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The Confluence of Communal-Individual-Societal Attitudes Towards Catholic Priesthood in The Nandi Community in Nandi County, Kenya

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Celibacy in the Catholic Church was considered a matter of personal choice in the Apostolic Church but over time, priestly celibacy has gained legitimacy and mandates through canons, decretals, canon law and encyclicals. Priestly celibacy has generally gained societal and cultural acceptance among the European-centric and the American-centric cultures but save for an insignificant number of incontinent priests. The African Synod of 1994 held in Rome re-emphasized deepening sacerdotal celibacy among the ongoing priestly formation in the Catholic Church in Africa however, priestly celibacy is generating a debate and highlighting the challenges facing indigenous African priests. Despite the mandatory rule on priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church, and the dialectical cultural and philosophical thought on marriage by the indigenous African community, the Church still faces challenges in evangelizing the African communities because of the mandatory priestly celibacy. Due to the dearth of studies detailing the perspective and experiences of the African Catholic priest concerning ministerial Priesthood in the Catholic Church, the study seeks to unravel the convergence of communal, individual and societal attitudes towards ministerial priesthood from the eyes of the priests themselves. The study therefore critically assessed how the community and the society embraced Catholic priesthood and made it possible for the priest to be culturally and socially accepted by the Indigenous Nandi community in Nandi County, Kenya. The study took a qualitative exploratory cross-sectional design and purposively sampled 20 Catholic priests of different ages from the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret using interviews and a focus group discussion. The data were transcribed before being subjected to a content analysis tool (NVivo 8, QSR International). The findings indicated that the Indigenous Nandi community detested celibacy by all means and never consented to any long-term celibacy at any level. They still cannot accept one of their kindreds to become a celibate priest but would paradoxically celebrate an ordained Catholic Priest as one of their own. At an individual level, Catholic priests are respected and acclaimed but are still individually questioned on their choices on cultural, social and societal fronts. At the beckoning of the 21st century and as the number of converts increased, the

Nandi community slowly began to accept a celibate priest but the cultural and social background of a Catholic faithful still shapes how they believe and practice their faith in that the community at large, still questions the celibacy choice made by their own. The gradual societal shift towards priestly celibacy at the community level has probably arisen because of the convergence of shared norms and values introduced into the community by the Catholic Church since its inception in the early 20th century. Thus, the study concludes that there still exist cultural and social rigidities among the Nandi Community concerning priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church. The study recommends that the celibacy requirement for the Catholic priesthood should be upheld based on the growing acceptance of priestly celibacy among the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Priestly celibacy has gained favours and justification during the growth of Christendom since the Apostolic Church when celibacy practice was a matter of personal choice (Frazee, 1972) before being legislated as a canon (Frazee, 1972) and later formalized as an obligation to priesthood (Cozzens, 2006; Aguilar, 2001) through the encyclicals (Ballano, 2019; Flannery, 1996) and Catholic church's Code of Canon Law from 1917 onwards (Siecienski, 2017). Apart from asceticism, there was no legal foundation for celibacy until the inceptions of canons (Frazee, 1972), decretals (Lea, 1884) and canon law (Komonchak, 1986) and the Catechisms of the Catholic Church (Joseph *et al.*,

2010) and encyclicals (Ballano, 2019; Flannery, 1996).

Celibacy was considered a matter of personal choice (Frazee, 1972) and therefore many Christians ascribed to asceticism in the early apostolic church as early as the 2nd century (Lea, 1884). This had important implications as the espoused sexual abstinence focused more on positioning the human body as a more appropriate vehicle to receive divine inspiration (Olson, 2010). The early Christians would sacrifice bodily passions and affections for salvation (Lea, 1984) and were subsequently glorified as the loftiest achievement of Christian virtue (Frazee, 1972). However, at the close of the 3rd century, the Church hierarchy condemned ruthless asceticism (Frazee, 1972).

