one of the most shocking sexual scandals ever to rock the Catholic Church to its foundations. The abuse of minors by Karadima in Chile

<https://onlinedoctor.lloydspharmacy.com/uk/sexualhealthadvice/10-benefits-of-sex>.

¹³See Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984.

¹⁴Article 17, ICCPR.

became public in 2010. He had been accused of sexually abusing adolescent boys as early as 1984, and was found culpable; yet no action was taken against him for over two decades. When the matter eventually became public, the said priest was sent into retirement, apparently to frustrate further revelations that would have had negative consequences for the Church. The motivation behind the concealment of such a heinous offence for so long was testimony to the fact that the Catholic institution was desperate to preserve the outward sanctity of clerical celibacy, however compromised. It was ultimately through the efforts of concerned parishioners, following a series of petitions against the Church, that the scandal was made public in 2010.

The pattern of denial or concealment of allegations of sexual and other immoral conduct is not limited to the Catholic Church; it pervades other religions as well. Buddhist monasteries in Thailand and Sri Lanka have been accused of persistent silence and the internal transfer of offenders to other jurisdictions, rather than subjecting them to transparent investigation. Buddhist monks and nuns are required to observe strict brahmacharya as a core part of their spiritual training. Among the cases that could not be concealed are the following:

- Bat Nha Temple, USA: In 2022, a woman accused a Buddhist temple in Santa Ana, California, of fostering frequent sexual molestation of young girls.
- Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 2018: The leader of Shambhala International Community faced numerous allegations of sexual misconduct, ultimately leading to his removal from his duties.

The tradition of celibacy is already being undermined within the Buddhist world, as a growing number of monks and clergy are failing daily in their vows¹⁵. It was further reported that:

“Buddhist monks are expected to be paragons of virtue; and so, the various scandals involving clergymen acting in ways that violate their faith’s tenets come as a shock to believers.”

The manifestation of religious hypocrisy is visible in moral failure and in the institutions designed to preserve this path at the expense of truth and modern-day realities. The prioritization of doctrinal considerations over human dignity and truth erodes the foundations of self-confidence and self-determination. The culture of sanctified silence

breeds double loyalty, and such duplication defeats the ethical foundations of religious authority. Celibacy practice must therefore be made a subject of reconsideration.

From a sociological standpoint, as argued by Pierre Bourdieu, who viewed celibacy as a form of social death within a community — a life lived contrary to all natural reason — celibacy in the Church represents a social distinction between two classes: the celibate clergy and the lay faithful, whom he regarded as second-class. He viewed it as a structure that reproduces existing power dynamics and the Church’s hierarchy, maintaining a clergy-centred governance that resists all forms of reform¹⁶. He further argued that celibacy was an imposition of moral standards that serves the prestige of the institution rather than the spiritual well-being of adherents; within this structure, hypocrisy becomes inevitable, personal failure is concealed, and any criticism of the system may lead to persecution, thereby reinforcing complicity and silence on the subject¹⁷.

From a psychological perspective, compulsory celibacy is emotionally damaging to mental health. Celibacy typically leads to repressive sexual behaviour and guilt-driven self-deception, accompanied by compulsive dishonesty. This may cause monks and priests to externalize their struggles through the abuse of authority. Emotional detachment frequently forces them to blame others for their failings, retreating into hypocrisy as a means of surviving the rigidity of institutional frameworks. The theological justification used to cover the gaps created by abstinence from sexual activity — in the very face of scriptural uncertainty and ambiguity — typically leads to interpretive convenience: a reflection of a systemic refusal to confront the truth of human weakness.

It is the goal of international law to expose the hypocrisy inherent in the practice of enforced celibacy. For example, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has underscored the incompatibility between institutional secrecy and the imperatives of human rights protection. All offences committed under the guise of institutional secrecy and spiritual discipline would be regarded as violating moral principles as well as international legal standards, including the right to dignity and protection from degrading treatment. A celibate clergyman who sexually abuses a minor has violated the moral principles upon which his ministry is founded, as well as the laws guaranteeing the safety and protection of the child from exploitation. The Committee on the Rights of the Child¹⁸ has repeatedly criticized the Holy See for its failure to prevent and punish

¹⁵UCA News Reporter. Bangkok, May 27th, 2022, 6:07am GMT.

