

## **Celibacy in Buddhism and Catholicism: Unveiling the Relationship between Sexuality and Spirituality**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Buddhism and Catholicism have different teachings but both have in common the tradition of celibacy. Where religious leaders such as priests and monks are forbidden to be extravagant and ordered to abstain from worldly pleasures and have conditions as vows or vows of celibacy. Celibacy is a state of living without marriage on religious or spiritual grounds. This research aims to reveal the essence of the meaning of celibacy in Buddhism and Catholicism as well as the points of similarities and differences regarding the essence of the meaning of celibacy in Buddhist or Catholic views. This research is included in qualitative research with a literature study approach in collecting data. In analysing the data, the descriptive analysis method is used in order to describe the nature of the meaning of celibacy, to then analyse the meaning of celibacy in the view of the life of a religious leader, especially Buddhism and Catholicism. The results of the research can be concluded that celibacy in Buddhism and Catholicism is a life outside of marriage that is carried out on religious grounds. So it can be said that celibacy is a happy life choice to love and serve God through total service to others. In practising celibacy, Buddhism aims to achieve Nibbana, while in Catholicism, it is to devote oneself to the kingdom of God. This research has contributed to the research problem so as to find the essence of the meaning of celibacy in two religious perspectives as well as the relationship of celibacy with spirituality.

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## Introduction

Religion plays a vital role in regulating various aspects of human life, but its rules often spark controversy and aren't universally accepted by all its followers. This creates differences in how religious communities, such as Christians and Buddhists, practice their spirituality. Corrigan, Denny, Jaffee, & Eire (2016), American religion scholar and historian, notes that in the third century, Christians considered celibacy as a form of spiritual sacrifice, although it was controversial for aligning sexual orientation with sanctity. However, sexual orientation is viewed as a natural gift inseparable from human life, as Freud, (1949) argued. Freud even suggested that sexual impulses underlie many human behaviors. Thus, the need for relationships and interactions arising from these natural impulses remains an integral part of human life.

Although living a celibate life, as commonly practiced by pastors and monks, is expected to lead them to high levels of spirituality, unfortunately, there are individuals who tarnish the values of spiritual and the sanctity of celibacy. Thousands of cases of abuse involving celibate individuals, such as pastors, have been reported and have become a disgrace to the Catholic Church. As said by Yanuar (2021) Pope Francis expressed sadness and embarrassment over these incidents. Controversial celibacy cases are also apparent among monks in China. As said by Christiastuti (2018), a monk in China was reported by his peers for forcing women into sexual relations, deemed as a violation of his monk vows. In addition to these cases, there are certainly many Catholic and Buddhist religious leaders who adhere to celibacy teachings. This phenomenon reflects differences in understanding celibacy practices within Christianity and Buddhism. Therefore, this research is crucial to comprehensively explain the differences in celibacy between Abrahamic religions (Christianity) and religions in Asia (Buddhism), as well as how it relates to spirituality.

Basically, research on celibacy has been researched by many previous studies. For example, research conducted by Fitriyana (2013) which says that celibacy comes from Latin, namely from the word *Caecibatus* which means living in a state of not being married. Basically, celibacy is not an easy thing to live in life. However, there is a special privilege for people who practice celibacy, namely the privilege in terms of love for God (Wibowo, 2017). In the view of Christians, someone who does not marry is based on faith and devotion to Jesus (Fitriyana, 2013). With this privilege, it can be said that celibacy is part of God's gift given to the elect (Hutagalung, 2020). However, in the view of Christians, it is also said that celibacy is not actually commanded by the Bible. This is evidenced by the temple priests who were married and had children (Oetomo & Waruwu, 2022). Since celibacy is part of God's grace, there is no contradiction between those who marry and those who are celibate (Dwiatmaja, 2021). However, in practice, celibacy is often practised by priests in order to achieve a holy life (Suharman, 2012). In addition, celibacy is also a way chosen by priests in order to show maturity and foster affective maturity and integration in terms of sexuality (Wibowo, 2016).

From the research above, it is clear that celibacy has been discussed by many previous researchers. However, previous researchers still tend to discuss the general concept of celibacy itself. From this, the researcher feels the need to continue this celibacy research by focusing more on the relationship between

sexuality and spirituality. This research departs from the sociological question of how the spiritual impact of someone who lives a celibate life or adheres to abstinence from sexuality. From this sociological question, the purpose of this research is to explore as much information as possible about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality from the perspective of Buddhism and Catholicism.

