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LEADERSHIP**

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BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

# **CELIBACY AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

Dr. K. P. Yohannan Metropolitan

Faith and Tradition Series

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Faith and Tradition Series

(English)

by

Dr. K.P. Yohannan Metropolitan

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## Preface

*In the name of the Father, the Son  
and the Holy Spirit ✠*

**O**ur faith and tradition are the two major factors that define our identity in Christian living. Faith stands for what we believe as a church and tradition denotes how we live according to our faith.

As a church, the faith of Believers Eastern Church is deeply rooted in the Holy Bible, which is the foundation of our life and spirituality. Our tradition is the practices of what the apostles, the composers of the New Testament showed and later was perfected by the vision of the early church fathers.

My hope is that the 'Faith and Tradition' series will bring renewal and life to our Christian life and our church, to know Jesus, who gave His life and loved us, more intimately.

✠The blessings of the Triune God be with you all forever.

Synod Secretariat  
August 15, 2017

✠Dr. K. P. Yohannan  
Metropolitan



## Introduction

Why don't Believers Eastern Church mandate celibacy for their bishops? It is a reasonable question to ask since 'Believers Eastern Church' adheres to the Eastern 'lineage of the Church', and in most of these churches, bishops are required to be celibate (that is, they don't marry). Another question is regarding the official ceremonial outfit that bishops wear, specifically the skull cap or *masanapsa*. Is it connected to this mandate of celibacy?

What does the Bible say about bishops' celibacy? Is there a holy tradition of the church to support this view?

There have been many disputes in the church, from the first century (refer to Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council). They were all dealt with in detail, discussed and resolved. An example of this is the Council of Nicaea where hundreds of church matters were discussed and decided, to

become canon law within the church. So now we must ask ourselves if these two questions were addressed and deliberated during these councils, and if so, what conclusions were reached. That will instruct us at the Believers Eastern Church on how to proceed regarding the *masanapsa*/skull cap and the marital status of the bishops of the church.

But now, let's also consider our current context. We live within a complex system of culture, with traditions and practices that we examine and dissect for biblical and historical veracity. At times, we find that minor issues are blown out of proportion, becoming entrenched in culture to become accepted as non-negotiable doctrine. I think, however, that a wider understanding of issues, and being accommodating as well as open to negotiation on certain minor things is an important value in the church, if we consider that it is our duty to maintain the unity that Jesus talked about in St. John 17.

## INTRODUCTION

Although all human races originate from Adam and Eve, the world is filled with tens of thousands of different cultures with their own dress codes, behaviours, tastes, foods, colours, creeds, laws that govern their community and so on. They are all different and unique to themselves. But the one unifying factor that overrides all else is that we are all human beings.

It is our duty to speak with other leaders and understand their perspectives. So once, I spoke to the supreme leader of a major church regarding this. He told me, “The Bible doesn’t teach that bishops of the Church should not marry, but we choose this as our church tradition.”

I considered this, and came to a few conclusions. This particular church is worthy of great respect, and we know that they are blessed by God in every way. But then, there are others that don’t follow their system, but are also blessed. There are many such matters that vary from church to church. As long as the church

adheres to the non-negotiable doctrines of the church and follows certain practices of faith, paying great attention to unifying elements such as being faithful to the Nicene Creed and the basic liturgical worship, as well as recognising the importance of Constitutional Episcopacy, we should not allow fissures over minor issues to be blown out of proportion.

In this booklet, we seek to bring some clarity to these matters in the hope that we can all love one another and work together as His body, glorifying God in word and deed.

## CHAPTER ONE

# **The Basis of Our Faith and Practice**

**H**ere is a critical question that we must answer: Do we believe that the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament? We may say ‘yes’ without questioning it, but have we considered the implications of such a conviction?

First, let us consider all the values that are integral to our Christian lives: worship, righteous living, justice, humility, loving others, family life, our relationship with money and a hundred other things. Even a casual or superficial understanding of the God of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, can show us that God’s nature

and instructions for our life on earth is the same throughout. For example, Jesus said, “All the law and prophets are summed up in one sentence: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Here is the rule of life that transcends everything, regardless of time and space.

