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DOES COMMITMENT TO CELIBACY LEAD TO BURNOUT OR ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT?

A Study among the Indian Catholic Clergy

(Received: 16 December 2009; accepted: 17 February 2010)

Burnout and engagement in general are thought to be associated mostly with work related factors and sometimes with personal factors as well. Over the past three decades a number of studies among clergy have identified various causes for priests' susceptibility to burnout and have linked various independent variables in the study of burnout among clergy. However, a study on the association between commitment to celibacy, burnout and engagement among clergy has not been attempted. Is celibacy psychologically a possible way of life? In the Catholic Church (Latin Rite), the sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred only on candidates who are ready to freely embrace and publicly manifest their intention of staying celibate for the love of God's kingdom and the service of human beings. This study among Indian Catholic clergy contributes to the literature of burnout and engagement by studying the association of commitment towards priestly celibacy with clergy burnout and engagement – a new venture in the field of burnout and engagement. In addition, for the first time the construct of engagement has been used among clergy. Hierarchical regression analyses in the sample of 511 Catholic diocesan priests from South India confirmed that commitment to celibacy was negatively associated with burnout (that is it had a negative association with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and a positive association with personal accomplishment), and on the other hand, it was positively associated with engagement.

Keywords: clergy burnout, clergy engagement, commitment to celibacy, diocesan priests, Catholic Church

Führt das Zölibatsgebot zum Burn-out oder steigert es im Gegenteil das Engagement? Eine Untersuchung beim katholischen Klerus in Indien: Burn-out und Engagement assoziiert man gewöhnlich mit beruflichen Faktoren, manchmal aber auch mit Faktoren, die mit dem Privatle-

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ben zusammenhängen. Die in den vergangenen drei Jahrzehnten beim Klerus durchgeführten Studien haben unterschiedliche Erklärungen dafür geliefert, warum bei Priestern ein Burn-out-Risiko besteht; bei der Untersuchung von Burn-out-Syndromen beim Klerus wurden unterschiedliche unabhängige Variablen miteinander korreliert. Allerdings wurde noch nie versucht, den Zusammenhang zwischen Zölibatsgebot und Burn-out bzw. Engagement bei Klerikern zu untersuchen. Ist der Zölibat eine aus psychologischer Sicht akzeptable Lebensweise? In der römisch-katholischen Kirche können traditionell nur diejenigen Kandidaten das Sakrament des Priestertums erlangen, die bereit sind – geleitet von der Liebe zum Reich Gottes und dem Dienst am Menschen – sich freiwillig dafür zu entscheiden, zölibatär zu leben, und diese Absicht öffentlich zu bekräftigen. Diese beim katholischen Klerus in Indien durchgeführte Untersuchung leistet einen Beitrag zur Fachliteratur über Burn-out und Engagement, indem sie den Zusammenhang zwischen Zölibatsgebot und im Klerus auftretenden Burn-out und Engagement untersucht – ein neuartiges Vorhaben im Bereich der Forschung zu Burn-out und Engagement. Des Weiteren wird hier zum ersten Mal das Engagement-Modell beim Klerus angewandt. Die für eine Stichprobe von 511 Priestern in der katholischen Diözese Südindien durchgeführten hierarchischen Regressionsanalysen haben bestätigt, dass zwischen Zölibatsgebot und Burn-out eine negative Korrelation besteht (negative Korrelation wurde gefunden für emotionale Erschöpfung und Depersonalisation, positive für individuelle Leistung), gleichzeitig wurde eine positive Korrelation mit Engagement gezeigt.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Burn-out im Klerus, Engagement beim Klerus, Zölibatsgebot, Diözesanpriester, katholische Kirche

1. Introduction

The Catholic Church does not wish to leave any doubts in the minds of anyone regarding the Church's firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin Rite (JOHN PAUL II 1992). The obligation of celibacy has been perceived by the church for several centuries as one of the main conditions for priestly ordination and its value and importance have been articulated in the teachings of the Magisterium down to our times (*Presbyterorum ordinis* 1965, 16; *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* 1967, 14; *The Code of Canon Law* 1983, 277 §1; JOHN PAUL II 1992, 29; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2002, 1599). The mandatory celibacy of priests in the Latin rite has provoked more discussion than any other single question since the Second Vatican Council. Assumptions relating celibacy with lack of commitment to priestly life and ministry (LOUDEN & FRANCIS 2003; SCHOENHERR & VILARINO 1979) or to leaving priesthood (SCHOENHERR & YOUNG 1993; VERDIECK et al. 1988) are not new to the Catholic Church. However, the fact remains that there are hardly any empirical studies of a psychological nature that have been undertaken with regard to celibacy and priesthood. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that it is a very sensitive issue and to assess practice of, or attitude toward, celibacy among catholic priests with a few objective questions is clearly difficult. Hence, it is not surprising to find that there are no empirical studies done among clergy to find the association of commitment to

celibacy to burnout or engagement. Our study attempts to verify whether commitment to celibacy can be a resource that would enhance engagement or, on the other hand, a non-committed attitude towards celibacy could be associated with burnout.