Over the centuries, priestly celibacy gained support from *Didascalia apostolorum*, the first canon on the sexual continence among the episcopates (Frazee, 1972). This was later supported by the three great church Doctors; St. Jerome, St. Ambrose and St. Augustin in the Patristic age who gave a moralist view to the ecclesiastical celibacy (Lea, 1884), while the 4th and 5th century Popes; Pope Damasus (366-84), Pope Siricus (384-399), Pope Innocent I (401-17), Pope Leo I the Great (440-61) cemented the philosophical thought on ecclesiastical celibacy (Frazee, 1972). Later on, the Council of Elvira (306) (Joseph *et al.*, 2010), the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) (Lea, 1884; Frazee, 1972), the Council of Saragossa (381 AD) (Lea, 1884; Frazee, 1972), the Council of Trullo (589 AD) (Rice, 1992; Frazee, 1972); The Council of Carthage (397 - 398 AD) (Lea, 1884; Frazee, 1972) wedded into priestly celibacy.

In the medieval ages, priestly celibacy was just a written law that was never implemented by the Western Church because promiscuous and licentious ecclesiastics were cynical towards the canons (Lea, 1884). Important persons during this time included St. Benedict of Nursia who promulgated new laws on monachism (Lea, 1907) and Damiani and Hilderbrand (Lea, 1884). In honour of St. Benedict, there have been 16 popes named after St. Benedict and this is the most frequently preferred name taken by an elected pontiff. The situation continued to be fluid till the early 13th century when the Lateran Councils invalidated ecclesiastical marriage (Joseph *et al.*, 2010; Sipe 1990). Up to the 14th Century, the canons on ecclesiastical celibacy were just mere regulations that the clergy rebelled and moved towards concubinage and other related vices (Lea, 1884).

The Reformation period was the turning point for the Western Latin Church after the East-West Schism as the period is associated with resistance to clerical licentiousness and clerical celibacy from the protestant movement (Lea, 1907; Plummer, 2013). In the 16th century, the Council of Trent (1545 -

1563 AD) introduced reformations to nib the licentiousness, simony and concubinage among the ecclesiastics and proscribed the first conciliar doctrine on priestly celibacy which still stands out today (Anello, 2014). The ecclesiastics continued to disregard the canons but there was a shift in the clerical attitudes as well as laity as the pressure for reformation from the lay forced the ecclesiastics to gradually accept priestly celibacy (Zöller, 2020).

The 17th, 18th and 19th centuries saw the state–church tension on priestly celibacy, ecclesiastical marriage and conferment of marriages and as a result, the nation-states disentangled themselves from the Latin Church and established civil marriages as a consequence and this led the Latin Church to enforce the mandatory priestly celibacy (Lea, 1907; Lea, 1884). The 20th century was a watershed moment with the promulgation of the Canon Law in 1917 which formed the underlying framework for any legal mechanism for the Catholic Church (Komonchak, 1986; Kadić, 1971) while the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) reaffirmed the importance of priestly celibacy (Joseph *et al.*, 2010). The Catholic church hierarchy has reinforced the mandatory rule of priestly celibacy through several encyclicals, including the *Presbyterorum ordinis* of 1965, the *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* of 1967, the Code of Canon Law 277 of 1983, John Paul II (1992), and the Catechism of the Catholic Church of 2002 (Joseph *et al.*, 2010).

Despite the strength of the canon laws and encyclicals, the behaviour of the ecclesiastics morphed into sexual abuse, paedophilia, and concubinage among other sexual vices. Concerning the Church in Africa, the 1st General Assembly for African Bishops in 1994 affirmed priestly celibacy while giving lip service to the nature of the African cultural tradition on marriage, while the 2nd General Assembly in 2009 focused on the changing social order and socio-economic transformation of Africa while overlooking priestly celibacy as a topical issue. The 21st century has seen many encyclicals on several theological viewpoints and has shifted from

tackling contemporary issues affecting the church to spiritual matters over the last decade. In it, the Catholic Church hierarchy has reorganized itself, through its new constitution *Praedicate evangelium* (Preach the gospel) which was promulgated in 2022 to reform the Roman Curia and all its structures.

