

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

On the Christological, Ecclesiological, and Eschatological Dimensions of Priestly
Celibacy in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* and Subsequent Magisterial
Documents

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Of The Catholic University of America
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree
Doctor of Sacred Theology

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By

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Washington, D.C.

2011

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Magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy prior to the Second Vatican Council was somewhat restricted in scope because of its reliance on two fundamental arguments: the superiority of celibacy over marriage and the need for the priest to maintain ritual purity. This view of priestly celibacy, as useful as it was, did not utilize the full substance of the Catholic theological tradition in this area.

The document, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), of Vatican II presented a richer and more ample teaching on priestly celibacy that was largely organized around a threefold scheme, highlighting the christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions of celibacy, respectively. Pope Paul VI, in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967), contributed to the further development of the scheme by using it as an organizing principle in his presentation of the Catholic understanding of priestly celibacy.

This study aims to evaluate magisterial teaching on the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy as introduced in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, to explore its origins, and to analyze its influence on subsequent magisterial teachings. The study begins with a review of the historical development of the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church through a study of scriptural texts, writings of the Church Fathers, and documents of Church councils and popes, up to and including *Sacra Virginitas* of Pope Pius XII. It then proceeds to analyze the *Acta Synodalia* of Vatican II

and contemporary theological reflection in order to discover the background to the conciliar presentation of the threefold dimension. Building upon this original research, the study then looks closely at Paul VI's use of the threefold scheme, which had a significant effect on subsequent magisterial teaching on celibacy, particularly in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) of Pope John Paul II. This study finally presents a thorough evaluation of the development of the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. It examines the latter's internal consistency, magisterial authority, and theological value for the Church as a whole, as a way of understanding more deeply the place of priestly celibacy in the life and mission of the Church, and concludes with some suggestions for further integration of the threefold scheme.

This dissertation by Gary Selin fulfills the dissertation requirements for the doctoral degree in Sacred Theology approved by Paul McPartlan, D.Phil, as Director, and by John T. Ford, C.S.C., S.T.D., and Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., Ph.D., as Readers.

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To the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Priests

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
<i>ADA</i>	<i>Acta et Documenta Antepreparatoria</i>
<i>ADP</i>	<i>Acta et Documenta Praeparatoria</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Acta Synodalia</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i>
<i>CCL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
<i>CSCO.S</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Syri</i>
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
<i>OE</i>	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Optatam Totius</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my sincere thanksgiving to:

- The Triune God, my patron saints, and my Guardian Angel.
- My father and mother, Arthur and Maire.
- His Eminence Francis Stafford, who first inspired me to research this topic.
- My ordinary, the Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., and my brother priests of the Archdiocese of Denver, especially Msgr. Michael Glenn and the priests and faculty of St. John Vianney Seminary.
- Msgr. Paul McPartlan, D.Phil., the director of this dissertation.
- Father John T. Ford, C.S.C., S.T.D., and Father Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., Ph.D., the readers.
- The other faculty members and staff of the School of Theology and Religious Studies.
- For the late Patricia Bozell, and Mary Borda, the proofreaders of the dissertation.
- Father Paul Scalia, and former pastors and clergy of St. John the Beloved parish in McLean, VA.
- My family and friends.

INTRODUCTION

The period since the Second Vatican Council has seen widespread discussion in the Roman Catholic Church regarding priestly celibacy, particularly with reference to its mandatory character in the Latin rite and its usefulness in the contemporary Church. Those who engage in this debate have focused on several issues that are related to the ministry and life of the ordained priesthood, such as the lack of priestly vocations, the possibility of a married Catholic clergy, and the ecumenical reality of Protestant denominations with married ministers. These issues highlight the widespread interest in priestly celibacy and underline its distinctiveness as a fundamental element in the history and spirituality of the priesthood.

A wide range of magisterial documents have discussed priestly celibacy during the past fifty years or so: two papal encyclicals, an apostolic exhortation, several documents of the Second Vatican Council, and various dicasteral pronouncements. Pius XII in the encyclical *Sacra Virginitas* (1954) argued for the suitability of celibacy for priests and of the evangelical counsel of chastity for religious. However, he did not provide extensive arguments in favor of priestly celibacy that differed in essence from those he used to justify the religious vow of chastity.

On the other hand, the decree of Vatican II on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), presented a distinct theology of priestly celibacy that was broadly organized around a threefold paradigm: christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions. This presentation of celibacy in terms of a threefold dimension constituted a development over previous magisterial teachings.

Presbyterorum Ordinis 16, for example, contained the first use of spousal language in a magisterial argument for priestly celibacy. Noticeably absent from the text were two arguments formerly used in magisterial teaching, namely, the superiority of celibacy over marriage and the need for the priest to maintain ritual purity.

Paul VI, in a subsequent encyclical letter, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967), contributed to the development of magisterial teaching on celibacy by using the threefold dimension as an organizing principle to justify the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church. The pope's use of the ecclesiological dimension, in particular, helped to inspire some of the more creative developments in subsequent magisterial teachings. Finally, John Paul II, in the apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), employed the threefold dimension in order to highlight the pastoral fruitfulness of priestly celibacy.

The purpose of this dissertation is to present and evaluate the development of the new magisterial teaching on the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy as introduced in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, to explore its origins, and to analyze its influence on subsequent magisterial teaching. A study of this development can contribute to a greater understanding of the ministry and life of the priest in the Latin Church. This dissertation draws from and builds on my earlier S.T.L. thesis, "The Development of Magisterial Teaching on the Ecclesiological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy in the Late Twentieth Century."¹

¹ Cf. Gary Selin, "The Development of Magisterial Teaching on the Ecclesiological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy in the Late Twentieth Century" (S.T.L. thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 2006).

Although some mention will be made of the debate surrounding the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church, the focus will be on the contemporary magisterial teaching and discipline in its recent development. Thus there is no extended treatment of married clergy of the Eastern Catholic or Orthodox Churches, both of which uphold the tradition of celibate bishops, but differ on particulars concerning married and celibate deacons and priests.²

With regard to the terminology used here, *continence* refers to abstinence or non-use of conjugal relations,³ while *celibacy* signifies the unmarried state.⁴ *Chastity* indicates a moral virtue that integrates sexuality within the person according to one's state in life; to live chastity one either abstains from all sexual relations or is moderate in their use, in conformity with moral norms.⁵ In magisterial documents, the state of *perfect chastity* is an expression used to describe the chastity to be practiced by those who are living a consecrated life in response to a specific calling from God. The word

² Cf. Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1988); and Joseph J. Allen, ed., *Vested in Grace: Priesthood and Marriage in the Christian East* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), hereafter cited: *Vested in Grace*. The Second Vatican Council affirmed in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 the lawful discipline of married clergy in the Eastern Churches.

³ Cf. Anthony K. McLaughlin, "The Obligation of Perfect and Perpetual Continence and Married Deacons in the Latin Church" (J.C.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C, 2010), 14.

⁴ According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *caelebs* ("unmarried; not having a spouse") comes from the Sanskrit *kevalah* ("alone") and the Old English *hal* ("whole"). *Celibacy* is neither a biblical term nor does it imply a particular motivation, religious or other, for the unmarried state.

⁵ Cf. Aurelio Fernandez and James Socias, *Our Moral Life in Christ: A Basic Course on Moral Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter, 1997), 297.

“perfect” does not signify a moral quality but rather denotes a “total” commitment that involves the renunciation of any and all sexual relations.⁶ *Cleric* signifies a man ordained to one of the higher orders (deacon, priest, and bishop), while *priest* denotes a presbyter as distinguished from a deacon or a bishop. *Priesthood* in general refers to the orders of the presbyterate and episcopate, although in some contexts only the former. Finally, *Magisterium* refers to the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church, that is, the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome, whose task it is to give “an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form [Sacred Scripture] or in the form of Tradition.”⁷

The dissertation is organized as follows. The first chapter contains three parts: (1) a summary of the biblical foundations of clerical continence and celibacy, (2) a review of the development of the discipline of clerical continence and celibacy in the Latin Church from the early Church to the twentieth century, and (3) a study of twentieth century magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy prior to Vatican II.

The second chapter focuses on the development of magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* of Paul VI. This chapter traces the emergence and development of the threefold dimension in these magisterial teachings. Significant background documents

⁶ Cf. McLaughlin, “The Obligation of Perfect and Perpetual Continence and Married Deacons in the Latin Church,” 13.

⁷ Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 10, in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello, 1998), 387; hereafter cited: *Vatican Council II*. All subsequent English translations of the Council documents are from this edition.

studied are the *Acta Synodalia* and *Acta et Documenta Antepreparatoria et Praeparatoria* of the Council.

The third chapter consists of a study of the teaching on priestly celibacy contained in some of the principal magisterial and liturgical documents published in the period from *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* to the end of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. The threefold dimension will be outlined in each document and the development in the treatment of each of the three dimensions will be analyzed. The collected writings of Pope Benedict XVI on priestly celibacy, however, will not be systematically reviewed. Some citations from his writings, however, will be used in a few instances to illuminate a particular section of the dissertation.

The fourth chapter presents an evaluation of the threefold dimension in terms of its theological value for the Catholic Church, that is, as a way of understanding more thoroughly the place of celibacy in the life and mission of the Church. The focus of this chapter will be twofold: of a study of the New Testament foundations of each dimension, followed by an elaboration of how each dimension can contribute to the development of the theology of priestly celibacy.

The fifth chapter will consider the threefold dimension as a means of addressing some pertinent issues and questions concerning the theology of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER 1
CLERICAL CONTINENCE AND CELIBACY IN THE LATIN CHURCH PRIOR TO
THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

1. The Biblical Foundations of Clerical Continence and Celibacy

Celibacy in the Old Testament was not prized as a noble calling and therefore was not a permanent or instituted state of life in Jewish culture. Because of the promise that God made to Abraham – that he would become the father of many nations – the Israelites looked upon celibacy in a negative light, with marriage as the true source of fruitfulness and blessing. To remain unmarried and childless was to be the object of shame,¹ while bearing many children was a sign of divine blessing (cf. Gen 22:17; Ps 127:3-4).² Virginity in a bride, however, was the object of high praise (cf. Dt 22:14-29), and conversely, loss of virginity entailed a loss of honor (cf. 2 Sam 13:2-18; Lam 5:11). All priests were obliged to marry a virgin (cf. Lev 21:13f, Ezek 44:22).

The prophet Jeremiah was a divinely established exception to the divine mandate of marriage (cf. Jer 1:4-10; 16:2-4).³ Jeremiah's celibacy symbolized the Lord God's withdrawal of the covenantal blessing: peace, love, and all the virtues of an ideal married life that were forbidden to Jeremiah. God commanded Jeremiah to remain

¹ Cf. Sarah in Gen 16:1-2, Rachel in Gen 30:1, and Hannah in 1 Sam 1. See also Jg 11:37-50, concerning Jephthah's vow.

² English scriptural citations in this dissertation are from *The New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), except those specifically indicated as being from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson, 1966), or those of another translation that may be part of a cited text.

³ Cf. Lucien Legrand, *The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), 22, 25-30, 35, 37, 151.

celibate so as to prophesy the imminence of Israel's chastisement. Under the influence of his predecessor Hosea, Jeremiah had a keen appreciation of the covenant between the Lord God and His people. When he saw that Israel was not listening to the warnings of God and that catastrophe was inevitable and the old covenant would come to an end, Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34).

Temporary continence was nonetheless practiced in the Old Testament for specific purposes.¹ Levites and priests were required to practice ritual continence during their time of service in the temple (cf. 1 Sam 21:4-5), and all Jewish adult men were admonished to avoid sexual intercourse before their communal worship (cf. Ex 19:15). Some men and women took the Nazarite vow (cf. Numbers 6), which seems to have required some form of temporary continence.² In the Old Testament the notion of cultic uncleanness was prevalent and thus it excluded those affected, particularly a priest, from participating in communal worship and communion with God.³

Later Judaism showed indications that the unmarried state was more highly regarded than before, as in the case with Judith (cf. Jud 16:22) and Anna (cf. Lk 2:37), and celibacy became an instituted way of life with the appearance of the Essene

¹ Cf. Thomas J. McGovern, *Priestly Celibacy Today* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 72-75, and Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992), xxv.

² According to Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 94-95: "Originally, they [Nazarites] were ascetically trained warrior ecstasies who – in the single certain tradition – left their hair unshorn and abstained from alcohol and, originally, also from sexual intercourse."

³ The biblical foundations of ritual purity will be treated in Chapter 4: cf. 271ff.

community in the second century.⁴ Yet despite this later development, there is no evidence of an institutionalized celibacy among the Israelites.

Within the New Covenant, however, there was a fundamental precedent for celibacy as a permanent state: the life of Jesus Christ. His celibacy is assumed in the traditions about him rather than being explicitly mentioned in the New Testament.⁵ Some scriptural passages, however, do imply the celibacy of Jesus.⁶ The New Testament portrays Jesus as having no earthly ties. For example, no family member was present at his death except for his mother (cf. Jn 19:25). If Jesus had a wife presumably she would have been present or at least mentioned in this event and others in his life.

Furthermore, the manner of life that Jesus lived was compatible with his mission of evangelization but not with marriage. Jesus' chosen lifestyle expressed his mission,

⁴ Cf. Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11, 14, Josephus, *Bella Judaica*, II, 121, 160, and J. Massingberd Ford, *A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy*, The Cardinal O'Hara Series: Studies and Research in Christian Theology at Notre Dame, Vol. 4 (Notre Dame, IN: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 28-43. Researchers of the Qumran community in Judea and the Therapeutae in Egypt have found evidence of celibate life: see Ford, *A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy*, 34-43.

⁵ Cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Volume 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 332-35; hereafter cited: *A Marginal Jew*. In responding to William Phipps, who claimed in his book, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 34-98, that the silence of the New Testament on the marital status of Jesus must be interpreted within the context of a Judaism for which marriage was the norm, Meier showed that the New Testament is far from silent about Jesus' other family ties (e.g. Mary, Joseph, and his extended family). Therefore the silence about a wife or children of Jesus is a strong witness to his celibate state.

⁶ Some scripture scholars, however, suggest that Jesus was married and that this tradition was suppressed by the Evangelists, such as John in his account of the wedding feast at Cana: see James Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 83; Paul Winninger, *Ordonner des prêtres: le célibat, une loi: le ministère, une nécessité* (Paris: le Centurion, 1977), 22-35.

for he left his home and family in Nazareth in order to live as an itinerant preacher, consciously renouncing a permanent dwelling: “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20). Jean Galot argued that Jesus lived as an unmarried man for at least two reasons. First, it was appropriate that he whose mission was the spiritual engendering of a new humanity should abstain from bodily engendering; his fruitfulness and offspring belonged to the order of grace. Second, Jesus came to reveal God’s love for all people. If Jesus had chosen to marry, he would have been bound to a particular love that would have concealed his universal love. His love for one woman would have distanced himself from all other women.⁷

Moreover, in the context of reaffirming the biblical teaching of the indissolubility of marriage (cf. Gen 1:27, 2:24), Jesus was asked by his disciples “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Mt 19:10). He answered them by describing three ways in which a person can be a *eunuch*:

Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.⁸

The noun “eunuch” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament with the exception of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (cf. Acts 8:27-39).⁹ Of the three manners in which

⁷ Cf. Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 230-32.

⁸ Mt 19:11-12; translation from *Revised Standard Version*.

⁹ Meier argued that this “offensively graphic metaphor for celibacy goes back to the unconventional and shocking Jesus,” rather than being a later addition to the text: see Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 1, 344.

one is incapable of sexual activity, the third alone is voluntary: “eunuchs *who have made themselves* eunuchs.” These people do so “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” that is, for the kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming and initiating (cf. Mt 4:17).

As Francis Moloney maintained, it is possible that Jesus was describing himself as such a voluntary eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Eunuchs were treated as outcasts in the Jewish community and were forced to live away from the Jewish people and to offer sacrifice because it was considered improper for a man who had been deprived of his power to transmit life to come close to the God of life.¹⁰ Jesus, in using the word *eunuch*, may have been referring to himself as one considered as a eunuch and outcast by his enemies, who also labeled him a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (cf. Mt 11:19), as well as a Samaritan with a demon (cf. Jn 8:48).¹¹ In speaking this way, Jesus was also stating that an unmarried person was no longer to be considered automatically as an outcast and separated from God. Jesus can be seen as implicitly inviting his disciples to follow him in the state of being a “eunuch” for the kingdom of heaven.¹² He taught that there is a resurrection into a heavenly life

¹⁰ Francis J. Moloney, “Matthew 19, 3-12 and Celibacy. A Redactional and Form Critical Study /1/”: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (January 1979): 50-53, at 50-51; cf. also Dt 23:1-2; Lev 21:17-20.

¹¹ Cf. Moloney, “Matthew 19, 3-12 and Celibacy. A Redactional and Form Critical Study /1/”: 50-51; Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 235; and Josef Blinzler, “Eisin eunouchoi. Zur Auslegung von Mt 19, 12,” *Zeitschrift die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1857): 254-70, at 254.

¹² Some scholars maintained that this voluntary eunuchry refers only to those men who, after dismissing their wives, do not marry a second time: cf. Jacques Dupont, *Mariage et divorce dans l'Évangile: Matthieu 19, 3-12 et parallèles* (Bruges: Abbaye de Saint-Andre, 1959), 161-222. Galot countered by arguing that the disciples in the Gospel intended to say that it was better not to marry at all, and Jesus affirmed their

in which there is no marriage (cf. Mt 22:30-32). It follows that celibacy, both his own and that of his disciples, was a prophetic lifestyle that bears witness both to the resurrection and to the kingdom.

It is in this kingdom that Jesus would promise eternal life (cf. Jn 3:5, 17:3; Rom 6:23). In this context a clear difference between Jewish and Christian notions of eternal life should be noted. In the Old Testament, it was imperative for the Jew to marry because there was no clear understanding of the resurrection of the body; Jews believed that they in some sense would survive death and live on through their offspring.¹³ The notion of celibacy, of course, nullifies this belief. But with the Resurrection of Jesus, Christians can hope for an individual resurrection. Because Jesus rose from the dead and would bring to life those who died believing in him (cf. Jn 6:40 and 1 Thess 4:16-18), a Christian could in good conscience forego marriage for the sake of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' own celibacy can thus be seen as a prophetic lifestyle, linked to his Resurrection.

As for the Apostles, it is evident that Simon Peter was married because Jesus cured his mother-in-law at Capernaum (cf. Mt 8:14-15; Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38-39). It is

insight by revealing the counsel of voluntary celibacy: cf. Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 233-34, and Thaddée Matura, "Le celibat dans le Nouveau Testament d'après l'exégèse récente," *La Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 97 (1975): 481-500.

¹³ However, there are signs of belief in a resurrection in later Jewish thought, such as the words of the mother to her seven martyred sons (cf. 2 Maccabees 7) and the testimony of Sadducees in their story of the woman who married successively seven brothers, although the Sadducees themselves did not believe in a resurrection (cf. Lk 20:27-40; Mt 22:23-33; Mk 12:18-27).

not clear, though, whether his wife was still alive at this point.¹⁴ Paul, on his part, wrote that he was celibate (cf. 1 Cor 7:7-8). The majority of Fathers believed that he had either never been married or at least was a widower.¹⁵ As for John, who was particularly beloved of Jesus (cf. Jn 13:23; 19:26; 21:7), several Church Fathers attributed the special love of Jesus to John's state of perpetual virginity.¹⁶ Other than Peter, Paul, and John, nothing substantial is known about the matrimonial status of the remaining Apostles.¹⁷ It seems that the majority of Fathers believed that those Apostles who were married on meeting with Jesus gave up their conjugal lives and practiced perfect and perpetual continence thereafter.¹⁸ This apostolic continence or celibacy enabled them to lead lives as itinerant preachers. Jesus promised great rewards to his disciples, including the Twelve, who had left their wives in order to follow him:

Peter said: "Lo, we have left our homes and followed you." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of

¹⁴ The silence in the New Testament about Peter's wife led Jerome to suggest that she was already dead at the time of his call: cf. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* I, 26, *PL* 23, 246b.

¹⁵ Cf. Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios Secundam*, 11, 2, *PL* 17, 320a; Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, *PL* 16, 315a; John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam ad Philippenses Argumentum et Homiliae* 1-15, 13, 3, *PG* 62, 279d.

¹⁶ Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion (Adversus Haereses)*, Haer. 58, 4, *PG* 41, 1016a; Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* I, 26, *PL* 23, 246b-c; Augustine, *Tractatus in Evangelium Ioannis*, 124, 7, *CC* 36, 687; Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 50, *PL* 61, 416a; *CSEL* 29, 421.

¹⁷ Cf. Christian Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, trans. Nelly Marans (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 65-79.

¹⁸ Cochini held that this patristic belief became part of the preaching in the great Christian centers as early as the end of the second and the beginning of the third century: cf. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 83.

God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.¹⁹

The above-mentioned biblical sources, however, tell little concerning the lives of the Apostles. What, then, did the Apostles *teach* about marriage and the vocation to continence and celibacy? The only information in this regard comes from Paul, who provided the scriptural passages that justify celibacy for the lay, single Christian. In his first letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 7:25-40), Paul counseled the unmarried faithful of Corinth to remain celibate, as he himself was (cf. 1 Cor 7:7-8), so that they might dedicate their time and energy more fully to serving Christ in his Church:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided (1 Cor 7:32-34a).

Celibacy gives the freedom to be concerned about the “affairs of the Lord” and thus “to please the Lord” with the whole heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32). Paul nevertheless clearly emphasized that the call to celibacy is a counsel and not a precept.

The scriptural passages cited above, particularly 1 Cor 7:25-40 and Mt 19:12, describe, as a Christian ideal, the theological and spiritual value of celibacy *in general*, which can be equally valid for any Christian who wishes to live a consecrated life. But

¹⁹ Lk 18:28-30; translation from *The Revised Standard Version*. *Wife* is not listed in the parallel passages of Mt 19:27-30 and Mk 10:28-31, although a man who leaves his house and children would seemingly necessarily leave his wife too. It also may be posited, however, that these parallel passages do not mention *wife* because some of the women who accompanied the Apostles on their missionary journeys were their wives. Lucien Legrand, however, argued that the meaning of the Lucan passage cannot be understood by reference to the immediate context but rather to Luke’s views of perfect discipleship: cf. Lucien Legrand, “Celibacy: Death and Sacrifice,” *Theology Digest* 9 (1963): 114-18, at 114-15.

these biblical citations do not seem to show any particular connection between celibacy and the *ministries* of the early Church.²⁰

The Pastoral Letters, however, include a discussion of marriage and ecclesial ministry, i.e., a candidate for the offices of episkopos, presbuteros, and diakonos must have been married only once. He must be a “man of one wife” (μιας γυναικος άνδρα).²¹ Exegetes have usually given one of two interpretations of “man of one wife”: it prohibits either remarriage or polygamy.²² The first interpretation holds that a candidate had been and could be married only once. Therefore, by implication, if his wife died, he could not marry again. The second view posits that the minister was forbidden to have more than one wife at the same time; this would simply be an exhortation to observe marital chastity. It is doubtful that this latter meaning is intended here, because polygamy was completely unacceptable in any case for Christians and

²⁰ Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, “The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy”: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_bfoun_en.html, 1993; no page numbers are given. This essay appears to be accessible only in an electronic version.

²¹ Compare 1 Tim 3:2, 3:12, and Tit 1:6. The fact that St. Paul earlier had counseled other Christians to be celibate as himself (cf. 1 Cor 7:7-7) is a material warning against interpreting this phrase as a mandate that all clerics *must* be married.

²² Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, “‘Mari d’une seule femme’: le sens théologique d’une formule paulinienne,” in *Paul de Tarse: apôtre du notre temps*, ed. Lorenzo de Lorenzi (Rome: Abbaye de Saint Paul, 1979), 619-38, at 619-23; hereafter cited: “Mari d’une seule femme.”

such a man would have been excluded *a priori* from ministerial office. The first interpretation is therefore the more likely of the two.²³

According to Ignace de la Potterie, the juridical quality of the formula “man of one wife” indicates a specific criterion that Timothy and his assistants would keep in mind as they screened candidates for office.²⁴ The ceremonious and formal sound of the formula implies a precise, concrete legal demand of a fixed, technical, and stereotyped nature – screening out candidates for office who had been married more than once. Perhaps the reason underlying this rule is that remarriage was not particularly esteemed in late antiquity, and many early Church Fathers considered second marriages as veiled adultery and disreputable.²⁵ This Pauline injunction, therefore, may have been a prudent measure of eliminating doubtful ministerial candidates.

²³ For a bibliography of select patristic and modern authors that deal with this subject, see Patrick Viscuso, “Concerning the Second Marriage of Priests,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40, no. 1-2 (1995): 201-11, at 204-05.

²⁴ Cf. de la Potterie, “Mari d’une seule femme,” 631-32, 636-38, and “The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy,” and Douglas Fusselman, “‘The Husband of One Wife’: Clergy Marital Status or Paradigm of the Public Ministry?” <http://members.aol.com/SemperRef/husband.html>, 1993. Fusselman, a Lutheran, interpreted “one wife” as the one ecclesial assembly that should be the only community that is “married” to its minister-husband.

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, who was probably celibate, argued that only those Christians entered a second marriage who were incapable of continence because Paul allowed the second marriage for this reason (1 Cor 7:8ff): see Clement, *Stromata*, 3, 18, 107, 5-108, 2, *GCS* 2/4, 246, 5-20; cf. Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, 3, 5, *CCL* 2, 1019, 30-34; Origen, *Hom.* 20, 4 in *Ier.* 20:7-12, *GCS Orig.* 3, 182, 20-183, 4; Methodius, *Convivium* 3, 12, 83, *GCS Method.* 41,7f. See also Roger Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 30, and Stefan Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church: The Beginnings of a Discipline of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 78-79; hereafter cited: *Celibacy in the Early Church*.

In addition to these two common understandings of “man of one wife,” some Church Fathers posited a third reading, one that would enjoin sexual abstinence (continence) for married men on assuming ministry.²⁶ In order to explain this third patristic interpretation, de la Potterie gave the following argument. From the strictly biblical viewpoint, “man of one wife” is the only passage in the New Testament where an identical norm is laid down for the three groups of ministers and only for them.²⁷ The phrase *μιας γυναικος άνδρα* (*unius uxoris vir*) is used to specify a requirement for episkopos (cf. 1 Tim 3:2), presbuteros (cf. Tit 1:6), and diakonos (cf. 1 Tim 3:12). It is never said of other Christians but is a requirement for these ministers in the exercise of their ecclesial ministry.

De la Potterie related these three passages to a fourth, 1 Tim 5:9, which includes a complementary formula *ενος ανδρος γυνή* (*unius viri uxor*), “woman of one husband.” It refers to widows, at least sixty years old, who could become enrolled in an order of widows, provided that, among other things, they had been married only once. The formula “woman of one husband” does not simply apply to any Christian woman but only to an elderly widow who would exercise a ministry in the community, perhaps similar to that of a deaconess.²⁸ This prohibition against second marriages, or diandry,

²⁶ Cf. Ambrose, *Epistolae*, PL 16, 1205b-c; Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Timotheum primam*, III, 12-13, PL 17, 470b-71b; John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in I Tim.* Prol., PG 62, 503f, and *Hom. 2, in Tit.* I, PG 62, 671; Eusebius of Caesarea, *De Demonstratione Evangelica* I, 9, GCS, 23, 43.

²⁷ Cf. de la Potterie, “Mari d’une seule femme,” 628-32.

²⁸ Cf. de la Potterie, “The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy” (website article).

highlights the fidelity of a wife exclusively to her first and only husband, even beyond his death. As mentioned above, in antiquity remarriage bore the stigma of incontinence and this is clear in 1 Tim 5:9-12 in Paul's words about widows. Younger widows frequently married again because they could not live continently. A widow who had been married only once should by this fact have already been tested with respect to continence. Marrying a second time is, for 1 Tim 5:9, equivalent to being unable to live continently.²⁹

The validity of the argument of de la Potterie depends upon his parallelism between the injunction for widows and that for the episkopos, presbuteros, and diakonos (cf. 1 Tim 3:2, 3:12; Tit 1:6) when the juridical sense of both phrases is compared. Since both phrases ("man of one wife" and "woman of one husband") are used in the context of ecclesial ministry, and since the latter phrase refers to the discipline of continence, by inference "man of one wife" would then require that a married cleric be bound to practice perfect sexual continence, i.e., to live with his wife as though he had none (cf. 1 Cor 7:29), as well as forbidding a second marriage (digamy) upon the death of his wife.³⁰ A widowed minister could not then remarry because he could not consummate his new marriage, on account of his commitment to continence. As will be

²⁹ Cf. de la Potterie, "The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy" (website article).

³⁰ Cf. de la Potterie, "The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy," (website article); Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 19-20; Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 38; Henri Deen, *Le célibat des prêtres dans les premiers siècles de l'église* (Paris: Les Editions du Cedre, 1969), 32-34.

shown below, this third interpretation of “man of one wife” was used by Pope Siricius and several Fathers and subsequently became part of Catholic tradition.³¹

Paul, however, seemed to contradict such a requirement for perfect continence through his apparent plea in 1 Cor 9:5 for the continued use of marriage: “Do we not have the right to take along a sister-woman (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα), as do the rest of the Apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” What does this passage mean, and does the phrase *sister-woman* mean *wife*, as some translations render it?³² In biblical Greek, γυνή generally means *woman*, although it can also signify *wife*. Ἀδελφὴ, however, signifies *sister* and thus specifies here the type of woman that traveled with the Apostles: a sister-woman or sister-wife.³³ There is agreement among the Fathers about the interpretation of this phrase, namely, that it does not refer to women with whom the Apostles continued to live a conjugal life, but to women who served the material needs of their apostolic ministry, as did the women who followed Jesus (cf. Mt 27:55-56, Lk 8:2-3).³⁴ In cases where this sister-woman was also the wife of an

³¹ Cf. below, 33-35.

³² For example, *The New American Bible and Revised Standard Version*. The above translation of 1 Cor 9:5 is my own.

³³ The Vulgate text has *sororem mulierem*. The word *soror* was used in several Latin conciliar texts, such as canon 6 of the Council of Gerona (517) and canon 13 of Second Auvergne (535), to signify the wife of major clerics in the context of sexual continence. Some Fathers also employed this term, e.g., Gregory the Great in *Dialogi*, IV, c. II; *PL* 77, 336. Cf. McGovern, *Priestly Celibacy Today*, 92-93.

³⁴ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 6, *GCS* 52, 220; Tertullian, *De Monogamia*, 8, *Corpus Christianorum* II, 1239-40; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, I, 26, *PL* 23, 245c-d; Isidore of Pelusium, *Ep.* III, 176, *PG* 78, 865d-68c. See also Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 79-82.

Apostle, her husband would be required to live with her “as a sister.” With Paul, who wrote these words and was celibate, it is evident that his relationship with such a *sister-woman* would entail no conjugal activity.

With regard to the biblical roots of clerical continence and celibacy, it seems that the scant New Testament data concerning the regulation of the lives of the Apostles and of early Church ministers shows them as neither obliged to marry nor explicitly bound to observe the Old Testament regulations concerning ritual purity. Rather, the motivations for decisions in this regard are unique to the New Testament: (1) the example of Christ and St. Paul (celibacy), (2) the ostensible life of the married Apostles after their call to ministry (continence), (3) the vocation of the eunuch “for the kingdom of heaven,” (4) the belief in Christ’s Resurrection as the cause of the elect’s resurrection, (5) St. Paul’s counsel that an unmarried man be free of anxiety, and (6) one particular interpretation of the Pauline formula “man of one wife.” The early Church drew from these New Testament themes in order to justify clerical continence and celibacy.

The next section of this chapter will be a study of the developing *discipline* of clerical continence and celibacy as formulated by the Magisterium for the Latin Church. In these magisterial texts, however, one can discern several elements of an underlying *teaching* that supports the discipline. A question that merits reflection is whether the discipline and teaching were influenced by New Testament motivations such as those above, or whether they were drawn from the Old Testament or from other sources. The answer to this question may strengthen or weaken the foundation of the discipline of

clerical continence and celibacy in the Latin Church. If the Church discipline, for example, is based on a ritual purity model taken from the Old Testament, then one could argue that it has no connection to the “newness” of the ministerial priesthood founded by Christ.

The first magisterial pronouncement on clerical continence and celibacy occurred only in the early fourth century. It will be useful, however, to look at prior patristic writings that set the tone for the subsequent conciliar decrees.

2. The Development of the Discipline of Clerical Continence and Celibacy in Magisterial Teaching from the Early Church to the Twentieth Century

With the growth of the Church in the post-apostolic era, clerical life also developed. Although ample documentation points to the existence of celibate clerics in the early Church, it seems that most major clerics (bishops, priests, and deacons) were married.³⁵ There are at least three reasons why this may have been the case: (1) the majority of Christians in the first generations of the Church were Jewish and celibacy was not part of their culture, (2) in the pagan culture in which the majority of Christians lived, widespread sexual immorality greatly weakened marriage and family life, and thus made it difficult for the Church to cultivate an environment in which celibacy could grow, and (3) the early Church wanted to emphasize the dignity of the married state against the heresies of the Encratites and Cathars.³⁶ As Christians successfully strengthened married life, a culture of virginal celibacy began to emerge.

³⁵ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 42.

³⁶ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 61-64.

What, then, are the origins of clerical continence and celibacy in the early Church? Most widely accepted today is an understanding of the origins of clerical continence-celibacy first formulated in the nineteenth century by the German scholar Francis Funk, which has been elaborated more recently by Roger Gryson.³⁷ This understanding can be summarized in the following manner.

In the early Church, clerical celibacy was optional. Most of the Apostles were married men, as were subsequent bishops, priests, and deacons. Most of the higher clerics in the early Church were married and freely exercised their sexual rights in marriage. It is possible that from time to time some practiced voluntary continence. As time went on, a movement inimical to marriage and the body, influenced by pagan philosophies such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism, as well as the Encratite and Gnostic heresies, entered the life of the Church so that, beginning with the second century, consecrated virginity and later monasticism were increasingly encountered.³⁸ In the

³⁷ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 203-04, for a succinct summary of his theory. Gryson depended on the works of two scholars: the nineteenth century German historian, Francis X. Funk, and Gryson's contemporary, Jean-Paul Audet. Cf. Francis X. Funk, "Der Cölibat keine apostolische Anordnung," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 61 (1879): 208-47, and Jean-Paul Audet: *Mariage et célibat dans le service pastorale de l'Eglise: Histoire et orientations* (Paris: Pastorale de l'Église, 1967).

³⁸ Heinrich Böhmer held that the tension that Christians felt between sexual activity and contact with sacred things was influenced by paganism: "J'en arrive ainsi à la conclusion suivante: La conception qui sert de base et de motivation déterminante au mouvement en faveur de la continence, et selon laquelle le commerce sexuel rend impropre au culte, ne provient ni du Nouveau Testament ni de l'Ancien (encore qu'indirectement de ce dernier), mais du paganisme," Heinrich Böhmer, "Die Entstehung des Zölibates," in *Geschichtliche Studien Albert Hauck zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht*, (Leipzig: 1916), 18; cited in French translation in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 39, note 24.

third century, this ecclesial development progressed, and an increasing sacralization of Church office allowed foreign concepts of cultic or ritual purity to invade the Christian understanding of worship. Finally, in the fourth century, with the Spanish Council of Elvira (305), this asceticism and sacralization joined forces in clerical discipline. What resulted was the custom of both clerics and laypeople to abstain from marital intercourse on days when the Eucharist was celebrated. In the Eastern Church married clerics could engage in marital intercourse with certain restrictions because the liturgy was not celebrated daily. On the other hand, the introduction in the Latin Church of the daily celebration of the Eucharist toward the end of the fourth century led to the discipline of perfect and perpetual continence for major clerics.³⁹ This left the door open for the gradual displacement of married by unmarried clerics. Eventually, in the eleventh century, the Catholic Church made the rule of celibacy binding on all clerics of the Latin rite.⁴⁰

Limitations of space do not allow for a detailed analysis of Gryson's theory, but it is at least possible to address his arguments that both anti-corporeal philosophies and ritual purity motivated the development of clerical continence in the Latin Church.⁴¹

³⁹ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 127, 197.

⁴⁰ This summary of Gryson's theory has been aided by Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 21.

⁴¹ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 43, 203. Peter Brown and Lisa Sowle Cahill also advanced similar theories: cf, Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), hereafter cited: *The Body and Society*; Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 171-73.

First, with regard to Encratism, a collective name for various anti-corporeal movements: this did exist in the early Church in various regions. However, a direct influence of Encratite views on clerical life cannot be proved. On the contrary, Encratism existed as a strong force in the first centuries only in Asia Minor and Syria. Marcion and Tatian, two of the most prominent promoters of Encratism, were excommunicated in Rome because of their views, which included a strong ascetical tendency and the rejection of marriage.⁴² Tatian moved to the region of Syria, the stronghold of the Encratite movement, shortly after his excommunication. In Syria around this time perfect continence was required of all Christians and admission to baptism depended upon it. This ascetical practice led to the eventual dissolution of existing marriages.⁴³

It seems unlikely that the Latin discipline of continence was introduced in order to keep up with the severe asceticism of the Syrians. Rome, the center of orthodoxy in the second century, clearly rejected the heresy and extreme asceticism of the Encratite movement. The latter, however, prodded the Latin Church to develop a sound, sober approach to asceticism and a balanced perspective on the body. As a result, the view of the Latin Church concerning the body ultimately influenced certain segments of the Eastern Church by introducing a more balanced discipline of continence.⁴⁴

⁴² Cf. Henry Chadwick, "Enkrateia," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5, (1962): 352-3; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* I, 29, I, CCL I, 472, 20-473, 22.

⁴³ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 63.

⁴⁴ Cf. Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951), 37-44, and Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 62-64.

The popes continued to oppose rigorism, for example in the battle of Popes Callistus (d. 222) and Pontian (d. 235) against Hippolytus (d. 236). Moreover, as Platonism became more popular with Christian thinkers, theologians in the West and the East recognized an unhealthy dualism in the Gnostic heresies that attacked the Church. Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - c. 215), for example, fought hard against this dualistic Gnosticism.⁴⁵ As a result, popes and the bishops of the Latin Church neither accepted these heretical ideas nor did they attempt to impose them on the clergy and laity. Stefan Heid thus criticized the theory popularized by Gryson:

Behind this *opinio communis* concerning a gradual intrusion of obligatory continence into the discipline for clerics, there is some sort of idea that in the beginning the clergy “naturally” made use of their marriage rights without specific regulations; the “unnatural” continence became widespread only gradually through the influence of ideas that were hostile to the body. It is considered improbable that an entire professional class would live more or less continently. At the same time this thesis is not infrequently associated with a particular image of the Church. If an ecclesiastical discipline of continence begins with an assembly of bishops, the one in Elvira, then this necessarily creates the impression that it was only gradually imposed from above against the vehement resistance from below. . . . So according to this view, Roman severity, under the influence of anticorporeal trends, suppressed the “original” humane practice, as it is still maintained in the Eastern Church. Thus the law that enjoined perfect marital continence upon the higher clerics of the Latin Church first saw the light of day toward the end of the fourth century in Rome.⁴⁶

The second argument of Gryson claimed that clerical continence was motivated by an infusion into clerical life and liturgy of an exaggerated concern to preserve ritual purity. Gryson and others held that the desire to safeguard ritual purity was the primary

⁴⁵ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, especially Book 3.

⁴⁶ Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 21-22.

motivation for married clerics to practice perfect continence and for unmarried men to embrace strict celibacy when entering ministry.⁴⁷ The concept of ritual purity, however, is complex and can be easily misunderstood through the use of modern categories foreign to the original sense of the term. One well established fact about ritual purity in the Christian tradition, however, is that it was linked to the Eucharist. This connection raises a pertinent question: was the daily celebration of the Eucharist the motivation for the introduction of clerical continence and celibacy in the Latin Church? Gryson maintained that perfect continence for the married cleric arose from the introduction of the daily celebration of the Eucharist in the West, while in the East the Eucharist was not celebrated daily, giving rise to periodic continence, i.e., married clerics simply abstained from sexual intercourse the night before celebrating the Eucharist.⁴⁸

Very little is actually known about the particulars surrounding the celebration of the liturgy in the early Latin Church and there is not enough evidence to show conclusively that the daily offering of the Eucharist was the norm of the Latin Church in the fourth century. Evidence for a daily celebration during this time is difficult to determine because of the ambiguity of the texts that refer to the daily reception of the

⁴⁷ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 197-204. See also Raymund Kottje, “Das Aufkommen der täglichen Eucharistiefeier in der Weltkirche und die Zölibatsforderung,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 82 (1971): 218-28, hereafter cited: “Das Aufkommen”, and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Celibacy*, trans. C.A.L. Jarrott (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968). Daniel Callam argued that the influence of the pagan practice of ritual purity upon the ministry and life of clerics in the early Church is not conclusive: see Daniel Callam, “Clerical Continence in the Fourth Century: Three Papal Decretals,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 3-50, at 48-50; hereafter cited: “Three Papal Decretals.”

⁴⁸ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 203-04.

Body of Christ, which could refer either to the celebration of the Eucharist or to the private reception of Communion at home.⁴⁹ It was only at the end of the fourth century, at the very earliest, that the daily Eucharist started to become a widespread practice in certain particular Churches within the Latin Church. This was considerably later than the first evidence of a widespread discipline of clerical continence, e.g., the legislation of Elvira (305), which bound married clerics to perfect and perpetual continence.⁵⁰

Daniel Callam has asserted that asceticism and virginity as goods in themselves, rather than the desired protection of ritual purity, were the motivating factors behind the developing custom of the daily Eucharist:

Daily Mass should not be viewed as a cause, but as an effect, of clerical continence. Fourth-century asceticism did not view virginity and continence as fortuitous side-products of celebrating, for one reason or another, the Eucharist each and every day. They were goods in themselves and indispensable to a clergy who were expected to be exemplars of the Christian life. This hypothesis avoids the weakness of the popular opinion that clerical celibacy arose from the simple juxtaposition of daily Mass and ritual purity. . . . What the sources actually indicate is that Mass was not said everywhere every day; that ritual purity is a subtle and complicated phenomenon involving fundamental religious instincts, the identity of the individual, the preservation of social order, and principles of hygiene; that the pope and

⁴⁹ Cf. Daniel Callam, "The Frequency of Mass in the Latin Church, ca. 400," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 613-50, at 614. Callam also argued that *cottidianus* bears several shades of meaning: "every day," "everyday" (commonplace), "usual," "frequent," "continual," and even "weekday": 613-14.

⁵⁰ Cyprian of Carthage (c. 208 - 258) clearly referred to daily Mass in the 250s (cf. *Letter* 57), but his remarks do not necessarily mean that it was a universal practice or one that continued. According to Kottje, it was probably exceptional and limited to Carthage. Among other reasons, Kottje based his conclusion on the lack of references to daily Eucharist for a hundred years afterwards: Kottje, "Das Aufkommen": 220.

the bishops were desirous of encouraging the new forms of Christian asceticism.⁵¹

It is also unlikely that clerics of the Latin Church would suddenly, unreflectively, and obediently observe perfect continence by mandate of the popes and bishops, and there is no evidence of a widespread protest against such papal and episcopal mandates. Nor does it seem conclusive that the concern to protect ritual purity was intrinsically bound up with the daily celebration of the Eucharist and provided the primary motivation for clerical continence and celibacy, as Gryson claimed.⁵²

Considering, however, the background to the fourth-century magisterial statements on clerical continence and celibacy in the Latin Church, one sees a dearth of evidence for this discipline in the second and third centuries. In the second century, sometimes called the *saeculum obscurum*, little documentation explicitly treats of clerical marriage or celibacy. One exception, however, was Clement of Alexandria, who stated that a married cleric, having raised his children, had to live with his wife from the day of his ordination as with a *woman-helper* or *sister-woman*. Such a married cleric was called to live the life of the married Apostle, as a perfect Christian (“Gnostic”) without sexual relations.⁵³

⁵¹ Callam, “The Frequency of Mass in the Latin Church, ca. 400”: 636.

⁵² Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 200, 203.

⁵³ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 3, 18, 107, 5-108, 2, *GCS*, 2/4, 246, 5-20. Tertullian also spoke of the existence of married clerics who were bound by continence: cf. Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 13, 4, *CCL* 2, 1035, 35-37.

The prohibition of remarriage continued for major clerics in the Latin Church during this time.⁵⁴ In North Africa, and probably in Rome as well, clerics were not permitted to enter into a second marriage.⁵⁵ Certainly, some clerics disregarded this discipline, but the prohibition remained. In the third century, the Eastern Church authorities are in fact stronger witnesses to a widespread discipline of clerical continence.⁵⁶ Further, it is significant that, although early documents attest to the existence of major clerics of the Latin Church with children, none of them states that these children were begotten after ordination, and no deacon, priest, or bishop was ever mentioned approvingly because he had fathered a child. Rather, it seems that sexual intercourse by major clerics was not tolerated by the Church authorities and was subject to ecclesiastical sanctions.⁵⁷

Such, then, are some of the scant references to clerical continence and celibacy in the second and third centuries. In the fourth century, however, the first conciliar legislation concerning a consistent practice of clerical continence and celibacy appears

⁵⁴ Cf. Tertullian, *De Monogamia* 12, *CCL* 2, 1247, 1-1248, 41, and *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 7, 2, *CCL* 2, 1024, 10-13; Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 9, 12, 21ff, *GCS Hippol.* 3, 249, 18-250, 1.

⁵⁵ Hippolytus accused Pope Callistus of allowing clerics to marry, but the latter may have been making accommodations for clerics who married without permission. Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, IX, 12, 22, *GCS* 26, 249-50; Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 152-54; Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 87-89.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum* 4, *CSCO.S (Scriptores Syri)*, 176: 45, 15-46, 4; Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 1, 9, 20ff, *GCS Eus.* 6: 42, 33-43, 5; Origen, *Comm. in Mt.* 14:22, *GCS Orig.* 10: 337, 19-338, 7.

⁵⁷ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 143.

in the Latin Church. With the lessening and eventual cessation of the persecution of the Church, provisional councils and synods were convened and record keeping was facilitated.⁵⁸ The regional Council of Elvira (305), although convened during continuing persecution, produced the first written law in the East or in the West with regard to clerical continence. In canon 33 the council required perfect continence for all married clerics under pain of deposition:

It has seemed good absolutely to forbid the bishops, presbyters, and deacons, i.e., all clerics who have a position in the ministry, to have [sexual] relations with their wives and beget children. Whoever in fact does this is to be removed from the honor of the clerical state.⁵⁹

This disciplinary canon dealt with an infraction of an apparently existing ecclesial law.⁶⁰ Neither it nor any other canon gave an explanation or justification for the law; it

⁵⁸ The following summary on the development of the discipline of clerical continence and celibacy from the early Church until the early twentieth century relies on Roman Cholij, “Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and in the History of the Church” (1993), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_010111993_chisto_en.html, as well as Ray Ryland, “A Brief History of Clerical Celibacy,” in *Priestly Celibacy: Its Scriptural, Historical, Spiritual, and Psychological Roots*, ed. Peter M.J. Stravinskias (Mt. Pocono, PA: Newman House Press, 2001), 27-44. For a more detailed history, see Alfons M. Stickler, “L’*évolution de la discipline du célibat dans l’Eglise en Occident de la fin de âge patristique au Concile de Trente*”, in Joseph Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat: Etudes historiques et théologiques* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1971), 373-442.