¹⁶Noite, P., International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2nd edition, 2015.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Convention on the Rights of the Child, came into force in 1989.

sexual abuse of minors committed by clergy. The Committee, through its 2014 report, which examined the atrocities carried out by celibate clergy, concluded that the institutional secrecy and reassignment of accused priests constitute systematic violations of the Convention that protects the child.

State Responsibilities in Protecting Human Lives

International law empowers states to ensure that every nation is free from those who violate the rights of the vulnerable. Rights violations that pervade the sphere of humanity — including within religious bodies, where commands are issued to individuals under the guise of soul purification for the purpose of reaching heaven — must be examined under the law.

The doctrine of due diligence obliges the state to employ a system that ensures careful investigation of reported matters, to prosecute offenders without bias, and to secure adequate remedies for injured parties. Any injury arising from a religious setting is actionable under the law, whether municipal or international.

The state must take all necessary steps to protect and ensure the rights of individuals without discrimination¹⁹. Every individual must be given equal treatment²⁰ and protection, irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, or other status.

This provision further emphasizes that, in the absence of sufficient legislative or other measures, states must strive to provide the required protections for humanity²¹ through appropriate legislation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) also provides that States Parties must take appropriate steps to prevent any form of discrimination against women²².

It is therefore the responsibility of states to examine the practice of religious celibacy in order to ascertain its safety and impact on the health and security of practitioners. For instance, a clergyman rendered mentally impaired through the depression and anguish associated with enforced celibacy could pose a threat to society at large, and the state has a duty to forestall such an outcome.

Celibacy and Liability under International Mechanisms

Although religious institutions are autonomous bodies, they are not immune from the scrutiny of international law. Human rights protection is a branch of international law. International law governs states and international

organizations; therefore, the relationship between individuals and organizations or institutions — whether in religion, armed conflict, or other non-governmental spheres — falls within the jurisdiction and purview of international law. It must be reiterated that one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations has been the development of international law to promote social justice and economic development for all sectors of society, including religious bodies.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has, over the years, developed numerous multilateral treaties throughout its history, with strong emphasis on human freedom in all areas of life. Under its humanitarian law, emphasis is also placed on the Geneva Conventions²³, affirming that human welfare must be held sacrosanct — especially for the civilian population and religious houses during armed conflicts or emergencies.

The Holy See — the central government of the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the Pope and situated in Vatican City — is recognized as a sovereign entity under international law and is mandated to cooperate with other nations on matters of human rights protection and religious freedom. International law does not, however, impose liability on individuals who voluntarily embrace celibacy as a personal choice or religious commitment. But where celibacy becomes a coercive measure, it constitutes a violation of human freedom to marry and to found a family. Within the Roman Catholic denomination, celibacy is a mandatory requirement for ordination to the priesthood. The context of liability arises not necessarily from the practice of celibacy itself, but from the deliberate actions or omissions of states or other international legal personalities — such as the Vatican — that prevaricate on matters of scandal connected with their clergy. As a unique entity that has ratified several United Nations human rights treaties, the Vatican bears the responsibility to monitor and implement its human rights obligations and to address crimes or misconduct by individual clergy that are attributable to the Holy See's strict adherence to untenable doctrines. It is disappointing that United Nations bodies have explicitly concluded that the institutional failure of human rights within the Catholic Church is a reflection of its doctrinal failures. On the question of accountability of religious bodies to international instruments, the case of *Grande Oriente d'Italia v. Italy* (2024)²⁴ confirmed that the state retains oversight functions when the rights of an individual are at stake within any religious body. Religious

¹⁹Article 2, ICCPR.

²⁰Article 26, ICCPR.

²¹Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), came into force in 1979.

²²See Article 1 of CEDAW.

²³<https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/geneva-conventions-1949>.