If this is the foundation for our decisions for living as the people of God, then we can think right thoughts and do the right things.

Let us now think about church life. The church was born out of the fulfilment of the Old Testament, which is clear when we read the Bible. The first converts to Christianity were the Jewish people. The church’s worship, leadership etc. are all derived from the Old Testament, reflecting the meaning and purpose God had in His mind.

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<sup>1</sup>*St. Matthew 22:37-39*

Throughout the Old Testament, from the very beginning when God established His people, that is the nation of Israel, the high priests, prophets, kings and all those who represented God to the people of God were responsible, *married* people. In this context, you will not find any command that requires priests and prophets to remain celibate to be shepherds of God's people. If one chose not to marry and have a family, that would have been that individual's decision based on the vow they made for themselves.

The dozens of examples of high priests and prophets from the Old Testament can be considered proof that God intended His leaders to live normal lives and be part of their community. God is the one who made Adam, and recognised his need for Eve, his wife, whom God created.

Think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Hosea, David – these are all people that God chose to lead His people.

If this is the God that we worship, why

would we think that He requires His bishops, priests and church leadership to remain celibate to lead the people of God in the new covenant?

Of course, I do not mean to say that somebody who chooses not to be married would be unfit for church leadership. After all, St. Paul said, if someone chooses to remain single to serve God, that is permissible by God.<sup>2</sup>

Not too long ago, I was reading the constitution of one of the large churches that mandates celibacy for their episcopas. I learnt from it that the Bible doesn't require that the episcopas should not marry, but that particular church had chosen that as their tradition. Their episcopas would not be married men.

Within a culture, there are sub-cultures that have their own unique identity and traditions. So it is with the church; but we should remember that no tradition we

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<sup>2</sup>1 Corinthians 7

embrace or create should go against or hinder the Word of God. It is always beneficial if a tradition helps to strengthen and promote the Word of God.

It is important for us to remember the blueprint Jesus Christ gave to His church for world evangelism, to see churches planted, to 'pray for workers to be sent' to share the gospel and shepherd the people of God. So we conclude that God's method of fulfilling His great commission is through 'people'. We as a church prioritise praying and faith, and of course do all we can to send out as many people as we can to serve the Lord.

We must also consider that sometimes, even unintentionally, man's traditions hinder God's great plans. God wants His children to spread the Good News of his Word far and wide. But how many are there now, who will dedicate their lives to this noble mission? Why is there such disheartening dearth of people who should be priests, deacons and missionaries to serve God? Could it be that we have restricted those best equipped to

raise children in God's ways from doing so, through tenets of man? This is a classic example of unbiblical tradition- the teaching of celibacy for priests and bishops of the church.

As we know, Jesus condemned the Pharisees to hell for holding on to man's traditions that destroy the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, St. Paul talked about embracing godly traditions that help us in godliness and to live the authentic life of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Now, let us look at the New Testament scriptures regarding the episcopacy and the instructions about it.

Let us consider a few passages:

“Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not

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<sup>3</sup> *St. Mark 7:13*

<sup>4</sup> *1 Corinthians 11:2*

violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”<sup>5</sup>

“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.”<sup>6</sup>

“When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.”<sup>7</sup>

“Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>1 *Timothy* 3:1-4

<sup>6</sup>*Titus* 1:5,6

<sup>7</sup>*St. Matthew* 8:14

<sup>8</sup>*St. Luke* 4:38

The Law of Hermeneutics requires that a doctrine to believe and practice should not be decided from one or two verses or based on the subjective experience of someone in the Scripture. But when there is a direct command, or explanation about a subject in the Old Testament or New Testament as made by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, we must take it seriously and fear God to heed it. Holy Baptism and the Eucharist are examples of this.

While the matter of bishops' and priests' marriages is not part of a cardinal doctrine of the church, like giving of tithe and offering is not a cardinal doctrine, yet it is something that God tells us to do in obedience.

When we examine the verses referenced from both the Old Testament and New Testaments, it is obvious that God's Word is very clear about one of the qualifications of a man holding the office of bishop or priesthood: that they should be married.