⁵⁹ “Placuit in totum prohibere episcopis, presbyteris, et diaconibus vel omnibus clericis positus in ministerio abstinere se a coniugibus suis et non generare filios. Quicumque vero fecerit, ab honore clericatus exterminetur,” Council of Elvira, can. 33, in E.J. Jonkers, ed., *Acta et Symbola Conciliorum Quae Saeculo Quarto Habita Sunt* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 12f. All translations of texts of the councils and Church Fathers in this dissertation are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁶⁰ According to Pius XI, this first written law concerning clerical celibacy and continence in the Latin Church presupposed an unwritten, oral tradition: “The law of ecclesiastical celibacy, whose first written traces pre-suppose a still earlier unwritten practice, dates back to a canon of the Council of Elvira, at the beginning of the fourth

simply demanded obedience. It is unlikely, however, that it was an innovation that would have deprived married clerics of a long established right.⁶¹

Further, it is a particular characteristic of law that the origin of a legal system consists in oral traditions and in the transmission of norms that only slowly receive a fixed, written form. Alfons Stickler has given historical examples of this process:

[It] was only after centuries and for various sociological reasons that the Romans formulated in writing the law of the Twelve Tables. The German peoples only compiled their popular juridical system and customs in written form after many centuries of their actual existence. Up to that time, their law was unwritten and was handed on orally. No one would thereby affirm that, on this basis, their law (*ius*) was not obligatory and that its observance was left to the free will of the individual. Like the legal system of any large community, that of the early Church consisted for the greater part in regulations and obligations which were handed on orally, particularly during the three centuries of persecution, which made it difficult to fix them in writing.⁶²

Thus not only those norms that had been written down were obligatory, for the general sense of law (*ius*) is not equivalent to a norm (*lex*). Law is a legal obligation, whether it be established orally, handed on by means of custom, or already expressed in writing. A norm, however, is a statute or rule established in written form and legitimately

century, when persecution still raged. This law only makes obligatory what might in any case almost be termed a moral exigency that springs from the Gospel and the Apostolic preaching,” Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, ed. Claudia Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian, 1990), 497-515, at 505.

⁶¹ An Eastern Orthodox archbishop, Peter L’Huillier, argued that canon 33 was not promulgated by Elvira, but was part of a group of canons added at a later time. He gave no support for this statement, however, nor did he say when the canons were added: cf. Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 36; see also Ryland, “A Brief History of Clerical Celibacy,” 28.

⁶² Alfonso Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations*, trans. Brian Ferme (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 17-18; hereafter cited: *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*.

promulgated. It is probable, therefore, that certain ecclesial laws, including those dealing with clerical continence, were obligatory although not written down. This is significant because the Second Council of Carthage (390) appealed to an unwritten law rooted in apostolic tradition to justify perfect and perpetual clerical continence.⁶³

In 314, Constantine called together the bishops of the empire at Arles to address the Donatist heresy. Canon 29, whose language is quite similar to that of canon 33 of Elvira, forbade married bishops, priests, and deacons to have conjugal relations with their wives, under pain of deposition from the clergy, because these clerics engaged daily in the ministry (*quia ministerio quotidiano occupantur*).⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that continence for married clerics was tied broadly to ecclesial ministry, which most probably embraced all three clerical ministries (liturgical, prophetic, and pastoral) rather than just one that was exclusively cultic.

The Council of Nicaea (325) likewise upheld the discipline of clerical continence for married clerics in canon 3:

This great synod absolutely forbids a bishop, presbyter, deacon or any of the clergy to keep a woman who has been brought in to live with him,

⁶³ In this respect, Augustine wrote on liturgy and doctrine: “. . . quod universa tenet ecclesia nec conciliis institutum, sed semper retentum est, non nisi auctoritate apostolica traditum rectissime creditur,” Augustine, *De Baptismo contra Donatistas* IV, 24:31, *CSEL* 51, 1-4; cf. below, 35-37.

⁶⁴ “Praeterea, quod dignum, pudicum et honestum, suademus fratribus ut sacerdotes et levitae cum uxoribus suis non coeant, *quia ministerio quotidiano occupantur*. Quicumque contra hanc constitutionem fecerit, a clericatus honore deponatur,” Council of Elvira, *CC* 148, 25; emphasis added.

with the exception of course of his mother or sister or aunt, or of any person who is above suspicion.⁶⁵

The rationale behind this particular ruling seems to have been both to protect the chastity of the cleric and to avoid giving public scandal through an irregular living arrangement with a woman. The *συνεισακτοι* (*subintroductae*), women living under the same roof with a cleric, had to be “above suspicion” concerning the chastity of the cleric. The wife of a married cleric is not mentioned in this canon and does not seem to fall in the category of “any person above suspicion.”⁶⁶

In 384, Bishop Himerius of Spain wrote to Pope Damasus (c. 305 - 384) asking for help in dealing with married clergy who were having conjugal relations with their wives and begetting children. Damasus died before he could respond, and thus his successor Siricius (c. 334 - 399) stated in *Directa* (385) that married priests and deacons were bound by perfect and perpetual continence. As the Levites were bound by temporary continence, the priests of the New Testament were bound by perpetual continence, which reflected the superiority of the New Law over the Old:

⁶⁵ Council of Nicaea, canon 3; translation in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume 1: *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward and Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1990), 7; hereafter cited: *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*.

⁶⁶ For different interpretations of this canon, see L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 34-36 and Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 185-95. See also Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 15-18, on the legend of Paphnutius, an alleged council Father who, with the approval of the other bishops, advocated allowing married clergy to continue their conjugal lives. Although Gryson accepted the legitimacy of this historical account (cf. *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 87-93), the scholarly consensus today accepts the position of Winkelmann that the story was fabricated: cf. Friedhelm Winkelmann, “Paphnutios, der Bekenner und Bischof. Probleme der Koptischen Literatur,” in *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, I (1968): 145-53.

This is why the Lord Jesus, when he enlightened us with his coming, proclaimed in the Gospel that he had come not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. This is also why he wanted the beauty of the Church, whose Bridegroom he is, to shine forth with the splendor of chastity, so that on Judgment Day, when he returns, he may find her without stain or wrinkle, as his apostle has taught.⁶⁷

In *Directa*, Siricius mentioned the Levitical priesthood in the context of liturgical sacrifice to imply that, as the Levites abstained from sexual intercourse in order to offer a worthy sacrifice, so too married clerics should abstain from their wives for the same reason. Siricius also argued that the law of perpetual continence for married priests and deacons is “indissoluble”:

By the indissoluble law of these decisions all of us priests and deacons are bound together from the day of our ordination to put our hearts and bodies in sobriety and purity; may we be pleasing to God in all things, in the sacrifices we daily offer.⁶⁸

The next year, Siricius, together with eighty bishops of the Roman Synod, issued *Cum in Unum* (386), in which they stated that those priests and deacons who after ordination beget children were acting against a law of perpetual continence that

⁶⁷ “Unde et Dominus Jesus cum nos suo illustrasset adventu, in Evangelio protestatur, quia Legem venerit implere, non solvere. Et ideo Eccelsiae, cuius sponsus est, formam castitatis voluit splendore radiare, ut in die iudicii, cum rursus advenerit, sine macula et ruga eam possit, sicut per Apostolum suum instituit, reperire,” Siricius, *Directa*, PL 13, 131b-47a, at 1139a; cf. Pierre Coustant ed., *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum* (Farnborough, England: Gregg Press, 1967), 623-38.

⁶⁸ “Quarum sanctionum omnes sacerdotes atque levitae insolubili lege constringimur, ut a die ordinationis nostrae, sobrietati ac pudicitiae et corda nostra mancipemus et corpora, dumodo per omnia Deo nostro in his, quae quotidie offerimus, sacrificiis placeamus,” Siricius, *Directa*, PL 13, 1139a. Cf. Callam, “The Frequency of Mass in the Latin Church, ca. 400”: 634-38, for possible meanings of *quotidie* in the writings of Siricius.

had bound major clerics from the beginning of the Church.⁶⁹ Siricius insisted that the question was not a matter of issuing new precepts, but of reminding the clergy of rules that were long established. Some of the clergy had defended their continuing conjugal life, although none appealed in any way to a tradition of optional celibacy.⁷⁰ They instead appealed to *μιας γυναικος άνδρα* (*unius uxoris vir*) of 1 Tim 3:2 (bishop), Titus 1:6 (presbyter), and 1 Tim 3:12 (deacon). Siricius, however, argued that *unius uxoris vir* did not mean that a married bishop (in this case) could continue conjugal relations after ordination, but that a man married only once could be expected to live the life of perfect continence that was required after ordination:

Perhaps one believes that this [is permitted] because it is written “a man of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). But [Paul] was not speaking of a man persisting in the desire to beget children, but rather of maintaining future continence (*propter continentiam futuram*).⁷¹

According to Siricius, having had only one wife was a requirement for receiving orders, since monogamy was seen as a sign that the candidate would have the capacity to practice perfect continence after ordination. Siricius also argued that the daily demands of the married cleric’s ministry necessitated his abstention from conjugal relations:

⁶⁹ Cf. Siricius, *Cum in Unum*, PL 13, 1160a-61a; Coustant ed., *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum*, 655-57.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ryland, “A Brief History of Clerical Celibacy,” 29.

⁷¹ “Forte hoc creditur; quia scriptum est, *unius uxoris virum* (1 Tim 3:2). Non permanentem in concupiscentia generandi dixit, sed propter continentiam futuram,” Siricius, *Cum in Unum*, PL 13, 1161a. A similar exegesis is found also in the writings of Fathers contemporaneous with Siricius: Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, and Epiphanius of Salamis. Cf. Ambrose, *Epistolae*, PL 16, 1205b-c; Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Timotheum primam*, III, 12-13, PL 17, 470b-71b; Epiphanius, *Panarion [Adversus Haereses]*, in ed. Karl Holl, *Die Grieschischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 31 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1922), 367.

Moreover, as it is worthy, chaste, and upright to do so, we advise this: that the priests and Levites [deacons] have no relations with their wives because they are occupied with the daily necessities of their ministry. . . . If the laity are asked to exercise continence so that their prayers should be granted, all the more so a priest, who should be prepared at any moment, secured in an immaculate purity, whether he offers the sacrifice or is obliged to baptize.⁷²

Although the *daily* necessities would include liturgical worship, they also embraced a broader clerical ministry, such as preaching and teaching. Nevertheless, the cultic element of the injunction contained hints of the link between service in the sanctuary and ritual purity.

In sum, Siricius was the first pope to use the Pauline formula *man of one wife* to defend clerical continence. However, he was not the first authoritative source to do so: the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which dates back to the early third century, also utilized this particular reading of the text.⁷³ Later in the century, the Second Council of Carthage was convened amidst the crisis of the decline of the Church in North Africa. On June 16, 390, the bishops of northern Africa gathered under the presidency of Genethlius. The conciliar proceedings record the following debate in the council hall:

⁷² “Praeterea quod dignum et pudicum et honestum est suademus, ut sacerdotes et levitae cum uxoribus suis non coeant: quia in ministerio, ministerii quotidianis necessitatibus, occupantur. . . . Si ergo laicis abstinencia imperatur, ut possint deprecantes, audiri: quanto magis sacerdos utique omni momento paratus esse debet, munditiae puritate securus, ne aut sacrificium offerat, aut baptizare cogatur?” Siricius, *Cum in Unum*, PL 13, 1160a. Siricius, in using the disjunctive *aut. . .aut*, implied that the Eucharist was not celebrated every day.

⁷³ “Talem decet esse episcopum *unius uxoris virum, curam domus suae bene agentem*. Ita ergo probetur, cum manus inpositionis accepit, et sic ordinetur in episcopatum, si est castus, si uxorem castam aut fidelem habuit aut habet,” *Didascaliae Apostolorum Canonum Ecclesiasticorum Traditionis Apostolicae Versiones Latinae*, in Erik Tidner, ed., *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur*, vol. 75 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963), 17-18, emphasis added.

Epigonius, Bishop of the Royal Region of Bulla said: “The rule of continence and chastity was discussed in a previous council. Let it [now] be taught with more emphasis that there are three ranks that, by virtue of their consecration, are under the same obligation of chastity, i.e., the bishop, the priest, and the deacon, and let them be instructed to keep their purity.”

Bishop Genethlius said: “As was previously said, it is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the Levites, i.e., those who are in the service of the divine sacraments, to be continent in all things (*continentes esse in omnibus*), so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed (*ut quod apostoli docuerunt et ipsa servavit antiquitas*), let us also endeavor to keep.”

The bishops declared unanimously: “It pleases us all that bishop, priest, and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal intercourse] with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep perfect chastity.”⁷⁴

The presiding bishop, Genethlius, thus said with the approval of his fellow bishops that this rule binding married bishops, priests, and deacons to practice perfect continence accorded with apostolic tradition. This is the strongest fourth century witness to the antiquity of the tradition of clerical continence. Siricius’ decretal *Cum in Unum* (386) had probably already reached the bishops of northern Africa and influenced their thinking. Interestingly, the constant presumption, even at the end of the fourth

⁷⁴ “Epigonius episcopus Bullensium Regionum dixit: Cum praeterito concilio de continentia et castitate tractaretur, gradus isti tres qui constrictione quadam castitatis per consecrationem annexi sunt, episcopus inquam, presbyter et diaconus, tractatu pleniori, ut pudicitiam custodiant, doceantur. Genethlius episcopus dixit: Ut superius dictum est, decet sacros antistites ac Dei sacerdotes necnon et levitas vel qui sacramentis divinis inserviunt, continentes esse in omnibus, quo possint simpliciter quod a Domino postulant impetrare, ut quod apostoli docuerunt et ipsa servavit antiquitas, nos quodque custodiamus. Ab universis episcopis dictum est: Omnibus placet ut episcopus, presbyter et diaconus, pudicitiae custodes, etiam ab uxoribus se abstineant ut in omnibus et ab omnibus pudicitia custodiatur qui altario inserviunt,” Second Council of Carthage, *CC* 149, 13.

century, was that ministers were married, or at least a large number of them. It seems that there was a continual struggle to get married clerics to abstain from continuing conjugal relations.

During the late fourth and early fifth century, several Eastern and Western Fathers helped to spur the continual development of the theology of clerical continence-celibacy that echoed earlier conciliar statements, such as those of Elvira and the Second Council of Carthage. The teaching of Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310 - 403) is significant insofar as he, an Eastern Father, gave testimony to the unity of the Western and Eastern Churches on the matter of clerical continence, rooting it in divine Revelation:

Since the Incarnation of Christ, the holy Word of God does not admit to the priesthood those monogamists who, after the death of their wife, have contracted a second marriage; and this on account of the exceptional honor of the priesthood. This [rule] the Holy Church of God observes with great exactness without flinching. She does not accept as deacon, priest, bishop and subdeacon, be he the husband of a single wife, the man who continues to live with his wife and to beget children; the Church accepts him who, as monogamist, observes continence or widowhood; this is observed above all wherever the canons of the Church are kept faithfully.⁷⁵

It is noteworthy that Epiphanius here commented on *unius uxoris vir* in a similar manner to Siricius (*propter continentiam futuram*).

During this period several Fathers in the Latin Church began to write in defense of consecrated virginity, as well as of clerical continence and celibacy. These teachings helped to strengthen the magisterial authority of the popes during this time. Among

⁷⁵ Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, ed. Holl, 367; translation in Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 20. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in I Tim. Prol.*, PG 62, 503f, *Hom. 2, in Tit. I*, PG 62, 671; Eusebius of Caesarea, *De Demonstratione Evangelica* I, 9, GCS, 23, 43.

these Fathers, Jerome (c. 347 - 420) stood out for his defense of clerical continence. In a letter written against Jovian, Jerome interpreted *unius uxoris vir* in accord with Siricius and went as far as to liken an incontinent bishop to an adulterer:

[The Apostle] does not say: Let a bishop be chosen who has one wife and sires children, but a man who took to himself one wife and keeps his children well disciplined in all things. You certainly would admit that he cannot be a bishop who continues to sire children during his episcopate. For if this is discovered, he will not be considered a husband but will be condemned as an adulterer.⁷⁶

Jerome seems to have accused the married bishop of adultery because the latter had acquired through ordination a new spouse, namely the Church. Jerome here used a spousal paradigm to buttress the argument for clerical continence and celibacy. Jerome also referred to Paul's exhortation in 1 Cor 7:5-6 – that spouses can practice periodic continence for the sake of prayer – in order to argue for perfect priestly continence, which Jerome seems implicitly to tie to ritual purity:

If a layperson, or any believer, is not able to pray unless he abstains from conjugal intercourse, the priest, who must always offer sacrifices for the people, must always pray. If he must always pray, he therefore must always abstain from the use of marriage.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Non enim dicit: eligatur episcopus, qui unam ducat uxorem, et filios faciat: sed qui unam habuerit uxorem, et filios in omni subditos disciplina. Certe confiteris non posse episcopum, qui in episcopatu filios faciat. Alioqui, si deprehensus fuerit, non quasi vir tenebitur, sed quasi adulter damnabitur,” Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* I, PL 23, T. 2-3, 257a.

⁷⁷ “Si laicus et quicumque fidelis orare non potest, nisi careat officio conjugali, sacerdoti, cui semper pro populo offerenda sunt sacrificia, semper orandum est. Si semper orandum est, ergo semper carendum matrimonio,” Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, PL 23, 257a.

In 456, Pope Leo the Great (c. 400 - 461) wrote to Bishop Rusticus of Narbonne in answer to the question: “Of those [clerics] who minister at the altar and have wives, whether they are able licitly to have conjugal relations?” Leo responded:

The law of continence is the same for the ministers of the altar, the bishops and priests; when they were laymen or lectors, they could licitly take a wife and beget children. But once they arrived at the ranks mentioned above, what was once permitted is no longer so. Therefore, so that their union may change from carnal to spiritual, it is necessary that they, without sending away their wives, live with them as if they did not have them, so that conjugal love be safeguarded and nuptial activity cease.⁷⁸

Leo made it clear that bishops and priests were to live Paul’s exhortation in a particular manner: “live with [their wives] as if they did not have them” (1 Cor 7:29). In most cases, it seems this entailed that these clerics had to separate from their wives, the latter being supported by the Church, either by entering a convent or by living in a community of women specifically established by the Church.⁷⁹

Up to the first half of the sixth century, the majority of magisterial and patristic pronouncements on this issue dealt with clerical continence rather than celibacy because the majority of bishops, priests, and deacons were married. Around this time, however, an increasing number of bishops were selected from the celibate clergy in both the Eastern and Western Churches. For example, in 535 Emperor Justinian issued a law that

⁷⁸ “Lex continentiae eadem est ministris altaris quae episcopis atque presbyteris, qui cum essent laici sive lectores, licito et uxoris ducere et filios procreare potuerunt. Sed cum ad praedictos pervenerunt gradus, coepit eis non licere quod licuit. Unde, ut de carnali fiat spirituale conjugium, oportet eos nec dimittere uxores, et quasi non habeant sic habere, quo et salva sit charitas connubiorum, et cesset opera nuptiarum,” Leo the Great, *Epistola ad Rusticum Narbonensem episcopum, Inquis. III, Resp., PL 54, 1204a.*

⁷⁹ Cf. Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 34-35.

required bishops to be either unmarried or separated from their wives.⁸⁰ As this and similar legislation took hold in the universal Church, the laws dealing with clerical marriage and continence began to be directed principally to priests and deacons.

Despite the gradual turn toward selecting celibate candidates for the episcopacy, the popes still had to deal with incontinent bishops. The early medieval period saw the widespread phenomenon of lay investiture bishops who were uncatechized in the Faith and worldly in their lifestyle. These bishops lived with their wives or concubines in plain sight and allowed their priests to live in marriage. Many of these married priests, living in the countryside and mired in poverty, supported themselves by farming, helped by wives and children. These priests willed their benefices to their sons, which helped to establish a form of hereditary priesthood.⁸¹

Clerical celibacy in the early Middle Ages thus declined dramatically with many clerics living with either wives or concubines. From the sixth century until the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century, Church authorities were constantly attempting to renew clerical life. The tone of the disciplinary measures taken by popes and bishops was one of reformation, rather than innovation. Collections of canons, such as the *Dionysiana* (ca. 500), reminded bishops of the discipline of earlier centuries. Around this time the *Penitential Books* of the Celtic Churches asserted the obligation to

⁸⁰ Cf. Justinian, *Novellae*, VI, c. 1, par. 7.

⁸¹ Cf. Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90. My summary of celibacy in the Middle Ages is drawn in part from this work of Tellenbach, along with Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 21-55, and Mary R. Schneider, "The Ancient Tradition of Clerical Celibacy," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (July 2007): 18-26.

continence for those high clerics who had been previously married and imposed penalties on those who had conjugal relations with their wives after ordination.⁸²

In 653, the Council of Toledo barred clerics from having any form of public relationship with their wives or concubines. Penitential manuals and the *Capitularies* of the Frankish bishops also urged the conservation of clerical continence, as did several regional councils, diocesan synods, and the decrees of several popes.⁸³ Chrodegang of Metz (c. 712 - 766) bound his cathedral clergy to communal life with him under a form of religious rule.⁸⁴ Chrodegang is considered one of the founders of the canonical life for priests, which later evolved into various communities of canons regular, who followed the *Rule of St. Augustine*. Canonical life made it easier for priests to live continently.

During this time the earliest legislation that permitted *periodic* continence for married clerics appeared at a regional council of the Eastern Churches, namely the Second Council of Trullo (691 - 692).⁸⁵ This council upheld the traditional discipline that required bishops to be unmarried, or if married, to live apart from their wives, and also continued the ban on remarriage for all major clerics whose wives had died after

⁸² Cf. Alfons Stickler, "Tratti salienti nella storia del celibato," *Sacra Doctrina* 15 (1970): 585-620, at 594, and *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 42.

⁸³ Cf. Cholij, "Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and in the History of the Church," (website article).

⁸⁴ Cf. John E. Lynch, "Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy: The Discipline of the Western Church: An Historico-Canonical Synopsis," Part I, *The Jurist* 32 (1972): 14-38, at 35.

⁸⁵ Cf. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 120-26.

their ordination. However the bishops also introduced a law that was unprecedented in previous local or ecumenical councils. Canon 13 mandated that married priests, deacons, and subdeacons were not permitted to separate from their wives and were bound to observe periodic rather than perpetual continence. Trullo appealed to apostolic tradition and cited canons from the African Codex (419) to justify this legislation.⁸⁶ The reigning pope, Sergius I (c. 650 - 701), a Syrian by birth, did not accept the Trullan canons on clerical marriage, nor did his successor, John VII (c. 650 - 707), who returned the Acts of the Trullan Council unsigned. However, Adrian I (c. 700 - 795), while rejecting the canons on clerical marriage, did accept with qualification other Trullan Acts that were free of anti-Roman canons.⁸⁷

In the Latin Church, various councils and synods, such as those of Pavia (1022) and Burgess (1031), mandated strict continence and banned major clerics from living with a woman. Clerics, including bishops, who refused to separate from their wives were laicized. Moreover, children fathered after ordination were declared illegitimate and thus ineligible to receive orders. This legislation helped put an end to the hereditary priesthood. Around this time, the reform under Nicholas II (c. 990 - 1061) was aimed at correcting abuses in the Church, particularly simony, priests living in marriage (Nicolaitism), and lay investiture. The synodal legislation of Nicholas II in 1059

⁸⁶ Cf. canons 3 and 25 of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae* (419). Cholij argued that the Trullan Fathers, in canon 13, altered the African Codex in order to make their case: Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 115-24, 179-92.

⁸⁷ Adrian I referred to the canons as though they pertained to the Third Council of Constantinople: see Vitalien Laurent, "L'oeuvre canonique du Concile in Trullo (691-692), source primaire du droit de l'église orientale," *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 23 (1965): 7-41, at 36, and Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 7.

actually declared Nicolaitism to be a heresy and subsequent councils repeated his decrees.⁸⁸ These reforms dealt with priests and deacons rather than bishops, who by this time were for the most part celibate. Nicholas II effectively used legates for the work of reform, including Humbert of Silva Candida, Hildebrand of Rome, and Peter Damian. Hildebrand, as Gregory VII (c. 1020 - 1085), and his immediate successors focused on correcting bishops who failed to reform their clergy with regard to abuses against celibacy and continence, as well as simony, lay investiture, and hereditary priesthood.

Among the many councils and synods of the eleventh and twelfth centuries called to enforce, among other things, the discipline of clerical continence and celibacy, the most significant were the First Lateran Council (1123) and the Second Lateran Council (1139). Lateran I made into universal law the prohibition of priests, deacons, and subdeacons cohabiting with their wives or concubines. Canon 7 reaffirmed the legislation of Nicaea mentioned above:

We absolutely forbid priests, deacons or subdeacons to live with concubines or wives, and to cohabit with other women, except those whom the council of Nicaea permitted to dwell with them solely on account of necessity, namely a mother, sister, paternal or maternal aunt, or other such persons, about whom no suspicion could justly arise.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cf. Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe*, 165.

⁸⁹ First Lateran Council, canon 7, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1, 191. These bishops thus interpreted canon 3 of Nicaea as excluding wives from the category of women “about whom no suspicion could justly arise.”

On the other hand, Lateran II declared that marriages contracted after ordination would be null and void: “matrimonium non esse censemus.”⁹⁰ In doing so, the council was reemphasizing the law of clerical continence and the prohibition of the single cleric to marry or the married cleric to marry again after ordination.⁹¹ Often Lateran II is wrongly interpreted as having introduced for the first time the general law of *celibacy*, with only unmarried men being admitted to priestly ordination. Yet what the council actually did was to reemphasize the law of *continence*.⁹²

Subsequent legislation continued to deal with issues relating to the ordination of married men. The primary sources for these laws were the *Quinque Compilationes Antiquae*, which were compiled between 1187 and 1227, and the decretals of Gregory IX (c. 1145 - 1241). These decretals formed part of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, a canonical work completed in the fourteenth century by eminent canonists such as Raymond of Peñafort (c. 1175 - 1275). These sources indicate that from the time of Alexander III (c. 1100 - 1181), married priests were not, as a rule, allowed to possess

⁹⁰ Second Lateran Council, canon 7, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol.1, 198.

⁹¹ Second Lateran Council, canon 7, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol.1, 198. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) reaffirmed the legislation of the Second Lateran Council: cf. canon 14, Tanner, *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils*, Vol.1, 242.

⁹² “[. . .] ut autem lex continentiae et Deo placens munditia in ecclesiasticis personis et sacris personis dilatetur,” Second Lateran Council, canon 7, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1, 198; cf. Chohij, “Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and in the History of the Church,” (website article).

benefices nor to bequeath a benefice. Young wives of priests and the wives of bishops had to agree at the time of ordination to enter a convent.⁹³

In 1322, John XXII (1249 - 1334) declared that no married man could be ordained unless he had full knowledge of the obligations of Church law. If a wife had not given her free consent to his ordination, the husband, even if already ordained, was to reunite with his wife and thus be barred from exercising his priestly ministry.⁹⁴ This irregularity of the married man was not due to the marriage bond *per se*, but rather to the assumption of the unwillingness or reluctance of the spouses to separate. The rights of the wife, fully respected by Church law, may have hastened the eventual universal practice, established after the Council of Trent, of ordaining only unmarried men. Hence the Gregorian Reform did not mandate universal celibacy for priests of the Latin Church, but simply enforced existing laws concerning perfect and perpetual continence for major clerics.

Despite the conciliar and pontifical legislation that emanated from the Gregorian reform, priestly concubinage continued to be a problem in the Latin Church. This led to calls for easing of the rules enforcing clerical continence and celibacy during the centuries between the Gregorian Reform and the Council of Trent. Even respected

⁹³ Cf. Aemilius Friedberg, ed., *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck - U. Verlagsanstalt, 1955), III, 32, c. 6. The relevant sections are: Liber III, tit. 1 (*De Vita et Honestate Clericorum*), tit. 2 (*De Cohabitatione Clericorum et Mulierum*), tit. 3 (*De Clericis Coniugatis*), tit. 32 (*De Conversione Coniugatorum*), Liber IV, tit. 6 (*Qui Clerici vel Voventes Matrimonium Contrahere Possunt*). Gratian's earlier *Decretum* (ca. 1140) also contains many texts on celibacy and continence.

⁹⁴ Cf. John XXII, "De voto et voti redemptione," Titulus VI, cap. un., *Extravagantes Iohannis XXII*, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, cited in Cholij, "Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and in the History of the Church" (website article, note 62).

churchmen such as Panormitanus at the time of the Council of Basle (1417-1437) called for the mitigation of the rules enforcing clerical continence and celibacy, as did Erasmus and secular rulers with political goals in mind: Charles V, Ferdinand I, and Maximilian II. For their part, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli made the abolition of clerical continence and celibacy one of the central tenets of their reform, but linked this goal with the abolition of the Catholic theology of the sacramental priesthood.⁹⁵

In answer to the Protestants, the bishops of the Council of Trent, during the third and final period of the council (1562-63), rejected calls for the mitigation or abolition of the rules for clerical continence and celibacy. In session 23 (July 15, 1563), they established seminaries to prepare young men for the priesthood and for the celibate life (canon 18).⁹⁶ This was a key strategy for enforcing strict celibacy. In session 24 (November 11, 1563), they reaffirmed the prohibition of clerical marriage (canon 9)⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Cf. John E. Lynch, "Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy: The Discipline of the Western Church: An Historico-Canonical Synopsis," Part II, *The Jurist* 32 (1972): 189-212, at 206.

⁹⁶ Cf. Council of Trent, canon 18, in Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume 2: Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed & Ward and Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 750-55.

⁹⁷ "Si quis dixerit, clericos in sacris ordinibus constitutos, vel regulares, castitatem solemniter professos, posse matrimonium contrahere, contractumque validum esse, non obstante lege ecclesiastica vel voto, et oppositum nil aliud esse, quam damnare matrimonium; posseque omnes contrahere matrimonium, qui non sentiunt se castitatis (etiam si eam voverint) habere donum, anathema sit. Cum Deus id recte petentibus non deneget, nec patiat, nos supra id, quod possumus, tentari," Council of Trent, canon 9, in Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 755.

and rejected the thesis that the marital state was superior to the celibate state (canon 10).⁹⁸ Concerning the Tridentine legislation, Roman Cholij wrote:

The discipline of continence by this time had meant in practice that only an unmarried man would be ordained. This is also shown in the discussions of the Council, for example when one theologian, Desiderius de S. Martino, concerned by the shortage of priests, suggested the possibility of ordaining married men provided the wives gave consent and that they and their husbands lived in continence. But the measure was not deemed expedient.⁹⁹

Although these Tridentine decrees did not have an immediate impact on priestly formation, they helped gradually to establish the universal practice of ordaining only unmarried men. Mandatory celibacy was due in large measure to the foundation of seminaries and great improvements in priestly formation. Canon 18 of session 23 of Trent obliged all dioceses to establish seminaries for the education of future priests and allowed for the admission of boys (*pueri*) as young as twelve years.¹⁰⁰ This monumental decision was gradually implemented throughout the Church and, for the most part, it steadily eliminated married men from the priesthood in the Latin Church. The popes during this time, however, had to deal consistently with priests who married after ordination. Priests, for example, who had married during the French Revolution

⁹⁸ “Si quis dixerit, statum coniugalem anteponendum esse statui virginitatis vel coelibatus, et non esse melius ac beatius, manere in virginitate aut coelibatu, quam iungi matrimonio, anathema sit,” Council of Trent, canon 10, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 755.

⁹⁹ Cholij, “Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and in the History of the Church,” (website article). Cf. Societas Goerresiana, ed., *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, Actorum, Epistularium, Tractatum* (Friburgi: Brigoviae, 1924), IX, vi, 441.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Council of Trent, canon 18, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 750-53.

were required either to renounce their civil marriage (invalidly contracted) or to allow the Church to sanate the invalidity. In the first case, they could be readmitted to priestly ministry; in the second, they were permanently barred from it.

Various voices continued to call for the Catholic Church to relax the law of celibacy. But these pressures notwithstanding, the popes upheld mandatory priestly celibacy through various authoritative teachings, such as Gregory XVI (1765 - 1846) in *Mirari Vos* (1834) and Pius IX (1792 - 1878) in *Qui Pluribus* (1848). After the First Vatican Council (1869 - 1870), the schismatic Old Catholics abolished clerical celibacy, much to the consternation of their sympathizer, Ignaz von Döllinger (1799 - 1890).¹⁰¹

There was little if any development in magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy from the Council of Trent until the early twentieth century. One important theological enrichment, however, occurred in nineteenth century Germany, when Franz Funk (1840 - 1907) and Gustav Bickell (1838 - 1906) disputed the origins of clerical celibacy. Funk, an historian of the early Church, maintained that the Church law mandating celibacy for priests in the West was a twelfth century development that had very little to do with the nature of the priesthood itself.¹⁰² Bickell, an orientalist, argued against a

¹⁰¹ Cf. Stanley L. Jaki, *Theology of Priestly Celibacy* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1997), 191.

¹⁰² Cf. Franz X. Funk, “Keine apostolische”: 208-47. Funk’s views have been greatly influential upon subsequent scholarship, especially as transmitted through Vacandard in his essays: Elphège-Florent Vacandard, “Les Origines du célibat ecclésiastique”, in *Études de critique et d'histoire religieuse*, 1st ser, (5th ed.: Paris, 1913), 71-120, and “Célibat”, in: *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 2 (Paris, 1905): 2068-88. Winfried Leinweber, however, in his detailed study of the debate on celibacy in nineteenth century Germany, only briefly mentions the Funk-Bickell debate: Winfried Leinweber, *Der Streit um den Zölibat im 19. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 152, 317.

merely disciplinary view of priestly celibacy in favor of one founded upon biblical and theological reasons.¹⁰³ Funk's view, which prevailed for the remainder of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, influenced scholarship up to the Second Vatican Council. Bickell's position, however, gained greater prominence in the post conciliar years and influenced magisterial teaching during the pontificate of John Paul II.

The Funk-Bickell debate was the last instance of significant scholarly research on priestly continence and celibacy in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The study of the history and theology of priestly celibacy, for all intents and purposes, receded into the background during this time. This in turn affected the development of the teaching of the Magisterium on celibacy: no further significant magisterial teaching was issued until the 1930s. Between the Funk-Bickell debate and the latter pontifical statements on celibacy, however, the Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1917 and concretized the clerical praxis in the Latin Church in the early twentieth century.

In sum, the development of the discipline of clerical continence and celibacy in magisterial teaching from the early Church to the twentieth century hinged on some key arguments of various popes, councils, and Fathers. For example, the writings of Pope

¹⁰³ Cf. Gustav W. Bickell, "Der Cölibat eine apostolische Anordnung," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 2 (1878): 26-64. In 1858 the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith issued an instruction to the Archbishop of Fagaras and Alba-Julia that coincided with Bickell's view: "Qui germanam traditionem de coelibatu ac continentia cleri sedulo expenderit, inveniet profecto vel a primis Ecclesiae catholicae saeculis, si non generali et explicita lege, moribus saltem ac consuetudine fuisse firmatum, ut nedum Episcopi et presbyteri, sed ut clerici in sacris constituti virginitatem, vel perpetuam continentiam inviolate servarent," *Collectanea S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, seu Decreta, Instructiones, Rescripta Pro Apostolicis Missionibus* (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1907), Vol. I, n.1158 (p. 628).

Siricius proved to be particularly influential insofar as he gave theological reasons for the discipline: (1) major clerics are bound from the day of ordination to “purity” of soul and body, so that they may be totally pleasing to God in the sacrifices they offer daily, (2) as the married priests of the Levitical priesthood were bound by temporary continence, so also the married priests of the New Testament priesthood are bound by perfect and perpetual continence because of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ over the Levitical priesthood, and (3) the Pauline phrase *unius uxoris vir* binds the married cleric to perfect and perpetual continence.¹⁰⁴ The popes and councils in succeeding centuries took up Siricius’ interpretation of this Pauline formula, and mandated perfect continence for married clerics.

In addition to Siricius’ reasons, the Second Council of Carthage invoked the “apostolic” tradition of perfect continence for the bishop, priest, and deacon, so each might “obtain in all simplicity what they ask from God.” The bishops of the council referred to major clerics as “guardians of purity” who are obliged to abstain from conjugal intercourse with their wives, so that “those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity.”¹⁰⁵ Clerical continence is in some way bound up with service at the Eucharist and enables the minister to offer up efficacious and constant intercessory prayer. This emphasis on ritual purity is similar that of Siricius.

Another important witness was Jerome, who stated that the married bishop who had conjugal relations with his wife was not to be considered a husband but an

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Siricius, *Directa*, PL 13, 1131b-47a, *Cum in Unum*, PL 13, 1160a-61a; Coustant ed., *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum*, 655-57; cf. above, 32-35.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Second Council of Carthage, CC 149, 13; cf. above, 35-37.

“adulterer.”¹⁰⁶ The concept of adultery here arose from Jerome’s ecclesiological understanding of continence and celibacy, i.e. the sacred minister was seen as the bridegroom of the Church.¹⁰⁷ Leo the Great, for his part, declared that major clerics must live with their wives in perfect continence “as if they did not have them” so that their marital union may change from carnal to spiritual and their conjugal love be safeguarded.¹⁰⁸ Subsequent magisterial teaching continued to defend the discipline with arguments that closely approximated those of Siricius and Carthage, although there appeared other theological reasons that were not directly related to ritual purity, as will be shown in Chapter 2.

3. Twentieth Century Magisterial Teaching Prior to Vatican II

a). 1917 Code of Canon Law

In 1917, Pope Benedict XV promulgated the first universal code of canon law for the Latin Church. In the section dealing with the obligations of clerics, canon 132, §1 treated the obligation of clerical celibacy: “Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligation of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are guilty of sacrilege, with due regard for the prescription of canon 214, §1.”¹⁰⁹ This canon referred to all clerics in major orders, and not only to

¹⁰⁶ Cf. above, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* I, PL 23, T. 2-3, 257a.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Leo the Great, *Epistola ad Rusticum Narbonensem episcopum*, *Inquis. III, Resp.*, PL 54, 1204a; cf. above, 39.

¹⁰⁹ “Clerici in maioribus ordinibus constituti a nuptiis arcentur et servandae castitatis obligatione ita tenentur, ut contra eandem peccantes sacrilegii quoque rei sint, salvo praescripto can. 214, §1,” *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law in*

priests. A cleric made a promise of celibacy when he received the order of subdeacon, which was considered a major order.¹¹⁰ Hence subdeacons, deacons, priests, and bishops were bound by the obligation to observe “chastity,” which in this context refers both to celibacy for the unmarried clerics and perfect continence for the married.

Clerics under the 1917 Code were almost always celibate. In rare cases, however, a married man could be ordained to the priesthood through special papal dispensation. Such married clerics were bound to live with their wives in perfect and perpetual continence. Commentaries on the 1917 Code pointed out the illicitness of married clerics having conjugal relations after ordination:

As regards a man *already married* . . . with a dispensation such a man may be licitly and validly ordained, but he is then forbidden to use the marriage rights, though the marriage remains valid.¹¹¹

Aligned with the concept of the illicit use of marriage by a married cleric is the illegitimacy of children born of such a cleric. Canon 1114 declared the illegitimacy of a

English Translation with Extensive Scholarly Apparatus, ed. and trans. Edward Peters (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 68; hereafter cited: *Pio-Benedictine Code*. Canon 214, § 1 enables a man, who is ordained to major orders under grave fear, to seek dispensation from celibacy and the recitation of canonical hours.

¹¹⁰ The Second Lateran Council (1139) established the subdiaconate as a major order and extended the legislation on continence and celibacy to include subdeacons: cf. Second Lateran Council, canon 7, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1, 198.

¹¹¹ T. Lincoln Bouscaren and Adam Ellis, eds., *Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, 4th edition (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 115, original emphasis. The authors did not indicate reasons for this law. Vermeersch and Creusen state: “Triplex obligatio clericis in Ecclesia latina imponitur, sc. Non nubendi, matrimonio licite contracto non utendi, servandi titulo speciali castitatem sui status.” A. Vermersch and J. Creusen, eds., *Epitome Iuris Canonici cum Commentariis*, Vol. 1 (Mechelen: Dessain, 1933), 220.

child born to a parent who was under solemn religious vows or ordained to major orders, thus reaffirming the prohibition against a major cleric's use of marriage after the reception of orders:

Those children are legitimate who are conceived or born of a valid or putative marriage unless the parents, because of a solemn religious profession or the taking up of sacred orders, had been, at the time of the conception, prohibited from using the marriage contracted earlier.¹¹²

The concept of illegitimacy of a child born of a married priest may seem a foreign and even cruel reality to the contemporary mind. But among other reasons, the 1917 Code retained this precept in order to emphasize the grievousness of the cleric's transgression of clerical chastity. The precept was dropped from the 1983 Code.

Other than the 1917 Code, early twentieth century magisterial doctrine did not offer much reflection on priestly celibacy, and even the writings and pronouncements of the Roman pontiffs of this time did not contain much on this subject. In fact, it is not until Pius XI that one finds the first significant twentieth century magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy.¹¹³

¹¹² “Legitimi sunt filii concepti aut nati ex matrimonio valido vel putativo, nisi parentibus ob sollemnem professionem religiosam vel susceptum ordinem sacrum prohibitus tempore conceptionis fuerit usus matrimonii antea contracti.” English translation from Peters, *Pio-Benedictine Code*, 384.

¹¹³ The twentieth century predecessors of Pius XI contributed minimally to magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy. See, for example, Pius X, “Haerent Animo,” *AAS* 41 (1908): 545-79, at 555-57; Benedict XV, “Ad R.P.D. Franciscum Kordac, Archiepiscopum Pragensem, Coetum Episcoporum Convocandum Statuens,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS)* 12 (1920): 33-35. The pope wrote to Kordac after several Czechoslovakian priests publicly attacked the discipline of priestly celibacy. Cf. William E. Phipps, *Clerical Celibacy: The Heritage* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 168.

b). Pius XI

The encyclical letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (1935) of Pius XI is perhaps the best representative of early twentieth century pontifical teaching on the ministerial priesthood.¹¹⁴ In the encyclical, the pope desired that the faithful appreciate the sublimity of “the Catholic Priesthood and its providential mission in the world” and that priests themselves have a deeper understanding and esteem of their vocation (cf. n. 6).

Within the context of the piety of a Catholic priest, Pius XI broached the topic of priestly celibacy, “for from piety springs the meaning and the beauty of chastity.”¹¹⁵ After treating of the obligation of clerics in the higher orders of the Latin Church to observe perfect celibacy, the pope drew upon the wisdom of the ancients to justify the necessity of priestly ritual purity:

A certain connection between this virtue [chastity] and the sacerdotal ministry can be seen even by the light of reason alone: since “God is a Spirit,” it is only fitting that he who dedicates and consecrates himself to God's service should in some way “divest himself of the body.” The ancient Romans perceived this fitness; one of their laws which ran *Ad divos adeunto caste*, “approach the gods chastely,” is quoted by one of their greatest orators with the following comment: “The law orders us to present ourselves to the gods in chastity of spirit, that is, in which are all things, [n]or does this exclude chastity of the body, which is to be understood, since the spirit is so far superior to the body; for it should be

¹¹⁴ Cf. Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, ed. Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian, 1990), 497-516; AAS 28 (1936): 5-53; English translations from the Carlen edition. Prior to writing this encyclical letter, Pius XI issued two pontifical documents on matters related to the ministerial priesthood: the Apostolic Letter *Officiorum Omnium* (1922), on the education of seminarians, and the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* (1931), on the reform of studies in ecclesiastical faculties.

¹¹⁵ Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, n. 40. In this document Pius XI used “chastity” synonymously with “celibacy.”

remembered that bodily chastity cannot be preserved unless spiritual chastity be maintained.”¹¹⁶

Pius XI appealed to ancient Roman thought on ritual purity to justify priestly celibacy. This appeal to reason, rather than to theology, may indicate that the pope wanted to show that celibacy was not against human nature and that, consequently, celibacy, lived according to supernatural motives, did no harm to the celibate individual.

Pius XI proceeded to state that the New Testament priesthood, being much superior to that of the Old Law, demanded a still greater purity (cf. nn. 42-43). He then briefly summarized the historical development of priestly celibacy, stating that the law of ecclesiastical celibacy, whose first written traces presupposed a still earlier unwritten practice rooted in the Gospel and apostolic preaching, dated back to canon 33 of the Council of Elvira (cf. n. 43). He took pains, however, not to be seen as disapproving the different discipline that legitimately prevailed in the Eastern Church:

Notwithstanding all this, We do not wish that what We said in commendation of clerical celibacy should be interpreted as though it were Our mind in any way to blame, or, as it were, disapprove the different discipline legitimately prevailing in the Oriental Church.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, concerning the Second Council of Carthage (390), which ruled that married clergy were bound to practice perfect continence because it accorded with apostolic tradition, Pius XI stated that this law made obligatory what might be termed “a moral exigency that springs from the Gospel and the apostolic preaching” (n. 43).

¹¹⁶ Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, n. 42.

¹¹⁷ Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, n. 47.

Having summarized the thoughts of Church Fathers, such as Ephrem and John Chrysostom, on the beauty and dignity of celibacy (cf. n. 44), Pius XI then praised clerical celibacy because of the “incredible honor and dignity” of the priesthood. Referring to the liturgical office of the priest, the pope said that the priest has a duty that is in a certain way “higher than that of the most pure spirits” who stand before the Lord. He emphasized the priest’s need to be totally dedicated to the things of the Lord and detached from the things of the world in order to dedicate himself to prayer because his mission is the salvation of souls. Is it not then fitting that the priest keep himself free from the cares of a family, which would absorb a great part of his energies (cf. n. 45)? The cares of the family and the need to please his wife would prevent the married priest, as a minister of God, from praying as he ought. Priestly celibacy, Pius XI believed, safeguards the time and energies of the priest so that he can be free to pray and minister to the Church. It is “one of the purest glories of the Catholic priesthood” which “corresponds better to the desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to His purposes in regard to priestly souls.”¹¹⁸

In sum, Pius XI stressed that celibacy does not harm the individual priest because it is not against nature, but is in a certain sense *beyond* nature. Further, the pope justified celibacy on the grounds of ritual purity: the physically and spiritually chaste priest who dedicates and consecrates himself to God's service should in some way “divest himself of the body” (n. 42) and remain pure and free from conjugal relations. A greater “purity” was needed for the New Testament priesthood than for the

¹¹⁸ Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, n. 47.

Levitical priesthood. The noble ministry of the celibate priest reaches its culmination in the liturgy wherein he has to be pure in body and soul in order to offer up prayers that are pleasing to God. Further, the pope emphasized the importance of the priest being free from the cares of the world and family so that he might dedicate his time to prayer. Finally, Pius XI stated that sacerdotal celibacy better conforms to the desires and plans of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with regard to the economy of salvation. Although he linked celibacy with this christological image, he stopped short of declaring that celibacy enabled the priest to be an icon or image of Jesus Christ.

