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Book Review:

***Accompanied by a Believing Wife: Ministry and Celibacy in the Earliest Christian Communities.* By Raymond F. Collins.**

Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013. ix + 273 pages. \$29.95 (paper).

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This clearly written volume develops, step by step, a logically ordered, detailed argument against seeing passages from the Gospels, Paul, and the Pastoral Letters as biblical roots for the practice of celibacy in the Christian ministry. Collins' first chapter effectively shows the nonexpert how historical-critical interpretations of these passages differ from the patristic and medieval readings that brought them into discussions about celibacy for Christian ministers. Because he cannot lavish on the Fathers and medievals the attention to literary genre and social context that he rightly does on the biblical texts, Collins risks leaving the uninitiated reader with the impression that earlier Christian interpretations are simply valueless when they do not agree with today's exegetes.

Chapter 2 concludes from the Mishnah and Talmud that Jewish men in the land of Israel in Jesus' day thought God commanded them to marry and to raise children. Collins opposes the conservatism of rabbinic tradition to the objection that these sources are much later than the first century, but he leaves largely unaddressed our ignorance of how widely first-century Jews in the land of Israel recognized or followed what would later become rabbinic tradition.

Chapter 3 takes up Jesus' teachings about disciples leaving all things, especially their wives (Luke 18:28–29), to follow him. From his previous chapter and the encouragement of marriage in the Roman *Lex Iulia*, Collins concludes that all Jesus' disciples likely married and maintained conjugal relations with their wives after their call, as Peter and other evangelizers had (Mark 1:29–31; 1 Cor 7:1–5; 9:5; the couple Junias and Andronicus in Rom 16:7). However, Collins admits (68) that the *Lex Iulia* was aimed mainly at the elite and could have been spottily enforced in Palestine. To avoid the conclusion that Jesus, too, was married, Collins argues, on John Meier's criteria, that Matthew 19:12 is a saying from Jesus himself. When opponents threw the slur “eunuch” in his face, Jesus metaphorically taught here that God chooses some people to stay unmarried, like Jesus himself, in view of the coming kingdom. Collins supports this interpretation by noting that Jesus had no reason to address here the high government officials who were sometimes called eunuchs, but he seems to undermine this support when he presents evidence for eunuchs' belonging to the religiously marginal folk that Jesus did frequent.

Chapter 4 persuasively presents Paul's teaching that, in view of the coming eschaton, people should not change the marital state in which they came into Christianity (1 Cor 7). Collins makes a good case for Paul referring to himself here as a widower who chooses to remain unmarried. The next chapter convincingly shows that 1 Corinthians 7 presents a regular sex life within marriage, and not celibacy, as an antidote to sexual immorality, while conceding that spouses may abstain from sex for a short time for the purpose of prayer. But Collins' exegesis of verses 29–31 (those with a wife should be as if they had none) may well underplay the distraction that Paul believed married life can offer to those who await the Lord's imminent coming (verses 28, 32–35).

After a solid chapter on the scholarly consensus regarding the authorship, dating, house church setting, and literary genre of the Pastorals, Collins' last chapter proves that in speaking of Christian leaders having one wife, Titus 1:5–9 and 1 Timothy 3:1–7, 8–13 require them to be married. But he complicates his case that these texts mandate these leaders to have no sexual partner other than their wife when he notes that Paul and the Pastorals imbibed the traditional Greco-Roman prohibition against adultery, which, Collins notes, allowed for married men to have unmarried women as sexual partners.

Numerous proofreader's slips mar this helpful book, and Collins sometimes expects too much of an undergraduate readership; he fails, for example, to translate *mitzvah* (35) or *homologoumena* (169). However, the excellent eleven-page conclusion usefully summarizes the whole book, which represents a rich resource for seminary and graduate classrooms, and for the research library.