This is God's instruction. At the same time, as St. Paul said, if someone chooses to remain single to serve God, that is allowed by God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>*I Corinthians 7*



## CHAPTER TWO

# Practice of the Early Church

Since the faith and practice of the holy Church is based on the Word of God and the early church traditions (that is, how the apostles, early church fathers and the church in general understood the teachings and how they practised it), it is important to examine available historical information regarding this subject of married bishops and priests.

To begin with, there is no doubt that the disciples of Christ were all married men. St. Peter, who was the chief Apostle appointed by Christ and the one who was given the key to the Kingdom, was married.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *St. Matthew 8:14; St. Mark 1:30; St. Luke 4:38*

His marriage did not adversely affect the performance of his duties or negate his choice as the Apostle of Christ. There is a strong tradition indicated in St. Peter's last words to his wife as she was led to martyrdom; St. Peter said to her, "Remember the Lord."<sup>11</sup>

There is plenty of evidence that the early church had married bishops. The father of the Cappadocian saints was a married bishop. The elder Gregory was converted to Christianity by the influence of his wife, Nonna, and he was later consecrated as the Bishop of Nazianzus.<sup>12</sup>

St. John Chrysostom had something to say about married bishops. "A bishop then," he says, "must be blameless, the husband of one wife." This he does not lay down as a rule, as if he must not be without one, but as prohibiting him having more than one.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Stromata, Clement of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 2, Book 7, p. 541*

<sup>12</sup> *Polegoomema Sect. 1, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7, p. 187.*

<sup>13</sup> *First Series, Vol. 13, St. John Chrysostom, Homily X, Homiletics on Timothy, p. 438.*

The priority for a married bishop must be the church and he should conduct himself so in his duties. St. Paul does not insist that a bishop must marry but rather emphasises the priority of his call. And the bishop must be married to one wife. There were practices of a man having two wives and this is not allowed for a bishop of the church.<sup>14</sup>

So now we have discovered scholarship that explains that a bishop may be married; that he may be the husband of one wife, with faithful children who're not accused of riotous or unruly behaviour. So now we wonder why this early church father should say this. There would have been no need for this explanation given by Apostle Paul if the bishop of the church had always been prohibited from marrying.

From the writings of St. Athanasius the church father, we find that many bishops were married and when they died, one of their sons succeeded them as bishop. For example he writes,

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

“In Tentrya, Andronicus is instead of Saprion, his father. In Thebes, Pilon instead of Philon, became bishops etc.”<sup>15</sup>

The record shows that in the early church (pure orthodox faith) there were bishops who fasted at length and monks who ate as normal people. There have been bishops who drank wine as well as monks who didn't. Many bishops were not even married, while monks have been fathers of children.<sup>16</sup>

Then St. Ambrose of Milan wrote in detail about the qualifications of a bishop by explaining the scripture where we can see that importance is placed on “being blameless... not soon given to anger, should be the husband of a single wife, not in order to exclude him from the right of marriage... but not marrying again.”<sup>17</sup>

Origen writes about the appointing of

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<sup>15</sup> *Letter 12, Sect 2, Letters of St. Athanasius, Second Series, Vol. IV, p. 538-539.*

<sup>16</sup> *Letter 9, Sect. 9, Letters of St. Athanasius, Second Series, Vol. IV, p. 560*

<sup>17</sup> *Chapters 61 & 62, Letters 63, St. Ambrose, Second Series, Vol. 10, p. 465.*

bishops, with comments on Titus 1:5-6.  
Also Tertullian (150-240 AD) was married.

It was in the 4th century that certain sections of the church began to insist on celibacy for their priests and bishops. Even then, till the 10th century priests and bishops continued to be married and had families.<sup>18</sup>

In the 11th century, Pope Gregory VII made a significant change by making celibacy a legal church matter and a strict requirement for bishops.<sup>19</sup>

We can see from these details that all the various reasons and logic behind the present condition of the church comes back to the one law that is laid down by St. Paul, that a bishop should be the husband of one wife. This possibly means that if his wife dies, he should not marry again but remain celibate serving the Lord, caring only for the church.