## **Method**

Researchers use a qualitative approach with descriptive methods when they want to understand deeply about a problem. The qualitative approach focuses on explaining and interpreting the meaning contained in the data, while the descriptive method aims to describe the detailed meaning of the research problem (Darmalaksana, 2020). In collecting data, this research uses two data sources, namely primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are the main data used in this research. Primary sources are obtained by researchers through reading from several literatures that are directly related to the topic of this research. The reference sources reviewed and used as primary sources such as books, articles, scientific journals, or other records. Meanwhile, secondary sources are supporting data used in this research. Secondary data sources were obtained by researchers from reading documentation, journal studies, books, previous research results, websites and also articles that did not specifically discuss the research topic but still had a connection to this research topic. Meanwhile, in conducting data analysis, researchers used inductive data analysis. This is used by researchers in order to make important contributions such as generating new knowledge, developing new theories, and deepening understanding of this research problem based on the empirical data that has been collected (Husaini & Purnomo, 2000).

## **Findings**

### ***The Relationship Between Celibacy and Spirituality in Catholic***

The Catholic Church requires its priests not to marry and obey the purity of thought or deed. In carrying out this teaching of celibacy, it is not a point of Catholic priests, but the demands of the Church's law that regulates the ideals of living in the Catholic religion. Who has the goal to follow Christ by becoming a monk. Becoming a monk willingly, driven by personal choice, living a life of vows, vowing to live in obedience, chastity, and poverty (Suharman, 2012). That a priest is not easy to choose the life choices she will live. The priest has her own way of life as when she prefers to live a celibate life. A priest also has aspirations like any other woman, but she gets directions to choose her life path as a priest. The path of life that he chooses is due to ideals, calling or the existence of interests and dreams (Pratiwi, 2010). There is a certain group of monks and priests who detach themselves from the pleasures of the world and surrender themselves wholeheartedly to God. Which a person if he believes in his god is not allowed to form his own ideals. And must show obedience to the leadership of his tarekat and adjust his will solely for the benefit of the kingdom of Allah (Hadiwijono, 1995).

Celibacy itself, asceticism driven to dedication to Christ, the essence of life in the monastery. In the article, it is deemed necessary and applied according to the old agreement, the implementation of poor life. A striking new feature of the New

Testament, however, is that the emphasis of asceticism shifts, not with living a poor life, but with abstinence, in particular living the continence of pure life voluntarily (Suharman, 2012). The first theological basis for supporting the practice of celibacy is free choice for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The practice of living on this basis emphasizes how a person gives himself totally to do the works of God. Therefore, celibacy which is carried out on a theological basis emphasizes what is the focus of one's life in this world (Boimau, 2021).

There are several opinions on the practice of celibacy. Some are in favour and some are against the practice of celibacy. Those who support the practice of celibacy use a theological basis, namely in order to improve their spirituality:

1. Because Christ is our only bride

A person who has chosen a path of life with purity will live and submit solely to the creator, but he also respects all His creatures including himself. And he also respects the life of sexuality in all its depths and elevates it on a divine level as a gift of God's unifying love as an expression of oneself (Fitriyana, 2013).

2. Virginitiy for the sake of the kingdom of God

Virginitiy really must be offered and sanctified only for God alone. The purpose of virginitiy is not only for the gospel commandment to live in a religious way, but must be directed to God and dedicated especially to Him. As a monk, they must be willing and without any sense of compulsion and must be obedient to the leadership, willing to live purely to love God alone. Willing to live in poverty and not depend on any kind of wealth. A priest will be a free and unattached person, even if they are bound only by God. This call is made to live up to the vocation of service to the Church, to serve with all her heart until she is willing to live a celibate life. Celibacy is not just an unmarried life, but how to live this celibate life and give birth to the virtues of life.

This life choice is also a testimony to be willing to dedicate yourself to serving with a heart that will not share. Celibacy implies an openness to serving the needs of the Church universally, including the needs of society. Celibacy does not make a priest not shut himself off from the needs of others, but a priest actually enables him to be open to realities and needs that are outside of him. Thus, living with celibacy is the right choice for priests (Ridick, 1986). The teaching of celibacy is not known in the Old Testament, even in the Old Testament it is commanded to multiply offspring. Therefore, the legal basis for celibacy is only found in the New Testament, among others, in Matius 19:12 and the first letter Orintus 7:32-35. Then this teaching was emphasized in the first decree of Canon 33 of the Elvira Synod in Spain "We declare that all bishops, priests and priests involved in the ministry are absolutely forbidden to live with their wives and have children. Anyone who transgressed would be disfellowshipped from his priesthood (Irawan, 2009).

A celibate life should be chosen to be with a happy heart, with a happy heart to live celibacy as "My body that I dedicate" only to God alone. Therefore, the call to life with celibacy is a trial of human values which in practice it is necessary to control sexual conditions by holding back lust for the higher good (Ridick, 1986). The first theological basis for practicing celibacy is freedom of choice for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This practice is carried out in the presence of one's total self-emphasis on doing the works of God. The first theological basis is taken from the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:11-12. In this verse Jesus states that there are three

kinds of people who have no possibility of getting married, namely, those who were born from the womb of their mother, those who were made that way by other people, and those who became like that of their own volition.