In evaluating the steps made by Catholic priests, Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) observed that the priests consider chastity as a psychological challenge, arising from their conscious effort to keep their mind pure, but face significant challenges in their physical and emotional world arising from the environment and advances made by women. The study highlights the context and the professional work challenges in which Catholic priests operate and thus informs the need for the evaluation within the context of the study. Based on the foregoing summary, the study seeks to examine the convergence of communal, individual and societal attitudes towards the gradual acceptance of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church by the Indigenous Nandi Community in Nandi County, Kenya.

Problem Statement

The charism of priesthood celibacy is imposed or legislated by the Catholic Church and this undermines the integrity of the church leadership and causes needless human suffering. If charismatic celibacy is the crown of priesthood, then mandatory celibacy without charism becomes a silent martyrdom (McLaughlin, 2010). Though celibacy has existed for a long time in the Catholic Church, most writings have remained on arguments for or against it. Some argue that allowing Catholic Priests the option of marriage would interfere with their devotion to the Church, while others believe it would offer more insight into counselling members of the congregation.

Celibacy is a cultural and social paradigm from the average person's understanding of sexuality (Sipe, 2013). Thus, the Catholic Church's law of priestly celibacy is a controversial issue in different cultures and countries, at different times and in various

contextual situations (Sunardi, 2014). This debate on celibacy began informally just before the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) and continued to persist as a topical issue in the Church. Because of the heated debates, the bishops, during the Second Vatican Council, made celibacy an agenda and resolved to exhort all Catholic priests to firmly embrace and esteem the law of celibacy as a gift (Flannery, 1996). Based on the context of the study examined how the convergence of communal, individual and societal attitudes has influenced the attainment of priesthood in the Catholic Church among the indigenous Nandi Community in Nandi County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main taking point largely relates to celibacy itself, its effects on the individual (ecclesiastics) as expressed through loneliness (Ballano, 2021), self-doubt (Covell, 2005), disillusionment (Prince, 1992), sexuality and illicit relationship with women (Sipe, 1994; Serbin, 2006), and concubinage (Mayblin, 2019); the community of the believers (church) through resignations by priests (Prince, 1992; Wubbels, 2011; Schoenherr and Yamane, 2004); the silence of episcopates and prelates during the sexual abuse pandemics in America among others (Böhm *et al.*, 2014); and the society at large through clerical sexual abuses (Rossetti, 2002; Kung, 2010; Frick, Moser & Simmons, 2021; Doyle *et al.*, 2004).

On a personal front, priests suffer to the point of martyrdom in the pastoral care of their churches and fidelity to the human struggle for justice and peace (Cozzens, 2006). Furthermore, the priest continuously struggles day-by-day acutely aware of their limitations and the numbing pseudo-values celebrated by their culture. This scenario was observed by Hillman and Hastings (1967) in the early 1960s when serving white priests in Africa faced treacherous environments for having adapted to high living standards only to be posted to Africa where the environment was wanting and dependent

on the financial support from their Bishops in their mother countries.

Adebayo (2013) observed that respondent Catholic priests indicated that celibacy is a life of self-sacrifice along with it, an enormous challenge of being surrounded and affected by sexuality (Wubbels, 2011). Appiah-Kubi and Korsah (2020) examined the issue of acceptability of celibacy among those currently serving priests in Ghana and reported that celibacy in the context of African Indigenous religion appears 'awkward' but it is still embraced by many religious men and women. Further, there is a growing number of priests quitting priesthood after ordination as many are disillusioned (Prince, 1992).

