Celibacy

The word celibate derives from the Latin caelebs, "unmarried." In modern usage celibacy generally means not only that one is unmarried but also abstaining from sexual intercourse. Celibacy may be a matter of individual choice or it may be the condition of joining an institution, as in Christian and Buddhist monasteries. Historically, Christian "total institutions" are enclaves which result from a social compromise in which a state of sexual asceticism, originally recommended as the ideal for all members of society, became mandatory for a defined minority only. Some inmates of Christian monasteries and nunneries have rationalized that homosexual conduct, not constituting marriage and not necessarily extending to intercourse, does not represent a breach of vows. Others hold that monks may experience homosexual feelings, but must not act on them.

Over the centuries many individuals have adopted sexual abstinence either for a given period or for life. This option may reflect aversion to the sexual act ("frigidity"), or a conscious decision to husband energy for the accomplishment of some other goal.

In the twentieth century psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich and his followers regarded frequent heterosexual intercourse as the very definition of mental health. Less extreme, other sex reformers, who seek to free those they counsel from the shackles of puritanical self-denial, seem to imply that the modern individual must fulfill a sort of quota of sexual acts. Faced with such pressures, some individuals react against what they perceive as the tyranny of the cult of the orgasm and choose celibacy. With the development of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, many are adopting celibacy less as a matter of personal preference than as a precaution. Their fears may be exaggerated, but some actually find relief in being excused from participating in the "sex race."

See also Asceticism; Buddhism; Monasticism.

Ward Houser

Cellini, Benvenuto (1500–1571)

Florentine sculptor, goldsmith, and memoirist. After early success as a goldsmith, Cellini could virtually write his own ticket as an artist, and he conducted a successful and peripatetic career in a number of places in Italy and France. His autobiography (written in 1558–62, and therefore not covering his last years) gives a highly colored account of the artist's motivation in these wanderings. A fervent admirer of Michelangelo in art, he conspicuously departed from the austerity of his mentor in his swashbuckling life, so that his name has become a byword for the profligacy and extravagance of the Renaissance artist.

Cellini's sculpture Perseus (1545–54) was judged worthy of a place of honor in Florence's Loggia dei Lanzi near Michelangelo's superb David. In 1540–43 Cellini completed the daunting task for the salt-cellar of Francis I in France. This and other undertakings in that country served to consolidate the mannerist taste of Fontainebleau, with which Cellini was perfectly in tune.

During his later years he chose to reside in Florence, where his relations with grandduke Cosimo I were stormy. Once during a quarrel a rival artist Baccio Bandinelli cried out, "Oh keep quiet you dirty sodomite," an early instance of public labeling. In 1527 he was called before a court for sexual irregularity, but the case appears to have been quashed. In 1557 he was placed under house arrest for sodomy, using the occasion to begin dictating his Autobiography, which more than any of his other works has made him famous. Some years later, apparently rehabilitated, he married the mother of some of his illegitimate children. In 1571 Cellini died and was
buried with full honors in the church of
the Santissima Annunziata.

One of his most personal works is
the marble Ganymede of 1545-46
(Florence, Bargello), where the Phrygian
youth stands next to the eagle, a manifesta-
tion of his abductor, Zeus. In his right
hand Ganymede holds a small bird, evi-
dently a love gift from his suitor. Other
works heavy with male eroticism are the
Narcissus and Apollo and Hyacinth (both
Florence, Bargello).

Heir to the Renaissance tradition
of the artist as a special being, exempt from
ordinary demands of morality, Cellini
nonetheless fell afoul of changing reli-
gious currents. The Council of Trent,
which began meeting in 1545 during his
middle years, was the belweather of this
shift. After Cellini Italy saw only one other
major artist in this grand homosexual/
bisexual tradition, the painter Mich-
elangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610).

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CELTS, ANCIENT

In the first millennium B.C. the
Celtic peoples expanded from their origin-
al homeland in Central Europe to occupy
much of what is now France, the British
Isles, and Northern Italy. Although Celtic
languages are today confined to small areas
in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Brittany,
their heritage forms an important substra-
tum of developing European culture, as
seen, for example, in the legends of the
Arthurian cycle.

In their dynamic period, bodies of
Celts also moved eastward, where they
encountered the ancient Greeks, who cele-
brated their warlike character and their
attachment to male homosexuality. In his

Politics (II, 9:7-8), Aristotle compares the
Spartans unfavorably with the Celts: under
the influence of their wives the former
have fallen into luxury, while the Celts
use their devotion to male love as a shield
against such self-indulgence. Athenaeus
(XIII, 603a; echoed by Diodorus Siculus
and Strabo) says that although the Celts
had beautiful women, they much preferred
boys. Sometimes, he states, they would
sleep on animal skins with a boyfriend on
either side. This observation seems to
reflect the fact that great warriors had two
squires, each with his own horse.

Inasmuch as the ancient Celts
were illiterate, we are compelled to rely on
the scanty testimony of the Greeks and
Romans. The wonderful specimens of
Celtic art ("La Tène") found in tombs do
not suffice to make up the gap. What is
known suggests that homosexuality had
an initiatory function among these warri-
ors, not unlike that found among some
Greek peoples. Whether all these manifes-
tations derive in turn from a unitary pri-
mordial Indo-European institution of ini-
tiatory homosexuality, as Bernard Sergent
has argued, must be regarded as still un-
proven.

In the late Roman Republic and
the first century of the Empire most of the
western Celtic peoples lost their independ-
ence—with which their devotion to male
love had been linked—and fell under the
domination of Rome, with its more am-
bivalent attitudes to homosexuality. The
coming of Christianity finally severed the
link with the old homoerotic traditions,
although traces of them seem to have
survived here and there in imaginative
literature. The early Irish penitentials also
show that homosexual love continued in
the monasteries, while subject to continu-
ing surveillance and repression.

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