

Editorial

Married Eastern Catholic Priests: The Continuing Saga of Identifying “Latin” with “Catholic”

The recent Synod on the Church in the Middle East again brought attention to the question of optional celibacy in the Eastern Catholic Churches. Almost fifty years after Vatican II, many Catholic authorities still resist official Church teaching on the question. (Apparently, “Cafeteria Catholicism” reigns among “conservatives” as well.) Canon 373 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern [Catholic] Churches*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1990, asserts: “the hallowed practice of married clerics in the primitive Church and in the tradition of the Eastern Churches throughout the ages is to be held in honour.”

Some authorities are inclined to suggest that the canon applies only to “Eastern territories.” That is erroneous. Nowhere is that even hinted in the legislation and, more importantly, it could not be. Official Catholic teaching insists that all “rites” are equal. *Orientalium ecclesiarum* 3 reads: “These individual Churches, whether of the East or the West ... are of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite and they enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations, also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mark 16: 15) under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff.” Below I shall return to “preaching the Gospel to the whole world” and “the guidance of the Roman Pontiff.”

Some have attempted to demonstrate that mandatory continence after ordination – which would naturally lead to mandatory celibacy – is the authentic (“apostolic”) tradition of the Eastern Churches. That eccentric thesis has been refuted; *inter alia* one can consult an extensive study published on the pages

of our own journal, *Logos*, in 1993 (J. Kevin Coyle, “Recent Views on the Origin of Clerical Celibacy”). If the thesis were true, millions of children born into Eastern Christian presbyteral families for centuries before and after the Council in Trullo (691–692 AD) were/are the result of indifference towards “authentic” Church tradition. (Trullo, according to proponents of the aforementioned thesis, attempted to restore the “apostolic” tradition.)

For those unaware of the consequences of the disregard for optional celibacy among Eastern Catholics, the following information may be helpful:

First, in France, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, married Ukrainian Catholic priests are required to leave their wives – and children – in Ukraine, or other parts of Europe. (There are various “arrangements” and “exceptions” that are sometimes “negotiated,” but these simply highlight how inanity engenders deception.) The late Cardinal Lustiger insisted that he did not want to see the celibacy debate re-opened among Roman Catholics in France. The presence of married Eastern Catholic priests would apparently do that. (More on this below.) Note, incidentally, that the aforementioned countries are now domicile for millions of Eastern Catholics forced to seek livelihoods outside their homelands, and in need of pastoral care.

Second, while certainly an improvement over the European ban, the ability to bring married Eastern Catholic priests *to North America* from Eastern Europe *with* their families reinforces the perception that Eastern Catholicism is an “alien,” “immigrant” reality – and thus doomed to disappear in the West.

Third, in the United States, the ordination of native-born American married seminarians to the priesthood is rare. Eastern Catholic seminaries in the USA are not allowed to prepare married candidates for the priesthood.

Fourth, in response to a decision in 1998 of the Council of Hierarchs of the Byzantine Catholic (Ruthenian) Metropolia of Pittsburgh to allow for the ordination of married candidates to the priesthood, the Vatican ruled that each candidate would have to be vetted individually by a dicastery in Rome.

Let us examine this last point. In 1998, the Council of Hierarchs forwarded its revised statutes for approval to Rome. Originally, par. 44, sections 1, 2 and 3, read:

1. The Council of Hierarchs of the Metropolia of Pittsburgh notes the very clear direction of the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Eastern Churches*, canons 373, 28, 39, and 40 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, paragraph 1 of *Orientalis Lumen*, which direct a return to the original patrimony of the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Council of Hierarchs also notes that there is currently a married clergy in the Latin Church in the United States, and that it has been implemented without scandal to the faithful of the Latin Church.
2. This same Council of Hierarchs ascertains that the imposition of clerical celibacy introduced by the decree *Cum data fuerit* and reaffirmed by the decree *Qua sollerti* are currently in effect [*sic*] for the Ruthenians in the United States.
3. The Council of Hierarchs declares that these special restrictive norms imposed by the Apostolic See are no longer in force and, thus, in the Metropolia of Pittsburgh, marriage is not an impediment to presbyteral orders.

Within days the Vatican asked the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan, Judson Procyk, to postpone implementation of the statutes. Within a year, they were revised to read:

1. Married men, after completion of the formation prescribed by law, can be admitted to the order of deacon.
2. Concerning the admission of married men to the order of the presbyterate, the special norms issued