1.1. Burnout and engagement

The most commonly used metaphor to describe a state of mental weariness is burnout (SCHAUFELI & BAKKER 2004). MASLACH (1982), a prominent scholar in the field, defined burnout as 'a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind' (p. 3). In line with this definition, clergy burnout can be seen as: (1) A feeling of being devoured from within, of being emotionally exhausted and of ministering from a posture of nothing left to give; not that one does not want to give, but one just cannot give. Drained, tapped out, a priest feels he has little energy to give service to others (MASLACH & JACKSON 1986); 2) The constant outputting of compassion and caring over time causes a decline in the ability to experience joy or to feel and care for others, which leads to the development of depersonalisation – a loss of concern for the people with whom one is working as a result of job-related stress (FREUDENBERGER & RICHELSON 1980); 3) It is a sense of reduced accomplishment, wherein the priest feels he is giving out a great deal of energy and compassion to others over a period of time, yet is not able to get enough back to reassure himself that the world is a hopeful place (MASLACH 1993). At the end of the day he questions himself, 'What have I accomplished? Is it worth becoming a priest, or being a priest?'

Since the beginning of the 21st century there has been a conscious shift from concentrating on the negatives to the positives. Thus, the appearance of work engagement coincides with the rise of so-called positive psychology that focuses on human strengths and optimal functioning (SELIGMAN & CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI 2000). The most prominent definition of engagement is the one proposed by SCHAUFELI and colleagues (2002) who define it as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (p. 74). That is, in engagement fulfillment exists, in contrast to the voids of life that leave people feeling empty as in burnout. In line with this definition, clergy engagement could be defined as a constant giving of oneself with vigor, dedication and absorption, in service to a noble cause, without becoming exhausted or cynical. It can be characterised as: 1) A feeling of possessing high levels of energy; a willingness to offer oneself wholeheartedly and to invest effort in one's ministry, even in the midst of difficulties and trying situations; 2) A spirit of enthusiastically dedicating oneself to challenging the situation in which one is ministering by unconditionally showing love, compassion and care to the people involved in the situation; 3) A sense of fulfilment and a state of being happily engrossed in one's ministry and an experience of difficulty in detaching oneself from the same.

1.2. Commitment to celibacy

Priestly celibacy can be defined as the abstinence from marriage, freely and willingly accepted for the purpose of committing and dedicating one's life wholeheartedly and totally to serve God and the people. There is no evidence in the Bible that celibacy and ministry are inseparably united (MANNATH 2003). It is true that in the apostolic times, celibacy was not imposed as a necessary condition for discipleship, even upon those who were to enter the sacred ministry. However, the example and the words of Jesus Christ (Lk 18:28–30; Mat 19:27–30; Mk 10:20–21), as well as the fervent exhortation of St. Paul, bring out the deep meaning and the spiritual and practical advantages of celibacy (1Cor 7:32–34) in offering oneself undividedly to serve God and humanity.

In the post-apostolic development of its life, the Church – for various significant reasons – found it fitting that its ministers lead a celibate life. In the period between 100–450 dubbed as the Patristic period, the fathers of the Church constantly advocated celibacy for ecclesial leaders, and, towards the end of the Patristic period, some even considered sexual activity in marriage to be tainted, and even sinful, if not done for reproductive goals. Hence, priests who were destined to perform sacred rites were forbidden to be tainted by 'suspect' sexuality (SWENSON 1998). The central reason for celibacy during this period was ritual purity. The Council of Elvira in Spain (306) was the first that prohibited bishops, deacons and priests from marrying. However, at the Council of Nicea (325), a proposal to require celibacy for all priests was defeated, and in the Council of Trullo (692), the right of priests to marry was reasserted (RICE 1992). The end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th centuries witnessed not only upheavals in society but also immense decline in clerical discipline and great lapses in morality as well. Church wealth was also increasing, and priests were leaving church property to their heirs. Hence, to check these abuses, in 1038 Pope Benedict VIII forbade descendants of priests to inherit property. Later in the 11th century Pope Gregory VII went further, by proscribing married priests from saying mass and forbidding people from attending masses said by them. Scholars are of the opinion that the first law forbidding priests to marry was finally handed down in the Lateran Council II in 1139. However, it took another three centuries for the law to become the official doctrine at the Council of Trent in 1563. Since then the position of the Catholic Church (Latin Rite) on the issue of celibacy has remained essentially unchanged (COCHINI 1990; FRAZEE 1972), though the present Pope and his immediate predecessor have made exceptions for Lutheran and Anglican clergy coming into the church. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) reaffirmed the Roman Catholic position on the importance of celibacy and the Synod of Bishops that met in Rome in 1971 noted that celibacy results in undivided devotion to Christ and dedication to the apostolic task (ministry) and is a sign of the world to come (ABBOT 1966; CORIDEN 1972).