Ballano and Vivencio (2019) examined the celibate lives of priests in the US and indicated that celibacy has been accepted as a norm but argued that obligatory celibacy with its culture of clericalism deprives secular clergy of direct guardianship against clerical sexual abuse. Recently, priestly celibacy courted controversy when Emmanuel Milingo, the former archbishop of Lusaka, in Zambia, challenged the Holy See (Vatican) in 2001 on mandatory celibacy. In the year 2004, several Catholic clerics in Kenya followed Milingo's way to defect from the Catholic Church. They include Fr. Godfrey Shiundu, Fr. Daniel Kasomo, Fr. Peter Njogu, and Fr. John Karimi among others. Almost all the clergy who decamped cited cultural incompatibility on the issue of priestly celibacy. More and more are decamping as late as 2019 Philip Muiga, 78, joined the Renewed Universal church

despite being a celibate priest for many decades (Wubbels, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The study took a qualitative exploratory cross-sectional design which was confined to the 20 Catholic clergy of the Nandi community from clergy from the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret. There were 6 key informant interviews with senior priests and one Focus group discussion (FGD) at Eldoret which had 14 priests. The data was transcribed, reviewed, analysed, and interpreted into themes and meanings with the aid of Nvivo software complemented by manual transcription. The researcher complemented thematic analysis with narrative analysis to interpret the stories told within the context of the research. The study observed all the ethical considerations by obtaining regulatory permits and approvals as well as informed consent, privacy and confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to bring into context, the real context of the Catholic priesthood among the indigenous Nandi Community living in Nandi and Uasin Gishu Counties at large, the study examined the records from the Diocese of Eldoret and documented the growth of the number of priests from the Nandi community since the year 2000 (CDE.co.ke, 2023). According to the records, there are approximately more than 110 priests who are ethnically affiliated with the Nandi community.

Figure 1: Catholic Priesthood Among the Indigenous Nandi Community Living in Nandi and Uasin Gishu Counties at Large: Records from the Diocese of Eldoret

Decade	Number ordained	Total number ordained
Before 1970s	0	0
1971 to 1980	3	3
1981 to 1990	5	8
1991 to 2000	11	19
2001 to 2010	32	51
2011 to 2020	34	85
2021 till now	23	107

Source: Catholic Diocese of Eldoret (2023)

Since the community perceptions seem to indicate the growing acceptance of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church (Rop, Kamaara & Koech, 2024) against customary cultural and societal traditions that draw from the natural and indigenous philosophy on marriage, the study evaluated the perceptions of Catholic priests on the issue of priestly celibacy. The findings in this section were drawn largely from interviews with senior priests ordained before the year 2000 and FGD for priests ordained after the year 2000. The general observation from the FGD is that all the younger priests, with 10-20 years in the priesthood, talked favourably about having accepted the vows of celibacy and living positively.

Am happy with this gift of celibacy as I have lived it and it has given me the freedom to serve God. Am happy that all my energies and time are dedicated to serving the Lord as opposed to the married persons who cannot dedicate their time to serve the Lord and the family (Ordained in 2013).

Celibacy is a choice that I have embraced and I ask God through my Charism to enable me to live a celibate life. It is something that the Church values as the Gospel indicates. I have decided to embrace and live a celibate life with an undivided heart and hold the responsibility of serving the church and community (Ordained in 2008).

Celibacy gives priesthood a 'bearing' or direction as priesthood requires the person to give undivided attention and love to Jesus Christ through the ministry. We ought to encourage one another to lead a celibate life and remain undivided in following Jesus Christ (Ordained in 2011).

I am enjoying the celibate life through the charism which gives me strength emotionally, psychologically and physically. Based on the teachings of the Gospel, I have sacrificed myself for the sake of the Kingdom. Celibate life is a

noble and precious life conferred by Jesus Christ and is lived through the charism and grace of God. Unless we understand God himself, then we cannot live the celibate life. As a priest, I have accepted it as a sacrifice as a call to become a perpetual bioyop- tum so that I can continue serving the people of God (Ordained in 2010).

As a priest, I came to appreciate celibacy as it comes from a cultural background with the responsibility of perpetual sacrifice. Celibacy is a choice and has value and that's why I have embraced it personally. It is a beautiful thing as some people have accepted me for the way I am (Ordained in 2014).