Ad Catholici Sacerdotii contained at least two themes that had been part of the magisterial teaching for centuries: (1) celibacy relates to the priest's freedom from the cares of marriage and the family in order to act better as a mediator, (2) celibacy is a means of protecting ritual purity. These two dimensions can be traced to the patristic era. Pius XI, however, did not link celibacy to other themes that appear in patristic and scholastic writings (as will be shown in the following chapter), such as the celibate priest living in imitation of the celibate Christ (cf. Lk 18:28-30), the significance of being an image of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church (cf. Ephesians 5), and the eschatological dimension of being a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Mt 9:12).

c). Pius XII

In 1950, Pius XII issued the apostolic exhortation, *Menti Nostrae*, which was directed to the clergy.¹¹⁹ In his brief treatment of the reasons for celibacy, Pius XII

¹¹⁹ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1951); AAS 42 (1950): 657-702; English translations are from this edition.

emphasized the liberating effects of celibacy and the need for priests to renounce “the things of the world” in order to have care only for “the things of the Lord”:

And it is precisely because he should be free from preoccupation with worldly things to dedicate himself entirely to the divine service, that the Church has established the law of celibacy, thus making it ever more manifest to all peoples that the priest is a minister of God and the father of souls.¹²⁰

The attractions of the world were dangerous to the priest, for he could become absorbed by their charm which would divide his heart, as Paul warned in 1 Cor 7:32-33. The priest, Pius XII held, is a “father of souls” on the spiritual level:

By this law of celibacy, the priest, so far from losing the gift and duties of fatherhood, rather increases them immeasurably, for, although he does not beget progeny for this passing life of earth, he begets children for that life which is heavenly and eternal.¹²¹

The priest must also grow in the virtue of chastity so that he might become, together with Christ, more of “a pure victim, a holy victim, an immaculate victim” (n. 21).¹²² Furthermore, the pope cautioned the priest against having excessive familiarity with women, for unchastity in thought, word, and action would make him too impure to celebrate the sacred liturgy: “‘Watch and pray,’ mindful that your hands touch those things which are most holy, that you have been consecrated to God and are to serve Him alone.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, n. 20.

¹²¹ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, n. 20.

¹²² The pope here cited the Roman Canon, “hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam,” thus implicitly linking celibacy to the sacred liturgy.

¹²³ Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, n. 23.

In this exhortation, Pius XII followed the thought of Pius XI in emphasizing two motivations for priestly celibacy: (1) the priest acquires freedom from distractions arising from marriage and worldly concerns so that he can concentrate his time and energy on his ministry for the sake of a greater ministerial fruitfulness, and (2) the priest gains a purity of body and soul that will enable him worthily to offer liturgical worship.

Several years later, Pius XII wrote the encyclical letter *Sacra Virginitas* (1954) to explain and defend consecrated virginity in general.¹²⁴ This was his most authoritative teaching on the topic and contained a brief treatment of priestly celibacy. His words were addressed not only to priests, but also to all those faithful – male or female religious, consecrated virgin, or cleric – who had taken some form of promise or vow to renounce marriage and sexual relations. The pope’s treatment of priestly celibacy thus falls within the broader subject of consecrated virginity.

Pius XII listed two reasons why Christian men and women are attracted to consecrated virginity (cf. nn. 20-24). First, the renunciation of marriage frees one from its obligations so that the heart is not divided between the love of God and the love of spouse. After quoting the Apostle Paul: “I want you to be free from anxieties . . . the married man is anxious about world affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided,” (1 Cor 7:32-33), Pius XII added:

Here however it must be noted that the Apostle is not reproving men because they are concerned about their wives, nor does he reprehend wives because they seek to please their husbands, rather is he asserting clearly that their hearts are divided between love of God and love of their

¹²⁴ Cf. Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, ed. Claudia Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals 1939-1958* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian, 1990), 239-53; AAS 46 (1954): 161-91.

spouse, and beset by gnawing cares, and so by reason of the duties of their married state they can hardly be free to contemplate the divine.¹²⁵

Persons who desire to consecrate themselves to God's service embrace the state of virginity in order to be more freely at the disposition of God and more fully devoted to the good of neighbor.

Second, men and women are drawn to the state of virginity because of the many advantages in the spiritual life that come from renouncing all sexual pleasure (cf. n. 21). The pope pointed out that such pleasure, when it arises in the context of the chaste use of marriage, is ennobled and sanctified by the sacrament of Matrimony. But as a result of the fall of Adam, the sub-rational faculties of human nature no longer obey right reason and thus may involve the person in "dishonorable" actions. Pius XII here quoted Thomas Aquinas, who taught that the pleasure associated with the use of marriage keeps the soul from "full abandon to the service of God."¹²⁶

Pius XII then turned to the matter of priestly celibacy. In an argument similar to that given for consecrated virginity in general (cf. n. 20), the pope points out that the Catholic Church demands that the sacred ministers of the Latin Church observe perfect chastity for two reasons: (1) to acquire spiritual liberty of body and soul, and (2) to be freed from temporal cares so as to engage fully in apostolic ministry (cf. n. 22). These two reasons, however, are not proper to the priestly state alone. Pius XII therefore added a third reason that is unique to the sacerdotal life: the priests' renunciation of marriage was related to their service at the altar (cf. n. 23). The pope set up an analogy

¹²⁵ Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, n. 20.

¹²⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 186, a. 4.

between the priests of the Old Testament and those of the New: as the Levites had to abstain from the pleasures of marriage during their service in the Temple for fear of being declared impure by the Law (cf. Lev 15:16-7; 1 Sam 21:5-7), so too should the priests of Jesus Christ be in a state of perfect “chastity” because every day they offered the sacrifice of the Mass. Pius XII cited Peter Damian (c.1107 - 1072), who exhorted priests to practice perfect continence:

If Our Redeemer so loved the flower of unimpaired modesty that not only was He born from a virginal womb, but was also cared for by a virgin nurse even when He was still an infant crying in the cradle, by whom, I ask, does He wish His body to be handled now that He reigns, limitless, in heaven?¹²⁷

Accordingly, priestly celibacy is most fitting for the good of the Church because “holy virginity surpasses marriage in excellence” (n. 24).

Pius XII here clearly justified celibacy based on the priest’s need to safeguard ritual purity. But over and beyond this argument, which was based on the sacred liturgy, the pope used arguments that were equally applicable to the religious charism of virginity: (1) spiritual freedom of body and soul, and (2) freedom from worldly concerns in order to engage fully in apostolic ministry. Thus Pius XII did not give reasons for priestly celibacy that differ greatly from those for religious virginity. This underdeveloped notion of priestly celibacy in *Sacra Virginitas* can be explained partially by the general audience to whom the letter was addressed: those in the religious life, clerics in major orders in the Latin Church, members of secular institutes, members of the lay faithful who make a private promise or vow of chastity (cf. n. 6),

¹²⁷ Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, n. 23; cf. Peter Damian, *De Coelibatu Sacerdotium*, cap. 3, *PL* 145, 384.

and “all of these beloved sons and daughters who in any way have consecrated their bodies and souls to God” (n. 7). Nevertheless, the portions of the encyclical that do address priestly celibacy reflect the limited theology of that time.

d). John XIII

John XXIII, in the encyclical letter *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia* (1959), which dealt with the life of Saint John Vianney, directed his teaching to “those in sacred orders,” and urged clerics to devote their attention to the “wonderful example of this holy man” who once shared in their priestly work and now served as their heavenly patron (cf. n. 5).¹²⁸ The primary purpose of the letter was to encourage the clergy to foster divine friendship with Christ the Lord and grow in it, for this was the main source of the joy and fruitfulness of any priestly work (cf. n. 7).

From the life of this saint, John XXIII drew some lessons for all priests, particularly in the area of priestly chastity (cf. nn. 20-25): the importance of voluntary mortification of the body (cf. n. 20), detachment from external things in order to acquire and protect chastity (cf. n. 20), the difficulty of the mission of a diocesan priest who has to live in a society that is infected by a looseness in morals and unbridled lust (cf. n. 21), the need for priests who work alone in the midst of temptations against chastity to dedicate their whole life to perfecting this virtue (cf. n. 22), and the practical truth that the ascetical life makes a priest more ready and eager to attend to the needs of his brethren (cf. n. 25). John XXIII then turned to priestly celibacy:

¹²⁸ John XXIII, *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*, ed. Claudia Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian, 1990), 21-37; AAS 51 (1959): 545-79.

What great benefits are conferred on human society by men like this who are free of the cares of the world and totally dedicated to the divine ministry so that they can employ their lives, thoughts, powers in the interest of their brethren! How valuable to the Church are priests who are anxious to preserve perfect chastity! For We agree with Our predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI, in regarding this as the outstanding adornment of the Catholic priesthood and as something “that seems to Us to correspond better to the counsels and wishes of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, so far as the souls of priests are concerned.”¹²⁹

The pope thus substantially repeated the thought of his predecessors with regard to the freedom from external things that the priest needs in order to (1) to acquire and protect chaste celibacy, and (2) to be better prepared to attend to the needs of those whom he serves.¹³⁰ Interestingly he did not utilize arguments based on ritual purity or the superiority of the celibate life to marriage.

In an address to the participants of the Roman Synod of January 26, 1960, John XIII spoke of cries coming from priests throughout the universal Church regarding priestly celibacy:

First of all we lament that, in order to repair a small piece of her lost beauty, some, indulging in a sort of hallucination, think that the Catholic Church wants, or deems it opportune, to stand down from the ecclesiastical law of celibacy, which through the course of centuries was and is the outstanding and most resplendent ornament of the priesthood. Indeed, the law of sacred celibacy and the care that is to be

¹²⁹ John XXIII, *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*, n. 25; English translations are from the Carlen edition.

¹³⁰ Etienne Gilson wrote of his private conversation about priestly celibacy with John XXIII, who reportedly said: “Ecclesiastical celibacy is not a dogma. The Scriptures do not impose it. It is even easy to effect the change. I take up a pen, I sign a decree, and, the next day, priests who wish to may get married. But I cannot [sign the decree]. Celibacy is a sacrifice which the Church has imposed freely, generously, heroically. I recently said to the Cardinals: ‘Can we face the prospect the Church can no longer be called one, holy and chaste?’ We cannot. No, we cannot do that,” “Married Priests?” (unsigned article), *Commonweal*, May 15, 1964, 223-24, at 223.

given that it might be diligently kept is always brought back to our mind by the memorable and glorious struggles of those times in which the Church of God was called to engage in dire combats and which brought forth a threefold triumph: For this is the mark of the victory of the Church of Christ: striving to be *free, chaste, and universal*.¹³¹

By 1960 the protests coming from priests and others were enough to move the pope to make this defense of priestly celibacy. These voices for change in the existing discipline of celibacy in the Latin Church would grow louder during the Second Vatican Council, as will be illustrated in Chapter 2.

In his teaching, John XXIII credited celibacy with providing for the priest the wherewithal to dedicate his life totally to the Church, free from spiritual and physical distractions that would draw him away from his prayer and ministry. However, John XIII did not draw from the fullness of Catholic tradition in his teaching on the suitability of the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church. Although at the time this approach was deemed sufficient, the bishops and theologians at the Second Vatican Council sought richer themes and a better synthesis.

¹³¹ “Cum primis moeremus, quod ad amissi sui decoris particulam reparandam, nonnulli, allucinationi cuidam indulgentes, putant Ecclesiam catholicam velle aut opportunum ducere ab ecclesiastici caelibatus lege desistere, quae per saeculorum decursum fuit et est sacerdotii praeclarum et nitidissimum ornamentum. Sacri caelibatus nempe lex atque impendenda cura, ut ea diligenter servetur, in mentem semper reducunt memoranda gloriosaque certamina eorum temporum, quibus Ecclesia Dei ad asperam praelia vocata fuit et triplicem rettulit triumphum: nam hoc est insigne victoriae Ecclesiae Christi, conniti ut sit *libera, casta, universalis*,” John XXIII, “Virtutes Dignitati Sacerdotum Necessariae: Caput, Cor et Lingua”, AAS 52 (1960): 221-30, at 226; the English translation is mine. “To repair a small piece of her lost beauty” may refer to the desire of the clergy of Rome for authentic ecclesial renewal.

4. Conclusion

From the fourth to the twentieth century, magisterial teaching justified the Latin discipline of clerical continence and celibacy through several arguments, among which were ritual purity, the superiority of celibacy to marriage, a greater facility in ministering to the Church, and a life in imitation of Christ. Perhaps the two most common arguments were those based on ritual purity and the superiority of the celibacy over marriage, about which Joseph Komonchak commented:

These [two] motives prevail in the disputes at the time of the Gregorian Reform, at the Council of Trent, and in the nineteenth century controversies. In fact, there is a remarkable similarity in the arguments brought forth on both sides of the debate from the fourth century to the twentieth.¹³²

This rather limited notion of priestly celibacy lacks reference to some of the richer biblical and patristic themes that had been neglected or lost throughout the centuries, such as the celibate priest as the icon of the celibate Christ. However, the motives to which Komonchak referred – the superiority of the celibate life to marriage and ritual purity – were notably omitted from the conciliar and post-conciliar documents of Vatican II that dealt with priestly celibacy, which may presage their eventual disappearance from contemporary theology of the priesthood. The magisterial doctrine on priestly celibacy before Vatican II was also tied excessively to a negative dimension: celibacy frees a priest from those things that hinder him from love of and service to the faithful of the Church. While this perspective may provide a valid insight, the positive

¹³² Joseph Komonchak, “Celibacy and Tradition,” *Chicago Studies* 20, no. 1 (1981): 9-10. For a summary of the centrality of ritual purity in the development of the theology of priestly celibacy, see Bernard Verkamp, “Cultic Purity and the Law of Celibacy,” *Review for Religious* 30 (1971): 199-217.

dimensions of priestly celibacy, such as the good of a dynamic spiritual paternity, must also be articulated. While celibacy helps the priest to attain liberation *from* earthly responsibilities tied to marriage, it also facilitates freedom *for* attaining a closer identification with Christ.

A corrective to this rather negative emphasis comes with the emergence of a threefold dimension of celibacy, the elements of which were articulated at the Second Vatican Council and developed by Paul VI. The threefold dimension provided a needed emphasis on the “other-directed” dimensions of priestly celibacy and stimulated a renewal of magisterial teaching on this subject. In particular, a newly developed ecclesiological motivation for priestly celibacy portrays the celibate priesthood as a dynamic priestly service to the Church for the good of the faithful. Further, the threefold dimension avoids an enclosed, or introspective, perception of the priesthood wherein one justifies celibacy principally on the basis of what is good for the priest himself.

Although one can discern in the magisterial texts prior to Vatican II some elements of an underlying *theology* that supports the discipline of the Latin Church, the majority of the texts studied in this chapter deal with the *discipline* itself. The next chapter will study the manner in which the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI renewed the theology of priestly celibacy in order better to articulate and defend the ecclesiastical discipline.

CHAPTER 2
MAGISTERIAL TEACHING ON CLERICAL CELIBACY IN THE DOCUMENTS OF
THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND OF PAUL VI

The renewal of magisterial teaching on clerical celibacy in the twentieth century began with the promulgation of several documents of Vatican II, particularly *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), and the encyclical letter *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967) of Paul VI. The teaching in these documents moved beyond the previous magisterial defenses of clerical celibacy, such as those based on the argument of ritual purity and the superiority of celibacy to marriage. The reformulated teaching emphasizes certain biblical and patristic themes, such as the celibate priest being an icon of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. This teaching is “renewed” insofar as it is rooted in explicit New Testament themes and incorporates many patristic insights on the nature of clerical celibacy.

Although this chapter will continue to study the *discipline* of clerical celibacy as it developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, its main focus will be the development in magisterial *teaching* that occurs in this period and the theology associated with it. It will propose that this renewal of magisterial teaching on celibacy began at the Second Vatican Council itself. However the works of several Catholic theologians of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century prepared the way for this theological renewal. In order to understand better the nature of this renewal, it will be appropriate first to consider the contributions of the most significant of these theologians.

1. The Theology of Clerical Celibacy Prior to the Second Vatican Council

Magisterial teaching and the resurgent Thomism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries followed the tradition of associating clerical celibacy with ritual purity, greater freedom for prayer, and the undivided heart. The scholastic theologians of that time, who tended to be more analytical and logical rather than analogical and mystical in outlook, did not add much to the justifications that had been advanced by theologians writing since the council of Trent. Ritual purity, the superiority of consecrated virginity over marriage, and freedom from the cares of marriage and family seemed to be the arguments preferred by both the Magisterium and theologians.

Several theologians, however, were exceptions to this trend. For example, Johann Adam Möhler (1796 - 1838) wrote a creative, although polemical, work against some proponents of optional celibacy.¹ Möhler focused mostly on defending priestly celibacy and therefore his work was more apologetic than theological. Möhler contended that it is celibacy that signifies the irreducible independence of the Church with regard to the State. Celibacy belongs to a different order from the one expressed in civil society, for the priest's celibacy places him above the ends that society pursues. Celibacy proclaims that the State is something different from the Church and that earthly power is not a

¹ Cf. Johann Adam Möhler, "Beleuchtung der Denkschrift für die Aufhebung des dem katholischen Geistlichen vorgeschriebenen Cölibates. Mit drei Aktenstücken," in *Gesammelte Schriften und Aufsätze*, (Regensburg: J. Mainz, 1839), 177-266. English translation: *The Spirit of Celibacy*, trans. Cyprian Blamires (Chicago/Mundelein: Hillenbrand, 2007).

goal.² Möhler was also concerned that the attack against clerical celibacy forms part of a plan to keep the pope distant from the Catholic Church in Germany. Although the State might treat the bishops as subordinates, it has to concede that the pope is a sovereign power independent of all governments. That the pope approves priests in their celibacy effectively protects them from being regarded as mere servants of the State.³

Matthias Scheeben (1835 - 1888) advanced the novel notion that the priest has a maternal role in the Church. The priest, he argued, embodies within himself a mystery of sacerdotal maternity in that new life comes about through his sacramental ministry:

In a part of its members the Church, as his Bride, was meant to be a true mother to the children who were to be reborn to him as Bridegroom, so that the heavenly rebirth of the human race might correspond to its natural generation, and the organization of the God-man's family might conform to the family of the earthly man. To this end [Christ] weds a part of the members of the Church in a special way, entrusts to their keeping the mystical resources belonging to the Church in common, and overshadows them beyond all others with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they may bear him children and bring them into closer fellowship with Himself. This is the great mystery of the maternity of the Church in her priesthood. In general the priesthood of the Church functions as an intermediary between Christ and his children, much as the mother does between father and children.⁴

Scheeben claimed that the task of ministerial priests is to bring Christ to birth anew in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, both in the Eucharist and in the hearts of the

² Cf. Möhler, *The Spirit of Celibacy*, 86-87; see also Hervé Savon, *Johann Adam Möhler: The Father of Modern Theology*, trans. Charles McGrath (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist, 1966), 71-79, at 78; and Jaki, *Theology of Priestly Celibacy*, 153-59.

³ Cf. Möhler, *The Spirit of Celibacy*, 92-93.

⁴ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1947), 546; cf. *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (Frieburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1941), 449.

faithful. He drew a comparison between the maternal roles of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the priesthood: the miraculous conception of Christ and his birth from the womb of Mary is the model and the basis of the further spiritual conception and birth of Christ in the Church through the priesthood:

As Mary conceived the Son of God in her womb by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, drew him down from heaven by her consent, and gave him, the Invisible, to the world in visible form, so the priest conceives the Incarnate Son of God by the power of the same Spirit in order to establish him the bosom of the Church under the Eucharistic forms. Thus Christ is born anew through the priesthood by a continuation, as it were, of his miraculous birth from Mary; and the priesthood itself is an imitation and extension of the mysterious maternity that Mary possessed with regard to the God-man.⁵

For Scheeben the Holy Spirit is the active principle by whom the priest, in his maternal priesthood, conceives new life from Christ the Bridegroom. Scheeben interestingly identified the priest in his sacramental ministry as acting in the person of the bridal Church, rather than in the person of Christ the Bridegroom. Scheeben's theology of the priesthood is unique in terms of its bridal association of the Church and the priest with Christ the Bridegroom, and is a rich development of the nuptial dimension of the priesthood, and, consequently, of the *ecclesiological* dimension of priestly celibacy.

John Henry Newman (1801 - 1890) defended priestly celibacy against attacks by Anglican theologians. Writing as an Anglican, Newman saw priestly celibacy as a Christian praxis embedded firmly in Catholic tradition:

The doctrine of the Sacraments leads to the doctrine of Justification; Justification to that of Original Sin; Original Sin to the merit of Celibacy. Nor do these separate developments stand independent of each other, but

⁵ Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 546-47; cf. *Die Mysterien des Christentums*, 449-50.

by cross relations they are connected, and grow together while they grow from one. The Mass and Real Presence are parts of one; the veneration of Saints and their relics are parts of one; their intercessory power and the Purgatorial State, and again the Mass and that State are correlative; Celibacy is the characteristic mark of Monachism and of the Priesthood. You must accept the whole or reject the whole; attenuation does but enfeeble, and amputation mutilate.⁶

This claim of Newman that celibacy is the characteristic mark of the priesthood is built on his prior claim that the doctrine of original sin reveals the merit of celibacy. The logical starting point towards the rationale of the celibate priesthood is original sin, which deeply affected the proper use of sex. The role of the priesthood is to mediate human redemption from this sinful, fallen state.⁷ Celibacy in some manner is an instrument of healing in the area of human sexuality.

Apart from the contributions of Möhler, Scheeben and Newman, most scholars writing during the late nineteenth century, such as Funk and Bickell, treated the history and canonical status of the priestly celibacy rather than its underlying theology. This tendency to concentrate on the historical and canonical aspects of celibacy continued through the first half of the twentieth century.⁸ There were however a few significant exceptions, one of whom was Odo Casel (1886 - 1948), who explored the nuptial

⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1878), 94. For Newman's polemical treatment of the Anglican married priesthood, see *The Present Position of Catholics in England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903), 134-36.

⁷ Cf. Jaki, *Theology of Priestly Celibacy*, 163.

⁸ The historical-canonical consideration of priestly celibacy, however, did not completely dominate the Catholic literature of this time, particularly in spiritual and devotional works, as well as in general reference works. See, for example, Henri Auffroy, "Sacerdoce et célibat," in *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique IV*, ed. A. d'Alès (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1922), 1040-62.

dimension of the priesthood. Casel was particularly astute in pointing out the significance of liturgical signs as symbols of an ecclesiological or spousal notion of the priesthood.⁹ In a work published posthumously, *Mysterium der Ekklesia* (1961), Casel argued that all liturgical activity of the Church flows from the relation of the Church as Spouse to Christ, her Head and Bridegroom:

It is especially in the liturgy that the Church manifests herself as the loving “Bride of the Lamb” (Rev 21:10), as Bride who entirely belongs to her Bridegroom, as the Spouse entirely penetrated by his strength, as Mother, who nourishes and forms in her own life what she received from him, and transmits it to her children.¹⁰

The bridal Church is protected and guided by the Bridegroom’s visible representative, the bishop. Casel explained that the ancient liturgical blessing of the bishop’s ring carries with it a profound theological expression of this bridal relationship:

In the consecration of a bishop, for instance, the new bishop is given a ring with these words: “Receive this ring, symbol of faithfulness; preserve intact the Bride of God, that is, the Holy Church, adorned with unchangeable faithfulness.” The bishop, who represents Christ the High Priest, is married in eternal faithfulness to the virginal Bride of God.¹¹

⁹ Cf. Odo Casel, *Mysterium der Ekklesia; von der Gemeinschaft aller Erlösten in Christus Jesus. Aus Schriften und Vorträgen* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1961), hereafter cited: *Mysterium der Ekklesia*; and Laurent Touze, “Célibat sacerdotal et théologie nuptiale de l'ordre” (S.T.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, Rome, 2002), 115.

¹⁰ “Gerade in der Liturgie zeigt sich die Ekklesia als das liebende ‘Weib des Lammes’ (Offb 21:10), als die Braut, die ihrem Bräutigam ganz angehört, als die Gattin, die von seiner Kraft durchdrungen ist, als die Mutter, die das von ihm empfangene Leben nährt und hegt und an ihre Kinder weitergibt,” Casel, *Mysterium der Ekklesia*, 80.

¹¹ “Bei der Bischofsweihe zum Beispiel wird dem Neugeweihten ein Ring übergeben mit den Worten: ‘Nimm hin den Ring, das Siegel der Treue; bewahre die Braut Gottes, nämlich die heilige Ekklesia, unversehrt, geschmückt mit unwandelbarer Treue.’ Der Bischof, der Christus den Hohenpriester darstellt, ist also in ewiger Treue mit der jungfräulichen Braut Gottes vermählt,” Casel, *Mysterium der Ekklesia*, 81.

Casel here drew upon a patristic tradition that described the bishop as wedded to his particular local church.¹² As Scheeben had done before, Casel developed a notion of the *ecclesiological-spousal* dimension of the priesthood, which would be introduced later into the magisterial teaching of Vatican II on priestly celibacy.

In 1932 the French theologian Gaston Lecordier wrote a spirited defense of traditional magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy.¹³ Lecordier sought to refute an argument by a theologian named J.M.T. who, in his efforts to strengthen the magisterial teaching on the issue, defended priestly celibacy according to a natural law argument versus the traditional stance that relies on considerations of suitability (*raisons de convenance*).¹⁴ J.M.T. advanced the notion that the human person experiences shame or modesty (*pudeur*) as a type of reflexive reaction to the final cause of the marital act: a child conceived in original sin. This feeling of shame would therefore legitimize the practice of perfect continence and affirm its superiority over marriage. Further, since the practice of perfect continence would free one from shame, ecclesiastical celibacy in particular could be seen as a triumph over the feeling (*sentiment*) of shame.¹⁵ Lecordier for his part argued that J.M.T. went well beyond the bounds of what is universally held in dogmatic and moral theology. Although J.M.T. used some arguments of Augustine, he

¹² Cf., for example, Ephrem, *Advers. Haer. Panar.*, 59, 4, PG 41, 1024.

¹³ Cf. Gaston Lecordier, “Une récente apologie du célibat ecclésiastique,” *Revue apologétique* 561 (1932): 685-700.

¹⁴ Cf. J.M.T., *Le célibat d’après une loi naturelle* (Paris: Editions de Pierre-Prat, 1932). Lecordier provided no page numbers of the length of the work by J.M.T., whom Lecordier did not specifically identify beyond his initials.

¹⁵ Cf. Lecordier, “Une récente apologie du célibat ecclésiastique,” 688.

does not exercise the same reserve and care as did the Universal Doctor. Lecordier pointed out that J.M.T. did not have a clear understanding of *pudeur*, and that he praises celibacy so highly that the flesh is disparaged by contrast: marriage leads to works of sin and death.¹⁶ His positions that marriage dispose one “to sin and death” and that woman is more impure than man are but two of several errors that fall outside of the boundaries of acceptable Catholic teaching on marriage and the family.¹⁷

Lecordier concluded by stating that the traditional magisterial defense of priestly celibacy based on the reasons of fittingness are sufficiently formulated to provide a reasoned and satisfactory account, even though they fall short of demonstrative arguments. Unlike the questionable views of J.M.T., the magisterial teaching is circumspect, balanced and reverential toward both marriage and the celibate life.¹⁸

The ideas of J.M.T. manifest an anti-corporeal philosophy that resembles elements of the Manichaean heresy. In contrast, although the Magisterium during this time period acknowledged the superiority of the virginal state over marriage, which in turn justified priestly celibacy as put forth in *Sacra Virginitas* of Pius XII,¹⁹ its arguments were always carefully nuanced in order to praise the dignity and beauty of the marital

¹⁶ Lecordier summarized this view of J.M.T.: “C’est que, d’après lui, le mariage aboutit à une ‘oeuvre de péché et de mort,’” Lecordier, “Une récente apologie du célibat ecclésiastique,” 690.

¹⁷ “La femme est plus impure que l’homme, parce qu’elle est plus souillée par sa fonction de mère. . . . La mère porte son enfant dans son sein et reste ainsi pendant de longs mois identifiée avec lui; et par conséquent la souillure se prolonge,” cited in Lecordier, “Une récente apologie du célibat ecclésiastique,” 691.

¹⁸ Cf. Lecordier, “Une récente apologie du célibat ecclésiastique”: 700.

¹⁹ Cf. above, 59-62.

state. In spite of the limitations of the magisterial teaching in this pre-Vatican II era, the Magisterium was careful to emphasize the greater dignity of the virginal life without denigrating marriage and the acts proper to it.

In 1955 Max Thurian, a member of the Community of Taizé, compared the married and celibate ways of life in *Mariage et Célibat*.²⁰ This work did not deal with priestly celibacy as such but was focused on marriage and celibacy as vocations of the Christian faithful in general. According to Thurian marriage is an *indirect service* of God and the Church whereas celibacy facilitates *direct service*. This singularity of purpose characteristic of voluntary celibacy is how the state came to be seen as existing “for the sake of the Kingdom of God.” Through being solely directed toward the Kingdom, the celibate Christian acquires a resemblance to Christ, not only on the spiritual level but also on the physical and practical levels. Thus it is a state of life that is especially adapted to the service of the Kingdom:

Like Jesus, the Christian celibate can be engaged entirely, spiritually and humanly, in the ministry. He is not a celibate in order to be more tranquil, but to resemble Christ in his work for the Kingdom. All his energies and preoccupations must tend to a living preaching of the Gospel in order to hasten the return of Christ, if he wants to live in the truth of his state.²¹

²⁰ Cf. Max Thurian, *Mariage et Célibat* (Neuchâtel and Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1955).

²¹ “Comme Jésus, le célibataire chrétien peut s’engager tout entier spirituellement et humainement dans le ministère. Il n’est pas célibataire pour être plus tranquille, mais pour ressembler au Christ dans son travail pour le Royaume. Toutes ses forces et toutes ses préoccupations devront tendre à une prédication vivante de l’Evangile pour hâter le retour du Christ, s’il veut vivre dans la vérité de son état,” Thurian, *Mariage et Célibat*, 134 ; the translation is mine.

Thurian here underscored both the christological and the eschatological dimensions of celibacy. The Christian embraces celibacy in order to imitate and resemble Christ in his work for the Kingdom (the christological significance) and hastens the second coming of Christ, which is the goal of Christian preaching and witness (the eschatological significance). Although Thurian emphasized the great dignity of the celibate life, he also cautioned against despising married life on the one hand or making virginity a superior ideal on the other. Rather, the celibate forgoes conjugal love in order to be entirely at God's disposal without restriction in service and prayer, and therefore remains available to extend the love of Christ to all people.²²

In *Prêtres du Christ* (1957) Joseph Lécuyer provided a brief chapter on the importance of the celibacy of Christ as an example and inspiration for the priest.²³ Lécuyer pointed out that since Christ came to announce and inaugurate the kingdom of heaven, his disciples, especially the priests, should want to give the same prophetic witness in their own lives:

They [the disciples] were vowed by a particular vocation to make ready for the eternal marriage feast of which earthly marriage is only a reflection, representatives here below of him who is the Bridegroom of that spiritual marriage, and would they not be led to do as he did, and to abstain on earth from any other marriage, so as to consecrate themselves

²² Cf. Thurian, *Mariage et Célibat*, 153.

²³ Cf. Joseph Lécuyer, *Prêtres du Christ: le Sacrement de l'Ordre* (Paris: Fayard, 1957). Lécuyer, professor at the Lateran University and subsequently superior of the Holy Ghost Congregation, wrote one other work on the priesthood prior to Vatican II: *Le sacerdoce dans le mystere du Christ* (Paris: Cerf, 1957).

entirely to preparing for that wedding banquet of which the Eucharist is the Sacrament?²⁴

Like Thurian, Lécuyer underlined two dimensions of priestly celibacy: (1) the christological notion in that the celibate priest is a representative of Christ the Bridegroom, and (2) his eschatological mission of preparing the faithful for the marriage feast of the divine Bridegroom. In addition Lécuyer stated that imitation of the celibacy of Jesus Christ is the primary motivation for his celibate disciples themselves to live that state of life. This is a simple yet important point since the acknowledgment of Christ's own celibacy has been often omitted from scholarly discussions about the suitability of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church.²⁵

In *Der Zölibat des Priesters* (1960), Wilhelm Bertrams contributed two arguments for celibacy that are distinctly priestly.²⁶ First Bertrams argued that a priest,

²⁴ This somewhat awkward English translation is from Joseph Lécuyer, *What is a Priest?*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Hawthorn, 1959), 91-92. "Ces derniers, voués par vocation particulière à la préparation de ces noces éternelles dont le mariage d'ici-bas n'est qu'une image, *représentants* ici-bas de celui qui est l'*Epoux* de ces noces spirituelles, ne devaient-ils pas être portés à faire comme lui, et à s'abstenir ici-bas de tout autre mariage pour se consacrer exclusivement à la préparation du banquet nuptial dont l'Eucharistie est le Sacrement?" Lécuyer, *Prêtres du Christ*, 87.

²⁵ Of Lécuyer's two books on the priesthood written prior to Vatican II, only *Prêtres du Christ* dealt with celibacy. Although the treatment of celibacy within this work is brief, it nevertheless merits attention because Lécuyer was a key redactor of the Vatican II document on the ministerial priesthood (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) and supervised the drafting on the section on celibacy: cf. Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile*, Vol. II (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 443, 511. In the post-conciliar period Lécuyer wrote a review of three works on priestly celibacy: Joseph Lécuyer, "Le célibat du prêtre," *Vie Spirituelle* 549 (1968): 607-15.

²⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Bertrams, *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis*, trans. Patrick Byrne (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963). For a general treatment of virginity and chastity according to the theology of this time period, see John O'Connor, "Virginity and Chastity," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 140 (1959): 17-26.

whose priesthood participates in the one Priesthood of Christ, is commissioned to lead human beings to union with God. If, then, he is to lead, it follows that he must already have “arrived” at that union of supernatural love insofar as it is possible here on earth. This means that the priest is a good priest to the extent that he loves God: an exclusive devotion to God must shine forth in his life. Bertrams wrote:

Union with God is not only a prerequisite for the office of priesthood: the exercise of that office consists largely in the realization of the supernatural divine love for men. The person who, by virginitas, gives up marital love, which completes him in a human way, dedicates thereby his life to God, to make it full of His love.²⁷

According to Bertrams it cannot be otherwise for the priest. As dedicated to God, the priest is free for the works of love as he promotes the salvation of souls; therefore his office of divine mediator, the exercise of which demands Christian mercy, exists for the service of others.

Second, Bertrams employed a christological argument for priestly celibacy as based on the eucharistic sacrifice. He reasoned that the priest represents Christ as both Priest and Victim in the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass. To offer the total sacrifice of his life along with Christ, the priest is called to take on virginity-celibacy, which itself is a participation in the Cross of Christ:

Without the undertaking of virginitas the representing of Christ by the priest would lack something for its perfection. The celebration of the Holy Sacrifice is, on that account, for the priest a continual appeal to take on celibacy, and not just externally – merely as a single state.²⁸

²⁷ Bertrams, *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis*, 37.

²⁸ Bertrams, *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis*, 39.

Further, the renunciation demanded by celibacy has value in the eyes of God when the priest takes it on himself with the right dispositions. To be associated with Christ in his suffering, celibacy must become love, a total devotion to God which the priest bears in obedience to the Father. Bertrams then concluded:

Therefore celibacy must become the consecration of the entire man for the service of God, be a spiritual sacrifice in the sense of a cult, an act of divine adoration. If the very nature of virginitas almost necessarily leads to a vow of perpetual chastity, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice calls for the vow in a very special way.²⁹

Priestly celibacy, therefore, is intimately connected with the highest act of the *munus sanctificandi* of the priest, and presupposes that he consciously identifies himself with Christ as victim in the eucharistic sacrifice. Bertrams however did not limit the meaning of celibacy to the offering of the Mass, for the celibate priest is also Christ's representative to those faithful committed to him, in his parish. As Christ belongs to all people – not to one alone – so the priest as Christ's representative belongs to all, a state which necessarily excludes marriage for him.³⁰ This argument of Bertrams is strongly christological and links the celibate priest to the salvific mission of Christ. There is also implicitly present an ecclesiological perspective insofar as the celibate priest belongs to every member of the Church, as Christ wholly belongs to his bridal Church (cf. Ephesians 5). The priest's celibacy enables him to represent more clearly Christ the Bridegroom, and also frees him from marital and paternal ties that would prevent him from imitating Christ's total dedication to his Church.

²⁹ Bertrams, *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis*, 40.

³⁰ Cf. Bertrams, *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis* 113, endnote 6.

In 1961, Lucien Legrand published an article that explored the eschatological notion of celibacy.³¹ For Legrand celibacy is a “prophecy in action, a foreboding of the end, a public proclamation of the fleeting character of this world” and is directed to “the Kingdom of Heaven” as to a final cause. In biblical language “the Kingdom of Heaven” is synonymous with “the Kingdom of God” because the word “heaven” was used by the Jews as a substitute for “God” as a way of avoiding the pronouncement of the divine name. “The Kingdom of Heaven,” in which the blessings of salvation would be realized, was at the center of Jesus’ preaching. It is “the life of the age to come” (“eternal life” in Johannine terms) and signifies the new resurrected life that the Jews had desired, the prophets had foretold, and the apocalyptic writers had described. Legrand underlined the “already but not yet” characteristic of celibacy:

Like the miracles and sacraments virginity is a “sign of the Kingdom,” an anticipated realization of the final transformation, the glory of the world to come breaking in on the present condition. Such is the meaning of *propter regnum caelorum*. . . . Eschatological life has begun to stir in [celibates] and that life will be, and can already be now, a life which has gone beyond the necessity and the urge of procreation.³²

Jesus and many of those who follow him refrain from sexual activity “in view of the Kingdom” in order to live now the life of the world to come. Thus, both Jesus and his disciples, then and now, announce the coming of this kingdom not only with their preaching and miracles, but also with their celibacy.

³¹ Cf. Lucien Legrand, “The Prophetical Meaning of Celibacy,” *Review for Religious* 20 (1961): 330-46.

³² Legrand, “The Prophetical Meaning of Celibacy,” 343.

In his essay, Legrand dealt with celibacy in general and did not link it with the priesthood. His treatment of the eschatological dimension, however, contributed to the development of the theology of celibacy in the early 1960s. As was indicated in Chapter 1, the magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy in the years prior to Vatican II lacked a rich theological depth and thus was ripe for renewal. It was through the efforts of theologians such as Legrand that a more profound theology was formed from which the bishops and their periti would draw at the Second Vatican Council.

In 1962, on the eve of the council, Bertrand de Margerie published a defense of the magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy. Margerie was prompted in part by a provocative article written by a Dominican priest, Raimondo Spiazzi, who argued that the historical evidence for the discipline of clerical celibacy was inconclusive.³³ Margerie drew upon the texts from *Sacra Virginitas* of Pius XII to support his arguments to the contrary, but he also put forth his own contributions, one of which addresses the popular notion that the imposition of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church constitutes a violation of personal liberty. Proponents of this theory saw celibacy as a charism freely given by the Holy Spirit and thus beyond the Church's authority to dictate through its canon law.

Margerie's primary tenet was that the Church has the right to require celibacy for priests and that the exercise of this right does no harm to the free will of candidates. He pointed out that, first and foremost, the Church does not prohibit anyone who is free of impediments from marrying. In other words, no Catholic layman is "obliged" to become

³³ Cf. Bertrand de Margerie, "Luzes Antigas e Novas sobre o Celibato," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 22 (1962): 616-37, and Raimondo Spiazzi, "Annotazioni," *Monitor Ecclesiasticus* 84 (1959): 369-409. See also Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 180.

a priest. If, however, a man should freely make the decision to embrace the priesthood, it is in his best interest to submit to the law of celibacy since the Church judges this discipline to be more useful for the perfection of this particular state of life.³⁴

Margerie also underlined two elements that are part of any authentic priestly vocation: the divine and the ecclesiastical. The latter element is the point of contention for those who struggle with the law of celibacy in the Latin Church. Margerie wrote:

The Sacrament of Orders was not entrusted by Christ with regard to the conditions of its administration, to the subjective wills of individuals, but to the hierarchy. And there is no complete and objective divine vocation where there is no ecclesiastical vocation, or when the candidate does not consent to build up the Church (which is the role of the priest) in a manner in conformity to the will of this same Church. The priesthood, the priestly vocation, is ecclesial or it is not a vocation.³⁵

The basic premise, then, is that the vocation to the priesthood is ecclesial or it is not an authentic vocation. Margerie emphasized that one should not drive a wedge between the visible and invisible ruling elements of the Church, i.e. the Magisterium and Christ.

Accompanying the development of the theology of priestly celibacy during the twentieth century was a significant change in the ecclesiastical praxis of celibacy. Starting in 1951 Pius XII granted dispensations to Lutheran and Anglican convert ministers, allowing them to be ordained as Catholic priests without having to separate

³⁴ Cf. Margerie, “Luzes Antigas e Novas,” 623. Margerie here relied upon an essay of canonist Emile Jombart in “Chasteté des clercs,” *Dictionnaire de Droit Canonique*, Vol. III (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1942), col. 671-73.

³⁵ “O Sacramento da Ordem não foi confiado por Cristo, quanto às condições de administração, às vontades subjetivas dos indivíduos, mas à Hierarquia. E não há vocação divina completa e objetiva onde não há vocação eclesiástica, ou quando o candidato não aceita construir a Igreja (papel do sacerdote) dum maneira conforme à vontade desta mesma Igreja. O sacerdócio, a vocação sacerdotal, é eclesial ou não é vocação,” Margerie, “Luzes Antigas e Novas,” 623 ; English translation is mine.

from their wives. A case in point was Rudolf Goethe, a married Lutheran pastor before his conversion, whom Bishop Alberto Stohr of Mainz ordained to the Catholic priesthood in 1951 with the pope's permission. The following year two other Lutheran ministers, Eugen Scheytt and Otto Melchers, were ordained as Catholic priests, followed by Martin Giegner in 1953.³⁶

This pastoral decision of Pius XII was all the more remarkable in that the practice of the Latin Church until that time required the separation of spouses if the husband was to be ordained. In the nineteenth century, for example, Pierce and Cornelia Connelly of Philadelphia separated prior to his priestly ordination in the Roman Catholic Church:

They could no longer live together. The Church, [which] only in very rare cases gives the permission Pierce sought, admitted two alternatives: that the parties should separate, one becoming a priest and the other a nun, or that the man should become a priest and the wife should make a public vow of chastity, continuing, for the sake of their children, to live under the same roof or separately, but not in a convent. The alternatives exist in their own and similar cases in theory only. The practical solution, if propriety is to be observed and scandal avoided, is that both parties should take religious vows.³⁷

Sadly, Pierce Connelly, who had been an Episcopalian minister prior to his conversion to Catholicism and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1845, left the active ministry a few years later. A public scandal was subsequently created when he filed a civil case in London to reclaim his conjugal rights with Cornelia, who had since founded a religious

³⁶ Cf. Joseph Fichter, *Wives of Convert Priests* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1992), 97, and Rudolf Goethe, "Die Offene Tur," in *Bekennntnis zur Katholische Kirche*, (Wurzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1955), 117-65.

³⁷ Juliana Wadham, *The Case of Cornelia Connelly* (New York: Pantheon, 1957), 39-40.

community in England. Pierce eventually lost the case and later returned to pastoral ministry in the Episcopal Church.³⁸

The dispensations granted by Pius XII, although they remained rare, further motivated theologians to explore more closely the nature of celibacy and its relation to the priesthood. One theologian who investigated the bond between celibacy and the priesthood was Jean Galot, who explored the christological significance of priestly celibacy through a study of the sacramental character in Holy Orders. According to Galot, the indelible priestly character is the basis for priestly celibacy and a consideration of it leads to a discovery of the nature of the priesthood.³⁹ He argued that the character conferred by the sacrament of Orders effects a likeness to Christ the Priest. Through ordination the priest represents Christ in the Church as a visible witness of the mission and life of the Savior. An integral representation of Christ includes celibacy:

Now if the authentic features of Christ's countenance are to stand in sharp relief on the priest's face, it is fitting that the latter adopt the ideal of perfect chastity assumed by the Son of God made man. A salient feature would be missing from the priestly countenance if he were not animated by this superior purity.⁴⁰

Although Galot maintained that celibacy is based on the sacerdotal character and on the resemblance with Christ which it stamps on the soul, he did not hold that it is an essential property inseparable from the priesthood. Referring to the tradition of the married priesthood in the Eastern Church, Galot stated:

³⁸ Cf. Wadham, *The Case of Cornelia Connelly*, 130-49.

³⁹ Cf. Jean Galot, "The Priesthood and Celibacy," *Review for Religious* 24 (1965): 930-56.

⁴⁰ Galot, "The Priesthood and Celibacy": 942-43.

Thus we must speak of a bond through suitability rather than necessity. . . . It is a bond of conformity since celibacy is absolutely necessary neither for the validity of the priesthood nor for the valid and fruitful accomplishment of priestly functions. In fact, the sacerdotal character effects a consecration in principle without however entailing the expressed, concrete determinations which would manifest this consecration in the life of the priest.⁴¹

While the sacramental character effects a resemblance to Christ in the soul of the recipient, it is not sufficient in itself to impose celibacy on priests. Rather, Galot reasoned that, while the character provides an essential orientation that leads to the principle of a celibate life, the Church is still free to judge when the application of and an exception to this principle are desirable. Thus it is the Church that actualizes and makes concrete this orientation toward celibacy that is rooted in the sacerdotal character.

Galot specifically addressed the dispensations granted by Pius XII for the priestly ordinations of the Lutheran converts:

Some converted ministers seem really called to the priesthood, and they cannot be blamed for desiring the priesthood while being in the married state since this was the custom in the church of their former allegiance. It is easy to see that their conversion would not force them to renounce a priestly vocation and that the Church should recognize their call to the priesthood and permit them to realize it in the state of life in which they actually are.⁴²

The papal dispensations seemed to have been motivated by a pastoral prudence that sought the spiritual good of the Lutheran converts in view of their state of life. At the same time the rarity of these ordinations insured that the traditional discipline of the celibate priesthood would not change.

⁴¹ Galot, "The Priesthood and Celibacy": 950.

⁴² Galot, "The Priesthood and Celibacy": 953.

In sum, the development of the theology of celibacy from the late eighteenth century up until the time of the Second Vatican Council progressed slowly yet steadily toward a renewed theology of priestly celibacy. Besides various apologetic works written by Möhler, Newman, and Lecordier, the theology of priestly celibacy was enriched by those theologians who focused on one or more of the following dimensions of priestly celibacy: (1) the *christological* dimension: Thurian, Lécuyer, Bertrams, Galot; (2) the *ecclesiological* dimension: Scheeben, Casel, Bertrams; and (3) the *eschatological* dimension: Thurian, Lécuyer, and Legrand. Some of these scholars specifically treated *priestly* celibacy, such as Bertrams, while others like Thurian considered celibacy in general. Their work contributed a rich perspective on celibacy that paved the way for the renewal of the theology of priestly celibacy at the Second Vatican Council. Furthermore, in the 1950s and 1960s, theologians such as Galot and Legrand wrote on priestly celibacy, while others discussed the nature of the bond between the diaconate and celibacy. Discussion about the possibility of a married permanent diaconate naturally led to consideration of a married priesthood.

In order to put into proper context the movement for the restoration of the permanent diaconate at Vatican II, this study will next outline the history of this movement, starting from the Council of Trent.

2. The Background to the Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate

By the time of the Council of Trent, the diaconate as a permanent order disappeared in the Catholic Church because ordination to this ministry became *de facto* a step to the priesthood. Starting in the fourth century, the various minor orders began to

develop in the Latin Church and gradually they were systematized into a *cursus honorum* (rising through the ranks) toward priestly ordination, steps that paralleled the experience of Christians in civil and military life.⁴³ Around the fourth century the diaconate and the subdiaconate were incorporated into these steps and thus the existence of a stable order of diaconate ceased to exist.

The bishops of the Council of Trent desired to give new life both to the diaconate as well as to the subdiaconate and minor orders, all of which were not only steps toward the priesthood but also orders unto themselves with proportionate ecclesiastical duties and rights. Although these orders continued to exist at the time of the council, many of the functions that were historically tied to each order were no longer exercised. To correct this situation, canon 13 of the *Decree on Reform* (June 15, 1563) stipulated that candidates for the subdiaconate and diaconate should be of good repute, well educated, and trained in all that belongs to the exercise of their order. They should also have a reasonable expectation of being able to live a celibate life with the help of God.⁴⁴ Canon 17 of the same decree mandated that the diaconate, subdiaconate, and minor orders should be restored to their original functions as exercised in the early Church:

The functions [*functiones*] of holy orders from deacon to doorkeeper have been commendably accepted in the church since apostolic times, and though lapsing for a time in some places are now being brought back to use according to the sacred canons and are not to be denounced by heretics as superfluous. Hence the holy council, desiring from its heart to restore

⁴³ Cf. Susan Wood, *Sacramental Orders* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 157.