Though the origin of the obligation of celibacy in the Catholic Church could be ascribed to practical reasons, down through the centuries the various documents and the teachings of the Church unearthed the rich theological and spiritual significance of the obligation. Priestly celibacy came to be viewed as a grace, a gift, and a commitment.

Theologically, three important dimensions of celibacy were identified: 1) Celibacy involves freedom, which means that the celibacy of the priest is determined by the free and conscious choice made by a psychically mature man; 2) It involves sacrifice – through celibacy a priest becomes a man for others sacrificing his desire to establish a family; 3) It requires the grace of God to be lived. The choice of celibacy made with human and Christian prudence and responsibility is governed by grace, which – far from destroying or doing violence to nature – elevates it and imparts to it supernatural powers and vigor (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* 1967, 51). In short, celibacy is a sign of freedom, empowered by God, that exists for the sake of service. The fact that one can be celibate, if one so chooses, is an indication of the growth of freedom. In the Latin Church, the sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred only on candidates who are ready to freely embrace and publicly manifest their intention of staying celibates for the love of God's kingdom and the service of human beings (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2002, 1599). *The Code of Canon Law* (1983) states that:

Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of God and therefore are obliged to observe celibacy, which is a special gift of God, by which the sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and mankind. (277, §1)

Celibacy has been freely and laudably observed by many Christians down through the centuries as well as in our time, and has always been highly esteemed in a special way by the Church as a feature of priestly and religious life (*Presbyterorum ordinis* 1965, 16). Hence, a true knowledge of the real difficulties of the commitment to celibacy is very useful and even necessary for the priest, so that he may be fully aware of what his celibacy requires in order to be genuine and beneficial (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* 1967, 52).

Is celibacy psychologically a possible way of (healthy) life? Mahatma Gandhi said only a love that can match or exceed what is possible with sexual love can sustain celibacy (SIPE 1990, 64). MASLOW (1943, 1954) in his theory of the hierarchy of needs says that we choose the higher need over the lower one if we have been experiencing both. In this 'needs' progression, Maslow found that genital abstinence or celibacy is not in any way psychologically harmful in the most integrated, most self-actualised people, functioning at the highest levels of human expression (BROWN 1989). From a psychological point of view, celibacy is not only a renunciation; it is always an affirmation – an affirmation of the priest's love and commitment to God and his people (MANALEL 2006). Living the ideal of celibacy is possible only if a priest harmoniously integrates the value of celibacy with the wider personality structure. As long as sexuality is considered as an instinct, it comes under the realm of a biological fact and the attitude towards sexual problems focuses primarily on self-control and renunciation. Such a concept does not realise that sexuality has a real influence on the entire personality; but rather views it as a psychological, instinctive substratum, which by intruding causes excitement. From this perspective, it is not enough to educate priests to accept their own sexuality but they should be taught to integrate it into their

own personality (VERGOTE 1998). Thus, it can be presumed that accepting one's sexuality and integrating it with one's personality, by a priest who appreciates the value of celibacy, and who has an ongoing relationship with God, can be the only means of living a healthy, priestly, celibate life.

1.3. Celibacy in the Indian context

Priests in India live in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society. Therefore, it would be beneficial to situate the issue of celibacy in the Catholic priesthood by briefly discussing the notion of celibacy in the other religious groups in India. Hinduism considers celibacy as an important virtue and an essential aspect of spiritual life. 'Brahmacharya', a student of Brahman engaged in the study of the Vedas and Brahman was exhorted to observe strict celibacy. Apart from students, Hindu seers and sages observed strict celibacy most of their lives even though they were married (MECHERIL 1991; MOOKENTHOTTAM 2000). Buddhism extols (life long) celibacy as a virtue essential for obtaining Nirvana (liberation from suffering). Celibacy is required of all monks and nuns of Buddhism [with the exception of Theravada tradition and among most of the schools of the Mahayana and Vajrayana orders in Tibet, Japan, and South Korea, that allow monks to marry] (SACHS 2002). The basic intent of celibacy in Jainism is to conquer passion and to prevent the waste of energy. It is the fourth of the five minor vows, applicable to monks. Positively stated, the vow is meant to impart the sense of serenity to the soul (MANI 1969). According to Sikhism, the true path to achieving salvation and merging with God does not require renunciation of the world or celibacy, but living the life of a householder, earning an honest living, and avoiding worldly temptations and sins (EDWARDS 2001; SINGH 1979). Islam forbids intercourse outside of marriage, but maintaining celibacy as an act of piety is strongly discouraged. However, even in Islam, there is a mystic movement called Sufism that advocates abstinence, renunciation, and silence as ways of giving up of oneself to God (EDWARD 1907). Thus from the above survey we can conclude that the major religious traditions in India (except Islam and Sikhism) honour and respect celibates and expect their monks and nuns to be faithful to their commitment of celibacy. Hence, for a Catholic priest in India to accept the commitment of celibacy which he has freely and voluntarily chosen is not something alien to his social environment, but an accepted norm for those offering themselves to God in the Indian culture and tradition.

