25. Priesthood, "call no man father," and celibacy

Often heard: "Matthew 23:9 says call no man father." / "1 Timothy 4:1–3 calls forbidding to marry a doctrine of devils."
Also heard: "Israel was a kingdom of priests and still had ordained priests. Why would the Church be any different?"

Priesthood of all believers; no sacrificing priests

HELD BY Lutheran | Reformed | Anglican three orders kept | Methodist | Baptist

All believers are priests with direct access to God; pastors teach and lead but are not sacrificing priests. Many evangelicals add that religious titles like "Father" are forbidden. Mandatory celibacy contradicts Scripture, which assumes married overseers, and Peter was married.

VERSES CITED

1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:14–16; Matt 23:8–12; 1 Tim 3:2; 4:1–3; 1 Cor 9:5; Mark 1:30.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Luther, *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), on the priesthood of all believers; Luther married Katharina von Bora in 1525. The "call no man father" objection is a later popular evangelical argument.

A ministerial priesthood within the priestly people

HELD BY Catholic Latin-rite celibacy | Orthodox married priests, celibate bishops

The priesthood of all the baptized is real, but Christ also gave a ministerial priesthood, just as Israel was a "kingdom of priests" yet had Levitical priests (and Korah was punished for claiming the people needed none). Matt 23 targets prideful titles; the same passage also forbids being called "Rabbi" and "master," and Paul calls himself a father to his converts. Celibacy for Latin-rite priests is a discipline, not a doctrine: Eastern Catholic priests may be married, and the Church calls marriage a sacrament. 1 Tim 4:3 condemns those who forbid marriage as evil (early Gnostics); a man freely choosing celibacy for the kingdom is what Jesus and Paul commend.

VERSES CITED

Exod 19:6; Num 16:1–11; Isa 66:21; Rom 15:16 (Greek *hierourgounta*, "ministering" the gospel as a priest); Acts 14:23; 1 Cor 4:15; Acts 7:2; Rom 4:16–17; 1 Thess 2:11; 1 John 2:13–14; Matt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:7–8, 32–35; 2 Tim 2:4.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

1 Clement 40–44 (orders of ministry); Ignatius; the ordination prayers in Hippolytus. The Council of Elvira (c. 305), canon 33, required continence of clergy; the Second Lateran Council (1139), canons 6–7,

deprived clerics from subdeacon upward who took wives of their office and declared such unions no marriage, so that in the Latin Church ordination became a bar to valid marriage.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 1120, 1141, 1546–1547, 1554, 1579–1580, 1601–1666 (marriage); Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16.

Across the traditions

How each major tradition understands ordained ministry and the marriage of clergy, from its own documents.

Catholic

The priesthood of all the baptized is real, but Christ also instituted a ministerial priesthood, as Israel had Levitical priests within a "kingdom of priests"; celibacy for Latin-rite priests is a discipline, not a doctrine, and Eastern Catholic priests may be married. The full case is set out above.

Sources: CCC 1546-1547, 1554, 1579-1580; Vatican II, Presbyterorum Ordinis 16.

Orthodox

Holy Orders is a sacrament in three degrees, bishop, priest and deacon, conferred by a bishop's laying on of hands; without the bishop there is no Church (Philaret; Dositheus, decree 10). A married man may be ordained deacon or priest, but no one may marry after ordination, and the Quinisext Council refused the Roman demand that married clergy give up living with their wives. Bishops must be unmarried, a married man raised to the episcopate separating from his wife, and in practice they are chosen from monastics.

Sources: Longer Catechism of St. Philaret, Q 357-360; Confession of Dositheus (1672), decree 10; Quinisext (Trullo, 692) canons 6, 12, 13, 48; Holy and Great Council (Crete 2016), The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments II.4.

Lutheran

Lutherans keep an ordered ministry: no one should publicly teach or administer the sacraments unless regularly called. Ordination may even be called a sacrament if it is understood as the ministry of the Word, but the Lutheran confessions reject a sacrificing priesthood. The whole Church is the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9 and so has the right to

Reformed

Reformed churches are governed by ministers (pastors), elders and deacons chosen by lawful election, and all ministers of the Word have the same power and authority, since Christ is the only universal bishop. There is no sacrificing priesthood: every believer shares in Christ's anointing, and the Heidelberg Catechism rejects the Mass as Christ offered daily by priests.

elect and ordain ministers. Priests may marry, and the Treatise calls the papal law of clerical celibacy unjust.

Sources: Augsburg Confession XIV, XXIII; Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII.9-12; Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 69, 78.

Marriage is lawful for "all sorts of people" able to consent, ministers included.

Sources: Belgic Confession 30-31; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31-32, 80; Westminster Confession 24.3.

Anglican

Anglicans retain bishops, priests and deacons, and no one may preach publicly or minister the sacraments in the congregation unless lawfully called and sent. Orders are not a sacrament of the Gospel like baptism and the Lord's Supper, having no visible sign ordained by God. Bishops, priests and deacons are not commanded by God's law to vow single life, and may marry at their own discretion, as other Christians do.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles XXIII, XXV, XXXII.

Methodist

Methodist churches ordain elders, for Word, Sacrament and Order, and deacons, for Word and service; the United Methodist Church teaches that ordination is anchored in the ministry of all the baptized and is not a separate sacrament. Orders is one of the five rites "not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel." Ministers are not commanded by God's law to vow single life and may marry at their own discretion.

Sources: Methodist Articles of Religion XVI, XXI (UMC Book of Discipline 2020/2024, para. 104); UMC, "Spirit empowered, church authorized: United Methodist ordination" (umc.org).

Baptist

All believers are priests with direct access to God; pastors teach and lead but are not sacrificing priests, and mandatory celibacy contradicts Scripture, which assumes married overseers. The full case is set out above.

Sources: 1 Pet 2:5, 9; 1 Tim 3:2; 1 Cor 9:5.

Where it gets contested: Those who reject a sacrificing priesthood (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists) answer that the NT never calls a church officer a *hiereus* (sacrificing priest). Catholics reply that the word was avoided while the Temple priesthood still stood, and point to Rom 15:16 and the early church's usage.

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