⁴⁴ Cf. Council of Trent, canon 13, in Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 749.

early practice, decrees that henceforth these ministries are only to be exercised by those holding the appropriate orders.⁴⁵

This canon became the impetus for the subsequent correction of abuses and neglect that crept into the ministries of the diaconate, subdiaconate, and minor orders.

As for the diaconate, Trent did not enumerate the specific functions of the deacon. Several bishops, however, listed examples of the diaconal ministry. Bishop John Bovius of Ostuni, for example, declared:

I desire that the functions of subdeacon and deacon, diligently collected from the sayings of the holy Fathers and the decrees of the councils, be restored and put to use, especially those of deacons. For the Church has always used their services, not only in ministering at the altar, but also in baptism, in care of the sick, of widows and of the suffering. Finally, all the prayers and needs of the people are brought to the bishop through deacons.⁴⁶

Although such bishops desired the restoration of these original functions to the diaconate, some of which had fallen into disuse, there is no documentary evidence that they intended to establish a permanent diaconate.⁴⁷

Canon 17 of the *Decree on Reform* also stated that if there were not enough celibate clerics to carry out the functions of the four minor orders, married men of worthy

⁴⁵ Council of Trent, canon 17, in Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 750.

⁴⁶ “Desidero, functiones subdiaconi et diaconi, ex dictis sanctorum patrum et conciliorum decretis diligenter collectas, restitui et in usu poni, praecipue eas, quae [sunt diaconorum]; eorum enim opera ecclesia semper est usa, non solum in ministrando in altari, sed etiam in baptismo, in cura habenda hospitalium, viduarum et miserabilium personarum; denique omnes populi causae et res ad episcopum per diaconos perducebantur,” *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, Actorum, Epistularum, Tratatuum Nova Collectio*, Societas Goerresiana, ed. , (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 558.

⁴⁷ Cf. William Ditewig, *The Emerging Diaconate: Servant Leaders in a Servant Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2007), 82-83; hereafter cited: *The Emerging Diaconate*.

life could be ordained to these orders and take up the various roles provided they had not been married twice (cf. 1 Tim 3:2, 3:12, Tit 1:6). In particular, such married clerics would wear the tonsure and clerical dress in the church.⁴⁸ This particular canon was never implemented in the post Tridentine period.

In the period following the council of Trent, a candidate for the priesthood could exercise the various minor and major orders that he received only in the immediate vicinity of his place of study or while at home on vacation; the period in each order was brief because the next higher order was conferred within a short space of time. Additionally, some of the functions historically attached to the minor orders, and to subdiaconate and diaconate, were never fully implemented in the post Tridentine period. Despite the teaching of Trent that these orders were distinct grades within the sacrament of Orders, the practice of the Church was to reserve them for men studying for the priesthood, with the exception of the indult given to married men to receive minor orders.

In post-Reformation Germany, the official visitor of the Society of Jesus, Jerome Nadal, acting with the consent of the provincial, Peter Canisius, wrote in 1566 to the Father General, Francis Borgia, asking him to petition the pope to introduce into Germany a system of consolidating several parishes into one and entrusting the people to one priest of proven loyalty. The resulting decrease in clergy would be compensated for by assigning married clerics in minor orders to these priests as assistants. Although this

⁴⁸ Cf. Council of Trent, canon 17, in Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 750. Cf. Josef Hornef, "Order of Diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church," trans. Patrick Russell, in Richard T. Nolan, ed., *The Diaconate Now* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968), 57-79 at 61-63.

suggestion was in line with canon 17 of Trent, the pope did not grant permission.⁴⁹ By this time, then, the focus was on protecting the discipline of the celibate cleric rather than reintroducing the continent married cleric. Everything therefore remained as it was before the Council of Trent.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the lack of priests in mission territories, especially in Latin America, became a major problem for the Catholic Church. Among the suggestions for aiding the mission work of the priests was the introduction of the diaconate as a permanent office. Little by little, theologians began to discuss and write essays on the married permanent diaconate, particularly in post-World War II Europe.

One of the first to argue for the restoration of the permanent diaconate during this time was Josef Hornef, a district court judge of Fulda, Germany. In the preface to his book, *The New Vocation*, Hornef related how his thinking was influenced by an article written by Otto Pies, S.J., who described the discussions of priests imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp.⁵⁰ Among other things, Pies mentioned the possibility of reviving the permanent diaconate in view of the anticipated shortage of priests in post-

⁴⁹ Cf. Hornef, "Order of Diaconate," 62-63.

⁵⁰ Cf. Josef Hornef, *The New Vocation* (Techny, IL: Divine Word Publications, 1963), 11-12. This section on the restoration of the permanent diaconate has been aided by Paul Wienhoff, "The Celibacy of Deacons" (J.C.L. thesis, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC), 1983, and by my unpublished paper written for a guided research course directed by Joseph Komonchak: Gary Selin, "The Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate in Relationship to Clerical Continence in *Lumen Gentium* 29 and Post-Conciliar Magisterial Documents" (unpublished research paper, The Catholic University of America, 2006).

war Germany.⁵¹ Hornef became enthused about this idea and proceeded to promote the restoration of the permanent diaconate because it was very difficult to recruit seminarians during the war.

In 1956, Bishop Wilhelm van Bekkum, Vicar Apostolic of Rutgen Island, Indonesia, proposed that the office of deacon be conferred upon married men. These married deacons would be able to distribute the Eucharist, baptize, lead Sunday prayer services, catechize, officiate at weddings, and perform other clerical tasks proportionate to the order of diaconate.⁵² Further discussion of this notion comes, in 1957, when Michel-Dominique Epagneul, the Prior-General of the Frères Missionnaires des Compagnes, argued that permanent deacons should conduct liturgical functions that did not require the presence of a priest. Epagneul's article was noticed by Pius XII, who mentioned the restoration of the permanent diaconate during his address at the World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in October 1957.⁵³ This was the first papal reference in the twentieth century to the possibility of the restoration of the permanent diaconate. Further, Paul Winninger, a priest of the diocese of Strasbourg, collected various studies

⁵¹ Cf. Otto Pies, "Block 26: Erfahrungen aus dem Priesterleben in Dachau," *Stimmen der Zeit* 141 (October 1947): 10-48.

⁵² Cf. Wilhelm van Bekkum, "Le Renouveau liturgique au service des missions," *La Maison Dieu* 47 (1956): 174-75.

⁵³ "Nous savons qu'on pense actuellement à introduire un ordre du diaconat conçu comme fonction ecclésiastique indépendante du sacerdoce. L'idée, aujourd'hui du moins, n'est pas encore mûre. Si elle le devenait un jour, rien ne changerait à ce que Nous venons de dire sinon que ce diaconat prendrait place avec le sacerdoce dans les distinctions que Nous avons indiquées," AAS 49: 925.

on the diaconate in his 1958 book *Vers un renouveau du diaconat*.⁵⁴ His work covered various aspects of the diaconate, including its pastoral and theological perspectives.

Thus by the time of the Second Vatican Council, there was a substantial amount of discussion concerning the restoration of a permanent diaconate. In the 1950s, some bishops and theologians such as Wilhelm van Bakkum promoted a permanent diaconate open to married men. The movement for a married diaconate inspired many Catholic faithful to hope that the forthcoming council would also reconsider the discipline of mandatory priestly celibacy in the Latin Church.

At Vatican II, the bishops discussed the merits of a restored diaconate open to married men; their deliberations eventually became part of article 29 of *Lumen Gentium*. The sometimes vocal and spirited discussions regarding the diaconate and the appropriateness of celibacy for its exercise would later stimulate debates concerning the appropriateness of celibacy for the priesthood. Among the fruits of these conciliar debates would be a renewal of the theology of priestly celibacy.

Since the bishops of Vatican II dealt with diaconal celibacy before priestly celibacy, this study will also follow a similar order of exposition in the next two sections: first, a treatment of the restoration by Vatican II of a permanent diaconate that would be open to married men, and second, a summary of the Council's renewal of magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy.

⁵⁴ Cf. Paul Winninger, *Vers un renouveau du diaconat* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958).

3. The Second Vatican Council on Diaconal Celibacy and Continence

As already seen, some discussion about the reestablishment of the permanent diaconate already existed by the time John XXIII announced, on January 25, 1959, his intention to convene an ecumenical council.⁵⁵ On May 17, 1959, the pope established the Ante-Preparatory Commission for the Council with Cardinal Domenico Tardini as its chairman. This Commission had the responsibility for the organization of the Council and the preparation of the conciliar agenda. That same year the Commission invited all cardinals, bishops, Roman congregations, and pontifical universities to submit topics for the conciliar discussions.

On June 5, 1960, John XXIII appointed the preparatory commissions and secretariats that were to organize the responses, which were then published under the title *Documenta Antepreparatoria*.⁵⁶ Many responses proposed that the restoration of the permanent diaconate be discussed, and some of these also supported the ordination of married men to the diaconate, one of them being by Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens of Malines-Brussels.⁵⁷ In contrast, Cardinal Paul-Marie-André Richaud of Bordeaux, although he also favored the establishment of the permanent diaconate, held that deacons

⁵⁵ Cf. Allocution *Questa Festiva*, AAS 51: 65-69, and Wienhoff, "The Celibacy of Deacons," 68-69.

⁵⁶ Cf. Secretaria Pontificia Commissionis Centralis Praeparatoriae, ed., *Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando, Series I, Antepreparatoria (ADA), Appendix Voluminis II, Pars I* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960); hereafter cited: *ADA*.

⁵⁷ Cf. *ADA*, II/I, 143.

must be bound by celibacy.⁵⁸ The celibacy controversy aside, though, the majority of European bishops supported the restoration, as well as bishops of Africa, Asia, and South America, where vast missionary territories existed.

A number of bishops from these missionary lands favored the restoration of a permanent diaconate that would be open to both celibate and married men. Bishop John Lesourd of Nouna, West Africa, for example, envisioned the possibility of admitting married catechists to the diaconate, provided there was a means of certifying their honesty, pastoral and doctrinal formation, and evidence of a life consecrated to God.⁵⁹ Perhaps the most progressive thinking about clerical celibacy in the *Documenta Antepreparatoria* appeared in a text entitled *De Diaconatu Sine Obligatione Caelibatus*. In this document, both bishops and superiors of religious communities approved of the ordination of married men to the permanent diaconate, without having to separate from their wives.⁶⁰ Although many responses from the bishops favored the restoration of the permanent diaconate for married men, the first draft of the Constitution of the Church

⁵⁸ Cf. *ADA*, II/I, 236.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ADA*, II/V, 58. See also the responses of Bishop Paul Furuya Yoshiyuki of Kyoto, Japan (*ADA* II/IV, 78), Bishop Paul Damais of Fort-Lamy in Equatorial Africa (*ADA* II/V, 23-24), Bishop Ivon Plumey of Garoua, Cameroon (*ADA* II/V, 131-32), and Bishop Francisco Vicentin of Corrientes, Argentina (*ADA* II/VII, 57).

⁶⁰ Cf. *ADA*, *Appendix*, II/II, 122-28. It is not clear in any of these proposals, however, whether the authors thought that married deacons should be henceforth continent.

proposed by the Theological Commission in May 1962 did not mention the diaconate, although it treated of the episcopacy and the presbyterate.⁶¹

Around this time of preparation for the first session of the Council, two influential essays on the married diaconate appeared. First, in 1962 Karl Rahner argued the premise that there is no intrinsic connection between the diaconate and celibacy:

For the Church shows by her practice that she does not see any very close and necessary connection between the office of deacon and celibacy. For this office exists and is transmitted in the Church without celibacy being demanded. For, those men and office-bearers in the Church in whose case the desirability of a sacramental transmission of office is indicated here are *de facto* for the most part married men, and neither the official Church nor the people in the Church have ever maintained or felt any incompatibility or inconvenience in the co-existence of this office and marriage in recent centuries or at the present time.⁶²

Although Rahner did not give any historical account or argument for this statement in his essay, he assumed that married deacons of the Latin Church were entitled to full marriage rights with their spouses. In addition to contending that the Church does not see celibacy as necessary to the office of deacon, Rahner also posited that marriage has a greater affinity with the diaconate than does celibacy, since the deacon in his ministry is the link between the clergy and altar on the one hand, and the world on the other.⁶³

⁶¹ Cf. *Commissio et Secretaria Praeparatoria Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, ed. *Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando, Series II, Praeparatoria (ADP), Volumen II, Pars III* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1968), 1038; hereafter cited: *ADP*. Cf. Wienhoff, “The Celibacy of Deacons,” 75-76.

⁶² Karl Rahner, “The Theology of the Restoration of the Diaconate,” in *Later Writings. Theological Investigations V*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1966), 268-314, at 293. This volume is a translation of his “Die Theologie der Eneuerung des Diakonates,” which was his contribution to a collection of articles that he edited with Herbert Vorgrimler, *Diaconia in Christo* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1962), 285-324.

⁶³ Cf. Rahner, “Theology of the Restoration,” 294.

The second influential theological work on the married diaconate was penned by a group of German laymen named the Original Deacon Circle, who in 1962 published an essay in favor of the restored diaconate open to married men.⁶⁴ The Original Deacon Circle argued that the diaconate from the earliest times had its own specific nature, that is, the liturgical office was always the basic task, while the exercise of the offices of charity and of the Word varied in importance according to the needs of particular times and places. The Circle described the diaconal ministries as flowing from service at the altar, including the other sacramental ministries of the deacon and the provision for the temporal necessities of the poor and other works of charity. With regard to celibacy the Circle made this observation:

The celibacy of the priest plays an impressive part in witnessing to the reality of supernatural goods, especially in our day, when so much emphasis is placed on the goods of this world. This celibacy would also apply to deacons under the new plan, when they were members of religious orders. On the other hand, the Church is also stressing more and more today the witnessing power of the sacrament of matrimony as a sign of Christ's union with his Church and as a means of sanctification in the world. As the diaconate of its nature does not require celibacy, it seems that there are rich potentialities for holiness in the married life for those who would also belong to the hierarchy of the Church as deacons.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cf. "Formal Request to Restore the Diaconate as a Permanent Order Presented to the Fathers of Vatican Council II in 1962 by the Original Deacon Circle, Munich, West Germany," in Patrick McCaslin and Michael Lawler, *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1986), 148-49. The authors gave no bibliographical reference to the original German document, but stated that they received it from a member of the Deacon Circle.

⁶⁵ Original Deacon Circle, "Formal Request," 149.

The restored diaconate, in their opinion, should be open to married men in order to promote the sanctification of marriage and the world. The married deacon in turn would enrich the hierarchy with the holiness gained through matrimony.

Rahner and the Original Deacon Circle, both of whom argued that there is no intrinsic connection between the permanent diaconate and celibacy in the Latin Church, based their arguments on studies of the permanent diaconate in the early Church that showed the existence of married deacons.⁶⁶ However, neither Rahner nor the Circle made the distinction between celibacy and continence, and consequently, they did not consider that married deacons in the early Church could have been bound by perfect continence.

In the developing discussion on the permanent diaconate between World War II and Vatican II, there was little attention to the distinction between diaconal celibacy and continence. Church historian Alfons Stickler, however, held that in the early Church all married deacons were bound by perfect and perpetual continence upon their ordination. His essay on this subject, published in 1964, would have been known by many of the conciliar periti during the later sessions of Vatican II.⁶⁷

Thus on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, there was a broad, grassroots movement among the lay faithful and the hierarchy pressing for the reinstatement of the permanent diaconate for both single and married men. Among other reasons, the

⁶⁶ Cf. Rahner, "Theology of the Restoration," 292-96, and Original Deacon Circle, "Formal Request," 144-46.

⁶⁷ Cf. Alfons Stickler, "La continenza dei diaconi specialmente nel primo millenio della chiesa," *Salesianum* 26 (1964): 275-302.

advocates of the restoration saw the need for more liturgical ministers in mission lands. Since married men were already active in those lands as catechists, it was thought that ordination would empower them to exercise the diaconal functions and provide the mission churches with a greater stability and dignity.

a). *Lumen Gentium* 29

(i). The Drafting of the Text

The first session of the Second Vatican Council lasted from October 11 to December 8, 1962. In the final days of this period, the bishops began a discussion of the first draft of the schema on the Church. In the discussion many bishops expressed their displeasure over the draft because it did not mention the diaconate.⁶⁸ For this reason, among others, a conference of German speaking bishops in Munich on February 5-6, 1963, discussed an alternate schema prepared by Gerard Philips and Karl Rahner, which they approved and submitted to John XXIII and Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the president of the Theological Commission, for review in mid-February of the same year.⁶⁹ The result was the revised, *De Ecclesia*, in which Article 15 contained a statement on the diaconate in its chapter on the hierarchical structure of the Church.

After giving a description of the deacon's role in assisting the bishop and priest in various ministries, i.e. liturgy, preaching, and works of charity and administration, Article 15 broached the topic of the permanent diaconate:

⁶⁸ Cf. Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: The Unknown Council* (New York: Hawthorn, 1966), 96; hereafter cited: *Rhine Flows into the Tiber*.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 96.

Even though the diaconate is thought today to be simply a step by which one advances to the priesthood, this practice has not always been in force nor is it so everywhere today. Rather, in the future, the diaconate may be exercised as a proper and permanent grade of the hierarchy wherever the Church would resolve that it be useful for the need of the care of souls, either in certain regions or everywhere. In which case, it would fall to the authorities of the Church to discern whether such deacons should be bound to sacred celibacy or not.⁷⁰

The door would be open, then, for the possibility of a married diaconate. The restoration of the permanent diaconate, open to married men, would be the most debated topic in the conciliar discussions of the Constitution on the Church, except for the notion of collegiality. The tensions that arose around the topic of the diaconate pointed to underlying concerns of the bishops, such as the potential impact of a married diaconate on the tradition of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church.⁷¹

⁷⁰ “Licet hodie in Ecclesia Diaconatus ut plurimum habeatur solummodo tamquam gradus, quo ad sacerdotium ascenditur, haec disciplina tamen non semper viguit ne hodie ubique viget. Imo diaconatus in futuro tamquam proprius ac permanens gradus hierarchiae exerceri poterit, ubi Ecclesia id pro necessitate curae animarum aut in certis regionibus aut in omnibus, expedire censuerit. Quo in casu ad praepositos Ecclesiae spectat decernere utrum tales diaconi sacra coelibatu adstringatur necne,” *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II (AS)*, (Vaticanus: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971), II/I, 235. All English translations of the preparatory council documents and the texts and speeches of bishops are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁷¹ Cf. Michael Novak, *The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 121-25, hereafter cited: *The Open Church*; Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council, June, 1962 - December, 1965*, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: Random House, 1967), 163-64, hereafter cited: *The Drama of Vatican II*; Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 96-100; Herbert Vorgrimler, “Constitution on the Church: Chapter III,” in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume I (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 226-30; Albert Melloni, “The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church,” in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II*, Volume III: *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intersession, September 1963 - September 1964* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis and Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 1-116, at 66-87, hereafter cited: “The Second Period”; Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the

During the second session of the council, which lasted from October 4-16, 1963, article 15 was debated. Seventy bishops spoke on the topic during this time. Its great significance was obvious when, on October 4, the first day of debate, Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York chose to speak about the permanent diaconate instead of the issue of collegiality. After expressing his general approval of the chapter on the hierarchical structure of the Church, he proposed the following arguments against the inclusion of the section on the diaconate: (1) this subject is disciplinary and therefore does not belong in a dogmatic constitution, (2) the training of deacons would create the difficulty of establishing adequate seminaries for them, (3) the permanent diaconate is obsolete and would continue to be so because priests can fulfill their function, (4) the laity and religious could perform many of the tasks formerly reserved to deacons, (5) not everything is good simply because it is ancient, and (6) vocations to the priesthood could decrease if married men became permanent deacons.⁷²

Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini of Palermo, who spoke after Spellman, talked mostly about the episcopacy but also warned the bishops that the restoration of a married permanent diaconate would inflict a grave wound on ecclesiastical celibacy.⁷³ Next Cardinal Antonio Bacci of the Curia devoted his whole intervention to the restored diaconate, saying that it would be both inopportune and dangerous if the law of celibacy

Constitution,” in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, Volume I, 105-37, hereafter cited: “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.”

⁷² Cf. AS II/II, 82-83; see also Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 96-97, and Novak, *The Open Church*, 122.

⁷³ “Inde enim grave infligeretur vulnus caelibatui ecclesiastico, de quo hierarchia Ecclesiae latinae per plura saecula gloriata est et adhuc gloriatur,” AS, II/II, 86.

were relaxed: new seminaries would be needed for deacons, priestly vocations would decrease since youth would tend to choose what was easier, and if a little window would be opened then some would want to open a large window.⁷⁴ Nearly every Italian bishop and most of the Yugoslav and Polish bishops who spoke opposed the married diaconate because they worried that priestly celibacy would be compromised.

On October 7, three days after Spellman's intervention, Cardinal Julius Döpfner of Munich stood up to respond to Spellman's opposition to the permanent diaconate. In sum he argued that: (1) the threefold hierarchy is of divine law and thus the issue belongs to the chapter on the Church, (2) the schema accepted the teaching of the Council of Trent and yet recognized the varying conditions of time and place, (3) the schema gave a doctrinal foundation for the permanent diaconate without trying to solve all the practical issues involved in its restoration, (4) there would be no need to create new seminaries because no new ministries (*munera*) would be instituted, (5) there would be no danger to priestly celibacy because the diaconate is a vocation distinct from that of the priesthood, (6) deacons do not belong to a second class priesthood (*sacerdotium secundae classis*), and (7) since married male catechists already did the work of deacons in mission territories, they should be given the sacramental graces to help them perform this work more efficaciously.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ "Timeo ne, si fenestrella hac de causa aperiat, periculum sit ut nonnulli postea fenestram pandere velint," AS, II/II, 89.

⁷⁵ Cf. AS II/II, 227-30. Karl Rahner and a team of writers at the German College drafted Döpfner's intervention on the diaconate: cf. Melloni, "The Second Period," 66 (footnote 256), 69.

On October 8, Cardinal Juan Landazuri Ricketts of Peru, speaking for ninety five Latin American bishops, gave several detailed arguments for the restoration of the permanent diaconate, such as providing a new arena of pastoral work for Protestant minister converts.⁷⁶ Ricketts was followed by Cardinal Suenens, who like Döpfner, wanted to respond to Spellman's objections. Suenens' intervention was more theological than practical, and proved to be the most influential of all the bishops' speeches in favor of the restored diaconate. Suenens argued that: (1) the diaconate is a sacrament and thus forms part of the very constitution of the Church, (2) this subject matter should be treated from the perspective of grace and not only from a practical point of view, (3) the Christian community has a right to all the various ministries and graces that Christ established for it, and (4) the married diaconate would not harm the law of celibacy and cause a decrease in priestly vocations. Suenens also requested that a separate vote be taken on this subject.⁷⁷ With regard to the married diaconate, Suenens reflected a growing consensus among the bishops that it would help rather than hinder clerical life in the Church. At a later press conference, the Belgian cardinal repeated his earlier suggestion that the bishops take a separate vote on this subject so that their thoughts might be manifested on this matter.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Cf. AS II/II, 314-17.

⁷⁷ Cf. AS II/II, 317-20; cf. Novak, *The Open Church*, 124, and Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 97, for summaries of the speech of Suenens.

⁷⁸ For the press conference see *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, October 9, 1963; Melloni, "The Second Period," 70.

On October 10, several missionary bishops spoke out. Bishop Yu-Pin of Nanking expressed support for the permanent diaconate, even open to married men, if needed on a local level because of the lack of priestly vocations caused by persecutions. Furthermore, married deacons could serve as a bridge between the laity and the clergy.⁷⁹ The Bolivian and Indonesian bishops, for their part, supported the restoration of permanent deacons but disagreed among themselves on the married diaconate.

Adding further weight to the importance of this topic, an emotional exchange between two bishops occurred on October 14. After several speeches opposed to the married diaconate, Bishop Jorge Kémérer of Posadas, Argentina, speaking in the name of twenty-five Latin American bishops, maintained that a man could have an ecclesiastical vocation that did not include celibacy. He pointed to the situation in mission lands where thousands of the faithful were deprived of spiritual nourishment because of the lack of a priest. In many cases there was one priest for many thousands of Catholics. Something serious needed to be done to solve the urgent problem of the priest shortage around the world. Furthermore, married deacons would belong canonically and theologically to the hierarchy, but psychologically and culturally to the people. Such deacons would continue to work in their professions while assisting the priest in the parish on the weekend. Then addressing those bishops who opposed a married diaconate, Kémérer said:

The restoration of the diaconate for the regions of Latin America appears as our great hope. Therefore, I express the desire of many bishops . . . that you, Venerable Fathers, do not take this hope from us when the matter comes to a vote. The door is now open. If there are among you some that do not want to enter, we will not force you to enter. But we graciously

⁷⁹ Cf. Novak, *Open Church*, 124-25.

beg you not to close the door on us, because we want to enter! Allow us to enter!⁸⁰

The council bishops responded to his exhortation with spontaneous applause.

Archbishop Paul Zoungrana of Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, replied to Kéméner with equal force. Although he conceded that the pope could give to episcopal conferences the authority to establish a non-celibate diaconate, Zoungrana nevertheless opposed the notion because it would have serious consequences for Africa, including establishing a sociological distinction between a higher and lower clergy as well as diminishing the sign of priestly chastity and its relationship to conjugal chastity.⁸¹ Joining Zoungrana in opposition to a married diaconate were retired Bishop Vincenzo Jacono of Nicastro, Italy, Coadjutor Archbishop Segundo García de Sierra y Méndez of Oviedo, Bishop Giuseppe Carraro of Verona, and Bishop Peter Cule of Mostar, Yugoslavia, who warned of possible economic and moral difficulties, such as scandal and concubinage.⁸² Then Archbishop Custodio Alvim Pereira of Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, who spoke in the name of thirty eight bishops, expressed the concern that a

⁸⁰ “Restauratio diaconatus pro regionibus Americae Latinae apparet ut magna spes nostra. Propter hoc, exprimo desiderium multorum episcoporum. . .ut vos, Patres venerabiles, in suffragio ferendo de hac re, spem nobis non tollatis. Porta iam aperta est. Si, inter vos sunt qui nolunt intrare, nos non vos compellimus intrare, sed suppliciter exoramus ne vos nobis portam claudatis, nam volumus intrare! Sinite nos introire!” AS II/II, 535.

⁸¹ Cf. AS II/II, 537-38.

⁸² Cf. AS II/II, 517-19; Novak, *The Open Church*, 122-23.

deep wound would be inflicted on the discipline of celibacy if the married diaconate was introduced.⁸³

On the other hand, Archbishop Bernard Yago of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, supported the restoration of the permanent diaconate because many missionary countries seldom saw a priest. To those who said that the diaconate was useful for the early Church but has since been rendered obsolete, he retorted:

I say that the Church in Africa is now living in the first century after the announcement of the Gospel. The conditions of Christian life and the pastoral needs are similar to those of the needs of the early Church.⁸⁴

Bishop Jean Gay of Basse-Terre and Pointe-a-Pitre in the French West Indies spoke about the possibility of married men being admitted to minor orders and thus being qualified to help in the liturgy, Catholic Action, catechetics, administrative work, the media, etc. The schema, he concluded, should contain a section on the minor orders alongside that on the diaconate.⁸⁵

Archbishop Armando Fares of Catanzaro, Italy, in order to ease the tension created by these passionate discussions, followed up on an earlier petition of Suenens and asked the moderators and presidency for a special vote on this matter. Hence, on October

⁸³ “Praeter illa iam dicta, si diaconis, enim, non ministratur scientia theologica competens, aequalis presbyteris, si legi caelibatus non obstringuntur, nihil vel pauca facient. Si utrumque agunt, cur ad sacerdotium non ascendant? Si ad matrimonium admittuntur, vulnus in sacra caelibatus disciplina inflictum, esset transitus, ad altiora impugnanda, de quibus sileo, sed multa dicenda essent. Inutile est amplius dissertare de hoc vulnere; omnes id admittunt,” *AS II/II*, 501.

⁸⁴ “Respondeo Ecclesiam in Africa nunc vivere in primo saeculo post nuntium evangelicum. Conditiones vitae christianae et pastorales necessitates similes sunt Ecclesiae primitivae necessitatibus,” *AS II/II*, 406.

⁸⁵ Cf. *AS II/II*, 594-95.

30, 1963, a vote was taken on five propositions dealing with the second chapter of the schema *De Ecclesia*. The fifth of these propositions dealt with the diaconate:

Whether it is pleasing to the Fathers that a schema be prepared in such a fashion that the opportunity of restoring the diaconate as a distinct and permanent grade of the sacred ministry could be considered, according to the diverse regions of the Church.⁸⁶

This proposition was worded in a more general form than the original version written by the Doctrinal Commission, which had mentioned exceptions to the law of celibacy:

V. The holy synod likewise holds that, following very ancient practice, the permanent diaconate can be restored according to the conditions and needs of regions, but with the provision that individual deacons normally remain subject to the law of celibacy. Exceptions can be made, especially if there is a question of a married man seeking the diaconate, according to the judgment of the episcopal conferences, which, however, are subordinate to the judgment of the Holy See.⁸⁷

No mention was made of celibacy in the proposition on which the bishops actually voted. Of the 2120 votes cast on the fifth proposition, 1,588 were affirmative, 525 were negative, and 7 were invalid. This vote was taken not to approve or reject a particular part of the draft, but to guide the Theological Commission in its revision of the

⁸⁶ “[Quaeritur] utrum placeat Patribus ita apparari schema ut opportunitas consideretur instaurandi diaconatum ut gradum distinctum et permanentem sacri ministerii, secundum Ecclesiae in diversis regionibus,” Francisco Gil Hellin, ed., *Lumen Gentium. Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia. Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis in Ordinem Redigens Schemata cum Relationibus necnon Patrum Orationes atque Animaversiones* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), 872-73.

⁸⁷ P.052.12, titled “De Ecclesia/VI Propositiones,” and listed as “CFM, De Eccl. Vota 2” (Doctrinal Commission). This document, #926, is in the papers of Msgr. Gerard Philips: cf. Agostino Marchetto, ed. *Inventaire des papiers conciliaires de Monseigneur Gérard Philips, secrétaire adjoint de la Commission doctrinale, par L. DeClerk et W. Verschooten, avec une introduction par J. Grootaers in Instrumenta Theologica* 24 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 89. The English translation is from Melloni, “The Second Period,” 100.

draft.⁸⁸ Despite the wide margin of victory for the approval of the restoration of the permanent diaconate, the opposition was strong. As already seen, several bishops feared that the creation of a married diaconate would be an attack on the law of clerical celibacy. This fear appeared to be the root cause of the unease, as was revealed during the debates. On the other hand, although forty nine of the interventions were opposed to the restoration in comparison to thirty in favor of it, the former represented only 150 bishops, while the latter were speaking for 716.⁸⁹

In view of the interventions and as a result of the voting, the text was considerably revised by the Theological Commission and adopted into a new draft on July 3, 1964. The Commission inserted significant changes to the text. The first change was the addition of the words “de consensu Romani Pontificis” with regard to the authority competent to admit married men to the diaconate. The second change mandated that young men who desired to be deacons would be required to be celibate. When it came time for individual votes on what was now chapter three of the new draft, it was determined in advance that thirty nine votes would take place between September 21 and September 29, with the vote on the whole chapter on September 30.

With regard to the section on the diaconate (cf. article 29), four votes would be taken, respectively on: (1) whether to authorize the restoration of the permanent diaconate, (2) whether this decision should fall under the authority of local episcopal conferences, (3) whether it could be conferred on mature married men, and (4) whether it

⁸⁸ Cf. Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 116, and Wienhoff, “The Celibacy of Deacons,” 93.

⁸⁹ Cf. Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 118.

could be conferred on younger men who would not be bound by the law of celibacy.⁹⁰ The vote on the first question took place on September 28, 1964, with the other three votes following the next day. The results were: (1) on the restoration of the permanent diaconate: 1903 for, 242 against,⁹¹ (2) on the authority of episcopal conferences in this regard: 1523 for, 702 against,⁹² (3) on mature married men as recipients of this order: 1598 for, 629 against,⁹³ and (4) on ordaining young men not bound by celibacy: 839 for, 1364 against.⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that only the fourth proposition was rejected.

As to the final vote on the whole content of chapter three on the hierarchy, the Doctrinal Commission approved a proposal by Sebastian Tromp that the moderators be asked to authorize final votes on two sets of articles: (1) collegiality (cf. articles 18-23), and (2) the clergy (cf. articles 24-29), which contained article 29 on the diaconate.⁹⁵ Some bishops thought that this division of votes would reduce the possibility of the whole chapter being rejected if the votes opposing the section on the diaconate were added to those opposing the section on collegiality.⁹⁶ Almost unanimously the bishops

⁹⁰ Cf. *AS III/II*, 211-18; Joseph A. Komonchak, "Towards an Ecclesiology of Communion," in Alberigo and Komonchak, eds., *A History of Vatican II, Volume IV: Church as Communion: Third Period and Intersession, September 1964 - September 1965* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis and Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 1-93, at 76.

⁹¹ Cf. *AS III/II*, 596.

⁹² Cf. *AS III/III*, 19.

⁹³ Cf. *AS III/III*, 25.

⁹⁴ Cf. *AS III/III*, 43.

⁹⁵ Cf. *AS III/II*, 584-85.

⁹⁶ Cf. Komonchak, "Towards an Ecclesiology of Communion," 83.

supported the two part vote, which took place on September 30. Articles 18-23 received 1,624 *placet*, 42 *non placet*, and 572 *placet iuxta modum*, while articles 24-29 received 1,704 *placet*, 53 *non placet*, and 481 *placet iuxta modum*.⁹⁷ Finally, on November 21, 1964, Paul VI promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

(ii). The Final Text

Lumen Gentium 29 deals with the diaconate and is the final article in Chapter 3, on the hierarchy of the Church (cf. articles 18-29). It is preceded by articles on the episcopacy (cf. articles 20-27) and the presbyterate (cf. article 28). The article on the presbyterate, however, does not treat *priestly* celibacy as such. This may have been because the council bishops knew that they would take up this topic the following year in the document on priestly ministry (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, December 7, 1965).

Lumen Gentium 29, however, contains a statement on *diaconal* celibacy within a well crafted paragraph that emphasizes the liturgical character of the office and its ordering toward works of charity. It also opens the possibility of a married permanent diaconate:

At a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands “not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry.”⁹⁸ For, strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity. It pertains to the office of a deacon, in so far as it may be assigned to him by the competent authority, to administer Baptism solemnly, to be custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, in the name of the Church, to assist and to bless

⁹⁷ Cf. AS III/III, 68, 129-30.

⁹⁸ “*Constitutions of the Egyptian Church*, III, 2: ed. Funk, *Didascalia*, II, p. 103. *Statuta Eccl. Ant.* 371: Mansi 3, 954.”

marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the sacred scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and the prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services. Dedicated to works of charity and functions of administration, deacons should recall the admonition of St. Polycarp: “Let them be merciful, and zealous, and let them walk according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all”.⁹⁹

Since, however, the laws and customs of the Latin Church in force today in many areas render it difficult to fulfill these functions, which are so extremely necessary for the life of the Church, it will be possible in the future to restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy. But it pertains to the competent local episcopal conferences, of one kind or another, with the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, to decide whether and where it is opportune that such deacons be appointed. Should the Roman Pontiff think fit, it will be possible to confer this diaconal order even upon married men, provided they be of more mature age, and also on suitable young men, for whom, however, the law of celibacy must remain in force.¹⁰⁰

Although the majority of the bishops approved the possibility of a married diaconate,¹⁰¹ they also maintained that a deacon could not marry after his ordination, thus reaffirming an ancient tradition that has been part of the ancient discipline of clerical continence in both the Eastern and Western Churches.

⁹⁹ “St. Polycarp, *Ad Phil.* 5, 2: ed. Funk, I, p. 300: It is said that Christ “became the ‘diaconus’ of all.” Cf. *Didache*, 15, 1: ib., p. 32. St. Ignatius, Martyr, *Trall.* 2, 3: ib., p. 242. *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 8, 28, 4: ed. Funk, *Didascalia*, I, p. 530.”

¹⁰⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 29; hereafter cited: *LG*. The corresponding Latin text will be cited for more significant works, such as *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*: cf. Secretaria Generalis Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, ed., *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II. Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966), 149-50. Hereafter cited: *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II*.

¹⁰¹ Cf. above, 108.

Interestingly, the Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, promulgated on the same day as *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), also provides for the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the Eastern Churches:

The holy council wishes the institution of the permanent diaconate to be restored where it has fallen into disuse, in order that the ancient discipline of the Sacrament of Orders may flourish once more in the Eastern Churches. For the subdiaconate and the lesser orders, their rights and obligations, the legislative authority of each individual church should make provisions.¹⁰²

This statement parallels that of *Lumen Gentium* 29 and likewise does not mention continence for married deacons of the Eastern Churches.

Two things, then, are clear in an analysis of article 29. First, in making provision for the restoration of the permanent diaconate, the council bishops did not provide an explicit theological framework for the *married* diaconate. They were concerned simply with providing legislation for the eventual restoration of the defunct permanent diaconate without giving historical or theological justifications for the compatibility of marriage with the diaconate. Second, the bishops neither distinguished between *celibacy* as an unmarried state and *continence* as the complete refraining from sexual intercourse, nor did they explicitly state that the obligation of clerical continence, which was required under the then operative 1917 Code of Canon Law, was to be relaxed.¹⁰³

It is not clear whether the bishops intended for married deacons to continue a full conjugal life with their wives, or whether these deacons would be bound by perfect

¹⁰² Vatican Council II, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 17; hereafter cited: *OE*.

¹⁰³ Cf. Edward Peters, "Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence," *Studia Canonica* 39 (2005): 147-80.

continence according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church and the 1917 Code. It is possible, although unlikely, that the bishops were ignorant of the history of diaconal continence in the Latin Church and therefore assumed that married deacons would continue in the conjugal life. It is more probable, on the other hand, that the council bishops, or at least their *periti*, would have had some knowledge of diaconal continence in the early Latin Church and of the provisions of the 1917 Code. In 1964 Alfons Stickler, who at the time of the Council had a solid reputation as a Church historian, published a historical sketch that would have been known by the *periti*.¹⁰⁴ Christian Cochini wrote of Stickler:

Fr. Stickler was an expert at the Second Vatican Council, which decided, as we recall, the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the Church. His study, “The Continence of the Deacons Especially during the First Millennium of the Church,” published in 1964, was written as part of studies aiming to bring to the Council Fathers elements of reflection borrowed from history. The author points out that one must understand celibacy in the early Church not only as meaning a prohibition of marriage, but also in the sense of perfect continence for those who were already married. The Western Church Tradition is studied in the light of the teachings of the councils, of the Fathers, and of the Roman pontiffs who always preserved (or restored) its essential features. The author opines it is on the basis of motivations inherent in the very nature of the Order and of the sacred ministry that this uninterrupted Tradition demands a perfect continence on the part of those who have been married before receiving sacred Orders.¹⁰⁵

The point raised by Stickler, that continence is integral to the diaconal service at the altar, never was discussed by the council bishops. While it is possible that the bishops thought

¹⁰⁴ Cf. above, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 43. John Paul II raised Stickler to the cardinalate in 1985. Interestingly, Stickler’s name never appeared in the indices of the works of Council historians such as Vorgrimler, Philips and Fesquet.

that they were approving a non-continent diaconate, it seems more probable that they assumed that married permanent deacons were to observe perfect and perpetual continence, as the 1917 Code required of all major clerics. From the available documents on this matter, however, this question cannot be resolved with certainty.¹⁰⁶

If *Lumen Gentium* 29 was intended by the bishops to allow married deacons the continuation of the use of marriage, it seems that such a change in the discipline of the Latin Church would have been explicitly granted along with reasons for this change. But this was never done. Insofar as the bishops did not make a distinction between celibacy and continence in article 29, they opened the way for the general practice of the use of marriage by married deacons after ordination.

Other than article 29, *Lumen Gentium* contains only one other substantial statement on celibacy or consecrated virginity. Article 42, which forms part of Chapter 5 on the call to holiness (cf. articles 39-42), addresses various ways in which the People of God are able to grow in holiness. Among the means for fostering the Church's holiness are the evangelical counsels, which Jesus proposed for his own disciples' observation:

Likewise the Church's holiness is fostered in a special way by the manifold counsels which the Lord proposed to his disciples in the Gospel for them to observe. Towering among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) to devote themselves to God alone more easily with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church

¹⁰⁶ For an in-depth study of this matter, see Donald Keefe, "Clerical Continence and the Restored Permanent Diaconate" (unpublished paper, Dunwoodie, NY: St. Joseph Seminary, 1998).

as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world.¹⁰⁷

“Perfect continence” is singled out as preeminent among the other counsels. According to frequent usage in magisterial documents, *continence* in this context refers to the unmarried or celibate state rather than the abstinence from conjugal relations by a married cleric. As a rule, the conciliar documents use terminology – such as “virginity” and “chastity” – as synonymous with to celibacy. On this matter Francisco Egana wrote:

Although the concept of chastity is distinct from that of celibacy, an analysis of the context in which the ecclesiastical documents use the words shows clearly that the Church uses indiscriminately the expression “virginity,” “perfect chastity,” and “celibacy” to express that “precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father to devote themselves to God alone more easily with an undivided heart for the Kingdom of Heaven” (*LG* 42). Traditional canonical doctrine identifies both expressions defining the celibacy of the clergy “the obligation to observe perpetual and perfect chastity.” In any case, unquestionably – even from a conceptual point of view – chastity includes celibacy.¹⁰⁸

It is significant that in *Lumen Gentium* the bishops did not employ the Tridentine teaching on the superiority of virginity over marriage,¹⁰⁹ and thus steered clear of a direct comparison of virginity-celibacy and marriage. Rather, they focused on perfect continence as a sign and stimulus of divine charity and on its being a source of spiritual fecundity in the world. This positive attitude represented a turning point in the

¹⁰⁷ Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 42.

¹⁰⁸ Francisco Egana, “Religious and the New Rite for the Ordination of Deacons,” *Consecrated Life* 17:2 (1992): 98-121, at 105. A footnote to this citation states: “Cappello, *De Sacramentis*, Vol. II, p. III, ed. 1935, p. 536.”

¹⁰⁹ Cf. canon 10, *Canons on the Sacrament of Marriage*, Session 24 (November 11, 1563) in Tanner, *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. II, 755.

Magisterium's presentation of virginity-celibacy and its relation to marriage. Subsequent texts of Vatican II would continue the theme of how marriage and celibacy are able to coexist in harmony, each enjoying its proper dignity.¹¹⁰

4. The Second Vatican Council on Priestly Celibacy

a). *Perfectae Caritatis* 12 and *Optatam Totius* 10

Lumen Gentium was followed by two other documents that briefly mentioned either consecrated chastity or celibacy for major clerics: *Perfectae Caritatis*, the decree on the renewal of religious life, and *Optatam Totius*, the decree on the training of priests, both of which were promulgated on October 28, 1965.

Since *Perfectae Caritatis* has to do with the renewal of the religious life, its focus is limited to members of religious communities who were bound by the evangelical counsels. Article 12 deals with consecrated chastity for religious *as a group*, with no distinction being made between men and women. For this reason, there is no mention of celibacy for those members of religious orders who are ordained as deacons or priests. Thus *Perfectae Caritatis* 12 gives a more general treatment of chastity, as this following passage attests:

Chastity “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:22), which religious profess, must be esteemed an exceptional gift of grace. It uniquely frees the heart of man (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-35), so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men. For this reason it is a special symbol of heavenly benefits, and for religious it is a most effective means of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the

¹¹⁰ Cf. Joseph Komonchak, “The Council of Trent at the Second Vatican Council,” in *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations*, eds. Raymond Bulman and Frederick Parrella (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 61-80, at 75.

works of the apostolate. Thus for all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse.¹¹¹

Absent from this text are concepts based on ritual purity that see celibacy-chastity as the sole means of keeping free from contact with the "impure." Instead the text concentrates on the liberation that chastity gives to the religious for a more fervent love for God and neighbor ("it uniquely frees the heart of man"). This formulation of religious chastity in positive, rather than negative, terms gives this teaching a certain *ad extra* dynamism: freeing the heart for service, rather than simply withdrawing whatever can impede a person from holiness. It also adds an eschatological dimension of chastity ("for the sake of the kingdom of heaven") insofar as the evangelical vow of chastity enables the consecrated religious to be a prophetic witness of the kingdom of heaven. In addition, this text refers to an ecclesiological dimension insofar as consecrated religious form part of the Bridal Church in relation to Christ the Bridegroom ("for all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God . . . in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse").

Perfectae Caritatis does not describe the religious life as a "state of perfection," in part because the council bishops wanted to avoid giving the impression that marriage was not a sufficient means for attain the perfection in charity and holiness. Joseph Komonchak wrote:

It would appear that in its treatment of celibacy, or consecrated virginity, as in its treatment generally of the religious life, Vatican II was concerned to avoid referring to such a vowed life as a "state of perfection," as if other Christians are not called to perfection. If the religious life were to be

¹¹¹ Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 12; hereafter cited: *PC*.

recommended as something that belongs to “the Church’s life and holiness,” it would not be on the grounds of singling it out and elevating it to a superior status.¹¹²

It is significant that the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, which was promulgated several weeks later (December 7, 1965) also avoids giving the impression that marriage lacked the sufficient means for attaining Christian holiness. Not only does *Gaudium et Spes* praise the marriage bond, but it also describes marital sexual intimacy as a noble and honorable act that enriches the spouses in joy, gratitude, and married love.¹¹³

Perfectae Caritatis 12, for its part, reaffirms the rich Catholic teaching on the excellence of consecrated chastity as an excellent means for attaining perfection in charity. As noted above, the text attributes the chastity of consecrated religious an eschatological significance: “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” On the other hand, it says nothing about the manner in which an ordained priest who has taken religious vows might differ from a non-ordained religious with regard to the eschatological dimension.

Optatam Totius treats of the formation of seminarians in the Latin Church.¹¹⁴ Article 10 emphasizes for the most part the practical elements of the formation of

¹¹² Komonchak, “The Council of Trent at the Second Vatican Council,” 75.

¹¹³ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 49; hereafter cited: *GS*.

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the conciliar documents on the priesthood and priestly formation, particularly *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*, deal primarily with the diocesan priesthood. There is no extended focus on the meaning of the priesthood in the religious life. Cf. Kenan Osborne, “Priestly Formation,” in *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations*, 117-35, at 127.

seminarians in the “venerable tradition” of priestly celibacy as laid down by the regulations of the Latin Church. It also points to the need for candidates for the priesthood to know and esteem Christian marriage, a sacrament that represents the love which exists between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:32). Seminarians, however, are also to recognize the “greater excellence of virginity” (*praecellentia virginitatis*) and to be consecrated to Christ so that they could offer themselves to the Lord with a deliberate and generous choice and a total surrender of body and soul. Although this phrase does not explicitly state that virginity is of “greater excellence” than *marriage*, the text implies this comparison.¹¹⁵ This understated but clear claim regarding the superiority of virginity to marriage contains a footnote that cites Pius XII, who in *Sacra Virginitas* defended the Tridentine teaching that anathematized anyone who denied that celibacy or consecrated virginity was superior to marriage.¹¹⁶ The council bishops did not use pro-celibacy arguments in *Optatam Totius* 10 based on the concept of ritual purity. This exclusion of the ritual purity argument may have been motivated by their desire to present marriage in positive terms in the whole conciliar teaching, as well as to emphasize that spouses have all the means within marriage to attain holiness.