I embraced priesthood after being encouraged to become a priest. I have seen the priest living a 'good life'. For me, there was no fear in joining the priesthood. Having gone through the formation and in the light of the Gospel, then I understood celibacy as a discipline that requires God's grace to become a priest. The formation period also allows a would-be priest to make a conscious decision to become a priest or not (ordained in 2009).

The excerpts above refer to celibacy as a gift, which is an interesting perspective. It acknowledges the fact that priesthood is a product of God's calling and living a celibate life is thus a charism, a gift of grace, in which God works through the life of the priest to help him overcome his humanness and embrace his union with God.

Similarly, the six senior Catholic priests interviewed, with at least 20 years in the priesthood, talked favourably of embracing celibacy and living it positively.

I accepted to be a priest because of my Catholic background and also my community accepted Christianity. I have lived as a celibate priest as it has given me time to serve people without any reservation because as a celibate priest, I can

dedicate myself fully towards the service of humanity and the church (ordained in 1998).

I thank God for having lived in the ministry through prayer, the Grace of God and support from fellow priests, fellow Christians, brothers and nuns. It is through their social support that I have been able to participate in the ministry. It is a good ministry because I have been able to dedicate myself to serving God through people. As the book of Hebrews says, 'The priest is anointed from the people to partake in spiritual matters about God, an individual makes one's sacrifice to be a priest after deciding to become one. You have been chosen from among people to become a priest through prayers, sacraments, and the sacrifice of the Eucharist (Ordained in 1985).

I freely and willingly chose a celibate life and have lived it fully and enjoyed it. I underwent theological training for six years and every time I was reminded of celibacy and lastly during my ordination, I was asked to live a celibate life which I gladly accepted. I have no regrets about living a celibate life, it is possible to live a life as it is a gift coming from God. You cannot live a celibate life if you think that it is an imposition or take it as a burden and it becomes a challenge (Ordained in 1984).

Celibacy is a gift that sets me free to be able to serve the people of God. Celibacy allows the priests in the Catholic Church to dedicate their time and effort to serving the people and are wonderful agents of evangelization in the most difficult environments as they are encumbered by family and can serve the people of God. The whole paradigm of celibacy is about not getting married and living a life of continence where a priest never engages in any sexual relations (Ordained in 1986).

Overall, the above remarks underscore some key points about the vocation of celibate life of a Catholic priest. One, family's Catholicism does

influence one's choice to be Catholic and subsequently to embrace the life of the clergy. Two, celibacy is not just about service to others; by his dedication and time spent in study, meditation and prayer, a priest does benefit from the ascetic life. He grows spiritually and cultivates a strong bond with God, which is the craving of every Christian. Three, even though priesthood is a call from God, individuals who enter this vocation need church support in the form of encouragement, prayer and most importantly theological formation. This preparation helps the priest to more ably handle his pastoral and spiritual office. Fourth, a priest's perception of celibate life can make his work either difficult or easier. Considering celibacy as an imposition leads to both a personal struggle and strive within the Church, which may ultimately impair the priest's effectiveness in his pastoral ministry.

The Catholic priests who were interviewed by the study gave mixed reactions to the question of whether or not the Nandi had fully embraced celibacy. Nevertheless, a majority indicated that the society had embraced the priests' celibate lives. It was noted that many families still struggled to accept the personal choices of their sons who opted for priesthood. The following comments were adduced from senior priests in the Nandi Community:

Celibacy is quite controversial to those who do not understand until you live a celibate life. I have met people who have asked me whether I am pretending to live the celibate life or I have kept a family secret and have been open to them that I choose to be celibate (Ordained in 1984).

Even from the perspective of the Indigenous Nandi Community, the community has had pioneering Catholic priests like the Late Fr Cheboryot, Late Fr Lelei and Late Fr Toror who were celibacy throughout their lives. Their stewardship has seen the community accept celibate priests. The community still holds

marriage in high regard but they have come to accept priestly celibacy (Ordained in 1985).

The Nandi people as a community have come to accept to allow their sons and daughters to become nuns and priests. This indicates that celibacy has been understood and appreciated at the current time (Ordained in 1988).