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<sup>18</sup> *Lea, Henry C., History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church (Philadelphia, USA: University Books, 1996), pp. 118, 126.*

<sup>19</sup> *Bobby Thomas, Christianikal: Christumathathinuoru Kaippusthakam (Kottayam: DC Books, 2016) p. 227.*

It is good to keep in mind St. Paul himself was a married man. We know that he was member of the Sanhedrin and all members of Sanhedrin were married. We can only conjecture, but there is good reason to believe that when he came to Christ, his wife might have left him and St. Paul chose to remain single for the Lord. But we must also remember his words when he said, "...don't we also have to have a wife like our brother Peter."<sup>20</sup>

St. Paul talked about those who deliberately chose to remain single so that they can serve God without being distracted by other concerns, such as that of their wife and children etc. He also talked about those who married, but lived as though not, for the sake of Christ.<sup>21</sup> We may decipher from these writings that though the overall teaching of the Word of God is in favour of church leaders being married, there are also the exceptions, such as when God calls

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<sup>20</sup> *1 Corinthians 9:5*

<sup>21</sup> *1 Corinthians 7:29*

certain people to remain single as the desert fathers and mothers who served the church.

But it must also be said – and anyone who understands church history will agree – that God used the desert fathers and mothers to sustain the faith of the church, especially during the Middle Ages. Even today, monasteries all over the world continue to have a huge impact on the Body of Christ. Believers Eastern Church, too, is currently in the nascent stages of starting our own monastic order for men.

One thing is for sure: the early church and the church fathers never taught that the bishops of the church should not marry. Rather, the accepted norm was the opposite.

Then too, St. Paul says, “...if one chooses not to marry for the sake of church...”<sup>22</sup> So we have churches that have chosen to decree that their bishops must be unmarried men, which became their tradition. This means that those individuals who aspire to church

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<sup>22</sup> *1 Corinthians 7*

leadership must choose to forsake marriage and having a family, devoting their lives without other responsibilities to the church, and the choice must be freely made.

Unlike olden times, today fewer men than ever are interested in exploring the options of priestly office for churches that require them to be celibate to do so. This has become a serious problem in many Christian communities both in the West and East. When I was a small boy, almost every family in our village had six to a dozen children. But today, if one family has two children, they feel that it's quite enough. For example, recent surveys from Germany and Japan indicate that they might not be able to sustain their population at current rates of birth of children per family. This isn't just about the Christian mission, but about the practicalities of carrying out many Christian qualities, like caring for the elderly in a population with few young people capable of giving care and many elderly people who require this care.

Recently, in an interview with a German Newspaper, Pope Francis hinted that the Catholic Church may consider ordaining married men who could potentially then work in remote areas faced with a shortage of priests. There are big countries like Brazil with large Catholic populations but few priests. This shortage has prompted some progressives to call for an end to the ancient tradition of celibacy for the Roman Catholic priests. Many in the church believe, given the lack of priests in many places, that a new path to ordination should be opened. Such a move would be a revolutionary change for the Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup>

Maybe it is time for Christian families to consider having more children for the sake of God's kingdom, and being living embodiments of His principles in this world.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/pope-signals-elderly-married-men-could-become-priests/articleshow/57581335.cms>



## CHAPTER THREE

### **Different Views of Episcopacy**

**O**ver 2000 years of church history, there have been many variations as to the selection process of bishops. There hasn't always been the same understanding as we have developed, as discussed before, from the scriptures, apostles, or from the early church fathers.

For example, the orthodox church world that embraced the monastic movement almost to themselves had plenty of celibate candidates to choose from. Many orthodox churches had married bishops in the early church, but later due to various circumstances and reasons not entirely

honourable, such as nepotism etc., the overwhelming decision of their own church councils (not the ecumenical councils) enshrined celibacy of bishops into law. They did this for 1000 years, except for the Armenians.

The fact is, the evidence is overwhelming that in orthodox tradition, marriage is not a bar to consecration.

I don't expect this tradition of celibate bishops to change easily for it has become both their structure and financial security.