Optatam Totius 10 also includes a brief theological synopsis of priestly celibacy.

The text describes several dimensions of celibacy that are to be incorporated into the teaching and formation of seminarians:

¹¹⁵ The statement on the “greater excellence” of virginity was included near the end of the text’s history: see Komonchak, “The Council of Trent at the Second Vatican Council,” 75.

¹¹⁶ Cf. above, 47, note 101. No other conciliar document refers to this teaching of the Council of Trent.

Students who follow the venerable tradition of priestly celibacy as laid down by the holy and permanent regulations of their own rite should be very carefully trained for this state. In it they renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12) and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the new Covenant; they bear witness to the resurrection in a future life (cf. Lk 20:36) and obtain the most useful assistance towards the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry.¹¹⁷

The text lists several theological justifications for priestly celibacy, three of which stand out. Although not explicitly named as such, these three reflect a significant grouping of concepts that will recur frequently in later magisterial documents:

- (1) [Priests] “hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the new Covenant” (the christological dimension);
- (2) “obtain the most useful assistance towards the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry” (the ecclesiological dimension);¹¹⁸
- (3) “renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12);” “bear witness to the resurrection in the future life (cf. Lk 20:36)” (the eschatological dimension).

These three perspectives on priestly celibacy provide new insights into priestly celibacy. The overall theme is positive and dynamic: celibacy enables a priest *to be* and *to do*, rather than simply *negating* an earthly good from his life, such as marriage. These

¹¹⁷ Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius*, n. 10; hereafter cited: *OT*.

¹¹⁸ This implicit formulation of the ecclesiological dimension does not express the full notion of ecclesial ministry that will be presented in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 (cf. below, 142-43), but it nevertheless denotes an aspect of the larger idea of a selfless service toward the Church.

three dimensions emerged as guiding concepts in later magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy. *Optatam Totius* 10 constitutes a significant development of magisterial teaching insofar as priestly celibacy is presented under a threefold, positive dimension. On the other hand, *Optatam Totius* 10 also includes a trace of the teaching of Trent, i.e. the “greater excellence” of virginity. This blend of old and new magisterial teachings indicates that the bishops desired to follow a hermeneutic of continuity that recognized legitimate development of doctrine without repudiating previous magisterial teaching.

b.) *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16

(i). The Drafting of the Text

In 1959, when John XXIII announced his plan to convene an ecumenical council, many expectations arose concerning the reform of the discipline of the Latin Church among clerics and laity alike, including a possible reassessment of priestly celibacy.¹¹⁹ Media accounts promoted the idea that the council would be the ideal forum for introducing a change in the traditional discipline of priestly celibacy.

Early in the process of drafting the conciliar documents, however, the tone of the teaching on sacerdotal celibacy remained traditional, ostensibly manifesting the mindset of the majority of the hierarchy. The *Documenta Antepreparatoria*, for example, contains a document on priestly celibacy that reaffirms the traditional practice, *De*

¹¹⁹ Cf. Giuseppe Versaldi, “Priestly Celibacy from the Canonical and Psychological Points of View,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives. Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, Volume III, ed. René Latourelle, (New York: Paulist, 1989), 131-156, at 131-32, and Friedrich Wulf, “Chapter III: The Life of Priests (Articles 12-16),” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume IV, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 191-239, at 279-80.

Coelibatu Ecclesiastico.¹²⁰ Within this document the majority of bishops and superiors (143) proposed that the practice of priestly celibacy be retained: “Coelibatus ecclesiasticus omnino servandus est in sua integritate” (n. 1). Some bishops (20) recommended that the discipline of celibacy be reformed: “Disciplina coelibatus reformetur” (n. 30), although there was a wide range of suggestions as to the nature of this reform.

Various points mentioned in the text range from a request that the law of celibacy be extended to the Eastern Church (cf. n. 3) to one facilitating both the ordination of married men of advanced age (cf. n. 28) and married Protestant minister converts (cf. nn. 31, 34).¹²¹ These latter proposals reflected a progressive view of some bishops and religious superiors that foreshadowed a future movement at the Council for change in the law of priestly celibacy. Most of the interventions, however, were conservative in their view of the issue.

Because of their practical nature, the *Documenta Antepreparatoria* lack significant theological reflections on priestly celibacy. The written proposals neither contain suggestions for deepening an understanding of the charism and discipline of celibacy, nor do they promote reflection on its various dimensions. It seems that the pastoral nature of the forthcoming Council influenced many bishops and religious

¹²⁰ Cf. *ADA* II/I, 307-16. A subsequent series of documents, *Documenta Praeparatoria*, prepared by the Central Preparatory Commission, does not contain any significant statement on priestly celibacy, but only on the virtue of chastity for priests; hereafter cited: *ADP*. Cf. *De Clericorum Vitae Sanctitate* in *ADP* III/I, 358-61, at 360.

¹²¹ As Pius XII had previously done: cf. above, 82-83.

superiors to concentrate on questions of the reform and renewal of celibacy through ecclesial legislation, rather than directing their thought to the theology of celibacy.

The Development of the Schema on Priestly Celibacy

(1) During the first months of 1963, a schema on priestly ministry, *De Clericis*, was drawn up by various commissions – principally by the Central Preparatory Commission and the Doctrinal Commission – and was presented in April to the council Fathers for review and comment.¹²²

(2) After the bishops' written interventions, the schema underwent various revisions and in April 1964 a schema *De Sacerdotibus* was produced, which reduced the text of the document to ten articles.¹²³ Both *De Clericis* and *De Sacerdotibus* contained only passing references to priestly celibacy.

(3) *De Sacerdotibus* was then revised on September 29 and the new text *De Vita et Ministerio Sacerdotalis* contained twelve articles.¹²⁴ Article 2 included for the first time in the drafting process a significant statement on priestly celibacy:

Let those who, relying on the grace of God, with the encouragement, and even the command, of the Church, have vowed sacred celibacy, reverently guard and sincerely love chastity. Let them also cleave to it with their whole heart and also rejoice that by reason of this they both unite themselves in undivided fashion to Christ (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) and minister more freely to the family of God; in this state, therefore, let them advance

¹²² Cf. AS III/IV, 825-30.

¹²³ Cf. AS III/IV, 846-49.

¹²⁴ Cf. AS III/IV, 225-33; Joseph Lécuyer, "History of the Decree," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume IV, 183-209, at 189-92; Norman Tanner, "The Church in the World (Ecclesia ad extra)," in *A History of Vatican II*, Volume IV, 270-386, at 345-46.

uprightly and bravely, so that each day they may become more ready for service and also acquire a fuller paternity in Christ.¹²⁵

Although in other conciliar texts the two terms were used synonymously, the draft clearly distinguished between priestly *celibacy* and priestly *chastity*, with the former denoting a state of life, and the latter signifying a virtue. A priest living in *celibacy* would guard and love *chastity* according to his state of life, and rely upon the graces flowing from the sacrament of Orders in order to be faithful to a chaste life.

(4) The next draft, under a new title, *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum*, was presented to the bishops on November 20, 1964.¹²⁶ Article 15 provided a clear glimpse at a developing theology of priestly celibacy that began to utilize nuptial imagery:

Therefore, presbyters, by renouncing matrimony, openly bear witness before the world that their mission is placed above all strength of flesh and blood and they are made a living sign of that world whose sharers, since they are sons of the resurrection, “neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Lk 20:36). In the service of the Church, the Spouse of Christ, and of all those whom they wish to espouse “to one man, so as to present a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2), let them make their own the joy of the precursor who as a friend of the Bridegroom said, “I greatly rejoice at the voice of the Bridegroom,” (Jn 3:29).¹²⁷

¹²⁵ “Castitatem sancte custodiant et sincere ament, et qui sacrum coelibatum, Ecclesia commendante immo vel etiam iubente, gratia Dei confisi voverunt, toto corde eidem inhaereant atque gaudeant se hac ratione indivise cum Christo uniri (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) necnon Dei familiae liberius ministrare; in hoc igitur statu recte ac fortiter procedant, ita ut expeditiores in dies fiant ad serviendum atque plenius paternitatem in Christo acquirant,” *AS III/IV*, 226-27. Seventy five Fathers requested this addition to the text because they wanted to make a clear defense of ecclesiastical celibacy in the face of the attacks against it.

¹²⁶ Cf. *AS IV/IV*, 833-63.

¹²⁷ “Renuntiando ergo matrimonio, Presbyteri coram mundo aperte testificantur suam missionem supra omnes vires carnis et sanguinis sitam esse, atque signum vivunt efficiuntur illius mundi cuius participes, cum sint filii resurrectionis, ‘neque nubent, neque ducent uxores’ (Lk 20:36). In servitium Ecclesiae, Sponsae Christi, atque omnium

The text placed two images side by side. First, the celibate priest in renouncing earthly marriage becomes a living sign of the future heavenly world. In this respect the priest shares a prophetic role with consecrated religious (cf. *PC* 12). Second, the celibate priest is described according to the image of John the Baptist, the Best Friend of the Bridegroom. Interestingly, the members of the Commission chose this second image, which was favored by Augustine, instead of one that portrayed the celibate priest as an image of Christ himself, the Bridegroom of the Church.¹²⁸

In addition to this theological development, several bishops requested that more be added to the text: 121 asked for an explanation of the foundations of the Church's doctrine regarding priestly celibacy and its appropriateness, and 118 wanted a clear statement that there was no fundamental incompatibility between the priesthood and matrimony.¹²⁹

(5) By the end of January 1965, a slightly shorter text with the same title *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum* had been prepared, having undergone several revisions by the Commission *De Disciplina*.¹³⁰ Article 14 of the revised text included the phrase "perfect continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven", which would remain in substance throughout all succeeding drafts:

illorum quos volunt despondere 'uni viro, virginem castam exhiberet Christo' (2 Cor 11:2), suum facient gaudium Praecursoris qui, ut amicus Sponsi, 'gaudio gaudet propter vocem Sponsi' (Jn 3:29)," *AS IV/IV*, 854.

¹²⁸ The biblical and patristic background of these two images will be studied in Chapter 4: cf. below, 315-22.

¹²⁹ Cf. *AS IV/IV*, 869; Lécuyer, "History of the Decree," 197.

¹³⁰ Cf. *AS IV/IV*, *Appendix*, 336-93.

Perfect continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven which the Church has always praised (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-39), is at once a sign of and an incentive to charity and is in a particular way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.¹³¹

Perfect continence is here a synonym for *celibacy*. As will be seen, the bishops later added *perpetual* to a subsequent draft and to the final text in order to denote the permanence of this state of life: *perfect and perpetual continence*.

(6) Article 14 developed more amply the theological significance of priestly celibacy.

First, the text broached a dimension that can be described as christological:

Therefore it is fitting that, by such perfect continence, priests signify the total gift of their own person, namely of heart and body, to Christ alone, responding to his apostolic vocation: ‘Having left all things they followed him.’ (Lk 5:2).¹³²

This passage depicts the priest as looking to the celibate Christ as his model for ministry and life. In renouncing earthly marriage, he also follows the apostolic path. Having left everything, including his natural desires for marriage that flow from his body and soul, the celibate priest can offer himself to Christ as a full oblation.

A second significance of priestly celibacy in article 14 can be described as heavenly, or eschatological:

Therefore, priests, through the celibate mission of Christ, who has united himself in the Church to the human race by a heavenly marriage, witness openly to the world, and thus are made living signs of that future world

¹³¹ “Perfecta propter Regnum caelorum continentia, quam Ecclesia semper magni fecit (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-39), signum est et stimulus caritatis atque peculiaris fons spiritualis foecunditatis in mundo,” *AS IV/IV, Appendix*, 362.

¹³² “Convenit ergo ut sacerdotes tali perfecta continentia totalem significant personae suae donationem, cordis nempe et corporis, soli Christo, respondententes apostolicae eius vocationi: ‘Relictis omnibus secuti sunt eum’ (Lk 5:2),” *AS IV/IV*, 362. Bishop Alexandre Renard of Versailles contributed this text to the working draft.

that is already here present through grace and faith, in which the sons of the Resurrection neither marry nor are given in marriage (cf. Lk 20:36).¹³³

As was noted above in the discussion on *Perfectae Caritatis* 12,¹³⁴ an eschatological witness is normally attributed primarily to consecrated religious. Here there was a positive development in the theology of priestly celibacy insofar as a magisterial text described the celibate *priest* as a living icon of the life of the blessed in heaven. It did not, however, distinguish between diocesan and religious priests.

Article 14 also contained a third significance, the ecclesiological, insofar as the celibate priest is freed from many earthly concerns in order to devote himself more fully to the needs of the Church:

Through celibacy, therefore, they are made more suitable for the task entrusted to them of espousing the faithful to one husband and of presenting them as a chaste virgin to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2).¹³⁵

The editors of this text had excised the reference – contained in the previous draft cited above – to the role of John the Baptist (cf. Jn 3:29), although the Pauline reference to the role of the father of the bride (cf. 2 Cor 11:2) was still present.¹³⁶ Again, as with the

¹³³ “Presbyteri ergo per coelibatum missionem Christi qui in Ecclesia genus humanum arcano connubio sibi coniunxit, coram mundo aperte testificantur, sicque signum vivum efficiuntur illius mundi futuri, per gratiam et fidem iam praesentis, in quo filii resurrectionis neque nubent neque ducent uxores (cf. Lk 20:36),” *AS IV/IV*, 363.

¹³⁴ Cf. above, 115-17.

¹³⁵ “Quapropter per coelibatum aptiores fiunt muneri sibi commisso despondendi fideles uni viro illosque exhibendi virginem castam Christo (cf. 2 Cor 11:2),” *AS IV/IV*, 363. This text was submitted by several Fathers and periti, including Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia and Cardinal Julius Doefner of Munich.

¹³⁶ 2 Cor 11:2 refers to the bride’s father, whose role was to prepare and betroth his daughter to the bridegroom. Cf. Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 498-99, and Margaret

previous draft, there was no mention of the priest's role as icon of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church.

(7) After the schema was subject to more discussion and emendation, it was then approved by the bishops on October 14, 1965, during the fourth session of the Council. The bishops subsequently submitted proposed emendations to the draft. One of them, Archbishop Gregorio Modrego y Casaus of Barcelona, commented on the ecclesiological dimension in the text:

Thus chastity [priestly celibacy] can be praised, according to the understanding of the New Testament, as a living testimony on earth to eschatological life. Perhaps chastity, *understood in a strict sense as priestly*, can be supported theologically as an "assimilation" to Christ insofar as he is the Bridegroom of the Church. . . . Priestly ordination, therefore, that takes place "in Christ," the Bridegroom of the Church, *leads* to total love and service of the Church.¹³⁷

According to Modrego y Casaus, priestly ordination is an origin and impetus for a celibate ministry motivated by total love and service of the Church. The celibate priest serves the Church with the full gift of himself in imitation of Christ. This dimension is ecclesiological because the priest's celibacy is clearly ordered toward service of the faithful. Modrego y Casaus also included a brief reference to the eschatological dimension insofar as he praised chastity as a "living witness on earth to eternal life."

E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Volume 2 (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 660-61.

¹³⁷ "Extolli posset etiam castitas, ad mentem Novi Testamenti, ut vivens testimonium in terra vitae eschatologicae. Fortasse castitas, *formaliter qua sacerdotalis*, inniti posset theologicae in 'adsimilatione' ad Christum quatenus ipse est 'Sponsus Ecclesiae'. . . . Unde, consecratio sacerdotalis quae fit 'in Christo' Sponso Ecclesiae ad absolutum amorem et servitium Ecclesiae *conducit*," AS III/IV, 462-63, original emphasis.

Several other bishops contributed to developing the text on the theology of priestly celibacy. Archbishop Alessandro Gottardi of Trent, for example, wrote:

Absent from the present text is what is noble in celibacy: namely, an imitation and representation of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church, and a totality of love, even human, in the service of Christ and reserved to the Church.¹³⁸

Gottardi noted the absence of a reference to the priest as an icon of Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, a relationship particularly established through celibacy. Here there emerged an ecclesiological understanding of sacerdotal celibacy as a priest's total donation of himself to the Church, in and with Christ. The celibate priest has the capacity to image John the Baptist (cf. Jn 3:29) and the Apostle Paul (cf. 2 Cor 11:2) in their preparatory ministries, as well as signifying the redemptive role of Jesus Christ himself.

Bishop Matthew Niedhammer, vicar apostolic of Bluefields, combined the christological and the ecclesiological dimensions in his description of the iconic richness of priestly celibacy:

Chastity is the beautiful ornament of bishops and priests, because in this virtue they imitate Christ the Lord, the Immaculate Lamb, who is the glorious Bridegroom of the Church, whose most chaste wedding feast is celebrated forever and ineffably in heaven (Rev. 19:7-9; 2:9). Chastity, particularly priestly, has a foundation in the New Testament, that is, in Christ himself. Therefore one must insist that chastity has a glorious and profound eschatological value as a symbol and more as a pledge of glorious and eternal life in the resurrection of the body.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ "Deest enim in praesenti textu quod est in caelibatu sublime: imitatio sc. et repraesentatio Christi ut sponsi Ecclesiae, et totalitas amoris, etiam humani, in servitium Christi et Ecclesiae reservata," AS III/IV, 591.

¹³⁹ "Castitas est ornamentum perpulchrum episcoporum et sacerdotium, quia in hac virtute imitant Christum Dominum, Agnum Immaculatum, qui est sponsus gloriosus Ecclesiae, quorum nuptiae castissimae in caelo sempiternae et ineffabiliter celebrantur (Rev 19:7-9; 2:9). Castitas, praesertim sacerdotalis, fundamentum in Novo Testamento,

Niedhammer, like other bishops, used *chastity* to describe the unmarried state of the priest, although the sense of the term meant holy or pure *celibacy*.

Archbishop Joseph Shehan of Baltimore pushed the nuptial paradigm further when he suggested that Christ was the “Bridegroom of the priest’s soul”:

Chastity: on account of the consecration of the priest to Christ, who is the Bridegroom of the priest’s soul and on account of his dedication to the Church, the new People of God, priestly celibacy is better understood if it be conceived as a fundamental element in the spiritual marriage of the priest with Christ and in Christ with the church, the beloved Bride of Christ.¹⁴⁰

Thus, the priest *as* priest enjoys a spousal relationship with Christ. It is through this relationship that the priest is related to the Church; the former is the cause of the latter. Shehan’s theology of priestly celibacy reflected to some extent the bridal theology of Scheeben.¹⁴¹ Perhaps because of its novel perspective, the proposal of Shehan did not substantially influence other bishops and therefore was not included in the schema.

(8) As the debate began on the final draft, the focus of attention at the Council started to revolve more around the disciplinary character of priestly celibacy. Pope Paul VI, who was elected on June 21, 1963 to succeed John XXIII (d. June 3, 1963), grew increasingly concerned that some bishops would publically question priestly celibacy. He therefore

i.e. in Christo ipso, habet. Etiam insistendum est hoc quod castitas gloriosam et profundum valorem eschatologicum habet, uti symbolum et magis uti pignus vitae gloriosae et aeternae in resurrectione carnis,” AS III/IV 617-18.

¹⁴⁰ “*Castitas*: propter consecrationem sacerdotis ad Christum qui animae sacerdotis sponsus est et propter eius dedicationem Ecclesiae, novo Dei populo, castitas sacerdotalis melius intelligitur si concipiatur uti elementum fundamentale in matrimonio spirituali sacerdotis cum Christo et in Christo cum Ecclesia, dilecta sponsa Christi,” AS III/IV, 644.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 546-47; above, 69-71.

asked Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro to contact those bishops who intended to discuss celibacy on the floor in order to dissuade them from doing so.¹⁴² On October 6, Lercaro met with Brazilian Pietro Koop, titular bishop of Lins, who had prepared a bold intervention in favor of optional celibacy. Among other things, Koop intended to press for the ordination of married men to the diaconate and to the priesthood. These clerics, although serving part time and on a supplementary basis, would nonetheless help shore up the Church in mission territories where he feared its influence was diminishing due to a lack of priestly vocations. After conversing with Lercaro, however, Koop agreed to desist from reading his text at the Council.¹⁴³

João Batista da Mota y Albuquerque, archbishop of Vitoria-Espirito Santo, Brazil raised an important question about the charism of celibacy and its place in the ecclesial life of the Church:

An answer needs to be found in particular to the following problem: total continence is a charism. Why then is a charism imposed as a universal obligation upon Latin priests? Is it perhaps that the West has reserved the ministerial function for charismatics? In what sense?¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Cf. Mauro Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” in *History of Vatican II, Volume V: The Council and the Transition, The Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965 - December 1965*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis and Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 185-274, at 232.

¹⁴³ For Koop's intervention, see Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II*, 694-95; cf. Velati, “Conciliar Agenda,” 232-36. His text was printed later in *Le Monde* but not in the *Acta Synodalia*.

¹⁴⁴ “Il faudrait notamment trouver une réponse au problème suivant: La continence total est un charisme. Pourquoi ce charisme est-il imposé comme une obligation universelle aux prêtres latins? Est-ce parce que l’Occident tient à réserver la fonction ministérielle aux charismatiques? En quel sens?”, AS IV/V, 286.

Such, then, were the sentiments of some council bishops. On October 11, however, a few days before the final vote on the schema *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum*, the bishops received the news that Paul VI had decided to intervene in the discussion concerning clerical celibacy by imposing a moratorium on any further discussion on the floor that dealt with changes to the law of celibacy in the Latin Church.¹⁴⁵ Various bishops, including Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV Sayegh, had been planning to open a debate on the value of celibacy and were eager to advance the idea of married clergy in the Latin Church.¹⁴⁶ The earlier conciliar debate concerning the ordination of married men to the permanent diaconate in *Lumen Gentium* 29 had encouraged some bishops to raise similar points in the schema on the priesthood, for as soon as the question was raised – whether men ought to be admitted to a restored diaconate without any obligation to celibacy – the question of the celibacy of priests was also raised.¹⁴⁷

The drama increased on the same day (October 11) when Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, chairman of the Presidential Council, ordered that a letter on celibacy written by the pope be read by the General Secretary to the bishops. In his letter, the pope asked

¹⁴⁵ Henri Fesquet claims that Paul VI received in audience several cardinals, including Cardinal Jaime de Barros Câmara of Rio de Janeiro, who had come to urge him to stop the interventions in favor of married clergy: Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II*, 696. Cf. Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” 233; Versaldi, “Priestly Celibacy from the Canonical and Psychological Points of View,” 131-32.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” footnote 133, at 233, and Anthony P. Kowalski, *Married Catholic Priests: Their History, Their Journey, Their Reflections* (Mequon: Caritas, 2004), 18-20; hereafter cited: *Married Catholic Priests*.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Wulf, “Chapter III: The Life of Priests (Articles 12-16),” 280.

those bishops who felt it to be their duty, to express their views in writing to the Presidential Council, which in turn would pass them on to him. Explaining his action, Paul VI wrote:

We have been informed that some of the council Fathers have it in mind, in the next sessions of the Council, to pose the question of the celibacy of the clergy of the Latin Church: namely, whether that law which in some manner joins celibacy with the priesthood should be preserved or not. In this regard, without in any way doing injury to the freedom which the Fathers enjoy of manifesting their thought, we nevertheless wish to bring to their knowledge that we are of the opinion that it is by no means expedient to have a public disputation regarding a matter which both demands great prudence and carries such great weight.

And likewise it is our purpose, so far as we are able, not only to preserve this providential, sacred, and ancient law, but also to strengthen its observance by calling the priests of the Latin Church back to a consciousness of the causes and reasons which today, indeed today most of all, require that the law itself be held by all to be deeply meaningful, and that they consecrate themselves fully to Christ and his love alone, and that they all devote themselves only to the service of the Church and the souls of men.

If one or the other of the council Fathers deems it necessary [to pose the question of celibacy], rather than speaking publicly, he could express his own thought in this matter in writing and send his written response to the President of the Council, whose responsibility it will be to transmit the same to our attention; meanwhile we will judge it to be our [duty] to ponder it attentively before God.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ “Certiores facti sumus, nonnullis Patribus Conciliaribus id in animo esse, ut in proximis Concilii coetibus quaestionem de caelibatu clericorum Ecclesiae Latinae ponant, utrum scilicet lex illa servanda sit necne, quae caelibatum cum sacerdotio quodammodo coniungit. Qua de re, quin libertatem ullo modo laedamus, qua Patres fruuntur suam patefaciendi sententiam, optamus tamen ad eorum notitiam perferatur, Nos in ea esse opinione, nequaquam expedire, publicam haberi disceptationem circa rem, quae et tantam postulat prudentiam et tanti ponderis est; itemque Nobis esse propositum, quantum in Nobis erit, non tantum huiusmodi legem antiquam, sacram, providamque servare, sed eius etiam corroborare observantiam, sacerdotes Ecclesiae Latinae ad conscientiam revocantes causarum rationumque, quae hodie, immo hodie quam maxime, efficiunt, ut lex ipsa ab omnibus tamquam perapta significatio habeatur, et plene seipsos Christo eiusque solius amoris sacravisse, et totos se addixisse Ecclesiae hominumque

This papal intervention caught everyone, even the moderators, by surprise. Due to a lack of documentation regarding this intervention, it is not easy to give a full account of the reasons behind the decision of Paul VI. However, one can reasonably speculate that the pope had grown concerned about the movement initiated by several bishops to push for married clergy in the Latin Church.¹⁴⁹

In the second paragraph, Paul VI stated that priests of the Latin Church need to reflect upon the causes and reasons of celibacy, which must be held to be deeply meaningful. In other words, it is not enough for priests to accept the ecclesial law of celibacy, but they also must consider its underlying reasons. Here the pope gave the motive and impulse for a richer and deeper magisterial teaching on celibacy. He subsequently invited the bishops to submit in writing their thoughts on this matter.

The Development of Article 16

(1) Subsequent to this papal intervention, however, several bishops had a lengthy discussion about various details of the newly revised schema. In this new draft the bishops retained the paragraph dedicated to priestly celibacy, although article 14 became article 16 as a result of the editing process.

animis solummodo serviendis. Quodsi Patrum Conciliarium unus vel alter necessarium putet, potiusquam publice dicendo, scriptis peculiarem de hac re sententiam aperire, scriptionem suam ad Concilii Praesidentiam mittere poterit, cui sane curae erit eandem Nostrae notitiae tradere; Nos vero Nostrum esse existimabimus eam attento animo coram Deo perpendere,” Paul VI, *Epistula Summi Pontificis Pauli VI ad em.mum P.D. Eugenium card. Tisserant Praesidem Consilii Praesidentiae Ss. Concilii*, AS IV/I, 40.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” 232-33. The *Acta Synodalia* show that Cardinal Pericle Felici, the secretary general, twice sent to Paul VI materials concerning this question: see letters of Felici to Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, October 16, 1965 (AS V/III, 437) and November 3, 1965 (AS V/III, 477).

In obedience to the papal directive, most of these bishops did not focus on the question of the abolition or retention of celibacy, but rather on the manner in which the ecclesial law should be formulated. One such discussion had to do with whether celibacy was essential to the priesthood. Several bishops pointed out that married priests were part of both the tradition of the Eastern Church and the practice of the ancient Church. The intervention of Cardinal Augustin Bea was particularly influential:

If I am not deceived our ecumenical council – I say ecumenical – ought to treat of both sacerdotal states: of the state of perfect continence in celibacy and of the perfect (I would rather say “ideal”) matrimony of the married priest, because the perfect example is of greatest importance for the Oriental Church. It ought to be shown for both states how someone ought to be properly selected, educated, and formed, for his own state . . . and how both might learn how one ought to be efficaciously protected against the dangers that threaten both states.¹⁵⁰

Ecumenical considerations prompted Bea to give this intervention as a corrective to the overly Western flavor of the schema. Bea’s intervention prompted a brusque reply from Cardinal Antonio Bacci, who reproved those he saw as disobeying the pope’s instruction not to speak on this subject at the general congregation.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the

¹⁵⁰ “Ni fallor nostrum Concilium oecumenicum--dico oecumenicum--agere deberet de utroque statu sacerdotali: de statu perfectae continentiae in coelibatu et de perfecto (quasi dicerem “ideali”) matrimonio sacerdotis coniugati, quod exemplum perfectum pro Ecclesia Orientali est summi momenti. Ostendi deberet quo modo utriusque ad suum quisque statum accurate seligi, educari, formari debeat . . . quomodo uterque discat quomodo contra pericula utriusque statui imminencia efficaciter protegi debeat,” *AS IV/V*, 34.

¹⁵¹ “Recentemente il S. Padre ha inviato al card. Presidente Tisserant una lettera, in cui esorta i Padri conciliari di non parlare in pubblica Congregazione Conciliare del celibato; ed inoltre ha fatto di esso un alto elogio. Perché dunque tornarci sopra pubblicamente?” *AS IV/V*, 209. Velati notes that Cardinal Julius Döpfner did not read in the hall the section of his address in which he underlined the contradiction between the schema’s statement that celibacy is a divine gift given to some and the demand that

bishops decided to add a few lines to article 16 in which married clergy are encouraged to give an example of love, faithfulness, conjugal chastity, the Christian upbringing of children, and a whole hearted devotion to the flock entrusted to them. It is noteworthy that this additional text said nothing about the wife of the married cleric.

(2) The schema was then sent to the Commission for further reworking. On November 9 a new text, still named *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum*, was distributed to the bishops for the anticipated vote.¹⁵² A new statement was added to Article 16: “[Priestly celibacy] is at once a sign and a stimulus of pastoral charity and a particular source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.”¹⁵³ Through this and similar texts, the pastoral dimension of the priest was linked to his spiritual life. The text also retained earlier references to the various ways in which celibacy is suitable for the priesthood insofar as it facilitates the priest’s union with Christ and gives him a role in presenting the Church as a pure bride to her one husband, Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2).

Perhaps the most significant interventions at this point came from Cardinal Doefner and the Episcopal Conference of Indonesia, who issued a joint statement:

For in virginity or celibacy observed for the kingdom of heaven, priests more easily adhere to Christ the Lord with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32ff); they more expressly verify the total gift of their person, indeed of heart and body; they more freely dedicate themselves in Christ and through Him to God alone; they minister to his kingdom and the work of

celibacy be obligatory for priests of the Latin Church: cf. Velati, “Conciliar Agenda,” 243; AS IV/IV, 764-67.

¹⁵² Cf. AS IV/VI, 345-408.

¹⁵³ “Est enim signum simul et stimulus caritatis pastoralis atque peculiaris fons spiritualis foecunditatis in mundo,” AS IV/VI, 376.

supernatural regeneration and thus take on more fully fatherhood in Christ.¹⁵⁴

This passage, which emphasized the christological perspective of priestly celibacy, underlined the spiritual fatherhood that the celibate priest acquires through giving himself in priestly ministry. This notion of spiritual paternity would gain momentum in the succeeding draft and would eventually be included in the conciliar document.

This latest schema was accompanied by a report (*Relationes de Singulis Numeris*) on all the articles. The commentary on article 16 included an outline of its structure: (1) beginning with the statement that celibacy does not belong to the essence of the priesthood, (2) then proceeding to outline the theological and pastoral reasons justifying its suitability, and (3) ending with the description of celibacy as a *donum aestimandum* for the whole Church.¹⁵⁵

(3) After this schema was distributed, the bishops then submitted their final comments. There were 1,331 *modi*, or written interventions. Two of the suggestions adopted were: (1) the addition of *et perpetua* in “perfect et perpetua propter Regnum caelorum continentia,”¹⁵⁶ and (2) the inclusion of passages from the Pastoral Letters

¹⁵⁴ “In virginitate enim vel coelibatu propter Regnum caelorum servato Presbyteri facilius Christo Domino indiviso corde adhaerent (cf. 1 Cor 7:32ff), totalem personae suae donationem, cordis nempe et corporis, expressius verificant, liberius in Christo et per Ipsum soli Deo sese dedicant Eiusque Regno ac operi regenerationis supernae ministrant et sic paternitatem in Christo plenius assumunt, AS IV/VI, 377.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Relationes de Singulis Numeris*, AS IV/VI, 389-405, at 399; Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” 253.

¹⁵⁶ At the request of forty-four Fathers: AS IV/VII, 206.

which mention married bishops and presbyters (cf. 1 Tim 3:2-5; Tit 1:6).¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, a number of the *modi* were turned down that aimed at affirming the superiority of the celibate over the married priesthood.¹⁵⁸ The bishops who submitted these requests were concerned that the sentences on the non-celibate priesthood of the Eastern Churches seemed to weaken what was said about the suitability of celibacy to the priestly state.¹⁵⁹

(4) Paul VI submitted a written intervention, dated November 6, 1965, which addressed several conciliar schemas, including *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum*.¹⁶⁰ Upon review of its content, however, the leaders of the Commission judged that the pope's observations would not be incorporated into the schema for three reasons: (1) this particular papal intervention was not considered to be authoritative but was rather the pope's personal view, (2) the points contained within it had little relevance to the topics at hand, and/or (3) they were already addressed in the reworked schema since the pope was commenting on an outdated text.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ At the request of 110 Fathers: AS IV/VII, 207.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. AS IV/VII, 207-209.

¹⁵⁹ "Quia talia verba infirmant quae de coelibatu eiusque convenientia dicuntur," *Modus no. 15 ad numerum 16*, in AS IV/VII, 207. The Commission responded: "Tota pericopes non videtur posse deleri, quia esset mutatio substantialis textus a Concilio approbati," *Ad a*, 208.

¹⁶⁰ Paul VI's intervention also included observations on *De Apostolatu Laicorum* and the *De Missionibus*. Cf. AS V/III, 507-508 for the Pontiff's notes on *De Ministerio et Vita Presbyterorum*. This papal intervention was attached to a letter from Archbishop Angelo Dell'Acqua to Cardinal Felici: AS V/III, 504.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Velati, "Completing the Conciliar Agenda," 255-56.

Of the nine points concerning priestly ministry and life in the pope's intervention, the Commission judged that the only significant proposal dealt with celibacy:

It seems opportune to propose that, in order to give clerical celibacy the character and value of a fully free act done with a view to priestly ordination, *an explicit public vow* be taken before major orders: an explicit vow that could be temporary for the subdiaconate and perpetual for the diaconate (or the presbyterate). In addition, it might be proposed that every priest renew this vow annually on Holy Thursday before celebrating or participating in the holy Mass that commemorates the institution of the priesthood and the Eucharist.¹⁶²

The Commission decided, however, that this papal proposal would have added something substantial to a text already approved by the Council and therefore could not be adopted. Thus Paul VI's later intervention, unlike his earlier one on October 11, proved to be without real influence on the content of the schema.

(5) After several emendations, the council approved the final form of the whole text on December 7, 1965, with 2,390 votes for and only four against. Paul VI promulgated the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* on that same day.¹⁶³ The section on priestly celibacy in this final text reflected a progressive enrichment of the earlier magisterial teaching. In

¹⁶² “Appare opportune proporre che, per dare al celibate del Clero il carattere ed il valore di un atto pienamente libero compiuto in vista delle ordinazione sacerdotale, si introduca la emissione di un *voto esplicito pubblico* prima degli Ordini maggiori: voto esplicito che potrebbe essere temporaneo per il Suddiaconato, e perpetuo per il Diaconato (o per il Presbiterato). Si potrebbe pure proporre che ogni Sacerdote rinnovi tale voto ogni anno il giorno del Giovedì Santo, prima di celebrare o di partecipare alla Santa Messa che commemora la istituzione del Sacerdozio e dell'Eucaristia,” (note 7), AS V/III, 508. The English translation is from Velati, “Conciliar Agenda,” 255-56.

¹⁶³ Cf. AS IV/VII, 109-234. As Lécuyer noted, Yves Congar stated that three quarters of the text of *Prebyterorum Ordinis* was drafted by Joseph Lécuyer, Willy Onclin, and himself. Lécuyer was secretary of the sub-commission entrusted with the initial draft of the section that included priestly celibacy: Lécuyer, “History of the Decree,” 185.

sum, the formulation of the final text of article 16 included the following refinements concerning priestly *celibacy*, or *perfect and perpetual continence*: (1) it is not demanded by the nature of the priesthood itself, (2) it in no way negates the praiseworthy custom of the married priesthood in the Eastern Church, (3) it is a sign and stimulus of pastoral charity and a font of spiritual fruitfulness, (4) it enhances the spiritual fatherhood of the priest, (5) it aids the priest in his spiritual life by bringing him closer to Christ with an undivided heart (the *christological* dimension), (6) it helps the priest to exercise the role of the father of the bride in presenting the Church as a pure Bride to Christ, her one husband (the *ecclesiological* dimension), and (7) it is a sign of and a participation in the kingdom of heaven (the *eschatological* dimension).

(ii). The Final Text

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) is divided into three chapters: (1) on the priesthood in the Church's mission (cf. articles 2-3), (2) on the ministry of priests (cf. articles 4-11), and (3) on the life of priests (cf. articles 12-21). Chapter 3, on the requirements for the life of the priest, deals with humility and obedience (cf. article 15), celibacy (cf. article 16), and voluntary poverty (cf. article 17). Article 16 on celibacy can be divided into three principal sections.

(1) Priestly Celibacy in General

The first section of article 16 addresses celibacy in general:

Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven was recommended by Christ the Lord (cf. Mt 19:12). It has been freely accepted and laudably observed by many Christians down through the centuries as well as in our own time, and has always been highly esteemed in a special way by the Church as a feature of priestly life. For it is at

once a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it as well as being in a special way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.¹⁶⁴

The text uses *continence* rather than *celibacy*, although in this context the meaning is the same. The phrase that describes perfect continence as “a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it as well as being in a special way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world” follows closely what is said in *Lumen Gentium* 42.

The text further adds an explanation of the relationship between the priesthood and celibacy that takes into account the tradition of the Eastern Churches:

It is true that it [celibacy] is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the primitive Church [cf. 1 Tim 3:2-5; Tit 1:6] and the tradition of the Eastern Churches where, in addition to those – including all bishops – who choose from the gift of grace to observe celibacy, there are also many excellent married priests.¹⁶⁵

The first sentence reflects the common Catholic understanding that celibacy is neither part of the essence of the ministerial priesthood nor necessary for its function. This sentence serves as an introduction to a brief discussion of married priests in the Eastern Churches. The text goes on to state that the Council in no way intended to alter the discipline of the married priesthood which “is lawfully practiced in the Eastern

¹⁶⁴ Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 16; hereafter cited: *PO*. “Perfecta et perpetua propter Regnum coelorum continentia a Christo Domino commendata, per decursum temporum et etiam nostris diebus a non paucis christifidelibus libenter accepta et laudabiliter observata, ab Ecclesia speciali modo pro vita sacerdotali semper permagni habita est. Est enim signum simul et stimulus caritatis pastoralis atque peculiaris fons spiritualis foecunditatis in mundo,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

¹⁶⁵ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “Non exigitur quidem a sacerdotio suapte natura, uti apparet ex praxi Ecclesiae primaevae et ex traditione Ecclesiarum Orientalium, ubi praeter illos qui cum omnibus Episcopis ex dono gratiae coelibatum eligunt servandum, sunt etiam optime meriti Presbyteri coniugati,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

Churches.” Married priests are to persevere in their holy vocation so that they might continue fully and generously to give themselves to the flock commended to them. There are no references made to the married priest’s wife and none to the Christian upbringing of children, the latter of which had been mentioned in the earlier schema.

(2) Theological Dimensions of Priestly Celibacy

The second principal section of article 16 deals with the appropriateness of celibacy for priests and contains the three aspects of priestly celibacy that first appeared in *Optatam Totius* 10, but now in a much more developed form: the christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions. Neither *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 nor *Optatam Totius* 10 uses these three terms *as such*, but the concepts are nevertheless present in the text. The first dimension, the christological, indicates the priest’s union with Christ:

There are many ways in which celibacy is in harmony with the priesthood. For the whole mission of the priest is dedicated to the service of the new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, raises up in the world through his Spirit and which is born “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:13). By preserving virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12) priests are consecrated in a new and excellent way to Christ. They more readily cling to him with undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) and dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and of men. They are less encumbered in their service of his kingdom and of the task of heavenly regeneration. In this way they become better fitted for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “Coelibatus vero multimodam convenientiam cum sacerdotio habet. Missio enim sacerdotis integra dedicatio servitio novae humanitatis, quam Christus, victor mortis, per Spiritum suum in mundo suscitavit, quaeque originem suam in mundo suscitavit, quaeque originem suam ‘non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo’ (Jn 1:13) habet. Per virginitatem autem vel coelibatum propter Regnum coelorum servatum, Presbyteri nova et eximia ratione Christo consecrantur, Ei facilius indiviso corde adhaerent, liberius in Ipso et per

This text states two facets of priestly celibacy that join the priest closely to Jesus Christ: *mission* and *consecration*.¹⁶⁷ With respect to *mission*, the whole priestly ministry is dedicated through celibacy to the service of a new humanity, which Christ brought forth through His Spirit in the world and which has its origin “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God” (Jn 1:13). Implicit in this statement is the belief that the celibate priest can give himself more fully to his mission if he is free from care for a wife and children. With regard to *consecration*, celibate priests are consecrated to Christ in a “new and excellent way” and “more readily cling to him with undivided heart” (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34). Thus they can give themselves more freely in and through Christ to the service of God and humanity and are better fitted for a “broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ.” The primary orientation is to Christ rather than to the Church, with the priest’s spiritual paternity springing directly from his union with the Lord.

The second dimension, the *ecclesiological*, refers to the priest in his relationship with the Church and in bringing the faithful closer to Jesus Christ:

By means of celibacy, then, priests profess before men their willingness to be dedicated with undivided loyalty to the task entrusted to them, namely that of espousing the faithful to one husband and presenting them as a chaste virgin to Christ. They recall that mystical marriage, established by God and destined to be fully revealed in the future, by which the Church holds Christ as her only spouse.¹⁶⁸

Ipsium servitio Dei et hominum sese dedicent, Eius Regno ac operi regenerationis supernae expeditius ministrant, et sic aptiores fiunt qui paternitatem in Christo latius accipiant,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Wulf, “Chapter III: The Life of Priests (Articles 12-16),” 285.

¹⁶⁸ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “Hoc ergo modo, coram hominibus profitentur se velle indiviso munera sibi commisso dedicari, fideles scilicet despondendi uni viro, illosque exhibendi virginem castam Christo, et sic arcanum illud evocant connubium a

This text uses the Pauline imagery from 2 Cor 11:2: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure virgin to her one husband.” Paul described the Church in Corinth as a chaste bride whom he, as her father, had prepared and presented to Christ. Christ inaugurated a new and unique relationship between God and humanity through his marriage with the Church. The council bishops, however, did not use the symbolism of the priest as icon of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church.

The third dimension, the *eschatological*, identifies the celibate priest as a prophetic witness to the heavenly realities that will never pass away:

Moreover they [celibate priests] are made a living sign of that world to come, already present through faith and charity, a world in which the children of the resurrection shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage.¹⁶⁹

The celibate priest as a living sign of the future Kingdom of God reminds the faithful of that Kingdom and of the fact that they will be taken up into the eternal marriage between Christ and his Church.

(3) The Law of Celibacy

After a short survey of the genesis of laws regulating celibacy, the text contains an approval and confirmation of the discipline of the Latin Church and a petition for the whole Church to pray that priests be faithful to this gift:

Deo conditum et in futuro plene manifestandum quo Ecclesia unicum Sponsum Christum habet,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16. The footnote to this text cites *LG*, nn. 42, 44, and *PC*, n. 12, which were treated above.

¹⁶⁹ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “Signum insuper vivum efficiuntur illius mundi futuri, per fidem et caritatem iam praesentis, in quo filii resurrectionis neque nubent neque ducent uxores,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

[The Council] feels confident in the Spirit that the gift of celibacy, so appropriate to the priesthood of the New Testament, is liberally granted by the Father, provided those who share Christ's priesthood through the sacrament of Order, and indeed the whole Church, ask for that gift humbly and earnestly.¹⁷⁰

Prayer, then, is the means by which the priest is able to receive the gift of celibacy and to live it faithfully. God the Father will liberally grant it because of its fitting connection with the priesthood of the New Testament. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 concludes with an exhortation for celibate priests to persevere in this state, holding fast to it with courage and enthusiasm, while keeping before their eyes the great mysteries that are signified and fulfilled in it. Given that many people consider perfect continence to be impossible, priests are exhorted to pray humbly and perseveringly for the grace of fidelity. In addition to prayer, priests are admonished to incorporate asceticism into their lives.

Presbyterorum Ordinis 16 is the most complete statement on priestly celibacy by Vatican II, and contributes significantly to the development of magisterial teaching on this subject. Instead of using arguments to justify celibacy that are based on notions of ritual purity and the superiority of celibacy to marriage, it employs an abundance of biblical and patristic themes, much more so than did the preconciliar magisterial teaching of the twentieth century. Among the conciliar themes one notices the emergence of three specific dimensions of priestly celibacy: the celibate priest's union with Christ (the *christological* dimension), his service to the Church (the *ecclesiological* dimension), and

¹⁷⁰Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “[Sacrosancta haec Synodus] confidens in Spiritu donum coelibatus, sacerdotio Novi Testamenti tam congruum, liberaliter a Patre dari, dummodo qui sacerdotium Christi per Sacramentum Ordinis participant, immo et universa Ecclesia, humiliter et enixe illud expectant,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

his prophetic witness to heavenly life (the *eschatological* dimension). This triad serves as a summary of the multilayered significance of sacerdotal celibacy.

Presbyterorum Ordinis 16 does not follow *Optatam Totius* 10 in referring to the “*praecellentia*” of celibacy vis-à-vis marriage. Rather, the text strives to state something equivalent, but using different language:

By preserving virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven priests are consecrated in a new and excellent way to Christ. They more readily (*facilius*) cling to him with undivided heart and dedicate themselves more freely (*liberius*) in him and through him to the service of God and of men. They are less encumbered (*expeditius*) in their service of his kingdom and of the task of heavenly regeneration. In this way they become better fitted (*aptiores*) for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ.¹⁷¹

As Komonchak noted, priestly celibacy is praised more quietly here by means of four comparatives (*facilius, liberius, expeditius, aptiores*).¹⁷² In choosing this mode of expressing the excellence of the celibate life, the bishops avoided words that would suggest a clear correspondence with the Tridentine teaching on the superiority of virginity to marriage. This ostensible nervousness of the bishops in evoking an association with Trent on this issue in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 may also have been an operative influence upon the formulation of *Optatam Totius* 10. Although *Optatam*

¹⁷¹Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16. “Per virginitatem autem vel coelibatum propter Regnum coelorum servatum, Presbyteri nova et eximia ratione Christo consecrantur, Ei facilius indiviso corde adhaerent, liberius in Ipso et per Ipsum servitio Dei et hominum sese dedident, Eius Regno ac operi regenerationis supernae expeditius ministrant, et sic aptiores fiunt qui paternitatem in Christo latius accipiant,” Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *PO*, n. 16.

¹⁷² Cf. Komonchak, “The Council of Trent at the Second Vatican Council,” 75.

Totius 10 speaks of the greater excellence of virginity (*praecellentia virginitatis*) it does not make an explicit comparison between virginity and marriage.