2. Empirical research on celibacy

Over the years much scholarly writing has been carried out on the subject of celibacy. However, there are very few empirical studies attempted in this field and definitely not one trying to establish the association between celibacy and burnout or engagement. The study by the National Organization for Research Centre (NORC) in the United States showed that resignations from priesthood were more frequent among young

priests who found loneliness a personal problem and who expressed desire to marry if celibacy was declared optional (SCHOENHERR & GREELEY 1974). A similar country-wide survey sponsored by the Spanish hierarchy reported that lack of commitment to the priestly role was associated with the negative impact of celibacy (SCHOENHERR & VILARINO 1979). VERDIECK and colleagues (1988) replicated relevant parts of the 1970 NORC Survey in another national sample of American priests and reported that the cost of celibacy as measured by a desire to marry, although weaker in 1985 than in 1970, remained the principal consideration in determining whether a priest would withdraw or continue in active ministerial priesthood. A study by LOUDEN & FRANCIS (2003) among 1482 Catholic Priests in England and Wales demonstrated that nearly three quarters of the priests (73%) agreed that chastity is essential for a Catholic priest. 72% were of the view that most priests remain faithful to their commitment to celibacy, but the proportion dropped to less than half (46%) to the question whether they felt that celibacy should remain the norm for entry to priesthood. The study also revealed that 58% of the priests were clear that given an option they would not entertain thoughts of marriage while remaining in priestly ministry. GREELEY in his book *Priests: A Calling in Crisis* (2002) reports the results of the replicated 1993 *Times* Survey in 2002 with some additional questions on the sexual orientation and practice of Catholic priests. The results showed that 72% of the American priests were heterosexual celibates, 10% homosexual celibates and 18% were not celibates.

From the findings of the empirical research the following emerges: All the studies that have attempted to study priestly celibacy have been done in the United States and in Europe. There are no studies which have been undertaken among priests in the Indian context, where celibacy is generally considered as a strong virtue among most other religious groups. In addition, the strict moral culture with moral codes, and even moral policing, of the parents and elders in the society in which an Indian grows up, could also have a significant effect on how priests in India view celibacy. Most of the studies mentioned above have focused on the behavioural outcomes of living a celibate life and have concentrated on the negative behavioural consequences like turnover intention, etc. With a few priests being non-committed to the obligation of celibacy, these minorities can and have been magnified and blown out of proportion to suit a particular interpretation. Therefore, studies and reports of this nature need to be cautiously analysed before jumping into conclusions. For many in the Western world almost all the problems of catholic priesthood seem to trickle down to the problem of celibacy, even though there can be other valid reasons for crisis in priestly life and ministry. Until now there have been no studies that have associated priestly celibacy with burnout or engagement.

3. Aims of the study

The primary aim of this study was to investigate if commitment to celibacy has an impact on burnout and engagement among Indian clergy. The study of burnout and engagement has concentrated mostly on work-related antecedents. This study adds to

the literature of burnout and engagement in three ways: 1) as the first study attempted to associate commitment to celibacy with burnout and engagement; 2) as the first study that has been undertaken to analyse the concept of engagement among priests; 3) as the first empirical study to be made among Indian priests relating celibacy with burnout and engagement. Taking into consideration the uniqueness of Indian society, we assumed that commitment to priestly celibacy, instead of being an encumbrance, would rather be a resource that could enhance engagement and reduce the risk of being burned out. In line with the tradition and teachings of the Catholic Church, the literature on priestly celibacy, and taking into consideration the Indian context, we assumed that commitment to celibacy would be associated negatively with burnout and positively with engagement. To investigate this notion the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: We expect commitment to celibacy to be negatively associated with burnout. That is

1a: We expect commitment to celibacy to be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

1b: We expect commitment to celibacy to be negatively associated with depersonalisation.

1c: We expect commitment to celibacy to be positively associated with personal accomplishment.