With time, people change. And the early church did face some problems, with church hierarchy enlisting their very close friends and relatives etc. to take responsible and important positions in the wealthy church. Naturally, the way to avoid some of these temptations of nepotism was to establish the requirement of celibacy for the top leadership of the church. The problem came when later, this became a tradition of the church and a deciding factor while choosing candidates for priesthood and as episcopas of the church.

And the church has made a few bad decisions in the past. Instead of repenting and amending our ways, why, like the Pharisee, must we die in our own self-righteousness and be blind to the bigger plan of God?

Then there is another approach some have taken where they remain married but dedicated to celibacy. This tradition is taken from St. Peter. There is strong reason to believe that, after Jesus called Peter to follow Him, Peter had his wife with him, yet they decided to maintain a celibate life.

Many married men like St. Demetrius, the vine dresser among the Coptic Orthodox, are examples of this. However, if the dedicated celibacy was due to the heretical view that marital relations were not honourable, then a clear rejection of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> of the Apostolic Canons\* would apply, placing the register under anathema.

The most common practice is for a bishop dedicated to the church to not be celibate.

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*\*Apostolic Canons is a collection of ecclesiastical law that has survived from early Christianity*

Those who reject this position quote this verse: “He who is married is concerned for his wife and the affairs of this world.”<sup>24</sup>

But let us also consider the world – our flock, to whom we are shepherds. The problems that the faithful of the church face every day in their lives are intricately connected to the idea of family. Divorce, break-up of families, rebellion of youth and all the social problems that result from the breakdown of one of the basic pillars that holds up civilised society are signs of a complicated and complex time.

Families weave the very fabric of society, and many ills that we see in society at large can be tackled if we consider the smaller units – the families – that make up that whole. I believe that a man who is a priest and spiritual leader needs to know how to take care of the church families.

Someone who has learnt to swim can teach others to do so, too. I am not saying that

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<sup>24</sup> *I Corinthians 7:33*

an unmarried priest or bishop cannot help families in their spiritual growth etc. But according to the Word of God, a priest or bishop should be a man with a godly home that he leads, so that he can be effective in his leadership in the church, which is a whole made up of many families.

Think about it. If God of the Old Testament is the same God in the New Testament, then why did God not make it mandatory for His high priests, priests, prophets and leaders of His people in the Old Testament not to marry?

Some say that the universal church established the tradition of monastic bishops in the third century. This is wrong. The universal church made no such declaration in the third century, nor in the following centuries.

What happened was very different. At the first ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325 AD, the Western delegates (now Catholic) tried to push through a canon requiring

celibacy, but it was completely rejected. At the Council was present St. Paphnutius of Alexandria, a saint who was famous and deeply respected by all. He, though he was celibate, said this:

“That too heavy a yoke ought not to be laid upon... that marriage is honourable and undefiled; that the church ought not to be injured by an extreme severity, for all cannot live in absolute contingency. In this way (by not prohibiting marital relation) it would be sufficient, according to the ancient tradition of the church, if those who had taken holy orders without being married were prohibited from marrying afterwards.”<sup>25</sup>

The words of St. Paphnutius silenced all further discussions on the matter.

It is to be noted that the Council of Nicaea declared the matter closed, and the fifth council did not ban married bishops. There has not been an ecumenical council since

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<sup>25</sup> *cf. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 14, The Seven Ecumenical Councils, “Proposed Action of Celibacy”.*

the schism of the church, and there may never be one again.

It is important to remember that in all the ecumenical councils of the church in history, there was never again a discussion regarding mandating celibacy as a requirement for bishops and priests in the church of Christ.

The Canons of the Twelve Apostles (Apostles' Canon) says, "Let not a bishop, presbyter or deacon, put away his wife under the pretence of religion; but if he put her away, let him be excommunicated; and if he persists, let him be deposed."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Canon LI of the Apostolic Canons*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Dress Code for Bishops**

**W**e as humans live by our senses. If you are on the road and need some help, when a policeman stops his vehicle, you don't ask who he is, for his uniform tells you who he is. What we wear represents what we do, and often who we are, from soldiers to beggars on the street.

