

Messori: Married priests no remedy for “vocations crisis”

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The renowned Italian journalist Vittorio Messori published an article recently in which he blasted one of the most popular myths of the day: that married priests would solve the “crisis of vocations.”

Reprinted by the Spanish daily “La Razon,” Messori’s article notes, “The Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish communities are all undergoing similar ‘crisis of vocations’, if not greater, than that of the Catholic Church, despite the fact that their pastors, priests and rabbis can marry.”

“Marriage, therefore, would not be the remedy for the shortage of priests,” Messori continued. “Nor would it be the remedy for the sexual disorders in certain religious environments, beginning with pedophilia. Most of all because pedophilia manifests homosexual impulses (boys are more often victims than girls) and having a wife would therefore not be an adequate solution. And moreover, as the statistics confirm, because the vast majority of abuse takes place in the home, between parents and children and uncles and nephews, this would not be remedy for such situations.”

Messori underscores in his article that “sexual continence” is not some imposition by the Church, but rather the result of a free choice that has its origins in the early Church and that has been practiced for centuries both in the West and the East. It is not a dogma, he noted, but rather “an aspect of Tradition that should be treated with the reverence due to that which is considered to be of apostolic times.”

“In the early Church, the vast majority of the clergy was made up of older men who assumed holy orders, left behind their wives, who gave their consent, and entrusted their families to the community. From that moment they were called to live in perfect continence, no longer living at home but rather in church buildings,” Messori asserted, citing a study by Cardinal Alfons Stickler, the former Vatican librarian and archivist.

Cardinal Stickler's research proved that priestly celibacy was never considered a novelty and that it has always been an indisputable part of early Church tradition, and it demolishes the theory that "clerical celibacy can only be traced back to 1139, to the Second Lateran Council."

"And what of the Eastern Churches, where only monks and bishops are obliged to embrace celibacy, while priests and deacons can marry, as long as it is the first and only marriage and takes place before ordination?" Messori asked. "All of the documents show that for many centuries, the abstinence practiced in the West was discussed in those communities and the exceptions that are cited today are actually based on fraudulent sources."

Messori explained that "only in 691, at the Council of Trullano, was the practice of today's Orthodox established. But there was an explicit capitulation: the Church in the East did not have the hierarchal organization of the West and it lacked means for repressing abuses, which were increasingly more numerous. And not only that: subject to the Byzantine emperor, the Church in the East gave in to politicians who claimed that a clergy 'with family' was more easily controlled. The attempt was made to salvage the principle, imposing sexual continence at least during the period in which priests were exercising their ministry and saying Mass, while aspiring to chastity for bishops and monks. No doubt it was a forced situation, not ideal at all, as many complained and as many still complain about in the East. It's curious that some today consider that to be desirable for the West also."