²⁴*Grande Oriente d'Italia v. Italy* (2024), European Court of Human Rights. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int>.

bodies are accountable to both domestic law and international law, which regulate all forms of exploitation. In the case of Ireland's child abuse²⁵ within the Catholic Church, the state, through its human rights mechanisms, assumed jurisdiction and justice was appropriately served through the Ryan Commission of Inquiry in 2009.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) also assumed jurisdiction in the case of *Fernández Martínez v. Spain* (2014), and it was held that the state has the *locus standi* to protect the religious freedom of individuals even in the face of the autonomy of religious bodies. The institutional complicity of concealing, intimidating, or persecuting whistle-blowers constitutes a gross violation of human rights. There is no immunity for religious sovereignty on the grounds of hypocrisy and enforced celibacy while concealing violations of moral and institutional norms by perpetrators.

Cases of Religious Hypocrisy in Celibacy

Across several religions in which celibacy is regarded as a form of purification or holy commitment for body and soul, a considerable degree of hypocrisy lies concealed. The following are documented examples:

- The Boston Archdiocese scandal of 2002 exposed John Geoghan, a priest convicted of the sexual abuse of children — a concealment that had spanned over a decade. He was found guilty and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.
- Paul Shanley, a priest in Boston, was found guilty of child rape and convicted in 2005.
- Marcial Maciel Degollado, a priest and founder of the Legionaries of Christ, was disciplined by the Vatican in 2006, following sustained pressure, for sexual abuse of seminarians.
- Gerald Francis Ridsdale, a priest in Australia, was convicted repeatedly between 1993 and 2017 for the serious sexual abuse of children, numbering into several hundreds.
- Hubert O'Connor, a priest in Canada, was convicted in 1996 of the sexual assault of teenage girls at a boarding school of which he was the head.
- Hans Hermann Gröer, a priest in Austria, was forced to resign in the 1990s amid credible allegations of molesting young boys.²⁶
- Nicola Corradi, a priest in Argentina, was convicted and sentenced to 42 years'

imprisonment in 2019 for sexually abusing deaf children at a Catholic-run school in Mendoza.

This list of desecrations of the vows of celibacy within the Roman Catholic Church continues at length. In other religions, the following spiritual leaders have also been publicly disgraced after prolonged concealment:

- Swami Premananda, a Hindu ashram leader, was convicted in 1997 on multiple counts of rape and molestation of girls and was consequently imprisoned.
- Prakashanand Saraswati, a Hindu monk who founded a monastic organization, was convicted of child molestation on multiple counts and served a prison term, in addition to paying a fine.
- Paraekke Pannananda Thera, a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, was publicly charged with the sexual abuse of minors inside and around the monastery.

The Nigerian case of sexual harassment involved a Catholic nun, Sister Annastasia Kinse²⁷, who, in July 2025, accused the Congregation of the Mother of Perpetual Help in Auchi of dismissing her for being a whistle-blower regarding sexual advances made against her by certain Catholic priests. She also accused the Catholic institution of systematically silencing other members of the celibate religious from exposing the persistent sexual harassment and misconduct within the Church. Evidence suggests that she was persecuted for speaking out against her superiors. She further lamented the concealment of the evil practices prevalent within her congregation, into which she had willingly entered in the spirit of purity. Analysts disclosed that the case of Sister Annastasia was emblematic of the systemic challenges created by enforced celibacy and institutional secrecy within the Catholic Church. The silencing of this whistle-blower underscored the manner in which religious hypocrisy functions as an internal mechanism for control and for the protection of offenders — a practice that exposed the fundamental incompatibility between religious dogmatism and international human rights norms.

The Authority of Religious Bodies and their Internal Mechanisms

Some religious bodies have continued to condemn the desecration of the vows of celibacy, yet the occurrences of such desecration, typically following the same pattern, have continued unabated. The Catholic institution has described these moral deficiencies relating to sexual scandal as “a most serious crime” under Canon Law²⁸. The abuse of a

²⁵The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com>.

²⁶Küng, Hans. *The Catholic Church: A Short History*. New York Library, 2003.

²⁷<https://www.facebook.com/>; see also www.aciafrica.org.

²⁸New Sections of the Code of Canon Law (Book

minor by a cleric is classified as Gravissimum Delictum. Among the measures recommended by the Catholic Church in addressing these atrocities are the following:

- Dismissal of the offending cleric.
- Canonical penalties, including restrictions and supervision of clerics in the exercise of ecclesiastical duties.
- Bishops are instructed to cooperate at all times with civil (state) authorities during investigations.
- Public apology to victims.
- Protection of victims from further violation or harm.