I heard a funny, yet true story of a man living in Mumbai. He earns INR 60,000 – 75,000 per month; owns two adjacent one-bedroom apartments and also owns a shop which he rents out. His profession? Well, he is a beggar. So when he goes to work, he changes his clothes to beggar's rags, puts on makeup to look sad and

gloomy, to evoke sympathy from people, and then goes to the CST (the railway station in Mumbai) and other crowded intersections, begging for money. When asked about his life, he said, "Begging fetches me a steady income and I am happy and content with it." You laugh! I did too, when I first heard it.

So, what does that have to do with the dress codes for the church clergy, deacons and bishops, or the hierarchy of the church? Everything.

When you read the Old Testament, have you ever wondered why God gave such detailed descriptions of how His priests should dress, representing God to people and people to God?

Did that God change in the New Testament? When people saw Jesus, they called Him 'rabbi'. One reason is because he dressed like a rabbi in the robe that he wore. From the very early days of the church, when Jewish people converted to Christian faith, I believe that when they gathered for Sunday worship, the bishop and priest did

dress differently from the congregation. They were of the Jewish background. No, I don't think they wore the priestly clothes of Aaron etc., but the robe, cassock, head covering etc. must have seemed a natural thing for a priest, clergyman or bishop to wear. It would've been a natural progression, and a sensible thing to wear clothes that represented their profession.

One thing is for sure: the cassock, the robe that our clergy wear, comes to us from the very first century. But the prayer shawl they wore during the worship services and the skullcap, representing the people of God in humility, were worn not as a sign of celibacy as some came to interpret.

Let me explain further. All these head coverings – and there are many kinds of them – came from the Jewish practice and tradition. It was Jewish practice that men should cover their heads during prayer and ceremonial occasions. They still do it. However, the priests and rabbis during the period of the Old Testament covered their heads not only during prayers and

religious services, but also at other times when they appeared in public. They wanted to minimise the importance of their presence before God, so they covered their heads in humility. This practice indicated one's insignificance and nothingness before God, the sovereign of the universe. During the time of Jesus, this custom was already in place, and in the icons/pictures representing Christ and His Apostles, we see them with their heads covered. During Christ's time, this skullcap was called *Yerai Malka* which is an ancient Aramaic phrase that means 'the fear of or honour for the king'.

It was only natural that since the early converts to Christianity were Jews, they carried this custom on wherever they went.

Again remember, the high priests, priests, prophets and so on were not celibate, so that could not have been a requirement for them to wear the head covering. Christian clergies, bishops and the like continued this practice even after the separation of the church from Judaism.

The practice of bishops covering their heads is not restricted to the Eastern Church alone. There are many other church traditions that do this, such as the Roman Catholic Church.

The point here, however, is that any kind of head covering practised in the East or West had nothing to do with the marital status of the priest, bishop or monks.

Many mistakenly call the monastic *schewa* (hooded robe) *maznaphtho*, which is a piece of linen embroidered with the picture of the crown of thorns Jesus wore, reminding the bishop to be a true shepherd to lead his flock with humility and gentleness and suffering. And the metropolitan wears the *bathmashill* that denotes his rank as the metropolitan in the Syrian tradition.

The tradition of bishops being celibate began much later in the fifth century. As a matter of fact, in all the monastic orders then and now, all monks do wear a head covering (hooded cassock) during prayer times.

There is no record of bishops of the early church wearing permanent head coverings, so that practice has evolved since then to become tradition. But since that time, the emphasis on celibacy for bishops, combined with the feeling of being set apart or perhaps more holy, became interlinked with the practice of wearing the head covering of the Orthodox Church tradition, like the *masanapsa* etc. Of course, I do not imply that it is a bad or wrong thing to do. But the prevailing notion that it is only worn by celibate bishops is not a true biblical understanding based on the Old Testament and New Testament or church history.