The observations highlight that overall, priestly celibacy has been widely accepted in the Nandi. However, there are sceptics who cannot imagine the lived experiences of celibate priests. From the interviews, priestly calling is deeply personal and the choice to obey and embrace the life of celibacy can only be fully explained by the priest who goes through those experiences himself.

The discussants in FGD also observed the societal challenges faced by young men seeking to become priests. There are still levels of resistance towards celibate priesthood in contemporary Nandi society.

It was difficult for me to be accepted as a priest save for the pioneering African priest before us. My uncle and aunts never accepted my choice to become a priest and considered me to be a 'kipsongoiyat'. They said that 'I have stopped the fire (kikome maa)' save for the spread of Catholicism and the pioneering African priest who blazed the path for us (Ordained in 2010).

Before I was ordained, a certain old lady told me that 'I was to disappear just like that' because I would not be married. These Catholic priests always 'disappear just like that because they remain celibate' (Ordained in 2008).

Up to date, some of the community members still cannot allow their sons to join the priesthood because of breaking the continuity in life (Kame maa) which means that 'life has been broken' (Ordained in 2009).

I have enjoyed my priesthood despite the challenges arising from societal expectations

who cannot understand the reason why I chose to become a priest (Ordained in 2010).

The discussants in FGD reiterated what has already been intimated the rejection of celibacy was not based on religious but cultural grounds; it was informed by the need to ensure the continuity of the Nandi lineage through the birth of children within the marriage and family context.

The discussion also took a cultural perspective as there is still reluctance from a cultural view which points out that priestly celibacy was and is still considered alien.

As per the Nandi Cultural perspective, the community was in a perpetual transition from childhood through death and ensures the perpetual continuity occurs through marriages. Individuals are therefore expected to marry for the continuity of the clan and the community. Celibacy is alien to African communities (Ordained in 2011).

Celibacy per se was not embraced by the community at large but there were periodic instances where sexual abstinence was allowed. Celibacy was specifically preserved for elders and diviners who were no longer sexually active (Ordained in 2010).

Priesthood is a challenge because of cultural viewpoints that a man must get married, procreate and propagate offspring for the perpetuation of the family, clan and community. It becomes a challenge because not everyone in the community would understand the breaks in the chain of life during priesthood. Celibacy breaks this chain of life as it breaks the perpetual continuity (flow) of life. Celibacy in the Indigenous Nandi Community was foreign but, in some instances, men were asked for advice to practice continence during specific ceremonies (Ordained in 2013).

Priestly celibacy is foreign to the Nandi culture as the custom dictated that a man should marry

to propagate offspring and perpetuate the community (Kolal maa) Celibacy is a discipline and remains very foreign to the African society (Ordained in 2009).

The remarks above show that the Nandi found perpetual celibacy alien, but the idea of sexual abstinence for spiritual reasons was present in their indigenous cultures. Some discussants held the view that priestly celibacy was not foreign and/or alien to indigenous African communities.

I do not think celibacy is alien to African communities as there were elements of celibacy in the community before the spread of Christianity into African communities (Ordained in 2013).

At the same time, I do not consider celibacy to be foreign because it has been universally accepted and embraced by multitudes of people all over the world. From the African cultural perspective, celibacy came with the spread of the Christian faith as a package and based on the vocation, some people have lived a celibate life and therefore African priests ought to embrace celibacy as it is despite the challenges. The challenges are everywhere just like in the world and we have to live a celibate life as discipline (Ordained in 2011).

Celibacy in the Indigenous Nandi Community was foreign but, in some instances, men were asked for advice to practice continence during specific ceremonies. For instance, during the kapkoros religious ceremony, men were obligated to abstain from sexual intercourse and practise ritual purity for the performance of the religious ceremony at the altar to make their sacrifices worthy. Furthermore, during circumcision ceremonies, the sponsors (materenik) were to seclude themselves and practise ritual purity for them to guide the young initiates and make the sacrifices worthy and acceptable by men (Ordained in 2011).