Presbyterorum Ordinis 16, therefore, is the principal locus for the renewal of magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy at the Second Vatican Council. In the other conciliar texts that deal with chastity or celibacy,¹⁷³ there is comparatively little doctrinal development, with the clear exception of *Optatam Totius* 10. A fuller development of conciliar teaching may have been limited in part by the prohibition of Paul VI against any further discussion about the retention of obligatory priestly celibacy in the Latin Church. While the pope directed his prohibition against those who were questioning the wisdom of the Latin discipline, he may have inadvertently discouraged a free exchange of ideas on celibacy in the subsequent sessions of the Council. Although there was significant doctrinal development in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 and *Optatam Totius* 10, there might have been even more had the pope not intervened at the Council.

Despite its brevity, the rich account of priestly celibacy in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 provides a foundation for further doctrinal development. In some respects it appears as an outline for a more complete presentation to be given at a future date. Paul VI would issue such a presentation a year and a half after the promulgation of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.

5. Paul VI

Pope Paul VI promulgated *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* in 1967. Unfortunately, this encyclical remains largely unknown in popular and academic circles, although it is the

¹⁷³ Cf. *LG*, n. 29, 42; *PC*, n. 12; *OE*, n. 17.

most complete magisterial exposition on priestly celibacy. One reason for its relative obscurity could be that just one year later the pope released his monumental encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. The controversy surrounding the latter may have distracted the faithful from much of the pope's previous teaching, including *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*.

Following the earlier pattern of this chapter, the first section will consist of a brief study of the magisterial documents of Paul VI on the restoration of the permanent diaconate, such as *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, and will be followed by a focus on their treatment of celibacy. The second section will treat of *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*.

a). *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* and Other Documents on the Diaconate

With his apostolic letter, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (June 18, 1967), Paul VI implemented the recommendations of *Lumen Gentium* 29 and determined general norms for the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the Latin Church.¹⁷⁴ In his introduction, the pope cited *Ad Gentes* 16 as an argument for the suitability of reestablishing the diaconal order as a permanent state of life:

It would help those men who carry out the ministry of a deacon – preaching the word of God as catechists, governing scattered Christian communities in the name of the bishop or parish priest, or exercising charity in the performance of social or charitable works – if they were to be strengthened by the imposition of hands which has come down from the apostles. They would be more closely bound to the altar [*arctius altari coniungi*] and their ministry would be made more fruitful through the sacramental grace of the diaconate.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Paul VI, “*Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*,” in *The Pope Speaks* 12 (1967): 237-43; AAS 59 (1967): 697-704.

¹⁷⁵ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

The diaconate, the pope continued, is not simply a step toward the priesthood, but rather is enriched with an indelible character and a special grace of its own so that deacons can serve the mysteries of Christ and of the Church in a stable fashion.

Paul VI stated that it is the function of episcopal conferences to decide, with the consent of the pope, where and when the diaconate is to be reestablished. When submitting requests for approval by the Apostolic See the episcopal conferences need to state whether it would be a case of conferring the diaconate on: (1) suitable young men for whom the law of celibacy must remain in force, or (2) older men, including those living in the married state, or (3) candidates from both categories.¹⁷⁶ With regard to the canonical norms regulating diaconal continence in the 1917 Code, the pontiff wrote:

We want to confirm all that is said in the Code of Canon Law about the rights and duties of deacons, either those right and duties which they have in common with all clerics or those proper to themselves, except where We here state otherwise, and we decree that these rules are to apply to those who are to be permanent deacons as well.¹⁷⁷

The text seems to indicate that Paul VI intended to preserve the laws of the 1917 Code that bound major clerics to perfect continence, which would therefore also bind married permanent deacons. Nowhere did Paul VI state that a married deacon would be dispensed from the law of perfect and perpetual continence. Further, subsequent to *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, no such canonical provision had been made with regard to married deacons.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Paul VI, “*Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*,” n. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Paul VI, “*Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*,” Introduction.

With respect to the preparation of candidates of a younger age, Paul VI declared that, on the basis of Church law and with the approval of the Second Vatican Council, young men called to the diaconate would be bound by the law of celibacy.¹⁷⁸ The permanent diaconate is not to be conferred upon such men prior to the age of twenty-five, although episcopal conferences could require a higher age if they so chose.

In reference to the formation of older candidates, the pope explained that “men of more mature years” (*grandioris aetatis viri*) meant those of thirty five or over. If such candidates are married, they could not be accepted unless there was clear evidence that their wives not only consented, but also had the Christian moral character and attributes that would neither hinder their husbands’ ministry nor be out of keeping with it.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, only those married men are to be promoted to the diaconate who have been already married for a number of years, have shown themselves to be good heads of their households, and whose wives and children are leading Christian lives and enjoyed good reputations.¹⁸⁰

On the same day, Paul VI issued the apostolic constitution, *Pontificalis Romani Recognitio* in which he approved the new rite of ordination for the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate, and also determined the matter and form of these

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Paul VI, “Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem,” n. 4.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Paul VI, “Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem,” n. 11. The purpose of the wife’s consent will be discussed in Chapter 3: cf. below, 213-15.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Paul VI, “Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem,” n. 13; AAS 59: 700; see also 1 Tim 3:10-13.

ordinations.¹⁸¹ In the ritual, a few changes were made to achieve a greater simplicity and clarity in the rites. The more concise liturgical delineation of charisms particular to each order clearly showed the diaconate to be a distinct and permanent grade of the hierarchy in the Latin Church. Furthermore, to the new ritual for the ordination to the diaconate was added the candidate's commitment to celibacy, which had previously been part of the rite for ordination to the subdiaconate.

On August 15, 1972, Paul VI issued two apostolic letters, *motu proprio*: on the reformation of the minor orders (*Ministeria Quaedam*), and on the diaconate (*Ad Pascendum Populum*).¹⁸² In *Ministeria Quaedam*, the pope determined that entrance into the clerical state is to be understood as occurring at ordination to the diaconate rather than at tonsure. The abolition of the minor orders and the subdiaconate, formerly the prescribed steps to priestly ordination, serve to align the modern understanding of the unity of the major orders with the patristic notion of the threefold clerical order, which was also taught at Vatican II.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Cf. Paul VI, *Pontificalis Romani Recognitio*, in Thomas O'Brien, ed., *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 2606-12; AAS 60 (1968): 369-73.

¹⁸² Cf. Paul VI, "Ministeria Quaedam," *Origins* 13 (1972): 203, 205, 216-17; AAS 64 (1972): 529-34; "Ad Pascendum Populum," *Origins* 13 (1972): 206, 217-18; AAS 64 (1972): 534-40.

¹⁸³ For example, see Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Trall.*, 3,1: *SCh* 10,96; *LG* 28. For an explanation of the Church as an ordered community and an understanding of the ministerial priesthood within it, see Paul G. McPartlan, "Priesthood, Priestliness, and Priests," in Lawrence B. Terrien Ronald D. Witherup et al., *Ministerial Priesthood in the Third Millennium* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 61-85, at 62-66.

The second apostolic letter, *Ad Pascendum Populum*, clarified the conditions for the admission and ordination of candidates for the diaconate. One of the various norms in this letter restates the principle established in *Ministeria Quaedam* that entrance into the clerical state is to be linked with diaconate. Paul VI also clarified the responsibilities of deacons with regard to celibacy, affirming again the prohibition against marriage after diaconal ordination:

The special consecration of celibacy observed for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and its obligation for candidates to the priesthood and for unmarried candidates to the diaconate are indeed linked with the diaconate. The public commitment to holy celibacy before God and the Church is to be celebrated in a particular rite, even by religious, and it is to precede ordination to the diaconate. Celibacy taken on in this way is a diriment impediment to entering marriage. In accordance with the traditional discipline of the Church, a married deacon who has lost his wife cannot enter a new marriage (Norm VI).¹⁸⁴

In the promulgation of these documents, Paul VI restored the permanent diaconate for both celibate and married men. Since these are primarily legislative rather than teaching decrees, most of the content deals with practical aspects of the restored diaconate. No substantial development of theological understanding of diaconal continence and celibacy is promoted in them. It would have been interesting if the pope had applied the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy toward an analogous understanding of diaconal celibacy.

¹⁸⁴ Paul VI, *Ad Pascendum Populum*, norm VI.

b). *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* and Priestly Celibacy

Paul VI issued his encyclical letter, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, on June 24, 1967, one and a half years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸⁵ In it, the pontiff presented the most comprehensive papal teaching on priestly celibacy in the twentieth century, perhaps in the entire history of the Catholic Church. In his opening paragraph, Paul VI underlined celibacy as an ecclesial gift that must be cherished and protected:

Priestly celibacy has been guarded by the Church for centuries as a brilliant jewel, and retains its value undiminished even in our time when mentality and structures have undergone such profound change.¹⁸⁶

Yet, amid the modern expression of opinions there is a persistent pressure from some clergy and laity alike for the Church to reexamine this discipline on account of the difficulty or even impossibility of living it. Before beginning his teaching on priestly celibacy, the pope acknowledged that he has to address this important issue:

This state of affairs is troubling consciences, perplexing some priests and young aspirants to the priesthood; it is a cause for alarm in many of the faithful and constrains us to fulfill the promise we made to the Council Fathers. We told them that it was our intention to give new luster and strength to priestly celibacy in the world of today. Since saying this we have over a considerable period of time earnestly implored the enlightenment and assistance of the Holy Spirit and have examined before

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter on Priestly Celibacy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1967). All subsequent English translations of the encyclical are from this official English edition; hereafter cited: *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. This approved translation, however, has deficiencies, some of which I will correct by placing bracketed words into the text.

¹⁸⁶ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 1. “*Sacerdotalis caelibatus, quem Ecclesia quasi quandam nitentem suae coronae gemmam tutatur, in summa laude et aestimatione nostris etiam diebus est, cum sive hominum sensus sive corporearum rerum condiciones sunt fere penitus immutata,*” AAS 59: 657.

God opinions and petitions which have come to us from all over the world, notably from many pastors of God's Church.¹⁸⁷

His teaching, accordingly, would not be a reworking of former magisterial arguments, but an earnest attempt to present a profound understanding of celibacy for the contemporary world. Before giving his presentation, however, Paul VI listed some of the more common objections to priestly celibacy:

(1) The New Testament does not openly demand celibacy for ministers, but rather proposes it as a free act of obedience to a special vocation or to a spiritual gift (cf. Mt 19:11-12). Jesus did not make it a prerequisite in choosing the Twelve, nor did the Apostles impose it upon the leaders of the first Christian communities (cf. n. 5; 1 Tim 3:2-5, Tit 1:5-6).

(2) The Church Fathers founded their arguments for celibacy and continence on an overly pessimistic view of the human condition or on a somewhat distorted notion of the purity necessary when dealing with sacred things. In addition, the old arguments are no longer in harmony with the different social and cultural milieus in which the Church today, through her priests, is called upon to work (cf. n. 6).

¹⁸⁷ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 2. "Quapropter huius generis rerum statu, quo cum nonnullorum sacerdotum et sacerdotii candidatorum conscientia commovetur in diversumque trahitur, tum multorum fidelium animi perturbantur, Nobis veluti adigi ipsi videmur, ut, omni cunctatione discussa, quod Venerabilibus Patribus Concilii promissimus teneamus, quibus esse Nobis propositum diximus, ut in hac temporum ratione novum decus novamque firmitatem sacerdotali caelibatui adderemus. Quo interim spatio, non solum diu ferventerque Spiritum Paraclatum ad necessaria lumina atque auxilia devocavimus, sed consilia etiam flagitionesque ante Dei oculos momentis suis ponderavimus, ad Nos undique, in primis vero a multis Ecclesiae Dei Pastoribus, delata," AAS 59: 657-58. For the words of Paul VI to the Fathers of Vatican II, see *Epistula Summi Pontificis Pauli VI ad em.mum P.D. Eugenium card. Tisserant Praesidem Consilii Praesidentiae Ss. Concilii*, AS IV/I, 40; cf. above, 131-33.

- (3) It is wrong to exclude from the priesthood those who have been called to the ministry without having been called to celibacy. This is to identify wrongly the gift of the vocation to the priesthood with that of perfect continence or celibacy as a state of life for ecclesial ministers (cf. n. 7).
- (4) Celibacy aggravates the shortage of priests (cf. n. 8).
- (5) A married priesthood would remove the occasions of infidelity, waywardness, and defections of celibate priests. It would also enable priests to witness more fully to Christian living through marriage (cf. n. 9).
- (6) Celibacy is against nature, and physically and psychologically detrimental to the development of a mature and balanced human personality. Celibate priests often become hard and lack human warmth, and are bound to live a life that leads to bitterness and discouragement (cf. n. 10).
- (7) Celibates passively receive this state of life and hence they neither understand its complexities nor have the full freedom to choose it (cf. n. 11).

The pope recognized that the sum of these objections would appear to render obsolete the tradition of clerical celibacy in the Latin Church. In response, he cited the example of saints and faithful ministers of God whose lives of sacred celibacy were the greatest witness to the necessity of preserving this gift. He saw that celibate clerics could live lives of courageous self denial and spiritual joyfulness with exemplary fidelity and relative facility. In view of these positive fruits, Paul VI concluded: “We cannot withhold the expression of our admiration; the spirit of Christ is certainly breathing here”

(n. 13). The pope therefore resolved that the law of celibacy should continue to be linked to ecclesiastical ministry (cf. n. 14).

What, then, about the distinction between the call to the priesthood and the obligation to live a celibate life: should Church authority impose the law of celibacy upon those who have freely responded to the priestly charism given to them by the Holy Spirit?

Paul VI responded in these terms:

[We certainly acknowledge that] the gift of the priestly vocation dedicated to the divine worship and to the religious and pastoral service of the People of God, is undoubtedly distinct from that which leads a person to choose celibacy as a state of consecrated life. But the priestly vocation, although inspired by God, does not become definitive or operative without having been tested and accepted by those in the Church who hold power and bear responsibility for the ministry serving the ecclesial community. It is therefore the task of those who hold authority in the Church to determine in accordance with the varying conditions of time and place, who in actual practice are to be considered suitable candidates for the religious and pastoral service of the Church, and what should be required of them.¹⁸⁸

In this careful formulation the pope argued that Church authority has a divine mandate to test and accept candidates according to their suitability for Orders and that the Latin Church is justified in seeking suitable candidates only from the ranks of the celibate.

¹⁸⁸ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 15. “Concedimus sane, donum supernae invitationis ad sacerdotium, ad cultum Deo adhibendum et ad religiosa bona christiano populo ministranda spectans, a dono differre, quo quis ad caelibatum, uti vitae condicionem Deo sacratam, eligendum movetur. Attamen superna, quam diximus, ad sacerdotium invitatione nihil sane efficitur, nihil absolvitur, nisi is illam periclitatus fuerit et probaverit, penes quem ministerii populi christiani est onus et potestas. Quam ob causam in rationem ecclesiasticae auctoritatis cadit, pro locis et temporibus, decernere quibus reapse numeris et virtutibus eos ornari deceat, quibus opportune animorum et Ecclesiae sint utilitates concredendae,” *AAS* 59: 662-63.

Paul VI's purpose for this encyclical, then, was to set forth the fundamental reasons for celibacy in a manner more suited to the understanding of the contemporary person (cf. n. 16). In pursuit of this end, he stated an important point of principle:

Consideration of the "manifold suitability" (cf. *PO* 16) of celibacy for God's ministers is not something recent. Even if the explicit reasons [in favor of celibacy] have differed with different mentalities and different situations, they were always inspired by specifically Christian considerations; and from these considerations we can get an intuition of the more fundamental motives underlying them. These can be brought into greater evidence only under the influence of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ to His followers for the knowledge of things to come and to enable the People of God to increase in the understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.¹⁸⁹

A most intriguing phrase of this statement, that the reasons given in the past in favor of celibacy were "always inspired by specifically Christian considerations," implies that Paul VI also included two of the most recent arguments of his papal predecessors: ritual purity and the superiority of celibacy over marriage. It is unfortunate that the pope neither gave examples of how such pro-celibacy arguments of the past were inspired by "specifically Christian considerations," nor did he indicate what were the more fundamental motives underlying them.

Paul VI then described the nature of the ministerial priesthood, which can be understood only in the light of the newness of Jesus Christ, the eternal Priest (cf. n. 19).

¹⁸⁹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 18. "Non his tantum temporibus de *multimoda convenientia* (cf. *PO* 16) caelibatus quoad sacri ordinis ministros disquiritur; quodsi allatae causae variae fuerunt pro vario mentis habitu variisque rerum condicionibus, semper tamen innitebantur in sententiis vere christianis, quibus penitus perspectis ad rationes perveniebatur altiores. Quae causae in pleniori luce possunt collocari, ob eum rerum usum, qui a subtiliore perceptione rerum spiritualium volentibus saeculis manavit; quae fieri contingunt afflante Spiritu Sancto, quem Christus suis promisit ad intellegenda futura et ad provehendam in populo Dei cognitionem mysterii Christi atque Ecclesiae," *AAS* 59: 664.

Each priest participates in the one priesthood of Christ, to whom he looks as model and ideal. It is true that Christ brought forth a new creation through His Pascal mystery (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), thus giving a new meaning to matrimony, raising it to the dignity of a sacrament, a symbol of His own union with the Church (cf. n. 20). But Christ also introduced into time a *new* form of life that is divine and that radically transforms the human condition (cf. Gal 3:28). Celibacy manifests this new way of Christian life:

But Christ, Mediator of a more excellent Testament, has also opened a new way, in which the human creature [sic] adheres wholly and directly to the Lord, and is concerned only with Him and with His affairs; thus, he manifests in a clearer and more complete way the profoundly transforming reality of the New Testament.¹⁹⁰

As the celibacy of Christ signified his total dedication to the service of God and humanity, the freedom from the bonds of flesh and blood would perfect the dignity and mission of the sacred ministers sharing in His priesthood (cf. n. 21).

The Threefold Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

Paul VI next introduced the dimensions of priestly celibacy according to a threefold dimension, or scheme: *christological* (cf. nn. 19-25), *ecclesiological* (cf. nn. 26-32), and *eschatological* (cf. nn. 33-34). Here the pope explicitly used these three terms and joins them together as a triad.

(1) First, the *christological* dimension refers to the celibate priest in his union with the celibate Christ in his priestly life and mission. The priest's acceptance of celibacy for

¹⁹⁰ Paul VI, *Sacerdotialis Caelibatus*, n. 20. "Christus vero, *melioris Testamenti Mediator*, novum etiam iter patefecit, in quo positus homo, Deo ipsi penitus adhaerens ac de eo tantum sollicitus et de iis, quae sunt ipsius, apertius et plenius manifestat vim illam quam maxime novantem, quae propria est Novi Testamenti," AAS 59: 665.

the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12), which together with the Gospel (cf. Mk 10:29-30) and the name of Christ (cf. Mt 19:29) motivate him to accept the burdens of the apostolate, facilitates his closer participation in the life of Christ (cf. n. 22). The newness of life that Christ ushered in is shared in a very particular way by his ministers:

This, then, is the mystery of the newness of Christ, of all that He is and stands for; it is the sum of the highest ideals of the Gospel and of the kingdom; it is a particular manifestation of grace, which springs from the paschal mystery of the Savior. This is what makes the choice of celibacy desirable and worthwhile to those called by our Lord Jesus. Thus they intend not only to participate in His priestly office, but also to share with Him His very condition of living.¹⁹¹

The priest's response to the celibate life is an answer of love to the love which Christ manifested so clearly (cf. Jn 3:16; 15:13). Rightly then Vatican II considered celibacy "as a symbol of, and stimulus to, charity" (*Lumen Gentium* 42); it stimulates the priest to a charity which is open to all (cf. n. 24). Celibacy is not an end in itself, but it is a way by which the priest becomes an example of Christ's total dedication to his mission of salvation, and it thereby effects his growth in charity and sacrifice. In sum, the bond between the priesthood and celibacy is seen as "the mark of a heroic soul" (*fortissimi animi index*) and the imperative call to unique and total love for Christ and the Church (cf. n. 25).

¹⁹¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 23. "Qui igitur hoc modo a Jesu vocati sunt, ad virginitatem quasi rem optabilem digne eligendam impelluntur sive mysterio novitatis Christi; sive mysterio earum rerum omnium, quae declarant quis reapse ille sit, quodve eius sit momentum; sive summa earum rerum, quae ut perfectissimae et maxime expetendae in Evangelio et regno proponuntur; sive denique peculiari quadam gratiae significatione, a divini Redemptoris mysterio paschal manante. Quod quidem illi agunt, non solum ut in partem veniant muneris sacerdotalis, quo Christus fungitur, sed etiam ut ineant vitae genus," AAS 59: 666.

(2) Next, priestly celibacy contains an *ecclesiological* significance, which refers to the priest's ministry in the Church and for the Church. Paul VI described this dimension with imagery from the Pauline Epistles:

[“Laid hold of by Christ”] unto the complete abandonment of one's entire self to Him, the priest takes on the likeness of Christ most perfectly, even in the love with which the eternal Priest has loved the Church His Body and offered Himself entirely for her sake, in order to make her a glorious, holy and immaculate Spouse.¹⁹²

The celibate priest becomes likened to Christ, Head and Bridegroom of the Church. The priest also manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church and the spiritual fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh” (cf. n. 26; Jn 1:13).

The priest's total service of Christ and of his Mystical Body also increases his ability to pray. Free from the distractions of an earthly family, the celibate priest increases in his ability to listen to the word of God and to meditate prayerfully (cf. n. 27). Like Christ himself, the priest is wholly intent on the things of God and of the Church (cf. Lk 2:49; 1 Cor 7:32-33), living in the presence of God in order to intercede for the faithful (cf. Heb 9:24; 7:25). The Divine Office in particular is a profound means of helping the priest to join his prayer with that of the Church (cf. n. 28).

Paul VI continued his treatment of the ecclesiological significance of priestly celibacy by stating that the celibate priest acquires a greater richness of meaning and sanctifying power in his own efforts at growth in holiness through the ministry of grace

¹⁹² Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 26. “*Comprehensus a Christo ab eoque ductus, ut totum pro eo se impendat, sacerdos similior redditur Christo, illo etiam amore, quo Sacerdos aeternus Ecclesiam, Corpus suum, amavit, totus se tradens pro ea, ut eam sibi exhiberet Sponsam gloriosam, sanctam et immaculatam,*” AAS 59: 668.

and that of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, where “the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5), the priest places on the altar his entire life, “which bears the marks of the holocaust” (n. 29). Part of this sacrificial offering is the way in which the priest dies daily to himself. By giving up the legitimate love of a family of his own for the love of Christ and his kingdom, he finds a fruitful life in Christ (cf. n. 30).

Since the priest represents Christ to the community of the faithful committed to his charge, it is appropriate that he be a fitting icon of Christ. In this context Paul VI developed the notion of the priest as an image, or icon, of the celibate Christ:

[Since] in the community of the faithful committed to his charge, [the priest represents Christ]. Thus it is most fitting that in all things he should reproduce the image of Christ and follow in particular His example, both in his personal and in his apostolic life. To his children in Christ, the priest is a sign and a pledge of that sublime and new reality which is the kingdom of God, of which he is the dispenser; he possesses it on his own account and to a more perfect degree, and nourishes the faith and hope of all Christians, who because they are such, are bound to observe chastity according to their proper state of life.¹⁹³

This passage underlines clearly the *christological* dimension (“the priest represents Christ), which is also closely linked with the *ecclesiological* dimension insofar as the priest is said to acquire through celibacy the ability to become an image of Christ’s total and exclusive love for the members of the Church. Since *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 did

¹⁹³ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 31. “Cum autem sacerdos in fidelium sibi concreditorum communitate Christum repraesentet, summopere convenit, illum in omnibus rebus huius exprimere imaginem huiusque exempla singillatim imitari, sive in vita sua intima sive in vita ministerio dedita. Suis enim filiis in Christo sacerdos est veluti signum ac pignus rerum nobilium atque novarum regni Dei, quarum est dispensator quasque ipse perfectius possidet. Ad hoc sacerdos fidem et spem omnium christianorum alit, qui, uti tales, lege castitatis secundum propriam cuiusque condicionem servandae tenentur,” AAS 59: 669.

not use the notion of the celibate priest as an icon of Christ the Bridegroom, Paul VI here enriched the ecclesiological dimension by using this perspective inspired by Eph 5:25-27.

The pope also emphasized the practicality of celibacy insofar as it provides the priest with the maximum efficiency and the best disposition, mentally and emotionally, for the continuous exercise of a perfect charity. This singular availability permits him to spend himself wholly for the welfare of all, in a fuller and more concrete way (cf. n. 32). The guarantee of freedom and flexibility in the pastoral ministry allows him to give to the faithful the fullness of that which is due to them (cf. Rom 1:14).

(3) Finally, Paul VI dealt with the *eschatological* significance of priestly celibacy. The celibate priest bears a twofold prophetic witness that: (a) all earthly goods are transitory, and (b) the blessed in heaven will be taken up into the eternal marriage between Christ and his Church. Sacerdotal celibacy reflects the Kingdom of God, which is present already on earth in mystery, and which will reach its perfection only with the final coming of the Lord Jesus (cf. n. 33). The pilgrim Church constitutes the seed and beginning of this Kingdom.

The eschatological dimension is inspired by the words of the Lord Jesus that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (cf. Mt 22:30). In the world one becomes so involved with earthly concerns and the desires of the flesh that heavenly realities are often forgotten. Priestly continence acts as an antidote to this earthly attitude insofar as it reminds the faithful of the rewards of heaven and testifies to the progress of the People of God toward the final, heavenly goal of their earthly pilgrimage:

This continence, therefore, stands as a testimony to the necessary progress of the People of God toward the final goal of their earthly pilgrimage, and as a stimulus for all to raise their eyes to the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and where our life is hidden [with Christ in God until it also appears with Him in glory].¹⁹⁴

Priestly celibacy proclaims the presence on earth of the final stages of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31) and anticipates the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven.

Of the three dimensions of celibacy presented in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* by Paul VI, the eschatological is the least proportioned to the priesthood itself, i.e., its characteristics are similar to those attributed to the chastity of consecrated religious (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 12). Since Paul VI made no significant distinctions between consecrated virginity and priestly celibacy from an eschatological perspective, further theological development of the eschatological dimension of *priestly* celibacy seems called for.

The remainder of the encyclical letter deals with celibacy in the life of the Church (cf. nn. 35-49), human values (cf. nn. 50-59), priestly formation (cf. nn. 60-72), priestly life (cf. nn. 73-82), defections from the priesthood (cf. nn. 83-90), the bishop's role as father toward his priests (cf. nn. 91-95), and the role of the faithful in encouraging the priest in his celibate life (cf. nn. 96-97). Although these remaining sections are too lengthy to be analyzed in detail, three elements are of particular importance for this study. First, in his short account of the history of the development of priestly celibacy, Paul VI

¹⁹⁴ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 34. "Id [continentia] igitur muneris aperto est testimonio continuati illius laboris, quo Dei populus ad extremum usque terrestris peregrinationis limitem contendit, idemque omnibus est incitamento, ut ad caelestia studiose respiciant, *ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens*, atque etiam *vita nostra est abscondita cum Christo in Deo*, donec appareat et ipsa *cum ipso in gloria*," AAS 59: 671.

simply stated that in Christian antiquity the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers testified to the spread of the voluntary practice of celibacy by sacred ministers (cf. n. 35). He neither posited that celibacy was of apostolic origin nor suggested it to be a later development.

Second, Paul VI dealt with the sensitive issue of the discipline of the Eastern Churches (cf. nn. 38-40). Having recognized that the legislation of the Eastern Church governing married and celibate clergy was a long established tradition, the pope then made a statement that is generous in its ecumenical implications:

If the legislation of the Eastern Church is different in the matter of discipline with regard to clerical celibacy, as was finally established by the Council of Trullo held in the year 692, and which has been clearly recognized by the Second Vatican Council, this is due to the different historical background of that most noble part of the Church, a situation which the Holy Spirit has providentially and supernaturally influenced.¹⁹⁵

Paul VI here acknowledged that the Trullan legislation manifested a legitimate development of clerical life – the married priesthood – insofar as the Holy Spirit influenced the customs of the Eastern Church “providentially and supernaturally.” The pope’s statement can be reconciled with previous magisterial pronouncements, insofar as the Magisterium has recognized the legitimacy of the married priesthood (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16), which can be traced back to apostolic times. It is not clear, though, if the pope was also referring to the development of the Eastern legislation on

¹⁹⁵ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 38. “Quodsi aliae prorsus leges in orientali Ecclesia de disciplina sacri caelibatus videntur, quas tandem Trullanum Concilium anno DCXCII sanxit quasque nuper Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II publice agnovit, aliis id certe rerum locorumque adiunctis, ad electissimam hanc partem catholicae Ecclesiae pertinentibus, est tribuendum, quibus sane omnibus Sanctum Spiritum provido supernoque auxilio suo praefuisse credimus,” AAS 59: 672-73.

periodic continence for married major clerics, which was codified in canon 13 of the Council of Trullo.

Continuing his treatment, Paul VI pointed out that the Eastern Churches allow only celibate priests to be ordained bishops, and that priests themselves cannot enter into marriage after their priestly ordination. This tradition indicates that these Churches possess to a certain extent the principle of a celibate priesthood, of which the bishops possess the summit and fullness.¹⁹⁶ Paul VI then defended the legitimacy of the Western custom against those who charge that it is a corruption of an early, original norm:

And it is unthinkable that for centuries she has followed a path which, instead of favoring the spiritual richness of individual souls and of the People of God, has in some way compromised it, or that she has with arbitrary [and insolent] juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and grace.¹⁹⁷

The pope did not directly answer this objection, but considered that the legitimate tradition of the Latin Church itself provides a sufficient response. In like manner, he made no judgment of the historical origins of the Eastern customs, i.e. whether they were of apostolic origin or of a later development.

Third, Paul VI provided for the possibility of allowing in certain cases married non-Catholic ministers to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood:

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 40. “Etiam cuiusdam convenientiae cum christiano sacerdotio, cuius summum fastigium ac plenitudo penes episcopos sint,” AAS 59: 673.

¹⁹⁷ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 41. “Neque eadem putanda est, aut multa per saecula quoddam instituisse iter, quod aliquatenus uberiori sanctimoniae ac virtuti sive singulorum animorum sive Dei populi adversaretur potius quam faveret, aut per improbas insolentesque leges impeditisse, ne recondita sive naturae sive gratiae bona libero cursu florecerent,” AAS 59: 674.

[. . .] A study may be allowed of the particular circumstances of married sacred ministers of Churches or other Christian communities separated from the Catholic communion, and of the possibility of admitting to priestly functions those who desire to adhere to the fullness of this communion and to continue to exercise the sacred ministry. The circumstances must be such, however, as not to prejudice the existing discipline regarding celibacy.¹⁹⁸

The pope underlined the authority of the Church to exercise power in this matter by referring to *Lumen Gentium* 29 and the council's decision to open the possibility of ordaining married men to the diaconate. Paul VI very clearly cautioned, however, against anyone seeing his decision as signifying a relaxation of the existing law of celibacy.

6. Conclusion

One of the most significant contributions of Paul VI to the magisterial doctrine on priestly celibacy was his development of the threefold dimension in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, already present implicitly in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16. Of the three dimensions, the ecclesiological was the most developed. It is noteworthy that Paul VI used nuptial imagery to describe the celibate priest's relation to the Church. This nuptial formulation contained the first explicit use of spousal imagery by a pope, at least in the twentieth century, to defend priestly celibacy. In speaking of the celibate priest as an

¹⁹⁸ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 42. “[. . .] Illinc licere peculiare perspicere condiciones sacrorum ministrorum, qui iam matrimonio conjuncti sive in ecclesiis sive in christianis communitatibus a catholica communione adhuc distincti vivunt, si, plena huiusmodi communione frui sacroque postea ministerio fungi exoptantes, ad sacerdotalia officia vocentur; ea tamen ratione quae statutae iam disciplinae sacri caelibatus, a clero servandi, non obsit,” AAS 59: 674.

icon of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church (cf. n. 26), Paul VI went beyond the symbolism of the father of the bride in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, Paul VI advanced the teaching of his papal predecessors of the twentieth century, such as Pius XII, who justified priestly celibacy mostly on the grounds of ritual purity, the superiority of celibacy over marriage, the liberty of spirit and body for more intense prayer, and detachment from the world. Paul VI greatly amplified the magisterial teaching by drawing upon the doctrine of Vatican II, especially by using various biblical and patristic themes in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, in his formulation of the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. This theological scheme greatly enhanced the intelligibility of celibacy by systematizing the various perspectives of the priestly discipline. Both the systematization and the content of the renewed teaching of Paul VI was a great advance over the method and content of Pius XII and his predecessors.

The Second Vatican Council and Paul VI thus provided a new direction for magisterial doctrine on priestly celibacy. As will be shown later, this new teaching will bear positive fruit through the development of arguments that are proportionate to the priesthood itself rather than those that are applicable to both priests and consecrated religious. The threefold dimension will henceforth play an essential role in a renewed presentation of priestly celibacy, and will aid in retiring from magisterial teaching some arguments formerly used for defending priestly celibacy, such as ritual purity.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Paulo E. A. Ponte's helpful evaluation of the encyclical: "Celibato Sacerdotal e Lei do Celibato: Reflexões sobre os Textos do Concílio e a Encíclica 'Sacerdotalis Caelibatus'," *Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira* 27 (1967): 545-69.

CHAPTER 3
MAGISTERIAL TEACHING ON CLERICAL CELIBACY AFTER
SACERDOTALIS CAELIBATUS

Sacerdotalis Caelibatus gave the most complete magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy in the history of the Catholic Church and constituted a foundational document from which future magisterial teaching would be drawn. Paul VI drew upon the riches of the teachings of Vatican II and was able to present a clear doctrine that was positive in value, rather than merely polemical or defensive. In particular, the pope used the threefold dimension as his principal tool for presenting the various perspectives of priestly celibacy. This threefold scheme was influential on subsequent magisterial teaching and helped to establish the contours of the contemporary magisterial doctrine on priestly celibacy.

While the threefold dimension is not found *as such* in the documents of Vatican II, as was seen in Chapter 2, traces of it appeared within two documents that used the three notions without explicitly tying them together, namely in *Optatam Totius* 10 and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16.¹ While the bishops of Vatican II may not have intended to formulate a threefold scheme as such, they nonetheless, almost intuitively, grouped these three notions together. *Optatam Totius* 10, written prior to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, was significantly the first evidence of an emerging magisterial theology of priestly celibacy that is schematized, at least implicitly, according to a threefold paradigm. As was illustrated in Chapter 2, the council bishops formulated their teaching on priestly

¹ Cf. above, 141-46.

celibacy in a renewed fashion that was drawn in large measure from scriptural themes. Paul VI continued this renewal in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, and subsequent documents developed the magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy in a systematic, clear manner through ample use of the threefold dimension.

This chapter studies the teaching on priestly celibacy contained in some of the principal magisterial and liturgical documents published in the period from *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* to the end of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, namely the revised rites of ordination (1968, 1990), *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* (1970), *On the Ministerial Priesthood* (1971), *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (1974), *Inter Insigniores* (1976), select writings of John Paul II, the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* (1994), and various documents dealing with the permanent diaconate. The presence of the threefold dimension is discussed in the case of each document, and any development in the treatment of each of the three elements is noted.

1. The Revised Rites of Ordination

The ordination rites in the Latin Church were revised following the directive of the Second Vatican Council.¹ On June 18, 1967, Paul VI issued the apostolic

¹ “Both ceremonies and texts of the Ordination rites are to be revised. The addresses given by the bishop at the beginning of each ordination or consecration may be in the vernacular,” Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 76; hereafter cited: *SC*.

constitution, *Pontificalis Romani Recognitio*, in which he approved new rites for ordination to the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.²

A highlight of the new rite of ordination to the diaconate is that an unmarried candidate is now required to make a promise of celibacy. Such a promise was previously part of the old rite of ordination to the subdiaconate.³ The first edition of the revised *Roman Pontifical* (1968) instructs the ordaining bishop to speak in his homily about the purpose of clerical celibacy, and then to ask the celibate candidate – for either the transitional or the permanent diaconate – to state publically his intent to remain celibate.

In the passage below, references to the dimensions of celibacy are noted:

By your own free choice you seek to enter the order of deacons. You shall exercise this ministry in the celibate state for celibacy is both a sign and a motive of pastoral charity, and a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world. By living in this state with total dedication, moved by a sincere love for Christ the Lord, you are consecrated to him in a new and special way. By this consecration you will adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart [cf. the christological dimension]; you will be more freely at the service of God and mankind, and you will be more untrammelled in the ministry of Christian conversion and rebirth [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]. By your life and character you will give witness to your brothers and sisters in faith that God must be loved above all else, and that it is he whom you serve in others.⁴

This text is primarily drawn from the section on priestly celibacy in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, wherein the christological and ecclesiological dimensions can be discerned.

² Cf. Paul VI, “Pontificalis Romani Recognitio,” *AAS* (1968): 369-73

³ The subdiaconate was suppressed by Paul VI in *Ministeria Quaedam* (1972); cf. above, 150.

⁴ *The Roman Pontifical*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1978), 179.

It is important to note, however, that this promise deals with a *diaconal* celibacy that is to be lived by both the transitional deacon and the celibate permanent deacon.

As has been emphasized in this study, the christological dimension of celibacy signifies union with and configuration to Christ, while the ecclesiological dimension indicates a particular relationship with the Church and its ministry in the world. In the text above, the christological dimension is present in the words that indicate that celibacy unites the deacon to Christ: “by this consecration you will adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart.” Moreover, the text implies the ecclesiological dimension by indicating that celibacy can free a deacon to give himself more fully to his ministry: “you will be more untrammelled in the ministry of Christian conversion and rebirth.” Although the Church is not explicitly mentioned in this text, it can be inferred in the reference to “the ministry of Christian conversion and rebirth” insofar as conversion and rebirth gives rise to the Church.

Following this introductory statement, the ordaining bishop then questions the candidate on his willingness to embrace the celibate life:

Therefore, I ask you: In the presence of God and the Church, are you resolved, as a sign of your interior dedication to Christ [cf. the christological dimension], to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom [cf. the eschatological dimension] and in lifelong service to God and mankind [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]?

[The candidate answers:] I am.⁵

The content of the promise itself, as stated by the bishop in his question to the ordinand, reflects the christological dimension of clerical celibacy as a “sign of your dedication to

⁵ *The Roman Pontifical*, 179.

Christ” by which the deacon freely gives himself over to Christ. The eschatological dimension can be found in the biblical phrase that indicates the orientation or ultimate goal of celibacy: “to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom.” The ecclesiological dimension seems to be implied when the promise requires the candidate to remain celibate “in lifelong service to God and mankind.” Although once again the Church is not explicitly mentioned here, the text implies an ecclesiological significance insofar as the building up of the Church and the desire to bring new members into it will be the principal focus of his mission “to mankind.”

The new rite includes the candidate’s explicit promise of celibacy. This is a significant liturgical development insofar as the commitment to celibacy in the former rite, which was made at ordination to the subdiaconate, was not specifically vocalized. Rather, the candidate tacitly agreed to the obligations of celibacy that were included in the admonition of the ordaining bishop.⁶

The subsequent 1990 revised edition of the ordination rites, which includes diaconal ordination, follows the same sequencing as the 1968 edition insofar as the promise of celibacy of the unmarried diaconal candidate is spoken after the ordaining bishop’s homily. Drawn from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 and similar in content to the 1968 edition, the section on celibacy in the set homily refers to the christological and ecclesiological dimensions:

Bishop: You will exercise your ministry committed to the celibate state: know that celibacy is both a sign of pastoral charity and an inspiration to it, as well as a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world. Compelled by

⁶ Cf. Pierre de Puniet, *The Roman Pontifical: A History and Commentary*, trans. Mildred Vernon Harcourt (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1932), 152.

the sincere love of Christ the Lord and embracing this state with total dedication, you will cling to Christ more easily with an undivided heart [cf. the christological dimension]. You will free yourself more completely for the service of God and man, and minister more effectively in the work of spiritual rebirth [cf. the ecclesiological dimension].

The bishop then asks the diaconal candidate who is to embrace the celibate state:

Do you resolve to keep for ever this commitment as a sign of your dedication to Christ the Lord [cf. the christological dimension] for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven [cf. the eschatological dimension], in the service of God and man [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]?

[The candidate answers:] I do.⁷

Once again, the Church is not explicitly mentioned in this passage, but the ecclesiological dimension is implied by the words “in the service of God and man.”

The phrase in the 1968 rite describing the celibate deacon as being “more untrammelled in the ministry of Christian conversion and rebirth” was removed from the 1990 revised edition, perhaps so as to make the text less “triumphalistic” in its description of the characteristics of the celibate state. Even with the removal of this phrase from the 1990 ordination rite, some liturgists and theologians still took exception to the way in which both editions tend by implication to downgrade or even ignore the status of the married deacon. William Ditewig wrote:

The text implies that married persons are themselves incapable of clinging to Christ with an undivided heart (which all disciples are called to do), or that (in the language of the 1968 text) married persons are somehow “trammed” in the capability to serve others.⁸

⁷ *Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003), 153-54, 156.

⁸ Ditewig, *The Emerging Diaconate*, 188.

Furthermore, there is nothing in either edition that refers to the fact that many diaconal candidates are married, either in the homily of the bishop or in the ordination prayers. Ditewig further stated his objection to the text:

[The section addressed to the married elect] has been drawn completely from the original 1968 text, with absolutely no mention of the state of marriage whatsoever! Even in the “combined text” which may be used when both married and unmarried elect are present, the introductory clause says only, “Whether or not you have been called to holy celibacy.”⁹

It seems that the form of the ordination rite is governed by the transitional diaconate, and that it fails to make explicit the experience and duties of married candidates for the permanent diaconate. The tradition in the Latin Church of ordaining celibate men to the diaconate exerts its influence in the text, while the situation and responsibilities of married candidates are not specifically recognized in the rite.¹⁰ The homily in particular asks the celibate candidate to affirm his commitment to the celibate life. The married candidate is not asked, in complementary fashion, to affirm and promise his commitment to his married state, nor are his wife and family mentioned.

In the rites of both 1968 and 1990, the married candidate for the diaconate is not asked to make any promise of continence. The wife of the diaconal candidate, however, must give her consent to his ordination in the form of a letter addressed to their ordinary prior to the ceremony taking place,¹¹ although there is no magisterial document that mentions a set of tenets to which the wife must agree in giving this consent. Prior to this

⁹ Ditewig, *The Emerging Diaconate*, 188.

¹⁰ For a critique of the ritual on this matter, see Susan Wood, *Sacramental Orders*, 161.

¹¹ Cf. Paul VI, “*Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*,” n. 11.

letter at the point of ordination, the wife has to give her consent at each stage along the way: as her husband is admitted to Candidacy, and then to the ministries of Reader and Acolyte. Again, no formal statement is required that lists specific points to which she agrees, beliefs she accepts, or potential trials she understands.

While the common understanding is that the wife is consenting to bearing the burdens of being married to a deacon, the traditional meaning of this consent, as will be discussed later in this chapter, has to do with the wife's willingness to forego her conjugal rights upon the ordination of her husband to the diaconate.¹²

2. *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation*

The Congregation for Catholic Education issued *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* (1970) at the request of the 1967 Synod of Bishops.¹³ The subject matter of this synod, which was the first such general assembly following Vatican II, was divided into subcategories: dangers to the Faith, revision of Canon Law, seminaries, and mixed marriages. *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* deals primarily with practical norms for priestly formation. In the section dedicated to celibacy (cf. n. 48), the norms are prefaced by an explanation of the theological foundations for priestly celibacy:

The entire mission of the priest is dedicated to the service of the new human race, which Christ, Victor over death, raises up in the world by his

¹² Cf. below, 213-15.

¹³ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1970). "Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis," AAS 62 (1970): 321-84. An updated version of this document was released in 1985 under the same title. The latter's treatment of the theological foundations of priestly celibacy (cf. n. 48), however, remained the same as in the original 1970 version cited.

spirit; [celibacy] is a state by which priests “more easily stay close to Christ with undivided hearts, [cf. christological dimension] more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and man . . . and so are better fitted to receive their fatherhood in Christ with greater generosity. . . .” [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]. In this way, then, choosing the state of virginity for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake, (Mt 9:12) “they are made a living sign of that world to come which is present now through faith and charity,” “in which the children of the resurrection do not marry (Lk 20:35-36)” [cf. the eschatological dimension].¹⁴

This paragraph, which cites *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, describes priestly celibacy according to its threefold dimension. The three terms are not explicitly mentioned in the text but are present as an organizing principle.

Following the precedent set by *PO 16* and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* does not utilize the pre-Vatican II arguments for celibacy based on the need for the priest to maintain ritual purity or on the superiority of celibacy over marriage. With regard to the ecclesiological significance of celibacy, *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation* does not mention the celibate priest’s role as representing Christ, Head and Spouse of the Church, as did Paul VI in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. The ecclesiological dimension is limited to a practical aspect: celibacy allows priests to “to more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and man.” As a result, in addition to the liberty of body and spirit, the priest is more apt to exercise spiritual paternity with generosity.

¹⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation*, n. 48.

3. *On the Ministerial Priesthood*

The 1971 Synod of Bishops, which dealt with the themes of the ministerial priesthood and justice in the world, is best known for its debate concerning the ordination of married men to the priesthood. Many clerics and laity expected that the Synod would call for the modification of the discipline of celibacy. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops two years previously had issued a letter in support of priestly celibacy during a time of questioning of this discipline in the Latin Church.¹⁵ Despite the publicity and external pressures, the majority of synodal bishops opposed the ordination of married men, even in special cases, unless authorized by the pope.¹⁶

The synod issued a document, *On the Ministerial Priesthood* (1971), which is a synthesis of Catholic teaching on the ministerial priesthood. This document confirms the decisions of the Second Vatican Council on priestly celibacy and describes conditions that foster celibacy: growth in interior life, integral human formation, fraternal relations with priests and the bishop, and adequate education about celibacy.¹⁷ The document

¹⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Statement on Celibacy* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1969). Around this time Karl Rahner wrote *An Open Letter* as a defense of priestly celibacy. His arguments, however, were mainly based on anthropological and sociological reasons rather than theological: cf. Karl Rahner, "The Celibacy of the Secular Priest Today: An Open Letter," in *Servants of the Lord*, trans. Richard Strachen (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 149-72.

¹⁶ For an account of the discussion at the Synod on the ordination of married men, see Jean-Miguel Garrigues, "Le Synode romain sur le sacerdoce et *Le Mystère du Père*," in *Un Homme pris par le mystère de Dieu: le père Marie-Joseph Le Guillou O.P.*, ed. Christoph von Schönborn (Paris: Mame, 1992), 175-90, and Kowalski, *Married Catholic Priests*, 21-23.

¹⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishops (1971), "On the Ministerial Priesthood," *The Pope Speaks* 16 (1971): 359-76; "Ultimis Temporibus," *AAS* 63 (1971): 897-942.

dedicates a section to priestly celibacy itself, and follows the teachings of *Prebyterorum Ordinis* 16 and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* in placing celibacy in a positive light while avoiding mention of ritual purity. As with *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation*, the synodal document *On the Ministerial Priesthood* describes the theological motivations of celibacy along the lines of the threefold dimension:

Celibacy for priests is in full harmony with the vocation to the apostolic following of Christ, and also with the unconditional response of the person who is called and who undertakes pastoral service. The priest, following the Lord, more fully shows his availability through celibacy, and embarking upon the Way of the Cross with paschal joy, he ardently desires to be consumed in an offering comparable to that of the Eucharist [cf. the christological dimension].¹⁸

While the value of the sign and holiness of Christian marriage is fully recognized, celibacy for the sake of the kingdom nevertheless more clearly displays that spiritual fruitfulness or generative power of the New Law by which the apostle knows that in Christ he is the father and mother of his communities. From this special way of following Christ, the priest draws greater strength and power for the building up of the Church. . . . Through celibacy, priests can more easily serve God with an undivided heart and spend themselves for their sheep; as a result they are able more fully to promote evangelization and the Church's unity [cf. the ecclesiological dimension].¹⁹

By transcending every contingent human value, the celibate priest associates himself in a special way with Christ as the final and absolute good, and shows forth in advance the freedom of God's children [cf. the eschatological dimension].²⁰

The motivation for celibacy as expressed in *On the Ministerial Priesthood* is similar to that given in *The Basic Plan for Priestly Formation*: both texts concentrate on

¹⁸ Synod of Bishops (1971), "On the Ministerial Priesthood": n. 4a.