Hypothesis 2: We expect commitment to celibacy to be positively associated with engagement.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The study population consists of Indian diocesan Catholic clergy ministering in 16 Catholic dioceses of South India (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Pondicherry). The age of the participants in our sample varied between 27 and 88 years with a mean age of 43.2 years ($SD = 11.8$). The participants' ministerial experience varied from 1 to 58 years with a mean of 14.9 years ($SD = 11.9$). With respect to participants' level of education in our study, 43.2% ($N = 221$) had bachelor's degrees, 44.4% ($N = 227$) obtained a masters degree and 11.5% ($N = 59$) had acquired a PhD. Four participants did not indicate their educational qualification. In our study, 28.2% ($N = 144$) of the participants lived alone without a companion priest; 26.4% ($N = 135$) had one priest companion, 16.8% ($N = 86$) had two; 8.4% ($N = 43$) had three, and the remaining 20.2% ($N = 103$) live with four and up to thirty-eight companion priests. The majority of the participants in our study are situated in the town/semi-urban and rural areas: 33.5% ($N = 171$) of the priests minister in rural areas, 49.7% ($N = 254$) work in town areas and 16.8% ($N = 86$) in metropolitan cities. In our study, 74.4% ($N = 380$) of the priests are engaged in parish ministry, 21.9% ($N = 112$) work in

institutions (seminaries, colleges, schools and commissions at the national, regional and diocesan levels) and 3.7% ($N = 19$) in the diocesan curia.

4.2. Measures

We adapted a few well known and internationally validated measures to analyse the association between burnout, engagement and personality traits.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (MASLACH & JACKSON 1986): The MBI is a self-report questionnaire with 22 items developed to assess the three aspects of the burnout syndrome: Emotional exhaustion (9 items) measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work (e.g., 'I feel emotionally drained from my ministry'; $\alpha = 0.91$). Depersonalisation (5 items) measures an unfeeling and impersonal response towards recipients of one's care (e.g., 'I feel I treat some parishioners/people in the institution as if they are impersonal objects'; $\alpha = 0.83$). Personal accomplishment (8 items) measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people (e.g., 'I can easily understand how my parishioners/people in the institution feel about things'; $\alpha = 0.81$). The MBI Scale uses a seven-point Likert scale (0 = *never*, 6 = *everyday*) indicating the frequency of a feeling or perception. Higher scores in the first two subscales and lower scores in the third subscale indicate greater levels of burnout.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (SCHAUFELI & BAKKER 2003): The UWES is a self-report questionnaire with 17 items assessing three aspects of work engagement: Vigor (6 items) refers to high levels of energy and resilience, to the willingness to invest effort, to not being easily fatigued, and to persistence in the face of difficulties (e.g., 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy'; $\alpha = 0.87$). Dedication (5 items) refers to deriving a sense of significance from one's work, to feeling enthusiastic and proud about one's job, and to feeling inspired and challenged by it (e.g., 'I find the ministry that I do is full of meaning and purpose'; $\alpha = 0.92$). Absorption (6 items) refers to being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulty detaching oneself from it, so that time passes quickly and one forgets everything else (e.g., 'When I am ministering, I forget everything else around me'; $\alpha = 0.88$). Participants have to indicate their answers on a seven-point scale (0 = *never*, 6 = *always*). Higher scores in the three subscales indicate greater levels of engagement.

Celibacy Scale: The questionnaire on commitment to celibacy was self-developed (which comprises of the authors of this article). It is a 7-item scale employed to assess the attitude of priests to the commitment of celibacy. Issues with regard to celibacy are charted out by asking participants whether they felt celibacy helped them to do their ministry effectively, and how they coped with the problems of celibacy (e.g., 'Celibacy is great and fulfilling'; 7 items $\alpha = 0.85$). Participants have to indicate their answers on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The higher the score, the more positive the attitude of the priests towards celibacy, a lower score indicates a negative attitude toward celibacy.