Therefore, celibacy when understood as sexual abstinence and a mark of ritual purity, was not considered alien to the Nandi culture.

Further, the senior priest who was interviewed also observed that there are still cultural impediments to the acceptance of priestly celibacy in the community.

Celibacy was not acceptable as life was valued through procreation as it was a sign of continuity in life. Individuals were encouraged to marry and whoever did not marry was considered an outcast, a misfortune and was not respected by the society and was still encouraged to marry. Individuals would seek a wife for him (Ordained in 1993).

As much as we are Africans, we still interact with other cultures and borrow good things. If celibacy is alien to Africans, it is a good thing that is worth embracing. Those who argue celibacy is un-African are implying that all African ways of doing things are good which subjective (Ordained in 1998).

The ministry comes with challenges in that some individuals cannot practise continence for long periods. This was also present in the Indigenous community where individuals who could not practise continence for long periods were asked to step aside. That is not to mean that celibacy as a virtue is not bad as such (Ordained in 1985).

I usually encourage the young aspirants to priesthood to join but at the same time allow them to think through the choice they have made. From my experience as a teacher in the seminary, we are open and ask them to re-evaluate the choice of becoming a celibate priest and if they feel that they are not well suited, nobody is forcing them to become one. We encourage married individuals and even unmarried ladies to visit the seminary and talk to the students about their choices. The young

novitiates are freely allowed to leave the seminary if they feel that they are unable to continue with the celibacy demands. The training for priesthood takes approximately nine years and therefore the novitiates are free to leave anytime they seek to leave. The celibacy controversy is present and the novitiates are free to leave the seminary if they are not able to practise celibacy (Ordained in 1985).

The following comments from the senior priests depict priestly celibacy as a cultural paradigm that is still evolving:

When Fr. Kuhn (the pioneering priest in Nandi) started working in Chepterit, the community referred to him as kipsongoiya (unmarried) even though they feared him. The first Nandi persons to become priests were also referred to as kipsongoiya.

The timing of celibate priesthood coming from the cultural point of virtuosity from the society indicates a manifestation of a rich culture that valued marriage and virtue. The evangelization from the missionaries was an eye-opener as it imparted the Christian faith to our grandparents and parents. The missionaries became the role models and inspired us to take up the challenge of evangelization and become Catholic priests. I grew up in a strong Catholic family and was inspired at a young age to become a priest as I was involved in church activities. As I grew up I got involved in young Catholic Students during my school years and through this I asked myself 'Does it mean that there is no black person who can serve in the church?' (Ordained in 1998).

I would attribute the desire to become a priest to the strong Catholic uprising and be inspired by black Catholic priests like Fr Khaemba who was in Chesoi and Fr Kiriwa among others. This motivated me to join the priesthood and embrace celibacy as a higher value and good

and to be outstanding in society stand out of the culture and serve people (Ordained in 1984).

All the years, I was in the seminary my mother did not accept the celibacy requirements, but two weeks before ordination she accepted and blessed me for accepting this call and urged me 'not to look back'. She encouraged me to continue serving the Lord and not to shame us. I was advised, encouraged and blessed and dressed traditionally as an elder even though I was celibate. 'Now that you are an elder, church leader, a community leader we have vested some authority to lead and guide the community'. These things are significant as the community looks unto you for leadership and direction and also allows you to live to your calling (Ordained in 1984).

What stands out from the above remarks is that the moral propriety of the Catholic priests has greatly contributed to the acceptance of celibacy in the Nandi society. The Nandi Christians seem to take great issue with priests who, after taking the vows of celibacy, break those vows by engaging in sexual incontinence. It is also evident from the above responses that the family's blessing and approval enhances the priest's confidence in his obedient response to the call to priesthood. This view also emerged from the remarks given by the younger priests who participated in FGD:

I have embraced the gift of celibacy despite significant challenges because a man has natural desires which have to be catered for, save for the sacrifices that I have made as a priest (Ordained in 2009).