Now we come to the question of whether there should be a dress code that visibly indicates that a person is a priest, bishop, metropolitan, deacon etc. I believe that that is the right thing to do. As part of the tradition we follow, our *Episcopas* follow an official dress code. Since the 1st century there has always been a dress code (which later others have helped develop) which

helps to recognize those in the church authority. This is also commonly seen in the Old and New Testament. In order to complete the picture of the Eastern stream of church we are part of, the official dress code of the Episcopa also includes a head gear (cap) which will be part of their attire.

There is a line of learning that interprets that when St. Paul says, “I bear in my body the mark of Christ”<sup>27</sup>, it meant that St. Paul had the sign of the cross tattooed on his forehead, for all to see that he was a follower of Christ. I cannot comment on whether this is true. But there are plenty of verses that explain that our appearance and behaviour should declare to the world who we are.

So, when it comes to church leadership, it is my opinion that a certain dress code drawn from our history and tradition, which speaks of the position and responsibility one holds, should be followed. This declares that we are not ashamed of the gospel.

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<sup>27</sup> *Galatians 6:17*

When the antichrist comes, he is going to make sure his followers will have his sign visible on them: the number 666.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary/Application

**O**ne: “Heaven and earth shall pass away but the Word of the Lord endures forever.”<sup>28</sup> Whether it is 2000 years or 20 years old, any and all traditions of man must be rejected when it goes against the revealed Word of God. The requirement of forced celibacy for bishops and clergies is not taught in the entire Bible as a mandate to hold offices for God’s work.

**Two:** If, like St. Paul and many saints in history, one chooses to be celibate for the sake of the kingdom, they need to adore and

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<sup>28</sup> *St. Matthew 5:18*

praise God for His grace and mercy given to them.

**Three:** The authoritative ecumenical councils of the undivided church never accepted or approved the celibacy requirement for bishops and priests.

**Four:** In the Eastern context, it may be still easier to accept this ascetic thinking for the culture itself leans toward this kind of thinking, and because there are plenty of monasteries, the church can still find many scholarly celibates to be elevated to leadership. But this ease, while it may enable a tradition and make it accepted, does not make it mandatory.

**Five:** Today the crisis is that there are not enough priests and bishops in the Western church. Especially we must consider how in some churches, increasing occurrences of sexual misconduct among their clergies must cause the church to re-examine if we are living in obedience to the Word.

**Six:** It is an honourable thing if one chooses to remain single for the Lord's sake. And

this should be encouraged rather than discouraged in these days of such darkness by sin all around us.

**Seven:** There is much good to be acknowledged about the desert fathers and mothers, who we believe held the church together spiritually, especially in the Middle Ages.

**Eight:** If nepotism is the argument for celibate leadership of the church, one needs to remember that times have changed. Today, the laws of the country require absolute accountability for public assets. In India and the subcontinent, all churches must have a separate legal trust that is legally responsible for protecting the assets of the church. Therefore, protecting the assets of the church by celibate leadership is no longer relevant.

**Nine:** There was a time when a family had six or more children and religious education was given without distraction. Today, no matter what community you are in, the number of children is usually

no more than one or two. The need and opportunity is so huge that we must not stubbornly hold on to our tradition.

We must be open to the Lord to change according to His Word. There are literally thousands of congregations without priests to take care of them. Opening the door for people to marry and serve God will be a significant change at this time.

**Ten:** Today, divorces and dysfunctional families are unfortunately far too common. When these family problems arise, how can a bishop or a clergyman adequately understand and minister to this crisis if they don't have a family, and unless they can understand the complexities of the situation from more than an academic or theoretic point of view?

**Eleven:** We need to be cautioned not to be in any way similar to false religions or cults that forbid marriage. This warning is given to us in the Word of God, as part of the things that we should be wary of when man departs from the teachings of God:

“Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”<sup>28</sup>

**Twelve:** It is important to note that the church does embrace the call and choice of individuals to serve God as celibates for the Scripture says so in 1 Corinthians 7.

The orthodox church has developed monasteries for those called to live and serve the church. My view is all churches should have monastic orders for this has been part of the church from the beginning. This should not be only for men, but for women as well, like Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity which has been significantly effective in serving the church.

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Timothy 4:3