¹⁹ Synod of Bishops (1971), "On the Ministerial Priesthood": n. 4b.

²⁰ Synod of Bishops (1971), "On the Ministerial Priesthood": n. 4b.

the idea that a celibate priest acquires freedom from the cares of the world and family in order that he may better serve God and Church with an undivided heart. Additionally, *On the Ministerial Priesthood* breaks new ground by introducing a further biblical concept into the discussion: the celibate priest has a *maternal* relationship to the members of the Church: “In Christ he is the father and mother of his communities.” This particular expression of the ecclesiological dimension may be rooted in the Pauline image of the Apostle as *nutrix*, or nurturer, according to 1 Thess 2:7: “But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children” (cf. Gal 4:19).

4. *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*

Following the call of Paul VI in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (cf. n. 61) for guidelines on the formation of priestly candidates in celibacy, the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1974 published *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*.²¹ Among other things, this lengthy document discusses the meaning of celibacy in contemporary priestly life (cf. nn. 6-16). One important observation deals with the eschatological dimension of celibacy:

Every Christian has a duty to be united with the love of Christ and to bear witness to this love. Thus, every Christian life is permeated with an eschatological character, from martyrdom to the religious life, from the priesthood to the married state. Strictly speaking, celibacy does not, therefore, confer an eschatological character on the priesthood. The priest already has this himself, just as Christians in all other states and vocations possess it in themselves, in their own special way. But, priestly celibacy harmonizes with the eschatological aspect of the priesthood, and in certain

²¹ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, “A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy,” *Origins* 4 (1974): 65, 67-76. There exists no Latin text of this document.

ways, reinforces this aspect and enables the priest to be very fully immersed in the perfect love of the Risen Christ.²²

This perceptive comment highlights the universal nature of the eschatological dimension of the Christian life, rooted in Baptism. Each baptized faithful witnesses to the eternal love of Christ, and lives as a visible sign of the future resurrection, already present here and now. The advantage of the specifically eschatological aspect of priestly celibacy, however, is that it enhances this already existing eschatological witness and enables the priest to be fully immersed in the love of the Risen Christ.

A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy then continues to provide a brief summary of the manifold reasons for ecclesiastical celibacy, as well as mentioning some outmoded justifications:

The Church has deep reasons for demanding celibacy of her priests. They are founded on the priest's imitation of Christ, on his role as representative of Christ, head and leader of the community, on his availability for service which is indispensable for the constant building up of the Church. The Church is not prompted by reasons of "ritualistic purity" nor by the concept that only through celibacy is holiness possible.²³

The "deep reasons" for the law of celibacy cited above include two that relate to the christological and ecclesiological dimensions of celibacy: the priest's imitation of Christ and his role as representative of Christ, "head and leader of the community."

The last sentence in this text clearly states that two arguments formerly used by the Magisterium in its defense of priestly celibacy are no longer valid: (1) ritual purity,

²² Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy": n. 11.

²³ Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy": n. 13.

and (2) the necessity for celibacy to attain authentic holiness. Aware that former magisterial documents have used those arguments, the text anticipates objections by providing some measure of an explanation:

Among the historical reasons adduced to justify a priest's celibacy there may be some which are *no longer valid* with the passing of time, but this should not cause the rejection of the connection between celibacy and the priesthood. This connection is a living reality in the Church. It is an experience that is linked not so much to this or that argument as to the fundamental fact and reality of Christianity itself, which is the person of Jesus Christ, at the same time virgin and priest.²⁴

The passing over of arguments formerly used by the Magisterium in defense of priestly celibacy is significant. It signals a shift from theological arguments based on ritual purity and celibacy as a necessary condition for holiness, to arguments of a relational or qualitative nature, namely, those referring to the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* does not claim that the outmoded arguments were and continue to be erroneous *in se*, but that they are “no longer valid with the passing of time.” The document unfortunately does not specify what conditions have contributed to the invalidity of these arguments, e.g. because of developments in theological anthropology and sacramental theology.

In the section, “Relationship between Celibacy and the Priesthood,” *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* explicitly refers to the threefold dimension:

The relationship between celibacy and the priesthood appears all the more clear as one considers the christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological aspects of celibacy. This is why the Second Vatican Council speaks of a manifold fitness (*multimodam convenientiam*) when

²⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, “A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy”: n. 13; emphasis added.

referring to the consecration and mission of the priest within the framework of the mystery of Christ and the Church.²⁵

A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy, however, does not go into much detail on the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. Instead it offers a brief synthesis on the celibate priesthood seen in the light of the three dimensions:

A priest is a representative of the person of Christ [cf. the christological dimension]. By his ordination he is deputed to build up the People of God through his ministry of Word and Eucharist and to show forth brotherly love in a unique and sacramental manner [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]. Equally in both these ways he contributes to the cause of the building of the kingdom [cf. the eschatological dimension].²⁶

A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy also refers to the threefold dimension under the aspect of the celibate priest's communion with Christ:

Priestly celibacy is a communion in the celibacy of Christ. The newness of the Catholic priesthood is an intimate sharing in the very newness of Christ. It is a vision of faith that has consequently governed the development of arguments in favor of sacred celibacy in its christological, ecclesiological and eschatological meaning.²⁷

The three elements of the scheme are not separable in reality, though they may logically be considered apart. Together they provide a useful means for illuminating the reality of priestly celibacy. On the other hand, they should not be used so rigidly that all other theological visions of priestly celibacy are forced to fit into this paradigm.

²⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy": n. 14.

²⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy": n. 14.

²⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, "A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy": n. 14.

5. *Inter Insigniores*

Almost ten years after *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a document on the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, *Inter Insigniores* (1976). Within it are discussed the reasons why the Catholic Church does not admit women to the ministerial priesthood.²⁸ This document contains sections relevant for priestly celibacy in an ecclesiological perspective.

In section 5, entitled “The Ministerial Priesthood in the Light of the Mystery of Christ,” *Inter Insigniores* explores the nature of the ministerial priesthood and provides theological justification for allowing only men to receive priestly ordination. The argument refers to the sacramental-representative role of the priest or bishop:

The Church’s constant teaching, which she has declared anew and more profusely is . . . that the bishop or the priest in the exercise of his ministry, does not act in his own name, *in persona propria*: he represents Christ, who acts through him: “the priest truly acts in the place of Christ,” as St. Cyprian already wrote in the third century. It is this ability to represent Christ that St. Paul considered as characteristic of his apostolic function (2 Cor 5:20; Gal 4:14).²⁹

The supreme expression of this representation occurs in the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal in which the people of God are associated in the sacrifice of Christ. The priest acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but “*in*

²⁸ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, in *From “Inter Insigniores” to “Ordinatio Sacerdotalis”* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 20-52; AAS 69 (1977): 98-116. This edition contains the English and the Latin texts on facing pages.

²⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5; original emphasis.

persona Christi, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration.”³⁰

Inter Insigniores then moves to a discussion of the visible, sacramental nature of the ministerial priesthood, i.e., the priest is a perceptible sign that the faithful recognize with ease. The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things:

When Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this “natural resemblance” which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.³¹

The priest is thus not only an *instrument* of Christ but he is also a *sign* of Christ. The declaration argues that the priest himself functions as a sign, and that gender has a role in this signification. The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things. Thus the visible sign that represents Christ is the ordained male.³²

³⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n.5; emphasis only in the translation and not in the Latin text. According to Samuel Aquila, the notion of the priest acting *in persona Christi* is based on 2 Cor 2:10 (εν προσώπω Χριστου), which actually means “in the presence of Christ.” The Church Fathers started with the idea of the priest acting in the presence of Christ – speaking and acting in his place – and gradually they developed the notion of acting “in the person of Christ.” The Scholastics then applied the phrase to the sacramental action of the priest. See the unpublished thesis of Samuel Aquila, “The Teaching of Vatican II on ‘In Persona Christi’ and ‘In Nomine Ecclesiae’ in Relation to the Ministerial Priesthood in Light of the Historical Development of the Formulae” (S.T.L. thesis, Pontificium Athenaeum Anselmianum, Rome), 1990; hereafter cited: “The Teaching of Vatican II on ‘In Persona Christi.’” In the texts of Vatican II, only *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2 contains the fuller formula *in persona Christi capitis*.

³¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5.

³² Cf. Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women* (Chicago/Mundelein: Hillenbrand, 2006), 81.

The text then focuses on the nuptial-ecclesiological aspect of the priesthood by summarizing the nuptial covenant established by the Lord God with the Chosen People, his Spouse, and by describing the manner in which the Son of God became the Bridegroom of the Church by means of the Incarnation. According to *Inter Insigniores*, scriptural language reveals to the believer the mystery of God and Christ through symbols, which affect man and woman in their intimate identity. It must be a man therefore who performs those sacramental actions in which Christ himself is represented as Bridegroom and Head of the Church (cf. n. 5).

At this point *Inter Insigniores* echoes a common objection: since the priest also represents the Church at liturgical functions because he acts in her name (*in persona ecclesiae*), could this representation not possibly also be carried out by a woman, who is a more apt symbol of the Church?³³ *Inter Insigniores* responds:

It is true that the priest represents the Church, which is the Body of Christ. But if he does so, it is precisely because he first represents Christ himself, who is the Head and the Shepherd of the Church. The Second Vatican Council used this phrase to make more precise and complete the expression “in persona Christi.”³⁴ It is in this quality that the priest

³³ For an interesting exchange on ways of understanding the formula *in persona Christi* vis-à-vis the sacramental ministry of ordained priests, see Dennis Michael Ferrara, “Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom *In Persona Christi* in St. Thomas and the Magisterium,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 195-224, and Sara Butler, “Quaestio Disputata: ‘In Persona Christi’.” A Response to Dennis M. Ferrara,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 61-80. Ferrara’s response to Butler immediately follows her article (cf. 81-91).

³⁴ The footnote attached to this sentence gives references to the notion of *in persona Christi*: “The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* 28: ‘Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head’; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2: ‘that they can act in the person of Christ the Head’; 6: ‘the office of Christ the Head and the Shepherd.’ Cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: ‘the minister of the altar represents the person of Christ as the Head, offering in the name of all his members’: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39 (1947), p. 556; 1971

presides over the Christian assembly and celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice “in which the whole Church offers and is herself wholly offered.”³⁵

Inter Insigniores insists that the priest first acts *in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae*, and only thereby *in personae ecclesiae*. The priest’s sacramental relationship with Christ is prior to his relationship with the Church. As a member of the baptized faithful, a priest is part of the Body of Christ; as a member of the ministerial priesthood, the priest is configured through the priestly sacramental character to the person of Christ the Head of the Church. The key term is *capitis*, which specifies the manner in which the priest acts *in persona Christi*. This teaching comes from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2, which states that the priest both acts *in persona Christi capitis* and offers the Eucharist *in nomine totius ecclesiae*:

Through that sacrament [Holy Orders] priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head (*in persona Christi capitis*).³⁶

Through the ministry of priests the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is completed in union with the sacrifice of Christ the only mediator, which in the Eucharist is offered through the priests’ hands in the name of the whole Church (*in nomine totius ecclesiae*) in an unbloody sacramental manner until the Lord himself come.³⁷

Synod of Bishops, *De Sacerdotio Ministeriali*, I, 4: “[The priestly ministry] . . . makes Christ, the Head of the community, present. . . .”

³⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5. A footnote to this passage cites Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, AAS 57 (1965): 761.

³⁶ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 2.

³⁷ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 2. For a history of the development of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2, see Aquila, “The Teaching of Vatican II on ‘In Persona Christi,’” 99-115, and Sara Butler, “Priestly Identity: ‘Sacrament of Christ the Head,’”

A study of the development of this teaching in the *Acta Synodalia* shows that the bishops at Vatican II intended to teach that the essential difference of the ministerial priesthood is rooted in a new configuration to Christ in his capacity as head of his Body. From this new ministerial-sacramental capacity the priest then can act in the name of the Church. On the other hand, if the priest would act first *in persona ecclesiae*, and because of this on behalf of the Christ the Head, then the Church's role would not be differentiated from Christ's; the one would be collapsed into the other and there would be no symbolic differentiation.³⁸

Inter Insigniores concludes by underlining the nature of the real equality of the baptized, which is "one of the great affirmations of Christianity." Equality is not identity, for the Church is a differentiated body in which each individual has a distinct role which itself is oriented to the better gift: love (cf. 1 Cor 12-13). Indeed, "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are not the ministers but the saints."³⁹

How, then, does the content of *Inter Insigniores* relate to priestly celibacy? Although priestly celibacy is not treated explicitly in *Inter Insigniores*, certain principles contained in the document have played a significant role in the subsequent development of the magisterial theology of priestly celibacy. Among these are the fuller development of the notion of the priest acting *in persona Christi*, especially as Bridegroom and Head

Worship 70 (1996): 290-306, at 300-04. Susan Wood offers an argument for the priority of the priest acting *in persona ecclesiae* in "Priestly Identity: Sacrament of the Ecclesial Community," *Worship* 69 (1995): 109-27.

³⁸ Cf. Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 99.

³⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n. 6.

of the Church, as well as the necessity of the “natural resemblance” that must exist between Christ and the male minister. These two principles in particular will be employed by John Paul II in his development of the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of the celibate priesthood.

6. John Paul II

John Paul II has left to the Catholic Church a massive body of pontifical teaching, much of which has yet to be studied in depth. One area of his teaching that has failed to garner much attention is his teaching on the ministerial priesthood, which the pope presented through several channels, such as in his weekly catechesis at the Wednesday audiences and his annual Holy Thursday letter to priests.⁴⁰ John Paul II’s most significant teaching on the priesthood, however, is found in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, his 1992 post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the formation of priests. In addition to this work, John Paul II contributed two other notable works with relevance for priestly celibacy: a series of weekly audiences entitled *Theology of the Body* and the encyclical letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

Before examining these three works, however, it would be worthwhile to review briefly a significant adaptation in the discipline of priestly celibacy during the pontificate of John Paul II that echoed a similar change in 1951 initiated by Pius XII. In 1980, John Paul II approved the *Pastoral Provision*, which allows convert Episcopalian ministers to

⁴⁰ The twenty one Wednesday audiences on the priesthood, which John Paul II gave in 1993, are available in *Priesthood in the Third Millennium* (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1994). His Holy Thursday letters to priests are found at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/index.htm, 1979-2005.

be ordained as Catholic priests without having to separate from their wives.⁴¹ The process for their acceptance began in 1977 when a small group of former Episcopalian clergy in the United States applied to the Holy See for admission to the Catholic priesthood. These converts requested to exercise their priestly ministry in the Catholic Church. Their petition was submitted to Rome by the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops and was granted in June 1980, by Cardinal Franjo Seper, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The decree, which was addressed to Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, contains the following disciplinary section:

Discipline: (a) To married Episcopalian priests who may be ordained Catholic priests, the following stipulations will apply: they may not become bishops; and they may not remarry in case of widowhood. (b) Future candidates for the priesthood must follow the discipline of celibacy. (c) Special care must be taken on the pastoral level to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the Church's discipline of celibacy.⁴²

In granting this indult John Paul II wanted to make a pastoral adaptation for converts who had exercised a ministry as Episcopalian priests prior to their entrance into the Catholic Church. The decree was written to safeguard the universal law of mandatory celibacy for priests of the Latin Church while at the same time making exception for the married converts who sought priestly ordination in the Catholic Church. As is evident from the disciplinary section in the indult, there is no stated requirement for the married priest to practice either temporary or perpetual continence.

⁴¹ Cf. Fichter, *Wives of Convert Priests*, 99-100. While the indult of Pius XII was directed to Anglican and Lutheran converts, the *Pastoral Provision* deals with converts from the Episcopal Church. Currently it is being implemented only in the United States.

⁴² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Document Outlining the Pastoral Provision Issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on July 22, 1980* (Prot. N. 66/77), n. II.3.

The first married priest ordained according to the terms of the *Pastoral Provision* was Luther Parker in 1982 for the Diocese of Charleston. As of September 2007, there had been eighty-seven married priests ordained to the Catholic priesthood under the terms of the Pastoral Provision, twelve of whom had since died.⁴³

John Paul II, however, also dealt with certain cases of the ordination of married Catholic men who had not been either converts or ministers. The pope approved the ordination of two married Brazilians as long as they gave up sexual relations with their wives. There were three conditions for such ordinations: (1) separation from the wife in the matter of cohabitation, (2) a free and conscientious acceptance by the ordinand of the continent way of life, and (3) the explicit and written consent of the wife and children, if any, to the ordination. Such permission is normally given to married couples of advanced age; the marriage bond is not regarded as broken, but suspended.⁴⁴ In this particular case in Brazil, John Paul II was dealing with lifelong Catholic men, rather than Episcopalian converts who desired to continue their ministry in the Catholic Church. Hence the pope judged that no *pastoral provision* should be made in order to grant these men an exception to the long standing tradition of perfect and perpetual continence for married clerics in the Latin Church.

⁴³ Cf. Eric Wells, "The Pastoral Provision of 1980: Results and Challenges in the United States" (Master's thesis, St. Paul University, Ottawa, 2009), 18. Wells points out that no priests ordained under the Provision are members of Eastern Churches, as the Provision was intended for the Latin Church.

⁴⁴ These details of the conditions for the ordination of the Brazilian men are contained in a Vatican statement of October 18, 1990: cf. *Origins* 20 (1990): 334, for a news report of the statement.

a). *Theology of the Body*

John Paul II first systematically treated celibacy in his Wednesday audiences on the subject known as the *Theology of the Body* (1979-1984).⁴⁵ In his discourses, the pope developed a theology of the human body that breaks new ground in Catholic tradition by placing *nuptiality* at the center of Christian anthropology.⁴⁶ He emphasized that the truth of the human person is expressed through the body, which itself reveals the human person and is essentially ordered to a nuptial relationship. Along these lines, John Paul II wrote with regard to matrimony:

As ministers of a sacrament that is constituted through consent and perfected by conjugal union, man and woman are called *to express* the mysterious “*language*” of their bodies in all the truth that properly belongs to it. Through gestures and reactions, through the whole reciprocally conditioned dynamism of tension and enjoyment – whose direct source is the body in its masculinity and femininity, the body in its action and interaction – through all this *man*, the person, “speaks.”⁴⁷

At the core of his understanding of nuptiality stands the notion of the human body as gift.

In order to establish the notion of the “language of the body,” John Paul II gave a reflective commentary on Genesis 2-4, to which he dedicated his first twenty-three catecheses. The pope taught that Adam and Eve were aware, through their consciousness,

⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Michael Waldstein, trans. (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 412-57; hereafter cited: *Man and Woman He Created Them*. This volume presents in sequence all of the particular Wednesday audiences on this topic.

⁴⁶ Cf. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 175; hereafter cited: *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 123:4, original emphasis. Cf. Michael Waldstein, *Introduction*, in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 1-128, at 124.

of the “nuptial meaning” of the human body, i.e. the body is intrinsically ordained toward marital union and is a sign of the gift of the man as person to the woman as person, and *vice versa*. The nuptial meaning of the body showed them that the fulfillment of a person occurs only in the mutual self-giving of the act of love.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the nakedness of the human body expressed its full meaning as a gift ordered to the communion of persons:

[. . .] The human body was from the beginning a faithful witness and a perceptible verification of man’s original “solitude” in the world, while becoming at the same time, through masculinity and femininity, a transparent component of reciprocal giving in the communion of persons.⁴⁹

Original sin, however, broke the nuptial unity that united Adam and Eve in the state of innocence. Concupiscence darkened the nuptial meaning of the human body and “original nakedness” was replaced by shame regarding the body after the Fall. Jesus Christ, however, restored this nuptial unity through his sacrifice on the Cross, which created a bond between himself, the New Adam, and his Church, the New Eve. Using Eph 5:21-33 as a primary text, the pope underlines the beauty of spousal love in marriage, with a creative emphasis on the physical and psychological dimensions of marital love.⁵⁰

Since the subject of marriage was the primary focus of the Wednesday audiences, John Paul II devoted most of his talks to the nature of the sacrament of Matrimony. The

⁴⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 15:1. See also Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 178.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 27:3.

⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, nn. 87-102.

pope, however, did give thirteen catecheses on celibacy in general as it applies to men and women (cf. nn. 73-85). Although he did not deal specifically with priestly celibacy, the pope provided principles that are applicable to the celibate priesthood, as will be seen from his subsequent argumentation in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

John Paul II invoked the threefold dimension of celibacy and first focused on the eschatological: the celibate male and female foreshadow the afterlife. Celibacy “for the kingdom of heaven” is the prism through which Christians understand the primary meaning and purpose of the celibate vocation:

This way of existing as a human being (male and female) points out the eschatological “virginity” of the risen man, in which, I would say, the absolute and eternal spousal meaning of the glorified body will be revealed in union with God himself, by seeing him “face to face,” glorified moreover through the union of a perfect intersubjectivity that will unite all the “sharers in the other world,” men and women, in the mystery of the communion of saints. Earthly continence “for the kingdom of God” is without doubt a sign that *indicates* this truth and this reality. It is a sign that the body, whose end is not death, tends toward glorification; already by this very fact it is, I would say, a testimony among men that anticipates the future resurrection.⁵¹

Celibacy “for the kingdom of heaven” bears above all the characteristic of likeness to Christ, who himself made this choice for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.⁵²

It is in this context that John Paul II briefly touched upon the christological dimension of celibacy. When Christ spoke of those who “made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12), his disciples would have understood this only on the basis of his own personal example. Such continence must have impressed itself on their

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 75:1; original emphasis. In these discourses, the pope often used “continence” as a synonym for “celibacy.”

⁵² Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 75:1.

consciousness as a specific trait of likeness to Christ, who had himself remained celibate “for the kingdom of heaven.”⁵³

In his exegesis of Eph 5:21-33, John Paul II suggested a nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of celibacy that draws from the Pauline nuptial imagery:

The Pauline image of the “great mystery” of Christ and the Church indirectly speaks also about “continence for the kingdom of heaven,” in which both dimensions of love, the spousal and the redemptive, are united with each other in a way that differs from that of marriage, in accord with different proportions. *Is not the spousal love with which Christ “loved the Church,” his Bride, “and gave himself for her” equally the fullest incarnation of the ideal of “continence for the kingdom of God” (see Mt 19:12)?*⁵⁴

John Paul II here gave a unique interpretation of Eph 5:21-33 insofar as he used this text, which was traditionally used in the Catholic theological tradition to illumine Christian matrimony in light of the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church, to show how it also can illustrate the nuptial quality of continence for the kingdom of heaven. The pope, however, admitted that Ephesians 5 does not speak about continence for the kingdom of heaven explicitly. On the other hand, this continence can be inferred from Eph 5:21-33 insofar as the redemptive-spousal love of Christ embraces every human being. Christian men and women who live this eschatological dimension of celibacy are able to link the spousal dimension of love with the redemptive dimension according to the model of Christ himself. John Paul II explained more fully:

[Celibate men and women] desire to confirm with their lives that the spousal meaning of the body – of its masculinity and femininity – a meaning deeply inscribed in the essential structure of the human person

⁵³ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 75:4.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 102:6; original emphasis.

has been opened in a new way by Christ and with the example of his life to the hope united with the redemption of the body.⁵⁵

The grace of the mystery of redemption bears fruit in a particular way, according to the pope, with the vocation to continence “for the kingdom of heaven.”

In his *Theology of the Body* John Paul treated celibacy in a broad manner that is applicable to all Christians, celibate and married. Consequently, the pope did not develop at any length the threefold dimension of *priestly* celibacy, but rather he concentrated on “continence for the kingdom of heaven” and on divine love as its motivating factor:

[Continence “for the kingdom of heaven”] has become in the experience of the disciples and followers of Christ the act of *a particular response to the love* of the Divine Bridegroom, and therefore *acquired the meaning of an act of spousal love*, that is, of a spousal gift of self with the need of answering in a particular way the Redeemer’s spousal love; a gift of self understood as a *renunciation*, but realized above all *out of love*.⁵⁶

b). *Mulieris Dignitatem*

In his encyclical letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), which deals with the dignity and vocation of women, John Paul II briefly considered consecrated virginity.⁵⁷ The pope emphasized the spousal quality of consecrated virginity, placing it within the

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 102:6.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, n. 79:9; original emphasis.

⁵⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), nn. 20-22, in John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline, 1997), 443-92; hereafter cited: *Mulieris Dignitatem*, AAS 80 (1988): 1653-1729. For a pithy summary of the teaching of John Paul II on priestly celibacy in the *Theology of the Body* audiences and *Mulieris Dignitatem*, see Thomas J. McGovern, “The Spousal Dimension of the Priesthood,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Spring 2003): 95-110.

context of Eph 5:21-32. This Pauline passage illustrates the relationship between Christ and the Church according to a marital bond:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives out to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-32).

By means of the head/body image and the citation of Gen 2:24 (“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother”), this text in Ephesians shows how the close union of man and wife in human marriage is a great *mystery* (μυστήριον) that points to the nuptial relationship of Christ and his Bride.

John Paul II presented a meditation on this passage, focusing on the theology of spousal love, human and divine. The divine spousal love describes here is poured forth from Christ to his Church. Christ desires to lay down his life for his Bride, the Church, who is nourished, protected, and beautified by her Bridegroom. The members of his Body, for their part, are called to reciprocate this spousal love, whether through sacramental marriage, consecrated virginity, or the single life. Commenting on this passage in Ephesians, the pope wrote about all members within the Church:

Christ has entered this history [of humanity and of the world] and remains in it as the Bridegroom who “has given himself.” “To give” means “to

become a sincere gift” in the most complete and radical way: “Greater love has no man than this” (Jn 15:13). According to this conception, *all human beings – both women and men – are called through the Church to be the “Bride” of Christ, the Redeemer of the world.* In this way “being the Bride,” and thus the “feminine” element, becomes a symbol of all that is “human,” according to the words of Paul: “There is neither male nor female; for you are all *one* in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).⁵⁸

The Ephesians text, according to the interpretation of John Paul II, indicates that all human beings are called to be the Bride of Christ, and this is particularly lived in a state of *consecrated* virginity.

In an earlier section on “virginity for the sake of the kingdom” (cf. n. 20), the pope taught that the bridal notion as such, seen under its feminine or receptive mode, is proper to the woman because of the “naturally spousal predisposition of the feminine personality.” Thus the female virgin, seen in her physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions, better signifies the gift of self to the male Christ under the spousal imagery, since the love of Christ is symbolized as masculine in relation to the traditional symbolism of the Church as feminine:

At the same time they [women] realize the personal value of their own femininity by becoming “a sincere gift” for God who has revealed himself in Christ, a gift for Christ, the Redeemer of humanity and the spouse of souls: a “spousal” gift. *One cannot correctly understand virginity – a woman’s consecration in virginity – without referring to spousal love.* It is through this kind of love that a person becomes a gift for the other. Moreover, a man’s consecration in priestly celibacy or in the religious state is to be understood analogously.⁵⁹

Thus, although the woman is a more fitting symbol of this receptive love of the Bride and can be consecrated in a special way as virgin to express it, men also share in this

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 25.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 20.

receptivity and can be consecrated in celibacy or religious vows to express it. Therefore the Church's bridal quality affects all of its members, both male and female:

In the Church every human being – male and female – is the “Bride,” in that he or she accepts the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person.⁶⁰

Through the sacrament of Baptism the lay faithful participate in the common priesthood, which serves as the foundation of the Church of Christ. From the common priesthood men are called to serve in the ministerial priesthood.

The male gender plays a significant factor in the sacramental life of the Church through the ministerial priesthood. The Bridegroom, the Son consubstantial with the Father, became the son of Mary; he became the “Son of Man,” a male. The symbol of the Bridegroom is masculine, which represents the human aspect of the divine love that God has for the Church (cf. n. 25). It is fitting, and even necessary, therefore, that the ministerial priest be a man, so that he can image Christ the Head and Bridegroom in the Church, and particularly when he celebrates the Eucharist:

Since Christ, in instituting the Eucharist, linked it in such an explicit way to the priestly service of the Apostles, it is legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is “feminine” and what is “masculine.” It is a relationship willed by God both in the mystery of creation and in the mystery of Redemption. It is *the Eucharist* above all that expresses *the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards the Church the Bride*. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts “in *persona Christi*,” is performed by a man.⁶¹

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 25.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26.

What is significant in this passage is the manner in which John Paul II linked the male priest with the celebration of the Eucharist, wherein the priest acts in the person of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. Through this nuptial-eucharistic theology, the pope advanced a particular understanding of the priest's role in the eucharistic celebration wherein the liturgical ministry, rooted in sacramental ordination, is essentially tied to a marital covenant as expressed in Eph 5:21-32.

However, the ordained priest's role within the Mass, as well as his other priestly ministries, do not demean the vocation of the members of the common priesthood, but are rather at the service of the latter:

Although the Church possesses a "hierarchical" structure, nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the "great mystery" in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom.⁶²

In sum, even though John Paul II did not explicitly treat priestly celibacy in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, he did lay a theological framework for a further development of specifically *priestly* celibacy, particularly with regard to its *ecclesiological* dimension. That is, the priest, who in virtue of his ordination is able to act in the person of Christ, the Head and Bridegroom of Church, becomes an icon of Christ's divine and exclusive love. In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II will argue that priestly celibacy most fittingly allows this iconic expression of Christ's love to shine in and through the priest.

⁶² John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 27.

c). *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

The 1992 post-synodal apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, addressed the formation of seminarians and the ongoing formation of priests.⁶³ In the exhortation, John Paul II cited select propositions from the final report of the 1990 Eighth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and incorporated them into his presentation. The subject matter for this synod was the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day.

Two preparatory documents were issued prior to the synod: the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum Laboris*. *Lineamenta* (1990), which was sent to episcopal conferences prior to the synod in order to foster discussion on the theme of the synod, contains only one paragraph on celibacy.⁶⁴ The most significant sentence of this paragraph promotes a sound teaching for seminarians on celibacy:

It is important to establish some firm convictions in the faith and to teach a total purity of heart and a life in priestly celibacy which is rooted in deep communion with Jesus Christ; to be cultivated at the same time is a true understanding of the realities of the world, which are not denied by the one who chooses this life of priestly service, but instead are seen in their true value in light of mission.⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: I Will Give You Shepherds, Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Boston: Pauline, 1992); AAS 84: 657-804.

⁶⁴ Cf. n. 12 in Vatican Synod Secretariat, "Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day" (*Lineamenta*), *Origins* 19, n. 3 (1990): 33, 35-46.

⁶⁵ Vatican Synod Secretariat, "Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day" (*Lineamenta*), n. 12.

This passage does not make use of the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy, although its mention that the total purity of heart and life in priestly celibacy should be “rooted in deep communion with Jesus Christ” hints at the christological dimension.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (1990) is a summary of the written responses to the *Lineamenta* sent in from the clergy, religious and laity.⁶⁶ The section on priestly celibacy, entitled “Chastity” (cf. n. 35), consists of three short paragraphs in which the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy is briefly indicated. In this section, the *Instrumentum Laboris* mentions the importance of formation “in a chaste and selfless love of persons,” and that priestly formation leads the seminarian to experience and manifest “toward one and all, a love which is sincere, human, fraternal, personal and capable of sacrifice, after the example of Christ” (the christological dimension). Further, the formation “to chastity in celibacy on behalf of the kingdom” (the eschatological dimension) presents some specific demands:

It calls for a proper presentation of the meaning of priestly celibacy not simply as a juridical norm or as a totally external condition for being admitted to ordination, but as a love for Christ and his church, a love which knows of no rivals, and a joyous and complete disposition of heart for pastoral service.⁶⁷

The ecclesiological dimension is implicit in the reference to the meaning of priestly celibacy as “a love for Christ and his church.” Other than these three allusions, the *Instrumentum Laboris* contains no express treatment of priestly celibacy according to the

⁶⁶ Cf. Vatican Synod Secretariat, “Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day” (*Instrumentum Laboris*), *Origins* 20, n. 10 (1990): 149, 151-68.

⁶⁷ Vatican Synod Secretariat, “Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day” (*Instrumentum Laboris*), n. 35.

threefold dimension. The *Instrumentum Laboris* concludes with a statement about the clergy of the Eastern churches, which include both celibate and married priests as well as celibate bishops. The bishops of these churches are the primary ones who witness to the tradition of priestly celibacy.⁶⁸

In regard to *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II stated that the document was inspired by the bishops at the Synod:

The concern of the 1990 Synod of Bishops and its discussion focused on the increase of vocations to the priesthood and the formation of candidates in an attempt to help them to know and follow Jesus – as they prepare to be ordained and to live the sacrament of holy orders, which configures them to Christ the Head and Shepherd, the Servant and Spouse of the Church.⁶⁹

The christological dimension of priestly ministry is the foundational element in seminary formation since it is the primary point of reference for priestly identity. Seminarians are to be motivated and formed so that they desire to understand and imitate Christ himself. Through sacerdotal ordination these future priests will be configured to Christ in his relationship to his Body, the Church, and thus will participate in the ecclesiological perspective of priestly ministry. John Paul II employed four biblical images to convey the ecclesiological notion:

- (1) Jesus Christ is *Head* of the Church: “Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and is himself its Savior” (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 21; Eph 5:23).

⁶⁸ Cf. Vatican Synod Secretariat, “Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day” (*Instrumentum Laboris*), n. 35.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n.3. The pope explains *head*, *shepherd*, *servant*, and *spouse* at length in nn. 21-22.

- (2) Jesus Christ is *Servant*: “The authority of Jesus Christ as Head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church. All this he did in perfect obedience to the Father; he is the one true Suffering Servant of God, both priest and victim” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 21; cf. Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-20).
- (3) Jesus Christ as *Shepherd* represents the same content as that of Jesus Christ as Head and Servant. “By virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the good Shepherd and are called to imitate and to live out his own *pastoral charity*” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 22; emphasis added; cf. Jn 10:11, 14).
- (4) Jesus Christ is the true *Bridegroom*, or *Spouse*: “Inasmuch as he represents Christ, the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 22; cf. Eph 5:23-29).

As is indicated (3), the ministerial priest imitates and participates in Christ’s own pastoral charity, which is the internal principle that animates and guides the priest in his ministry inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the Head, Servant, Shepherd, and Spouse. The essence of pastoral charity is a gift of self to the Church after the example of Christ himself. Insofar as pastoral charity is directed toward the Church, it has an intrinsic ecclesiological dynamism. Moreover, it is rooted in and supremely expressed through the Eucharist:

Indeed, the Eucharist represents, makes once again present, the sacrifice of the cross, the full gift of Christ to the Church, the gift of his body given and his blood shed, as the supreme witness of the fact that he is Head and Shepherd, Servant and Spouse of the Church. Precisely because of this,

the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realization – just as it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a “sacrificial” dimension.⁷⁰

Underlying this pastoral charity is the mystery of trinitarian communion, which is the font of this charity and the root of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and hence between the priest and the Church:

Consequently, the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships which arise from the Blessed Trinity and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as a sign and instrument in Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity (cf. *LG* 1).⁷¹

The priest discovers the truth of his identity in his participation in the priesthood of Christ, to whom the priest is primarily referred. Through Holy Orders the priest becomes a living image of Christ the Priest; from his union with Christ, the priest is related to the Church. At the heart of the priest's relationship to Christ and the Church is the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.

Continuing this theme of participation in the priesthood of Christ, John Paul II listed two primary images of the priest's relationship, in Christ, to the Church:

The priest's fundamental relationship is to Jesus Christ, *Head* and *Shepherd*. Indeed, the priest participates in a specific and authoritative way in the “consecration/anointing” and in the “mission” of Christ (cf. Lk 4:18-19). But intimately linked to this relationship is the priest's

⁷⁰ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23. This passage is preceded by a citation from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 14, which states: “Now this pastoral charity is derived chiefly from the eucharistic sacrifice which is the center and source of the entire life of the priest, so that the priestly soul strives to make its own what is enacted on the altar of sacrifice.”

⁷¹ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 12. Cf. Richard Malone, “On John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis*,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 569-71.

relationship with the Church. It is not a question of “relations” which are merely juxtaposed, but rather of ones which are interiorly united in a kind of mutual immanence. The priest’s relation to the Church is inscribed in the very relation which the priest has to Christ, such that the “sacramental representation” to Christ [sic] serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church.⁷²

The relation of the priest to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd, constitutes the *christological* dimension of priestly ministry; the relation of the priest in Christ, Head and Shepherd, to his Church constitutes the *ecclesiological* dimension. Both relations are rooted in the priest’s sacramental consecration. The pope did not say that the priest’s relationship to Christ is the same as his relationship to the Church, but that the two are intimately linked, with the former being the foundation of the latter.

John Paul II then turned his attention to priestly celibacy and continued the prior theme of the priest’s relationship to Christ and the Church. Near the beginning of the section on celibacy (cf. n. 29), the pope employed principles that appeared in his *Theology of the Body* and in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, such as the nuptial meaning of the body and the *eschatological* dimension of “celibacy for the kingdom,” in order to illustrate the nuptial meaning of celibacy:

In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the “nuptial meaning” of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come.⁷³

⁷² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 16, emphasis added.

⁷³ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29.

John Paul II maintained the focus on celibacy as a *personal gift*, as a precious service to Christ and to his Church. In this respect, the pope continued the Magisterium's shift away from presenting celibacy in terms either of ritual purity or the Tridentine teaching on the superiority of virginity over marriage. The pope's portrayal of celibacy-as-gift was a positive contribution to a more positive attitude that the Magisterium has adopted with regard to its teaching on celibacy and marriage.

John Paul II then illustrated the motivations that underlie ecclesiastical celibacy. By citing a passage from Proposition 11 of the synod, the pope underlined the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy as a sign of the heavenly kingdom:

The Synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the kingdom which is not of this world – a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's people, with the result that celibacy is seen as a positive enrichment of the priesthood.⁷⁴

Next, John Paul II appealed to the *sensus fidelium* as a touchstone of the need to retain the tradition of mandatory celibacy in the Latin Church. In perhaps the best known statement on priestly celibacy in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the pope wrote:

It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29.

Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self *in* and *with* Christ *to* his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.⁷⁵

In this passage two elements of the threefold dimension are evident: priestly celibacy unites the priest to Jesus Christ (the christological dimension) and consequently orients him toward ministerial service to the Church (the ecclesiological dimension).

What is particularly significant in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 29 is the claim of John Paul II that the Church, as spouse of Jesus Christ, desires to be loved and served by a celibate priest. Just as Christ and ordained priests have an exclusive, nuptial relationship to the Church, so too the Church has an exclusive, nuptial relationship to the priest. Thus the priest's exclusive relationship with the Church suggests the incongruity of his having a human, nuptial relationship. In the mind of John Paul II, the manifestation of the *sensus fidelium* on this matter is a significant argument in favor of priestly celibacy.

Finally, the pope commented on the status of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church:

And so priestly celibacy should not be considered just as a legal norm or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination, but rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ [cf. the christological dimension], the good Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church [cf. the ecclesiological dimension], as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29; emphasis in the English translation but not in the Latin text.

⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 50. Traces of *Inter Insigniores* are here in the emphasis on the necessity of the "natural resemblance" that must exist between Christ and the male minister: cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5.

Priestly celibacy, therefore, is more than mere ecclesiastical law; it flows from the priest's sacramental configuration to Christ (the christological dimension) and thus gives to the celibate priest, united through ordination to Christ the Shepherd and Spouse, a dynamic orientation toward the Church (the ecclesiological dimension). The centrality of *pastoral charity* in the ministry and life of the priest is also underlined by reference to a “full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry.” Interestingly, John Paul II made reference to a “profound” connection between priestly celibacy and ordination. That is, through sacerdotal ordination the priest is called by God to give himself totally in pastoral ministry. Celibacy enables the priest to answer this divine call for him to give himself to Christ and his Church with an undivided heart.

In sum, John Paul II provided in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* a rich development of the teaching of Vatican II on priestly celibacy. In particular the pope expanded the theological analogies that are commonly used to describe priestly ministry. *Lumen Gentium* 28, for example, teaches that the ministerial priest is the sacramental representative of Christ the Head in relation to his body and of Christ the Shepherd in relation to his flock. These biblical analogies convey a relationship but not an interpersonal relationship. To the familiar pairs of Head-Body, Shepherd-Flock, the pope in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 22 added Servant and Bridegroom.⁷⁷ The four images – Head, Servant, Shepherd, and Bridegroom – say something about Christ's relationship to the

⁷⁷ If the head-body analogy of Christ suggests the unity of a human being composed of head and body, the bridegroom-bride analogy, on its part, is interpersonal and relies on gender symbolism to portray the communion of Christ with the Church; cf. Butler, “The Priest as Sacrament of Christ the Bridegroom,” *Worship* 66 (1992): 498-517, at 509.

Church, which he served in a total gift of self. Likewise, the priest is to imitate Jesus Christ in this total gift of self through pastoral charity. In the teaching of John Paul II, the priest both represents Christ, at the head of the community, standing “before” God the Father on its behalf, but he also represents Christ standing “before” the church as her Bridegroom.⁷⁸

According to John Paul II, celibacy helps the priest most effectively to portray in his life this exclusive love of Christ. In virtue of his Baptism, the priest is *in the Church* as a member of the royal priesthood. However, in virtue of his ordination, the priest is also *in relation to the Church*: the priest is configured to Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church, which gives the priest an intrinsic relationship to the Body of Christ. Expressed in another manner, one can say therefore that the celibate priest participates in the role both of the Bridegroom and of the Bride in the mystery of grace: (1) of the “Bridegroom,” in that the priest acts in the person of Christ, Head and Spouse, thus reflecting the eternal, sacrificial love that Christ has for his Church, (2) of the “Bride,” in that the priest, in virtue of being a member of the baptized faithful through baptism, enjoys a personal relationship to Christ his Head and Spouse.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Hence Christ stands ‘before’ the Church and ‘nourishes and cherishes her’ (Eph. 5:29), giving his life for her,” John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22; cf. Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 99.

⁷⁹ Cf. McGovern, “The Spousal Dimension of the Priesthood”: 102; Donald Keefe, “‘In Persona Christi’: Authority in the Church and the Maleness of the Priesthood,” *Faith* 34 (2002): 15-24; John Saward, *Christ Is the Answer: The Christ-Centred Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 65-67, 125-28.

As an icon of Jesus Christ the Head, Shepherd, Servant, and Bridegroom of the Church, the priest “faces” the rest of the baptized.⁸⁰ Of all of these images, John Paul II favored the *spousal* image to describe the priest’s relationship to the Church:

The priest is called to be a living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church. . . . In virtue of his configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community.⁸¹

According to John Paul II, the priest is called to live Christ’s spousal love towards the bridal Church, which requires that he be a witness to this divine marital love in full, constant, faithful, and exclusive dedication. The faithful themselves, as members of the bridal Church, recognize the need to be loved with such an exclusive love, and thus recognize the worth of the celibate priesthood.

7. 1983 *Code of Canon Law*

The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* legislated that major clerics (i.e., bishops, priests, deacons, and subdeacons) were bound to celibacy. Canon 132, §1, stated:

Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligation of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are sacrilegious, with due regard for the prescription of canon 214, §1.⁸²

⁸⁰ Cf. Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 89.

⁸¹ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22.

⁸² “Clerici in maioribus ordinibus constituti a nuptiis arcentur et servandae castitatis obligatione ita tenentur, ut contra eandem peccantes sacrilegii quoque rei sint, salvo praescripto can. 214, §1,” trans. Peters, *Pio-Benedictine Code*, 68. For the following sections on canon law and the permanent diaconate I have drawn material from my unpublished research paper: cf. Gary Selin “The Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate in Relationship to Clerical Continence in *Lumen Gentium* 29 and Post-

Chastity in this context referred to the celibate life, since major clerics under the 1917 *Code* were almost always celibate, unless a married man received a special papal dispensation for ordination.⁸³ Canon 214, §1, referenced in this passage, deals with a situation where a man is ordained to major orders under grave fear, which would subsequently enable him to seek dispensation from celibacy and the recitation of canonical hours.

The canonical legislation of canon 132, §1 of the 1917 *Code* was reaffirmed in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*. The canons on celibacy of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, however, contain some important variations:

- (1) the introduction of the permanent diaconate, with the possibility of accepting married men, led to the creation of two categories: celibate and married deacons (cf. canon 236);
- (2) because of the abolition of tonsure and minor orders, one now enters the clerical state by reception of the diaconate (cf. canon 266);
- (3) all those admitted to the presbyterate and unmarried candidates for the permanent diaconate are required to make the promise of celibacy publicly before God and the Church prior to diaconal ordination (cf. canon 1037).⁸⁴

Conciliar Magisterial Documents” (private research paper, Catholic University of America, 2006).

⁸³ As mentioned in Chapter 2 (cf. above, 82-83), Pius XII allowed several Lutheran and Anglican married clergy, who had converted to Catholicism, to be ordained Catholic priests without having to separate from their wives.

⁸⁴ Cf. Versaldi, “Canonical and Psychological Points of View,” 138-39, and Roman Cholij, “Observaciones críticas acerca de los cánones que tratan sobre el celibato en el Código de Derecho Canónico de 1983,” *Ius Canonicum* XXXI, no. 61: 291-305.

Among the canons in the 1983 *Code* dealing with celibacy-continenence, however, the most significant is canon 277. Situated among the provisions on the rights and obligations of clerics, canon 277 is divided into three parts: § 1 binds all major clerics of the Latin Church to the obligation of continence and therefore to celibacy, § 2 exhorts clerics to behave with prudence toward persons whose company can endanger their obligation to “continence” or give scandal to the faithful, and §3 authorizes the bishop to issue norms in support of these obligations.

Paragraph §1 gives the clearest indication of an underlying theology of clerical celibacy-continenence.⁸⁵ Drawn from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, one can discern therein elements of the threefold dimension:

Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven [cf. the eschatological dimension] and therefore are bound to celibacy, which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can more easily adhere to Christ with an undivided heart [cf. the christological dimension] and can dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and man [cf. the ecclesiological dimension].⁸⁶

For significant canons that deal with the formation of candidates, see canons 241, 247, 1027-29, 1031, 1041, 1044, and 1051-52. Canon 247, which deals with the theological and pastoral guidelines for the formation of candidates in celibacy, is based on *OT* 10.

⁸⁵ Canon 373 of the Code of the Eastern Churches sums up the tradition of clerical celibacy and marriage in the Eastern Churches: “Clerical celibacy chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and highly suited to the priesthood is to be greatly esteemed everywhere, according to the tradition of the entire Church; likewise, the state of married clerics, sanctioned in the practice of primitive Church and in the Eastern Churches through the ages, is to be held in honor,” *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1992).

⁸⁶ “Clerici obligatione tenentur servandi perfectam perpetuamque propter Regnum coelorum continentiam, ideoque ad coelibatum adstringuntur, quod est peculiare Dei donum, quo quidem sacri ministri indiviso corde Christo facilius adhaerere possunt atque Dei hominumque servitio liberius sese dedicare valent,” (c. 277, §1). The Latin texts and

This canon first obliges clerics to a life of “perfect and perpetual continence,” which in the next phrase is specified as “celibacy.” The former reflects the more general meaning (abstinence from conjugal intercourse for married and non-married clerics), while the latter refers to the manner in which this abstinence is lived in the Latin Church (non-marriage). Clerical celibacy is thus presented in the law as a secondary good that, while valued in its own right as “a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can more easily remain close to Christ with an undivided heart, and can dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and their neighbor,” is nevertheless ordered to the protection and support of a more fundamental good, i.e. that of “perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”⁸⁷ In sum, celibacy is a legal protection for continence, and is a consequence of the obligation of Latin clergy to be continent.

