

The Augsburg Confession

Talking About Faith with Family and Friends



Article XXIII Marriage of Priests

Article 23 includes additional comments by the Lutherans to Emperor Charles V and not considered as a doctrinal statement

Discussion: Does marriage and a family enhance or detract from the ministry of a priest or pastor? How does marriage to a priest or pastor affect a spouse? Why do we refer to the clergy as having a “Call” rather than a “job”?

There has been common complaint concerning the examples of priests who were not chaste. For that reason also Pope Pius is reported to have said that there were certain causes why marriage was taken away from priests, but that there were far weightier ones why it ought to be given back; for so Platina writes. Since, therefore, our priests were desirous to avoid these open scandals, they married wives, and taught that it was lawful for them to contract matrimony.

First, because Paul says, [1 Cor. 7:2,9](#): To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife. Also: It is better to marry than to burn.

Secondly, Christ says, [Matt. 19:11](#): All men cannot receive this saying, where He teaches that not all men are fit to lead a single life; for God created man for procreation, [Gen. 1:28](#).

Therefore, those who are not fit to lead a single life ought to contract matrimony. For no man's law, no vow, can annul the commandment and ordinance of God. For these reasons the priests teach that it is lawful for them to marry wives.

It is also evident that in the ancient Church priests were married men. For Paul says, [1 Tim. 3:2](#), that a bishop should be chosen who is the husband of one wife. And in Germany, four hundred years ago for the first time, the priests were violently compelled to lead a single life, who indeed offered such resistance that the Archbishop of Mayence, when about to publish the Pope's decree concerning this matter, was almost killed in the tumult raised by the enraged priests.

Furthermore, God ordained marriage to be a help against human infirmity....And it is to be expected that the churches shall at some time lack pastors if marriage is any longer forbidden.

But while the commandment of God is in force, while the custom of the Church is well known, while impure celibacy causes many scandals, adulteries, and other crimes deserving the punishments of just magistrates, yet it is a marvelous thing that in nothing is more cruelty exercised than against the marriage of priests. God has given commandment to honor marriage. By the laws of all well-ordered commonwealths, even among the heathen, marriage is most highly honored. But now men, and that, priests, are cruelly put to death, contrary to the intent of the Canons, for no other cause than marriage. Paul, in **1 Tim. 4:3**, calls that a doctrine of devils which forbids marriage. This may now be readily understood when the law against marriage is maintained by such penalties.

Explanation: Luther's explanation is sufficient in its basis of evidence from the Holy Bible. In this context, permit me to focus on the arguments presented as a challenge to the Lutherans by the Roman Catholic theologians: The scriptural evidence presented against the position of the Lutherans is in 1 Corinthians 7:5, ***“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves in prayer.”*** Since a priest ought to always be in prayer, marriage would be a distraction.

The second piece of evidence is from 1 Corinthians 7:32,33, ***“An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife.”***

The third evidence is based on the sacredness of the vow of celibacy taken by the clergy.

The history of celibacy dates back to the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius at the time of the Council of Carthage who stated that celibacy was a practice commanded by the apostles. The counter argument to Luther's reference to the violent conflict in Germany is countered by the political conflict of lay investiture (1076) when Pope Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor, forcing an Interdict (mass excommunication) on the people of Germany. Henry IV eventually repented by kneeling in the snow for three days at the winter palace of the pope in Canossa, Italy. The violence may have been caused by political motives and not the decree to prohibit priests to be married.