4.3. Results

Factor analysis for the MBI scale revealed that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scales were merged as one factor and personal accomplishment as another factor, and all items had a minimal factor loading of 0.56. The results of our data among the Indian clergy demonstrating that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation group into a single factor were in line with a few studies (GREEN et al. 1991; SCHAUFELI & VAN DIERENDONCK 1993). Some researchers feel that a two-factor model will also fit the data well (TARIS et al. 1999), since there is a broad consensus that the 'Core of Burnout Scale' is a composite score of exhaustion and depersonalisation (GREEN et al. 1991). However, the MBI manual (MASLACH & JACKSON 1986) states that a three-factor model for the relations among items will fit the data better than a two-factor model in which the exhaustion and cynicism scales are merged. Taking into consideration the norms of the MBI Manual for our further statistical analysis we will use the three-factor model. With regard to the engagement measure a clear three-factor structure was absent. However, all items had a minimal factor loading of 0.55. This is the first time that UWES inventory has been used in a sample of clergy. The assumption that the fit of the one-factor solution (that all three aspects of work engagement load on one underlying dimension), as well as the fit of the three-factor solution that assumes that the three aspects of work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) are independent, yet correlated factors, was assessed in various studies (SCHAUFELI & BAKKER 2003) and it was concluded that the fit of the three-factor solution is superior to that of the one-factor solution. However, SONNENTAG's (2003) study, which used explorative factor analyses, failed to find a clear three-factor structure, and settled for the total composite score of the UWES as a measure for work engagement and thus, the fit of one-factor model also became acceptable. Since the three-factor structure in our data was absent, the proposal of SONNENTAG (2003), the one-factor solution, will be adopted in our study, which is in line with the manual (SCHAUFELI & BAKKER 2003). Factor analysis for commitment to celibacy showed that all the items loaded on one factor and had a minimal factor loading of 0.71 (cf. *Table 1*).

Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients of burnout, engagement, ministerial demands and ministerial resources for the Indian Catholic diocesan priests are reported in *Table 2*.

Table 3 reports the results of the correlational analysis between the subscales of burnout, engagement and commitment to celibacy.

In line with our assumptions, commitment to celibacy was correlated negatively to emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and positively to personal accomplishment and engagement. In order to examine the predictive impact of commitment to celibacy on burnout and engagement a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed for each of the dependent variables (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, personal accomplishment and engagement). *Table 4* demonstrates the results of the hierarchical regression analyses. Several relevant demographic variables were controlled, namely: age (years), education, companions, place and residence. Education was recoded into two dummy variables with those who have completed a Masters as

Table 1
PCA factor structure of commitment to celibacy scale
in the Indian Catholic diocesan clergy sample ($N = 511$)

Nos	Commitment to celibacy items	<i>l</i>
1	Priestly celibacy is great and fulfilling.	0.832
3	Celibacy helps to minister to the people more effectively.	0.820
5	Celibacy is an unnecessary burden imposed on the Catholic priests.	0.785
7	If offered an option, I would choose to be a celibate priest again.	0.758
4	I am able to tackle the problem of loneliness in celibate life.	0.751
2	Formation in the seminary helped me to a great extent to integrate celibacy in my life and pastoral ministry.	0.748
6	Celibacy in no way helps to relate better to issues concerning the problems of the family.	0.708

Table 2
Means, standard deviation, Cronbach alpha, skewness and kurtosis

Variables	No. of items	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
1 Emotional exhaustion	9	511	2.00	1.35	0.91	0.86	0.32
2 Depersonalisation	5	510	1.84	1.40	0.83	0.87	0.23
3 Personal accomplishment	8	508	3.61	1.18	0.81	0.11	-0.66
4 Engagement	17	509	4.02	1.42	0.96	-0.73	-0.28
5 Commitment to celibacy	7	511	3.66	0.73	0.85	-0.60	-0.28

Table 3
Correlations, means and standard deviation
for the scales of burnout, engagement and commitment to celibacy

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 Emotional exhaustion	1					2.00	1.35
2 Depersonalisation	0.85**	1				1.84	1.40
3 Personal accomplishment	-0.22**	-0.22**	1			3.61	1.18
4 Engagement	-0.63**	-0.62**	0.56**	1		4.02	1.42
5 Commitment to celibacy	-0.48**	-0.46**	0.27**	0.52**	1	3.66	0.73

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4
Results of regression analysis with emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, lack of personal accomplishment and engagement as dependent variables and demographic characteristics and commitment to celibacy as predictors ($N = 511$)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>EE</i>		<i>DP</i>		<i>PA</i>		<i>EN</i>	
	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>
<i>Age</i>	-0.10*	-0.04	-0.13**	-0.07	0.01	-0.02	0.07	-0.00
<i>Ed. Bach</i>	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.08	-0.02	-0.05	-0.02	-0.07
<i>Ed. Phd</i>	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.05	0.07	-0.01	0.03
<i>Companions</i>	-0.10	-0.04	-0.10	-0.06	-0.03	-0.06	0.08	0.04
<i>Place Rural</i>	-0.02	-0.06	-0.08	-0.10	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	0.01
<i>Place Metro</i>	-0.02	0.03	-0.08	-0.07	-0.02	-0.03	0.03	0.02
<i>Residence</i>	-0.13*	-0.08	-0.13*	-0.09	0.03	0.00	0.10	0.06
<i>Celibacy</i>		-0.47***		-0.44***		0.27***		0.51***
<i>R</i>	0.22***	0.50***	0.27***	0.51***	0.08 n.s	0.28***	0.22***	0.54***
<i>R²</i>	0.05	0.25	0.07	0.26	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.29
<i>F Value</i>	3.48	20.99	5.59	21.29	0.44	5.16	3.61	25.15
<i>df</i>	(7,499)	(8,498)	(7,498)	(8,497)	(7,496)	(8,495)	(7,497)	(8,496)
<i>Change in R²</i>	0.05	0.21	0.07	0.18	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.24