When viewed from the first theological basis according to Matthew 19:11-12 there are 3 criteria for people who cannot marry, but among these three types, only people who do not marry because of their own will are the basis for practicing celibacy. In this case, the element of freedom is one of the most important elements in understanding the meaning of this celibacy, which means that celibacy is something that a person must carry out with his life choices freely (Bartlett, 1996).

The term "celibacy" is etymologically derived from the Latin, *caelebs* meaning single, unmarried people or *caelibatus* meaning unmarried life. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the idea of celibacy directly refers to ordained ministers for the Latin Church. In the Latin Catholic Church, all ordained officials, including priests, are men of faith who have the will and willingness to express and carry out a personal commitment, namely to live unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven for the rest of their lives (Wibowo, 2017).

The implementation of the commitment to celibacy is a testimony, especially in an era that tends to be influenced by the view that sexuality is merely a means of recreation. In relation to sexuality, celibacy testifies to the ability to integrate sexual urges. A priest is a complete person, including the existence of a sexual urge in him. This sexual urge is actualized in the work of service and service to others (Kristiyanto, 2007).

The choice of celibacy is also a testament to being willing to dedicate oneself to service with an undivided heart. Celibacy contains an openness to serve the needs of the universal Church, including the needs of society. Celibacy does not make a priest close himself to the needs of others, but instead enables him to be open to realities and needs outside himself. Thus, celibacy is the right life choice for priests (Irawan, 2009).

Celibacy also supports the work of a priest's pastoral ministry. He can focus his mind, mind, and affection on serving the needs of the Church. A priest can be a free and flexible person to respond to various pastoral needs. Being a free person means that one can give oneself completely to the service of the Church. The attention of his life is not divided as in family life, namely meeting household needs, including making his wife and children happy (Kwardhana, 2014).

Celibacy is not just an unmarried life, but how celibacy is lived and gives birth to the virtues of life. When Pope Gregory I was a highly respected and respected person in Christian history, he issued a fatwa regarding the obligation of celibacy (Celibacy) for every bishop, priest and priest. This caused a reaction in the eastern part of the church. The fatwa was seen as being able to cause adultery in disguise, because they thought that not all members of the congregation could avoid lust (Hardawiryana, 1993).

In the New Testament there seem to be two views on clerical marriage: on the one hand, some of the apostles married (Matthew 8:14; I Corinthians 9:5). And Paul encouraged church owners to have wives (I. Timothy 3:2). On the other hand, the value of virginity is assigned to those who are called to devote themselves entirely to God alone (Sitorus, 2019). By living a celibate life, a priest can give himself more totally in his ministry. A priest is called to give himself totally to God with an

undivided heart. He was called to sacrifice himself for others, as Christ had exemplified. A priest can be a free and flexible person to respond to various pastoral needs. Being a free person means that one can give oneself completely to the service of the Church (Wibowo, 2016).

In other words, the call to the priesthood is a direct call to spiritual fatherhood, in the form of a special pastoral responsibility, namely in the function of teaching and celebrating the sacraments. To fulfill his vocation to this particular dedication, the priest is charged with abstaining from marriage and worldly fatherhood. It's not just about following the crucified Christ. It is a priestly business and exercise for the priest to fully carry out the duties that fulfill his position (Suharman, 2012).

### ***The Relationship Between Celibacy and Spirituality in Buddhist***

The appreciation of sexual life can also be manifested in a celibate way of life (not married). There are various motivations that drive people to follow this way of life. But this way of life is often a problem because it is hindered by wrong views or prejudices against interpersonal relationships which are often considered dangerous and risky. On the other hand, there is a misunderstanding about this way of life that seems a-sexual: unmarried life (celibacy) means breaking away from even taboos on sexual reality (Moa, 2019).

In Buddhism, Buddhist adherents are divided into two major groups, namely the layman group (Upasaka and Upasika) and the clergy group called Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. This group is a group of clergy called the sangha. Sangha comes from Sanskrit, which means Buddhist congregation. Then this meaning is absorbed in Indonesian without any change in meaning. Sangha can also be interpreted as an association or association of monks in Buddhism. Monks can also be associated with Buddhist religious leaders. When the monks formed their own association with the name of the sangha (Bakri, 1986).