In other religions, the Buddhists regard sexual intercourse as a serious offence for a monk; accordingly, offenders are to be expelled entirely from the Sangha. Sexual exploitation is a violation of non-harm (ahimsa) and right conduct. Buddhist communities may sometimes recommend an independent investigation, in accordance with the divergent lineages of the Buddhist tradition, unlike the Vatican, which has a centralized structure within which culprits are to be decisively addressed.

In Hinduism, sexual exploitation is also considered a violation of dharma (moral duty). All Gurus are therefore required at all times to exercise self-control over sexual urges and to observe brahmacharya.

The Way Forward

Compulsory celibacy is a concept rooted in ancient religion that has outlived its usefulness in the modern era, and there is a global call to re-examine the entire ideology of the doctrine. Most instances of its desecration arise from the sexual conduct of those bound by celibate vows. Some cardinals have questioned the rule of priestly celibacy, having received numerous reports of violations.

In 2022, Cardinal Reinhard Marx²⁹ opined that “sexuality is a part of being human.” He further described the practice of celibacy by priests as “precarious” and called for a reform of the ideology. He called on the Catholic Church to consider ending celibacy for priests, stating: “They should be allowed to marry if they wish.” In his words:

“It would be better for everyone to create the possibility of having both celibate and married priests. For some priests, it would be better if they were married — not just for sexual reasons, but

because it would be better for their lives, and they would not be so lonely.”

He concluded: “I think that things as they are cannot continue like this.” In 2021, Cardinal Marx offered to resign over the Church’s institutional and systematic failure in its handling of child sex abuse scandals; however, he was prevailed upon by Pope Francis to remain, who remarked that the Cardinal’s ideas were good for reforms.

Allowing priests to marry while continuing to exercise their ecclesiastical calling is consistent with the biblical injunctions of the Apostle Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: “It is better to marry than to burn with passion.³⁰” Sexual privation is an unnecessary burden for celibates and is no longer a preferred path to purity. The book of Proverbs states: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the Lord.³¹” A healthy sexual relationship within marriage brings good prospects and sound health to married couples, in contrast to the struggle inherent in celibacy.

The Apostle Paul³² was explicit in his position concerning celibacy; he did not recommend compulsory clerical celibacy. Compulsory celibacy is not in any way a biblical requirement. Jesus Christ, though celibate Himself, uttered no instruction on celibacy. He encouraged family life. Celibacy is oppressive when coerced. One Catholic priest, Father Patrick Waweru of Nairobi, Kenya, once declared: “I have a wife and five children.” He had been celibate for many years before leaving the priesthood. He revealed the hypocrisy he perceived behind the ideology of celibacy, stating that he had witnessed many priests maintaining hidden romantic relationships and abusing alcohol. According to him, he was devastated by this level of hypocrisy and decided to marry and leave the priesthood³³. The evils associated with the canonical vows of celibacy in religion are numerous. The book of Psalms asks: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.³⁴” Celibacy as currently practiced cannot provide the moral impetus for the clean hands and pure hearts that are required.

Conclusion

The frequent self-deception of celibacy — presenting it as a symbol of divine virtue while tolerating or concealing continuous violations of the vow — represents a fundamental contradiction between professed purity and

VI, revised 2021).

²⁹<https://www.dw.com/en/german-cardinal/a-60639526>.

³⁰1 Corinthians 7:9.

³¹Proverbs 18:22.

³²1 Corinthians 7:7–8, Holy Bible.

³³<https://phoenix.browser.com/DYDrTvQ4HM2>.

³⁴Psalms 24:3–4.

institutional secrecy, reducing the entire ideology to a state of religious hypocrisy. International law is not comfortable with the abuse of moral values perpetrated under a veil of secrecy, since such abuses violate the principles of transparency and the right to human dignity. It is regrettable that celibacy, once a mark of moral virtue in religion, has now degenerated into a mirage and a watershed of religious complacency and hypocrisy, characterized by the shielding

of misconduct and the victimization of whistle-blowers — all in order to protect a tradition of religious hierarchy rather than to uphold the framework of human rights and liberty as guaranteed under international law.

The nexus between human rights and religious doctrines remains a challenge in the struggle for purity under celibacy, for fairness, and for human survival.