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$; EE = Emotional Exhaustion; DP = Depersonalisation; PA = Personal accomplishment; EN = Engagement; Ed. Bach = Education Bachelors.

the reference group. Place was recoded into two dummy variables with town as reference group and residence was recoded into one dummy variable with institution as reference group with parish. In each of these regressions, demographic variables (age, education, companions, place of ministry, residence) were entered in the model in the first step to control for their influence on the outcomes. In the second step, commitment to celibacy was introduced (cf. *Table 4*). Foremost we wanted to test the predictive impact of commitment to celibacy on burnout after controlling for demographic variables.

Hypothesis 1 stated that commitment to celibacy would be negatively associated with burnout. That is, commitment to celibacy would be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion (Hypothesis 1a). The results in *Table 4* show that as expected commitment to celibacy was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.47$; $p < 0.001$) and with the introduction of commitment to celibacy in step 2 there was a significant increase in the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.25$; $p < 0.001$; R^2 Change = 0.21; $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 1b stated that commitment to celibacy would be negatively associated with depersonalisation. As per our expectations commitment to celibacy was negatively associated with depersonalisation ($\beta = -0.44$; $p < 0.001$) and there was

a significant increase in the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.26$; $p < 0.001$; R^2 Change = 0.18; $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 1c stated that commitment to celibacy would be positively associated with personal accomplishment. In line with our expectations the results in *Table 4* show that commitment to celibacy was positively associated with personal accomplishment ($\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.001$) but the explained variance was rather small ($R^2 = 0.08$; $p < 0.001$; R^2 Change = 0.07; $p < 0.001$) since step 1 was not significant. Thus the results of our findings corroborate Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 stated that commitment to celibacy would be positively associated with engagement. The results in *Table 4* demonstrate that commitment to celibacy is positively related to engagement ($\beta = 0.51$; $p < 0.001$). With the introduction of commitment to celibacy in step 2 there was a significant increase in the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.29$; $p < 0.001$; R^2 Change = 0.24; $p < 0.001$). Thus the results corroborate Hypothesis 2. From the results we can derive that commitment to celibacy seems to be a significant antecedent in the prediction of both burnout and engagement. The findings revealed significantly that lower scores on commitment to celibacy lead to burnout while on the other hand, higher scores on celibacy enhance engagement.

5. Discussion

Sexuality is one of the central, pervasive and powerful dimensions of human nature and it affects the way in which the priest thinks, feels, makes choices, views social roles and even prays. Priests in the Catholic Church (Latin Rite) have affirmed that they have freely embraced and have publicly manifested their intention of staying celibates for the love of God's kingdom and the service of human beings (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2002, 1599) in perfect and perpetual continence (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, 277, §1). The results of our study have shown that such a celibate commitment is associated negatively with burnout and positively with engagement. The reasons why commitment to celibacy is negatively associated with burnout and positively associated with engagement could be derived from reviewing the item scores of the celibacy scale used in our study among the Indian priests. Putting to rest some of the speculation that commitment to celibacy is a yoke too heavy to handle or even an unnecessary burden to Catholic priests, our results confirm, in line with the tradition and teachings of the Catholic Church, that rather than being a burden, it is a resource, helping the majority of the priests in our survey to be happily engaged in priestly life and ministry. The item scores of the celibacy measure reveal that 70.9% percent of the Indian priests viewed commitment to celibacy to be great and fulfilling, while 13.2% denied this view and 15.9% were neutral. This view of the Indian priests is in line with the study of LOUDEN & FRANCIS (2003) among 1482 Catholic priests in England and Wales that reported that 73% of the priests considered celibacy to be essential for a Catholic priest.

Interestingly, there is always speculation, without any grounded reason, that the obligation of celibacy is the reason for fewer vocations in the Catholic Church. However, there is no empirical evidence or statistical data to substantiate that the law of

celibacy in the Latin Rite has been the cause for decline in vocations. In fact many ordained priests have expressed that celibacy was a blessing which allowed them to focus more on their vocation to selfless service to others and the church. This notion has been reiterated from the findings of our study wherein 78.1% of the Indian priests in our sample have stated that it is commitment to celibacy that helps them to minister to the people more effectively (10.9% disagreed and 11% were neutral). The study also revealed that 67.7% of the priests were clear that given an option they would choose to be a celibate priest again while 15.5% disagreed and 16.8% had no opinion. Therefore, rather than speculating that the obligation of celibacy is the prime cause for lack of vocations, we could speculate that secularism, materialism and individualism are viable causes for lack of vocations in the West.