Celibacy in Buddhism is a Buddhist who chooses to live without a household because of a religious basis to become a monk or priest who is required to choose to live celibate or not for the lay community in Buddhism (Scherer, 2011). Single life choices will increase spiritual progress. The life of a monk is one aimed at attaining nibbana. The teaching for celibacy in Buddhism comes from the Vinaya Pitaka and the Dhammapada if a monk who has received training in the way of life and monkhood rules but he violates these rules he will be expelled from the sangha (Wijaya, 2007). And for those monks who have done, spoken, and have a calm mind and can get rid of worldly matters, then they are included in the class of people who are truly peaceful. Although the rules of the sangha are very heavy and difficult, the members of the sangha still carry out well to serve the religion. With the life of a celibate person, a monk or priest he can be said to be like reborn. His life when he was a layman was very different from his life when he was a monk. Which is the ultimate goal of Buddhists attainment of Nibbana or total suffering. Nibbana comes from the words Ni and Vana. Ni means negative particle, while vana means lust or desire. It is called Nibbana because it is free from lust and free from attachment (Khippano, 1992).

In Buddhism, Nibbana is not something empty or empty, but a state that cannot be properly expressed in words. As for the way to attain nibbana for lay

people or monks by using the noble path which has eight elements which are carried out simultaneously and each element cannot be separated, all of this constitutes an absolute unity. The eight noble paths (Asta Arya Marga). The eight noble paths include right view (samma ditthi), right thought (samma sankappa), right speech (samma vaca), right action (samma kammanta), right livelihood (samma ajiva), right effort (samma vayama), right consciousness (samma sati), and right concentration (samma samadhi) (Dhammabhorn, 2003).

Between lay people and monks, both choose the same basis and have the same goal, namely Nibbana. Observance of the eight noble paths will promote good qualities, generosity, and good intentions. People who have the goal of going to Nibbana will have something that drives them to avoid worldly pleasures and choose to become a monk. And for a monk who is calm and focused in deed, speech, and mind, has been able to put away worldly things, then he is a truly peaceful person. So it is clear that the teaching of celibacy in Buddhism exists. However, the goal of celibacy in Buddhism is related to the goal of the life of a monk or priest who lives a celibate life. By living celibate a monk or priest is more free to go anywhere to teach Buddhism and more freely to Buddhists. Because between monks and people is a relationship that is moral, religious and reciprocal. In addition, by living celibate a monk or priest is easier to practice the teachings of the Buddha and accelerate the development of the mind to a higher level and accelerate to Nibbana, namely the complete elimination of suffering or freedom from attachment (Wijaya, 2001).

From the exploration of celibacy in Buddhism and Catholicism, it can be concluded that celibacy as a living will carries significant theoretical implications that contribute to the understanding of religious practices and societal norms. These findings challenge the common assumption that priestly celibacy is inherently burdensome due to the complexities associated with it. However, from the data, it can be argued that this assumption is shaped by various factors, such as revelations of priestly abuses in certain regions, cultural perceptions that regard celibacy as an anomaly, and contemporary trends that trivialise the essence of human sexuality.

These findings highlight the need for religious leaders, especially priests, to live celibacy with genuine joy, as their attitudes and behaviours can significantly influence perceptions of this chosen path. By embracing celibacy as a joyful way to express love and devotion to God and humanity, priests can inspire greater support and understanding among their congregations.

Nevertheless, this study does not forget to emphasise on the importance of addressing the challenges associated with celibacy by offering alternative interpretations of its meaning. These practical insights require continuous engagement and development of reinterpreted meanings as ways to love, serve and live. By integrating this perspective into religious teachings and practices, communities can empower celibate individuals to model meaningful ways of living and create an environment that encourages understanding and support for their chosen path. In the current context, where cultural views or societal dynamics undermine the importance of celibacy, this research thus emphasises the importance of reclaiming and re-articulating the privilege of celibacy. By embracing celibacy as a unique and valuable way of life in changing times, religious communities can uphold its value and purpose.

## Conclusion

Celibacy is a living testimony that expresses the totality of self-devotion to God and others. This totality is the message that makes celibacy a valuable and meaningful life choice. The testimony of celibacy will inspire the faithful even more, if priests live it joyfully. In other words, it can be stated that celibacy is a happy life choice to love and serve God through total service to others. Seeing the happiness of a priest in living a celibate life, the faithful are called to continue to support celibacy, even though it requires faithfulness and struggle to live it. However, celibacy as a living witness is a response to the view that celibacy (especially priestly celibacy) is not an easy life choice to live.

The richness of meaning in celibacy is then re-articulated to display its privileges, especially when facing current situations that sometimes do not support this life choice. The researcher found that the privilege of celibacy today is divided into at least three interpretations, namely as a way to love, a way to serve, and a way to live. These interpretations reveal that celibacy remains a unique and valuable way of life in the face of changing times. Thus, the way to love, the way to serve, and the way to live are part of the meaning of celibacy as a testimony. These three meanings are an offer that needs to be nurtured and lived continuously so that celibacy becomes a meaningful testimony and does not rule out the possibility of giving testimony also to those around it.

The researcher recommends that this study on celibacy in the view of Buddhism and Catholicism can be designed with a broader and more comprehensive research design. Hopefully, the findings on the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in the views of Buddhism and Catholicism can contribute more in an effort to improve the scholarship.

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