For me, celibacy has not been easy as I had to make a sacrifice to live a celibate life. We the priests are called to sacrifice one's own life because we are living a call to carry a cross and imitate Christ's life. Celibacy is a discipline and as indicated in the Gospel of Matthew 19 'it is not everybody who can embrace the discipline and accept the sacrifice but only those who are

granted the grace by God' Celibacy gives priesthood a 'bearing' or direction as priesthood requires the person to give undivided attention and love to Jesus Christ through the ministry. We ought to encourage one another to lead a celibate life and remain undivided in following Jesus Christ (Ordained in 2011).

I am enjoying living a celibate life despite the challenges of human desire (Ordained in 2010).

The challenges are mainly related to the sacrifices that I make to serve the Lord and these challenges make me strong and I have to carry them because it is my sacrifice. Thus, when I encounter challenges, I see them as my cross, I have to carry them and dedicate myself to the Lord (Ordained in 2014).

Celibacy should be embraced for a purpose despite the challenges. We are all unique whether someone is married or celibate life, there are challenges. We are created especially for married or celibate life as per God's grace (Ordained in 2008).

Celibacy is a gift from God but has its challenges because of our human nature but God calls us the way we are. and we are not running away from marriage. Celibacy is not a refuge from marriage and when celibacy is taken as a refuge as it will burden the priest, but when one takes it positively, as a God – Given Gift not for the motive of serving oneself but serving God, his people and humanity (Ordained in 2010).

The responses above highlight some of the challenges faced by priests in their vocation. First, the option to priesthood and hence celibacy does not rid one of the realities of sexual needs, which are the natural gifts from God.

I would like to encourage priests, and people to be closer to God, especially priests, seminarians and Christians. There is no life or

vocation without challenges whether you are a teacher, priest or married. I would encourage young men to join the ministry to perpetuate Christ's work as it is God's Work (Ordained in 1985).

Overall, the study noted that priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church has taken a trajectory of non-acceptance by the community from the mid-20th century to the early 1990s when the community began to acquiesce to priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church. There is still some cultural and social resistance; however, celibate Catholic priests at a personal level are accorded respect in the Nandi. This finding concurs with Wubbles (2011) who showed that the acceptability of priestly celibacy draws from varied viewpoints; the personal perspective where the priest formally accepts to be celibate during ordination and the social perspective, that is, how the priest views himself in the public sphere. The study showed that celibate priest feels more accepted within their churches than in other churches.

Several empirical studies have also observed the growing societal or communal acceptance of priestly celibacy (Olson (2007). Some studies have shown that certain Indigenous communities accepted celibacy as a way of life for specific people (Makamure, 2004; Gwaza, 2019), however, Gwaza (2019) considered priestly celibacy as alien to the indigenous communities, while Makamure (2004) indicated that celibacy was practised by the indigenous Karanga people way before the introduction of Catholicism.

CONCLUSION

Though understood and appreciated, however, the practice of priestly celibacy by the Nandi remained socially and culturally unacceptable for the whole of the 20th century. There has been a gradual acceptance of celibacy in the community, but a cross-section of the contemporary Nandi community is still unable to appreciate priestly celibacy and considers it culturally inappropriate.

Catholic priests from the Nandi community are largely accepted by their Christian community. In the mid-20th century, the community could not accept their own to join the priesthood, however, with time, and as the number of converts increased, the Nandi community began to accept a celibate priest at the beckoning of the 21st century. However, still, the community at large still questions their choices regarding celibacy. Nevertheless, the community of believers still find it difficult to accept priestly celibacy as mandated and practised in the Catholic Church. The cultural viewpoints and social backgrounds of Christians still shape much of how they believe and practice their faith.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the celibacy requirement for the Catholic priesthood should be upheld based on the growing acceptance of priestly celibacy among the community.

Suggestion for Further Research

The study suggests that more studies should be undertaken on a larger population of individuals who practise indigenous religion to gauge their view on priestly celibacy. Other studies may consider the protestant view on priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church.

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