

RELIGIOUS CELIBACY

My position is clear: religious celibacy in all of its aspects is an area of ideals, regulation and practice requiring study, discussion and honest dialogue.

Some very devoted committed scholars and dedicated men and women employ the practice of celibacy in the service of others. Gandhi remains an explicit example.

Celibacy, however, is not *natural*. Church teaching recognizes that and calls it a *gift and a grace*.

Religious celibacy, properly defined,* can be possible and is practiced by 2% to 10% of vowed clergy over long periods. I, like many others, found it possible and rewarding for a period of twenty years.

The structure of a regulated life, community support, satisfying work, and a daily routine of mental prayer and contemplation—some elements that continue in my professional and married life—made celibacy possible for me.

Celibacy fit me at one time, and I learned a great deal from the practice. For me blind obedience was a far greater problem in the monastery and priesthood.

The 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* was not intellectually or pastorally acceptable.

Many active Catholic priests say that celibacy is “impossible.” Aldous Huxley called chastity the “most unnatural of all sexual perversions.” It can, however, be useful to some men and women.

*Religious celibacy is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification, in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive. Cf. Sipe, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*. (2002)