A few studies have found that the primary reason for Catholic priests to leave ministry was the desire to marry, which was partly due to loneliness (SCHOENHERR & GREELEY 1974; VERDIECK et al. 1988). However, 60% of the participants in our study were confident that they were able to tackle the problem of loneliness in celibate life, in contrast to 22.2% who experienced difficulties and 17.8% who had no opinion. In a similar vein, 58.9% felt that commitment to celibacy helped them to relate better to issues concerning the problems of the family in contrast to 24.7% who disagreed and 16.4% who had no opinion. Without overruling the negative impact of loneliness and solitude in priestly life, in line with GODIN (1983) it could be argued that the decision to quit priesthood can arise from different complex crises. Hence, caution is essential to avoid making a simplistic interpretation of statistics. Since many studies on celibacy have been made among men who left the priesthood, in evaluating those results it is important to be aware that the stated reason in petitioning for laicisation is usually problems with celibacy. The problem is interconnected and more complex than can easily be perceived externally. For example, what is the connection between feeling commitment to celibacy as a burden and the feeling of isolation and solitude, and what is the connection of that feeling with dissatisfaction with priestly life and ministry and from the conflict and tension between personal expectations and the reality one confronts? (First, it arises with the problem of solitude and isolation, which comes from dissatisfaction with priestly life and ministry and from the conflict and tension between personal expectations and the reality one confronts.) From these observations we can say that the difficulty of remaining faithful to the commitment of celibacy in the priestly life is a manifestation of a rather complex crisis and the desire to marry is a consequence rather than a determining factor. Therefore, to emphatically conclude (from the findings of a few empirical studies that gathered data by self reported questionnaires) that celibacy is the principal cause for crisis in priesthood would be a grave error, for the results of our study have demonstrated that commitment to celibacy is an important foundation for a majority of the priests in our study from which to be engaged and to minister with vigor, dedication, and absorption.

62% of the Indian priests in our sample strongly disagreed with a 'no' to the fact that commitment to celibacy is an unnecessary burden imposed on the Catholic priests. Catholic priests in India have always been praised and respected by people, even of other faiths, for living a celibate life. However, living a celibate life by a Catholic

priest (Latin Rite) involves more than mere respect or honour. It is also part and parcel of the spirituality of a diocesan priest and an integral part of the imbibed priestly identity. Therefore it is no surprise that our results confirm that those who score low on commitment to celibacy are emotionally exhausted, depersonalised, and lack a sense of personal accomplishment. On the contrary, those who live their commitment to celibacy amidst the daily struggles of life are engaged.

6. Limitations

First of all it should be acknowledged that all indicators in the present study – commitment to celibacy, burnout and engagement relied exclusively on self report measures. The response rate, though satisfactory, is similar to what is common to all mail surveys – a relatively low response rate. It is possible that those who did not respond could be those with higher scores on burnout and who therefore perceived responding to the questionnaire as an unnecessary burden. Secondly, since the attitude towards commitment to celibacy is a sensitive issue, it was very difficult to examine all the elements of the subject of celibacy in a quantitative study with few questions. A qualitative study, especially in the mode of an in-depth interview, would be more beneficial. Taking these limitations into account could probably help the analysis of data in future studies to be undertaken.

7. Practical implications

Nearly half of the respondents (47.8%) answered with a ‘no’ to the question ‘Does formation in the seminary help you to a great extent to integrate celibacy in your life and pastoral ministry?’ No doubt, theoretically and academically the seminary satisfies all the guidelines covering the presentation concerning the obligation, however, there must also be a forum for open dialogue that provides opportunities for discussion which would help men deal with their sexual urges (SIPE 1990). An environment of trust and confidence must be created in the seminaries, so that candidates for the priesthood can share specific problems, feelings or realistic ways of approaching a life of celibacy without fear. As part of the theology program, a special course that integrates psychology, theology and philosophy to deal with the practical difficulties of living the commitment to celibacy and of integrating it into one’s priestly personality should be offered. Training a seminarian to understand his celibacy is as important as anything else being taught to candidates for priesthood. However, in the last analysis, after all the assistance provided, one should also not fail to realise that the choice of celibacy, made with human and Christian prudence and responsibility, is governed by grace which elevates it and imparts to it supernatural powers and vigor (*Sacerdotialis Caelibatus* 1967, 51).

8. Conclusion

Celibacy is an obligation that is freely and voluntarily chosen by the priest of the Catholic Church (Latin Rite). In line with the teachings and exhortations of the Catholic Church, the results of our data confirmed that commitment to celibacy is associated negatively to burnout and positively to engagement.

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