Notably, canon 277, §1 contains no explicit reference to the ritual purity argument or to the superiority of celibacy over marriage. Rather, the substance of *Prebyterorum Ordinis* 16 and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* was utilized by the legislator, particularly with regard to the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy.

8. Canon Law and Diaconal Continence

With regard to canonical legislation that deals with celibacy and continence for permanent deacons, canons 1031, §2 and 1042, §1 envision the ordination of married

the English translations of the 1983 Code are taken from *Code of Canon Law Annotated: Latin-English Edition*, (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur Limitée; 1993).

⁸⁷ Cf. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”: 140-50.

men to the permanent diaconate.⁸⁸ The latter, canon 1042, §1, prohibits a married man from being ordained unless he is lawfully destined for the permanent diaconate. The former, canon 1031, §2, refers to the necessity of the consent of the wife for the diaconal ordination of her husband, who must be at least 35 years old.⁸⁹

What is the purpose of this uxorial consent? It may be that the consent simply refers to the wife's matrimonial cooperation, since the husband's ministry can put strains on the marriage. Robert Geisinger interpreted this consent as expressing the wife's assurance that the diaconate will not place undue hardships upon the marriage:

A wife's agreement to her husband's diaconal ordination does not imply that she intends to participate actively in his ministry, although she may wish to do so; the consent rather suggests simply that she will support him in his exercise of sacred ministry. Most fundamentally, the wife's consent assures all parties that she foresees no threat to her marriage.⁹⁰

The wife's consent, therefore, protects the marital bond of the spouses. Ecclesial ministry should never endanger the intimate relationship of husband and wife, equal partners who support each other in their commitments (cf. canons 1055-1057).

Edward Peters, on the other hand, argued that the consent should have to do with the wife's willingness to surrender marital rights upon her husband's ordination:

⁸⁸ Chapter 2 treated the permanent diaconate and its relation to diaconal continence (cf. 93-115). This section looks at the canonical legislation regarding diaconal continence.

⁸⁹ Canon 1050, §3 refers to the necessary documentation for a married man's ordination to the diaconate; this includes the testimony of his wife's consent.

⁹⁰ Robert Geisinger, "Article 4: The Required Documents and Investigation [cc. 1050 – 1052]", in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, eds. John Beal, James Coriden, and Thomas Green, (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000), 1228-33.

[The requirement of uxorial consent] would be understandable, indeed, wholly justified, if, as a result of the husband's ordination, the wife were to suffer the loss of one of her own fundamental marital rights as would be the case if all clerics, including married permanent deacons, were bound under c. 277, §1 to the obligation of "perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."⁹¹

From the time of the early Church, uxorial consent was always tied to the free surrender of conjugal rights on the part of the wife because the continence of one spouse could have placed the chastity of the other at some risk.⁹² Therefore spouses were allowed to practice permanent continence only by mutual agreement. This was in keeping with the pastoral rule that no ascetically minded lay person could force their spouse against his or her will to renounce marital relations.⁹³ To support his interpretation Peters pointed to the development of canon 277, §1 from its two prior canonical forms.⁹⁴ Canon 135, §2 of the 1977 *Schema de Populo Dei*, which was the first draft of the 1983 *Code*, was an incipient form of canon 277, §1:

Men of more mature age, who are promoted to the stable diaconate and are living in marriage, are not bound to the prescription of n. 1; these men, however, upon the loss of their wife, are bound to observe celibacy.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Peters, "Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence": 155.

⁹² Cf. Origen, *Comm. I, I in Rom I:I*, as cited in Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 331

⁹³ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 331-32.

⁹⁴ Cf. Peters, "Canonical Consideration on Diaconal Continence": 167-71.

⁹⁵ "Praescripto n. 1 non tenentur viri maturioris aetatis in matrimonio viventes qui ad diaconatum *stabilem* promoti sunt; qui tamen et ipsi, amissa uxore, ad coelibatum servandum tenentur," *Schema de populo Dei*, c. 135, §2 in *Communicantes* 9 (1977), 77; my translation; *stabilem* will be replaced by *permanentem* in the 1983 Code. The "prescription of n. 1" obliges clerics to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the "kingdom of heaven" and thus they are bound to observe celibacy.

The language of canon 135, §2 would have abrogated all obligations of continence for married deacons. Such men would only be bound by continence if their wives were to die, whereupon they would be bound also by celibacy.

The second form of the same canon, canon 250, §2, was found in the 1980 *Schema Codicis*, which was the second draft of the 1983 *Code*. Canon 250, §2 not only retained the exemption from continence for married permanent deacons, but it also removed the obligation of consequent celibacy for those whose wives might die after ordination: “Men who are promoted to the permanent diaconate and are living in marriage, are not bound to the prescription of n. 1.”⁹⁶ This exempting language was then carried into the 1982 *Schema Codicis* with no change. The express exemption for married permanent deacons, however, disappeared from canon 277, §1 of the 1983 *Code*. What remained was simply the reference to the dual obligation of continence and celibacy for major clerics in canon 277, §1. The removal of the exemption occurred when John Paul II and a special group of canonists reviewed the 1982 *Schema*.⁹⁷

It is doubtful that the exemption was removed because the legislator deemed it unnecessary because the canon deals only with celibate men. A material warning against this reading is that all previous drafts of canon 277, §1 contained the exemption clause. One can reasonably conclude that the legislator saw the necessity of adding the exemption clause in the drafts because the subject of canon 277, §1 is all major clerics,

⁹⁶ “Praescripto n. 1 non tenentur viri qui in matrimonio viventes ad diaconatum permanentem promoti sunt,” *Schema Codicis*, canon 250, §2; my translation.

⁹⁷ Cf. “Preface to the Latin Edition,” *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*, trans. Canon Law Society of America (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), xvii-xxviii, at xxvii.

married and unmarried. In support of this interpretation of this canon, Peters asked whether the law, which has imposed a given obligation on a certain class of persons, needs to expressly say that “no exception for a subset of those persons is granted” in order for that obligation to be binding on the subset of persons in the class.⁹⁸ The specification in canon 277, §1, therefore, affirms the rule of perfect continence and thus celibacy for all major clerics in the Latin Church, even though a particular portion of major clerics are married and thus are bound only by the law of perfect continence.

What were the reasons John Paul II removed the exemption from perfect continence for married deacons? It is not possible to say with certainty because of lack of documentation, but there are at least two possible motives. First, with regard to the prohibition of conjugal activity within the marriage of a deacon, the pope may have been conscious, among other things, of the importance of guarding the ancient tradition of the Church.⁹⁹ Second, with regard to the possible remarriage of a widowed deacon that the 1980 revision seemed to permit, the intervention of two members of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law may have influenced the pope. Prior to the Commission’s final plenary session (*plenarium*) Cardinal Ermenegilde Florit, the retired archbishop of Florence, and Archbishop Luis Eduardo Henríquez of Valencia in Venezuela, objected that the exemption was contrary to the tradition of the whole Eastern Church, both Catholic and Orthodox, as well as contradicting *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* of Paul VI, which prohibited deacons from contracting marriage after

⁹⁸ Cf. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”: 176-77.

⁹⁹ Cf. Roman Cholij, “The Lex Continentiae and Orders,” *Studia Canonica* 21: 391-418, at 415-16.

ordination.¹⁰⁰ Both Florit and Henríquez urged that the traditional law be retained in the new Code.¹⁰¹

With this exemption being removed, it is reasonable to maintain that the intent of the Supreme Pontiff was to craft canon 277, §1 so that it would bind all clerics without distinction to perfect continence. Other canonists, however, have argued against this interpretation of canon 277, §1 and point to canon 4 of the 1983 Code as providing to married deacons an exemption from perfect continence:

Acquired rights, and likewise privileges hitherto granted by the Apostolic See to either physical or juridical persons, which are still in use and have not been revoked, remain intact, unless they are expressly revoked by the canons of this Code.¹⁰²

In virtue of this canon one thus can argue that the right to the conjugal life acquired through the deacon's sacramental marriage would still be intact since it had not been expressly revoked by a another particular canon. James Provost agreed with this interpretation of canon 277, §1 in the light of canon 4:

[There remains] the problem of canon 277. This is the canon which imposes perfect and perpetual continence on all clerics. No exception is

¹⁰⁰ “Post ordinem receptum diaconi, grandiore etiam aetate promoti, ex traditi Ecclesiae disciplina ad ineundum matrimonium inhabiles sunt,” Paul VI, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, n. 16.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Recognoscendo, *Relatio Complectens Synthesim Animadversionum ab Em.mis atque Exc.mis Patribus Commissionis ad Novissimum Schema Codicis Iuris Canonici Exhibitarum, cum Responsionibus a Secretaria et Consultoribus Datis* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1981), 64-65; see also Wienhoff, “The Celibacy of Deacons,” 109.

¹⁰² “Iura quaesita, itemque privilegia quae, ab Apostolica Sede ad haec usque tempora personis sive physicis sive iuridicis concessa, in usu sunt nec revocata, integra manent, nisi huius Codicis canonibus expresse revocentur,” *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, canon 4.

made for permanent deacons, although one had been included in the earlier drafts of the canon. Does this mean that married permanent deacons as of November 27, 1983 had to cease having marital relations with their wives? The text of the law would seem to impose this “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”. However, through matrimony each of the spouses acquired “equal obligations and rights to those things which pertain to the partnership of conjugal life” (c. 1135), and sexual cooperation is part of the permanent consortium (c. 1096, §1). Since the new code does not take away acquired rights unless they are expressly revoked by the code (c. 4), and since canon 277 does not explicitly state it is revoking the acquired marital rights of married deacons, continence is not being imposed on them even though the law reads that way.¹⁰³

Provost recognized canon 277, §1 is written in a manner that seems to impose perfect continence on married deacons. But when read in connection with other canons dealing with acquired rights in marriage, including conjugal union, canon 277, §1, he argued, does not require perfect continence to be practiced by a married deacon. Hence in virtue of canon 4 in particular, the right to a continued conjugal life for married deacon and his wife is not abrogated by canon 277, §1.¹⁰⁴

Peters, however, maintained that canon 4 does not apply to canon 277, §1. First, it is not clear that canon 4 protects conjugal rights of married persons since such rights are not conferred on Catholic spouses “by the Apostolic See” but rather by natural and divine law. Second, if conjugal rights of married deacons are indeed subject to canon 4, then these rights were revoked by the Apostolic See in the 1917 and 1983 Codes.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ James Provost, “Permanent Deacons in the 1983 Code,” *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings* 46 (1984): 175-92, at 186.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ad Hoc Committee of the Canon Law Society of America, “Canonical Implications Related to the Ordination of Married Men to the Priesthood in the United States of America,” *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings* 58 (1996): 438-51, at 448.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”: 174-75.

Despite the disagreement over the correct interpretation of canon 277, §1, married deacons and their wives have been given what amounts to *tacit* permission by the Apostolic See for the continuation of the use of marriage, even though a strict reading of c. 277, §1 prohibits conjugal relations. Further, neither deacons nor their wives have been informed as to the possibility that admission to major orders in the Latin Church carries with it the obligation of “perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” and thus they are not bound to observe canon 277, §1 with regard to perfect and perpetual continence.

In light of the confusion and disagreement regarding the proper interpretation of canon 277, §1, it would be opportune for the Magisterium to rectify this canonical anomaly, either by changing canon law to provide for the use of marriage by married deacons, or to make explicit the law of perfect and perpetual continence for married deacons by interpreting canon 277, §1 according to the tradition in the Latin Church. The latter course would recapture the ancient discipline in the Latin Church and would align the contemporary permanent diaconate more clearly with this tradition.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”: 177-80. Joseph Komonchak argued that a gradual establishment of the *custom* of a non-continents married diaconate has canonically justified the use of marriage: “‘Custom’ is supposed to be the best interpreter of the law (*CIC* 27). It would seem, by the widespread practice of failing to instruct married candidates for the permanent diaconate regarding the obligation to continence, a custom of interpreting the law as exempting them from the obligation has been established, or is in the process of being established (that depends on whether or not you count the years from the first class of married men ordained to the permanent diaconate or from the promulgation of the new code of canon law (cf. *CIC* 26).” This quotation comes from personal correspondence between Komonchak and the present author in 2006.

9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) contains two significant references to clerical celibacy. Article 1579 in the section on the Sacrament of Holy Orders (cf. articles 1536-1600) deals with clerical celibacy in general:

All the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, with the exception of permanent deacons, are normally chosen from among men of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12). Called to consecrate themselves with undivided heart to the Lord and to “the affairs of the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32), they give themselves entirely to God and to men. Celibacy is a sign of this new life to the service of which the Church’s minister is consecrated; accepted with a joyous heart celibacy radiantly proclaims the Reign of God (*PO* 16).¹⁰⁷

The threefold dimension of priestly celibacy underlies this text. First, celibate clerics give themselves “with undivided heart to the Lord and to ‘the affairs of the Lord’” (the christological dimension). The text cited from 1 Cor 7:32 contextualizes this statement by placing clerical celibacy in the realm of a total consecration to the Lord Jesus. Second, by virtue of their consecration to the Lord Jesus, celibate clerics give themselves through their priestly ministry in service to the faithful: “Celibacy is a sign of this new life to the service of which the Church’s minister is consecrated” (the ecclesiological dimension). Third, celibate clerics intend to remain celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12), and “accepted with a joyous heart celibacy radiantly proclaims the Reign of God (*PO* 16)” (the eschatological dimension).

In the summary section on the Sacrament of Holy Orders (“In Brief”), article 1599 states the motivations necessary for priestly ordination:

¹⁰⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1997). All citations from the *Catechism* are from this edition.

In the Latin Church the sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred only on candidates who are ready to embrace celibacy freely and who publicly manifest their intention of staying celibate for the love of God's kingdom and the service of men.¹⁰⁸

Here the motivation of the candidate with regard to priestly celibacy is “the love of God’s kingdom” (the eschatological dimension) and “the service of men” (the ecclesiological dimension). Both of these motivations can be said to presuppose the christological dimension insofar as the celibate priest unites himself to Christ in order to work more effectively “for the love of God’s kingdom” and “the service of men.”

With regard to celibacy and the Eastern Churches, article 1580 is dedicated to clerical celibacy in relation to the Eastern tradition:

In the Eastern Churches a different discipline has been in force for many centuries: while bishops are chosen solely from among celibates, married men can be ordained as deacons and priests. This practice has long been considered legitimate; these priests exercise a fruitful ministry within their communities (*PO* 16). Moreover, priestly celibacy is held in great honor in the Eastern Churches and many priests have freely chosen it for the sake of the Kingdom of God. In the East as in the West a man who has already received the sacrament of Holy Orders can no longer marry.¹⁰⁹

One other article of the *Catechism*, within the context of the section on the Sixth Commandment and chastity has significant bearing upon the subject of priestly celibacy. Citing *Persona Humana* (n. 11), a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1975), article 2349 states:

People should cultivate [chastity] in the way that is suited to their state of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable

¹⁰⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1599.

¹⁰⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1580.

manner. Others live in the way prescribed for all by the moral law, whether they are married or single.¹¹⁰

Article 2349 underlines a truth often forgotten in discussions about celibacy: chastity is the virtue that gives merit to celibacy. Celibacy, on the other hand, is simply a state of life that becomes a means of sanctification through the virtue of chastity.

In sum, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* incorporates into its doctrine the renewed magisterial teaching of priestly celibacy. Article 1579 gives a comprehensive summary of the Catholic teaching on priestly celibacy that is based on the elements of the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. In the teaching of the *Catechism* on priestly celibacy, there are no arguments based on the concept of ritual purity or on the excellence of the celibate state over the married state. These two justifications for priestly celibacy have been absent from magisterial documents since Vatican II.

10. *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*

In 1994, the Congregation for the Clergy issued the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*.¹¹¹ This document was directed, through the bishops, to all the priests of the Latin Church, in particular the diocesan clergy.¹¹² The text contains a section on priestly celibacy (cf. nn. 57-60), which deals principally with the theological and pastoral

¹¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 2349.

¹¹¹ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).

¹¹² Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, Introduction, 5.

motives that uphold the relationship between celibacy and the priesthood.¹¹³ Although the threefold scheme is not explicitly stated as such in the text, each dimension is nonetheless present. Rather than following the customary sequence, the presentation of the three dimensions follows a reverse order: eschatological, ecclesiological, and christological.

The eschatological dimension is briefly presented when celibacy is described as a way to freedom for the celibate priest from earthly concerns:

Like any evangelical virtue, consecrated celibacy should be seen as that liberating novelty which the world, especially today, demands as a radical testimony that following Christ is a sign of the eschatological reality.¹¹⁴

This passage is followed by a citation from Mt 19:10-12, which refers to those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. Interestingly, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* compares celibacy with the evangelical virtues – rather than simply being described as a chosen state of life – and says that it shares with poverty, chastity and obedience the same fruit: liberation from the constraints of this world so as to bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

Second, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* contains a strong statement regarding the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy, particularly under its spousal aspect. The text states that the ecclesiastical discipline of celibacy manifests the will of the Church and finds its ultimate reason in the intimate bond that celibacy has

¹¹³ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, nn. 58-59.

¹¹⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 58.

with priestly ordination, which shapes the priest to Jesus Christ Head and Spouse of the Church. The text then states:

The letter to the Ephesians (cf. 5:25:27) shows a strict rapport between the priestly oblation of Christ (cf. 5:25) and the sanctification of the church (cf. 5:26), loved with a spousal love. Sacramentally inserted into this priesthood of exclusive love of Christ for the Church, his faithful Spouse, the priest expresses this love with his obligation of celibacy, which also becomes a fruitful source of pastoral effectiveness.¹¹⁵

Through ordination the priest is thus inserted into the “priesthood of exclusive love of Christ for the Church, his faithful Spouse.” The priest expresses this exclusive love through celibacy.

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* further teaches that the priest assumes a “specific juridical bond” through his promise of celibacy. This bond is the source of two blessings for the priest: (1) it is a sign of the “spousal reality present in sacramental ordination,” and (2) through it the priest “acquires that true and real spiritual paternity that has universal dimensions.”¹¹⁶ This spiritual paternity is specified, in a particular way, in the rapport with the community to which he has been entrusted. The priest not only has a spousal relationship with the community, but he also is a father to his community.

Finally, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* describes the christological dimension, largely paraphrasing key passages from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16. The principal idea in this section is the imitation of Christ:

¹¹⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 58.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 58.

It would be entirely immature to see celibacy as “a tribute to be paid to the Lord” in order to receive Holy Orders rather than “a gift received through his mercy”, as a free and welcomed choice of a particular vocation of love for God and others. The example is Christ, who in going against what could be considered the dominant culture of his time, freely chose to live celibacy. In following him the disciples left “everything” to fulfill the mission entrusted to them (Lk 18:28-30).¹¹⁷

The motive of following Christ, however, is not isolated but is linked to the motive of service for the Church; in this way the christological and ecclesiological dimensions are interlinked. Indeed, celibacy is a “gift of self ‘in’ and ‘with’ Christ to his Church and expresses the service of the priest to the Church ‘in’ and ‘with’ the Lord.”¹¹⁸

As well as the above presentation of the motives for celibacy and the affirmation of the Latin tradition of priestly celibacy (cf. n. 57), the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* contains a passage on the historical roots of clerical continence and celibacy:

In following [Christ] the disciples left “everything” to fulfill the mission entrusted to them (Lk 18:28-30). For this reason the Church, *from apostolic times*, has wished to conserve the gift of *perpetual continence* of the clergy and choose the candidates for Holy Orders from among the *celibate faithful* (cf. 2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 7:5; 9:5; 1 Tim 3:2-12; 5:9; Tit 1:6-8).¹¹⁹

Each disciple was required to leave “everything,” including “wife” according to the Lucan text cited (cf. Lk 18:28-30), and the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*

¹¹⁷ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 59. According to the footnote to this citation, the internal quotations come from Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, n. 16.

¹¹⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 59. The *Directory* here is directly quoting John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29.

¹¹⁹ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, n. 59; emphasis added.

implies that here is found the origin of ecclesiastical continence and celibacy. The document goes on to present several scriptural texts in support of the position that, from the earliest times, perpetual continence was practiced by the clergy.¹²⁰

With regard to these biblical quotations cited in defense of *perpetual continence* from apostolic times, the first refers to apostolic tradition itself: “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter” (2 Thess 2:15). This text at first glance seems unrelated to perpetual continence in its original context. Rather, the Apostle Paul is actually giving a broad exhortation to his hearers to follow apostolic tradition. For its part, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* seems to be employing it for the purpose of buttressing the phrase: “For this reason the Church, *from apostolic times*, has wished to conserve the gift of perpetual continence of the clergy.” The Pauline text itself does not prove the existence of perpetual continence among ministers in the early Church, but it only indicates the direction in which the *Directory* is heading in its argument.

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* next cites 1 Cor 7:5 in order to link continence to the priestly charism. This Pauline counsel actually advises its temporary suitability for married couples as a means of growing more deeply in prayer: “Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor 7:5).

¹²⁰ Cf. 2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 7:5; 9:5; 1 Tim 3:2-12; 5:9; Tit 1:6-8.

Again, the passage has no explicit reference to the perpetual continence of ministers. The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* seems to have employed this text in order to show that a voluntary and temporary form of sexual continence existed in the early Church among married couples who wished to set aside more time for prayer. Although 1 Cor 7:5 does not prove the existence of perpetual continence among ministers of the early Church, it does show that sexual continence as such was practiced by Christians.

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* then refers to 1 Cor 9:5, which deals with the *sister-woman* who accompanied the Apostles: “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα) as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5). *The New Revised Standard Version* renders ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα as *believing wife*, although literally it means *sister-women*. On the one hand, the phrase could simply mean *women*, for there were pious women who served the material needs of the Jesus and the Apostles (cf. Mt 27:55, Lk 8:3). Since Paul was celibate when he wrote this passage (cf. 1 Cor 7:7), his relationship with such a *sister-woman* obviously would entail no conjugal activity. On the other hand, the phrase could mean *wife*, for the married Apostles may have been ministered to by their wives.¹²¹ Some hold that a married Apostle who travelled with his wife would be required to live with her “as a sister.”¹²² The *Directory* seems to be employing 1 Cor 9:5, as interpreted

¹²¹ Lk 18:28-29, however, refers to the command of Jesus to the Apostles that they abandon all earthly ties, even their wives, in order to follow him.

¹²² Cf. above, 12-13, and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 6; Tertullian, *De Monogamia*, 8; Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* I, 26, and Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones*

by writings of some of the Church Fathers,¹²³ as a text that witnesses to the perpetual continence of the Apostles and of their successors.

The remaining biblical citations in the aforementioned passage from the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* deal with the requirement that the bishop (cf. 1 Tim 3:2), presbyter (cf. Titus 1:6) and deacon (cf. 1 Tim 3:12) be a “man of one wife” (μας γυναικος άνδρα).¹²⁴ The footnote attached to the bracket containing the scriptural references lists a series of early councils, several papal decrees of Popes Siricius, Innocent I, and Leo the Great, and some works of Eusebius of Caesarea and Epiphanius of Salamis.¹²⁵ These sources can shed light upon the meaning of the expression “perpetual continence” that is used in the *Directory*. In several of these texts,¹²⁶ the Church Fathers interpreted the injunction in the Pastoral Epistles – that a candidate for ordained ministry must be a *man of one wife* – to mean that absolute monogamy is the

Veteris et Novi Testamenti, 127, 33-36; see also Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 82-83.

¹²³ Cf. above, 18-19.

¹²⁴ Cf. above, 14-18.

¹²⁵ Footnote 188: “Cf. Council of Elvira (a. 300-305) cann. 27; 33: Bruns Herm., *Canones Apostolorum et Conciliorum saec. IV-VII*, II, 5-6; Council of Neocesarea (a. 314), can. 1; Ecum. Council of Nicea I (a. 325), can. 3: *Conc. Oecum. Decree* 6; Roman Synod (a. 386): *Concilia Africae* a. 345-525, CCI 149 (in Council of Telepte), 58-63; Council of Carthage (a. 390): *ibid* 13. 133 ff.; Council of Trullano (a. 691), cann. 3, 6, 12, 13, 26, 30, 48: *Pont. Commissio ad redigendum CIC Orientalis IX I/1* 125-186; Siricio, decretals *Directa* (a. 386): *PL* 13, 1131-1147; Innocent I, lett. *Dominus inter* (a. 405): Bruns, cit. 274-277. S. Leo the Great, lett. a Rusticus (a. 456): *PL* 54, 1191; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 1 9: *PG* 22, 82 (78-83); Epiphanius of Salamina, *Panarion PG* 41, 868, 1024; *Expositio Fidei PG* 42, 822-826.”

¹²⁶ As was noted in Chapter 1: cf. above, 16, note 29 (Eusebius), 29, note 62 (Council of Elvira), 31-33, note 68 (Council of Nicea), and 37, note 78 (Epiphanius).

minimum guarantee that a married man could live in marital abstinence once he received the laying on of hands. The entrance into a second marriage was regarded as a sign of the inability of the man, if he were later to be made a deacon, presbyter, or bishop, to live the discipline of the Church, i.e., future perpetual continence with his wife. These Church Fathers and councils argued that this Pauline formula indicated the law of perfect and perpetual continence required of the early Church ministers.¹²⁷

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* therefore aligns itself with this particular interpretation of the Pauline texts. However, this is not the only interpretation of these scriptural texts and it is disputed still today.¹²⁸ For example, Michael Winter maintained that the patristic citations in the footnote of the *Directory* do not make a convincing case in favor of the practice of perfect continence by married clerics prior to the fourth century.¹²⁹

The biblical texts cited in this passage of the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* are used to argue in favor of the perpetual continence of the Church's ministers. However, the *Directory* also seems to use them to argue that *celibacy* was practiced by *all* candidates for Holy Orders from apostolic times: "For this reason the Church, from apostolic times, has wished to conserve the gift of perpetual continence of the clergy and

¹²⁷ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 41-55.

¹²⁸ Cf. above, 14-19.

¹²⁹ Cf. Michael M. Winter, "A New Twist to the Celibacy Debate," *Priests & People* 10 (1996): 428-32. However, Winter focuses on patristic texts and does not treat the biblical texts cited by the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*.

choose the candidates for Holy Orders from among the celibate faithful.”¹³⁰ This line of argument, however, would be false if it is stating that the Church has chosen candidates for ordination *only* from among the ranks of celibate men simply because of the concrete evidence of married clerics in the early Church.¹³¹ While the *Directory* may claim that *perpetual continence* existed from apostolic times, it ought to clarify that only since the sixteenth century have candidates for Holy Orders been taken solely from celibate men in the Latin Church.¹³² The history of clerical continence-celibacy, however, is not the focus of the teaching of the *Directory* on celibacy. Rather, it is primarily concerned to show that priestly celibacy is intimately connected with priestly ministry in its twofold relation to Christ and the Church, rather than being an extrinsic quality added to the priesthood by ecclesiastical law.

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* does not develop any significant insights into the *eschatological* and *christological* dimensions, but mostly paraphrases key thoughts from *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16. On the other hand, the *Directory* in n. 58 amplifies the *ecclesiological* dimension through the use of spousal imagery: the celibate priest has a nuptial relationship to the community entrusted to him.

¹³⁰ Cholij writes concerning this citation from the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*: “The very texts used in *Presbyterorum ordinis* to support the early tradition of a married clergy have now been used to support the tradition of perpetual continence.” Cf. Roman Cholij, “Celibacy, Married Clergy, and the Oriental Code,” *Eastern Churches Journal* 3, no. 3 (1996): 91-117, at 111.

¹³¹ Cf. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 84-138.

¹³² Cf. above, 46-47.

11. Diaconal Continence Revisited

In 1998 the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy issued a series of documents beginning with the *Joint Declaration and Introduction*, which prefaced the Congregation for Education's *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* and the Congregation for the Clergy's *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*.¹³³ The *Joint Declaration and Introduction* states that the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* in particular has, together with its hortative character, a juridically binding force under certain circumstances.¹³⁴ However, the prescripts of the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* lack all force when they are contrary to canon law (cf. canon 33, §1). Nothing in the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* or its companion documents can abrogate any norms of canon law.

In a section on the married diaconate, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* refers to diaconal continence within the context of marriage:

Married deacons should feel especially obliged to give clear witness to the sanctity of marriage and the family. The more they grow in mutual love, the greater their dedication to their children and the more significant their example for the Christian community. . . . This love grows thanks to chastity which flourishes, even in the exercise of paternal responsibilities,

¹³³ “The Permanent Diaconate (Joint Declaration and Introduction),” Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy, *Origins* 27 (1998): 78-180; Congregation for Catholic Education, “Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28 (1998): 181-91; Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28 (1998): 191-204; *De Diaconatu Permanenti*, AAS 90 (1998): 835-927.

¹³⁴ Cf. “The Permanent Diaconate (Joint Declaration and Introduction),” 179.

by respect for spouse and the practice of *a certain continence*. This virtue fosters a mutual self-giving which soon becomes evident in ministry.¹³⁵

The phrase “a certain continence” is not found in previous post-conciliar magisterial statements and no explanation is given of it here or elsewhere in the 1998 documents. Moreover, it has not generated much discussion in theological or canonical literature, and its precise meaning cannot be inferred from its context.¹³⁶

On the other hand, a passage from the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* seems to deal with the begetting of children, and thus certainly gives no indication of expecting perfect and perpetual continence of the married deacon:

For married candidates, to live love means offering themselves to their spouses in a reciprocal belonging, in a total, faithful and indissoluble union, in the likeness of Christ's love for his Church; *at the same time it means welcoming children*, loving them, educating them and showing forth to the whole Church and society the communion of the family.¹³⁷

It is possible that the phrase “welcoming children” could be understood, as with other phrases in this section, simply as stating a requirement of conjugal life for married deacons that already existed before their ordination. But the more obvious meaning is that the married deacon can continue to exercise his conjugal rights after ordination. This

¹³⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28: 199; emphasis added.

¹³⁶ Cf. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”: 173. In its historico-theological report, *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles*, the International Theological Commission does not mention diaconal celibacy or continence, neither in its historical account of the permanent diaconate nor in its analysis of the restoration of the permanent diaconate by Paul VI. Cf. International Theological Commission, *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles*, (Chicago/Mundelein: Hillenbrand, 2004).

¹³⁷ Congregation for the Clergy, “Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28:188; emphasis added.

passage when read together with that of the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (“a certain continence”) may be an exhortation to the married deacon to practice *periodic* continence. The two texts may also point to a compromise on this matter among the authors.

With regard to the possibility of a subsequent marriage for widowed deacons, the *Directory of the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* reaffirms the tradition followed in the Eastern and Western Churches:

In particular, the widowed deacon should be supported in living perfect and perpetual continence (*CIC* 277, §1). He should be helped to understand the profound ecclesial reasons which preclude his remarriage (cf. 1 Tim 3:12), in accordance with the constant discipline of the Church in the East and West. This can be achieved through an intensification of one’s dedication to others for the love of God in the ministry. In such cases the fraternal assistance of other ministers, of the faithful and of the bishop can be most comforting to widowed deacons.¹³⁸

Part of the footnote to the sentence “He should be helped to understand the profound ecclesial reasons which preclude his remarriage (cf. 1 Tim 3:12), in accordance with the constant discipline of the Church in the East and West” states:

Provision is made for possible exceptions to this discipline in the circular letter of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, N. 26397, of 6 June 1997, n. 8.¹³⁹

The circular letter referenced by this footnote is entitled “Deacons’ Remarriage; Laicizing Priests,” and deals with the issue of permanent deacons widowed after

¹³⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28: 200.

¹³⁹ Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28: 199.

ordination who seek to contract a further marriage.¹⁴⁰ The letter notes that it has become evident that this issue has caused “grave difficulties” for some who have been widowed after ordination but desire to remain in diaconal ministry. In n. 8 of the letter, the Congregation established a new practice modifying the then current norm, which required the satisfying of three simultaneous conditions which would constitute motivating exceptions for the granting of a dispensation from the prohibition in canon 1087, which states that those who are in sacred orders invalidly attempt marriage. The Congregation requested and obtained from John Paul II that just one of the following conditions taken singly would be sufficient for a favorable consideration of the dispensation from the impediment to remarriage: (1) the great and proven usefulness of the ministry of the deacon to the diocese to which he belongs, (2) that he has children of such a tender age as to be in need of motherly care, and (3) that he has parents or parents-in-law who are elderly and in need of care.¹⁴¹ This new legislation traces its lineage to the apostolic letter *De Episcoporum Muneribus* of Paul VI (June 15, 1966), in which he provided for the granting of a dispensation from the obligation of celibacy or from the prohibition of contracting marriage for a priest or a deacon in certain circumstances.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, “Deacons’ Remarriage; Laicizing Priests,” *Origins* 27 (1997): 169, 171-72.

¹⁴¹ This letter, dated June 6, 1997, was issued by Archbishop Jorge Medina Estevez (pro-prefect) and cites canons 236, 276.2 and .3; 281.3; 288; 1031.2 and .3; 1035.1; 1037; 1042.1; 1050.3.

¹⁴² Paul VI, n. IX/1, *De Episcoporum Muneribus*, AAS 58 (1966): 467-72, at 470. It may be noted that canon 10 of the Council of Ancyra (314) seems to give the authority to a bishop to allow a deacon, who married after ordination, to continue his ministry. If this be true, it was an exception to the ancient practice in the Latin and Oriental Churches

This liberalization of the requirements for a widowed deacon's remarriage, however, was relatively short lived. In a letter to "Presidents of the Conferences of Bishops, to the Superior Generals," dated July 13, 2005, Cardinal Francis Arinze, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, tightened the requirements for dispensation from the impediment to remarriage.¹⁴³ Arinze wrote that Benedict XVI directed that those widowed deacons who desired to "celebrate new weddings" with a dispensation from the *impedimentum ordinis* and who wanted to remain in the ministry should submit their cases to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, which would retain competency in this matter. These cases, however, will be taken into consideration only when the following conditions occur *together*: (1) great pastoral usefulness of the deacon's ministry, (2) attestation by the bishop, (3) care of minor children. This legislation clearly made it more difficult for a widowed deacon to remarry.

In addition to what is said about diaconal continence in the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* and *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, there is also a section in the former on diaconal celibacy, i.e. the celibacy lived by the single or widowed deacon. In the section "Spirituality of Deacons and States of Life" (cf. nn. 59-62), the *Directory* teaches that diaconal celibacy exists for the sake of pastoral charity (cf. n. 60). The charity with which the celibate deacon loves

that bars major clerics from marriage after ordination. Cf. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 169-77.

¹⁴³ I have a photocopy of the letter, which to my knowledge has not been published.

God and serves his neighbor does not impede his personal development but fosters his true perfection founded on charity. In the celibate life, charity becomes “a sign of total and undivided consecration to Christ and of greater freedom to serve God and man.”¹⁴⁴

The *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* also describes diaconal celibacy in terms of the threefold dimension, i.e. the celibacy lived by the single or widowed deacon (cf. n. 60). This application of the threefold paradigm to the diaconate is original to the *Directory*. It had never been used previously in a magisterial document on diaconal celibacy. As with many preceding magisterial documents, the threefold dimension is clearly present although it is not explicitly enunciated and formulated as such. In one sentence the three dimensions are grouped together:

The Church is conscious that this gift [celibacy], accepted and lived for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 19:12) [the eschatological dimension], directs the whole person of the deacon towards Christ [the christological dimension] who devoted Himself in chastity to the service of the Father so as to bring man to the fullness of the Kingdom [the ecclesiological dimension].¹⁴⁵

Among the three dimensions, the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* emphasizes the eschatological dimension as an effective witness for the contemporary world, since each person “very often submerged in the ephemeral, is particularly sensitive to those who are a living witness of the eternal” (cf. n. 60). Hence the deacon should be careful to give witness to his sisters and brothers by his fidelity to

¹⁴⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” n. 60; a footnote cites c. 277, § 1 and *OT* 10.

¹⁴⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, “Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,” *Origins* 28: 199.

the celibate life in order to move them to seek those values consonant with the human person's transcendent vocation.

12. Conclusion

With *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Paul VI continued the renewal of the theology of priestly celibacy initiated by Vatican II, and subsequent magisterial documents have incorporated and developed this renewed teaching. The pope's use of the threefold dimension has helped to present this renewed theology in a systematic manner and proved to be an effective pedagogical tool that has influenced subsequent magisterial teaching, thus setting the framework for contemporary magisterial doctrine on priestly celibacy.

The Church's understanding of diaconal celibacy was also affected by the renewed theology expressed at Vatican II, as can be seen from the revised rites of Ordination (1968, 1990), and from the fact that the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* also describes the celibacy lived by the single or widowed deacon in terms of the threefold dimension.

Since the time of Paul VI, there have been many notable teachings on *priestly* celibacy, such as those contained in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*. During this period, however, it was John Paul II who most thoroughly developed the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy, particularly in his *Theology of the Body* and in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. For John Paul II, the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy is rooted in the christological dimension: the celibate priest's relationship to the Church is rooted

in his relationship with Jesus Christ. Both the christological and ecclesiological dimensions, moreover, are connected to the eschatological in the sense that the priest's union with Christ in service to the Church is ultimately a sign of the Kingdom of God to come.¹⁴⁶

In addition, John Paul II significantly developed the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy. He taught that celibacy and the priesthood are intimately connected because Christ is not just the Head of the Body, the Church, but also the Bridegroom of the Church.¹⁴⁷ Since the priest is configured to Christ, he can have only one Spouse, namely the Church. The priest's love for the Church has to be exclusive and permanent, and from this spousal commitment he derives his spiritual paternity. Moreover, John Paul II taught that the "Church, as Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her."¹⁴⁸ He thus applied the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension directly to the relationship between the priest and faithful, stressing that the priest, in being identified with Christ the Bridegroom through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, enjoys an exclusive marital relationship with the Church, and that the Church likewise enjoys exclusive nuptial rights with regard to him. This exclusive and spousal love between the priest and the Church implies the incongruity of the priest having a human, spousal relationship.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29, where the pope makes his own the teaching of the 1990 Synod of Bishops that priestly celibacy is "a sign of the kingdom which is not of this world."

¹⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23; above, 205-09.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29.

In sum, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council has moved away from its former teaching on priestly celibacy that employed the arguments of ritual purity and the superiority of virginity over marriage. Instead, it has used the threefold dimension, enriching and expanding the traditional teaching on priestly celibacy. The consistency with which this theological scheme has been incorporated into magisterial documents is a sign of its theological and pastoral fruitfulness and value.

This renewed magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy implicitly emphasized the dignity of the married state, by using the nuptial theme as a means of illustrating the intrinsic worth of priestly celibacy. John Paul II, in particular, has described the difference of the sexes in terms of the complementarity of man and woman in the reciprocal capacity for the personal gift of self, rather than in terms of a hierarchically structured relationship. A result of this integral teaching was that the beauty and importance of ecclesiastical celibacy was clearly noted without at the same time neglecting the dignity of sacramental marriage.

Following this review of the use of the threefold dimension in magisterial documents in recent decades, various questions arise: What is its theological value? What issues does it resolve? What questions remain? The next chapters of this study will attempt to answer these questions regarding the threefold dimension by summarizing the latter's biblical foundations and considering its effectiveness in addressing some issues about priestly celibacy.

CHAPTER 4
EVALUATION OF THE THREEFOLD DIMENSION OF PRIESTLY CELIBACY

As was seen in Chapter 1, the Magisterium throughout the centuries has sought to justify the suitability of celibacy for major clerics. Although the reasons offered have varied with different mentalities and situations, as Paul VI said, “They were always inspired by specifically Christian considerations; and from these considerations we can get an intuition of the more fundamental motives underlying them.”¹

The process of discerning the motives of celibacy is part of the ongoing development of Catholic doctrine and life, which *Dei Verbum* 8 describes:

What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit.² There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her.³

¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 18. Some historians and theologians, however, dispute Paul VI’s assertion that the defense of priestly celibacy in the Latin Church was “always inspired by specifically Christian considerations;” cf. for example, Gryson, above, 20-22.

² Footnote reference: “cf. First Vatican Council, *Dogm. Const. on the Catholic Faith*, c. 4 (On Faith and Reason): *Denz.* 1800 (3020).”

³ Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 8.

Throughout the centuries, the growth of understanding with regard to one of those “realities . . . that are being passed on,” namely priestly celibacy, has come about in all three ways listed above: (1) through the contemplation and study of the faithful, (2) from a spiritual experience of these realities, and (3) from the teaching of the Magisterium. Although the doctrine of priestly celibacy has developed since the patristic era, the Church continues to advance toward the fullness of truth in its regard “until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her.” Paul VI recognized this fact when he described the process of development in Catholic teaching on priestly celibacy:

These [motives given for celibacy] can be brought into clearer light only under the influence of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ to His followers for the knowledge of things to come (cf. Jn 16:13) and to enable the People of God to increase in the understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. In this process the experience gained through the ages from a deeper penetration of spiritual things also has its part.¹

With regard to the magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy, Paul VI developed the teaching of Vatican II insofar as he employed in his encyclical an explicit formulation of the threefold dimension, which had been implicit in the conciliar documents. This new theological paradigm brought into magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy a richer array of biblical and theological ideas than was previously associated with the two more common arguments for it: ritual purity and the superiority of virginity over marriage.

Even though the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy has been a sustained feature of magisterial teaching since Vatican II, one should still submit it to a theological evaluation. Such an evaluation can be made at least in two ways: (1) by studying its biblical foundations, i.e. its roots in divine revelation, thereby assessing its claim to be a

¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 18.

legitimate development of doctrine rather than a mere theological construct, and (2) by analyzing its theological value as a whole.² The present chapter will undertake an evaluation of each of the three dimensions in the two ways listed above. The following chapter will deal with lingering issues and questions related to the threefold dimension.

This chapter, therefore, is divided as follows, so as to consider the value of the threefold dimension for contributing to the development of the theology of priestly celibacy. It will evaluate each of the three dimensions of priestly celibacy in turn, considering for each one its biblical foundations as well as its theological value for the Church as a whole, as a way of understanding more thoroughly the place of celibacy in the life and mission of the Church.

1. The Christological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

The ordained minister images Christ to the community. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis* (cf. *LG* 10; 28; *SC* 33; *CD* 11; *PO* 2; 6).³

² There is here an analogy of sorts to the teaching of *Dei Verbum*, which states that Scripture must be interpreted, not just by use of literary forms, but also with reference to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture and by means of the analogy of faith; cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 12.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1548.

The minister is configured to Christ the High Priest, the source of all priesthood.⁴ The

Catechism of the Catholic Church continues:

Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers.⁵

Further, this ordained ministry continues the mission begun by the Apostles. The

Catechism further teaches:

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.⁶

Christ sends his Apostles and their successors, the bishops, to proclaim the faith and to establish his reign. He gives them a share in his mission and from him they receive the power to act in his person.⁷ Each bishop is the visible source and foundation of unity in his own particular Church.⁸ Priests and deacons assist the bishop in his mission.⁹

⁴ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 22, 4c.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1549.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1536. The *Apostolic Tradition* shows both a christological and an apostolic understanding of the bishop, and this was extended to priests when they started presiding at the Eucharist: see § 3, 3-4 (bishop), and § 7, 2 (presbyter), in Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 30, 56. Cf. McPartlan, *Priesthood, Priestliness, and Priests*, 72-74, and John D. Zizioulas, “Episkopé and Episkopos in the Early Church: a Brief Survey of the Evidence,” in *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective (Faith & Order paper 102)*, ed. World Council of Churches (Geneva: 1980), 30-42, at 38.

⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 935.

⁸ Cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 23.

⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, nn. 28-29.

The focus of this section will be the christological dimension of *priestly* celibacy, that is, the celibacy of both the bishop and the priest. The christological dimension refers to the priest's union with and configuration to Christ, which has consequences also for the ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions: the celibate priest, by uniting himself with Christ in pastoral charity, is united also with the Church (the ecclesiological dimension) for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (the eschatological dimension).¹⁰ Since the christological dimension is the most fundamental of the three dimensions, it is fitting that it be the first of the three to be studied according to its biblical foundations. In the following section, the New Testament indications of the celibacy of Christ will be established, and this will be followed by indications of the celibacy of the Apostles and of their successors as ministers of the Church.

a). New Testament Foundations of the Christological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy¹¹

Belief in a resurrection to eternal life, as taught by Jesus, clearly differed from Jewish understandings of eternal life, as mentioned earlier.¹² Because of the lack of a clear notion of the resurrection of the body, the Jews believed that they would survive death and live on in some way through their children. Thus in the Old Testament it was considered necessary for a Jew to marry in order to survive through his offspring. This was the way to “live eternally.”

¹⁰ For example, see above, 125, 157-58, and 169-70.

¹¹ A summary of the biblical evidence of the celibacy of Jesus has been given in Chapter 1: cf. above, 8-11. This section consists of a study of the consequences of the celibacy of Jesus in the apostolic ministry in the Church.

¹² Cf. above, 11.

Christian celibacy, however, indicates another understanding, one of life after death: given the Resurrection of Jesus, every Christian can hope for an individual resurrection (cf. Jn 6:40). The Resurrection of Jesus itself gives the Christian the assurance of eternal life, so marriage and offspring cease to be imperative and celibacy becomes possible. A Christian in good conscience can forego marriage for the sake of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Rev 14:4 describes the reward of the 144,000, who had chosen celibacy in imitation of Christ:

It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins [*parthenoi*]; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.¹³

Jesus' own celibacy thus can be seen as a prophetic lifestyle, linked to his Resurrection, whereby he proclaims eternal life. Jesus has given the Christian hope for an individual resurrection and has lifted the obligation to marry and have children. Christian celibacy is both new and prophetic, and is a vocation that springs forth from the grace of Jesus Christ, who renews all things (cf. Rev 21:5).

From the celibacy of Jesus, one can then establish the biblical foundation for celibacy for the Church's ministers.¹⁴ Although Mt 19:11-12 addresses celibacy in general as an option freely available to Christians in accordance with their own gift, it does not indicate a specific connection between celibacy and the ordained ministers of

¹³ Rev 14:4. This passage speaks of voluntary celibacy, and only for males, although it is not clear whether the text refers literally to a special group of virgins in the Church or symbolically either to martyrs or to the whole Church as the Bride of Christ; cf. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 1, 344.

¹⁴ This has been addressed more at length above, 12-19.

the Church. Where, then, might one discern the value of celibacy for the Church's ministers? One indication is found in Lk 18:28-30, which contains the most radical call to celibate discipleship, or in this context to perfect and perpetual continence for married men, insofar as it refers to one's "wife" in the list of the goods of marriage and family life given up for the sake of the kingdom of God:

Peter said: "Lo, we have left our homes and followed you." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."¹⁵

In comparison with Mt 19:11-12, which refers to celibacy for Christians in general, this Lucan passage is directed to those *men* who have left their homes and human relationships in order to *follow Jesus*. Although Lk 18:28-30 does not refer explicitly to Church ministry, it is implied insofar as Jesus is addressing Peter, who seems to be speaking on behalf of the Twelve (cf. v. 31).

Other than texts referring to Peter and Paul, there are no scriptural indications of the marital status of the Apostles.¹⁶ The majority of Church Fathers held that the Apostles who were married, on deciding to follow Jesus, gave up their conjugal lives and thereafter practiced perfect continence.¹⁷ This apostolic continence allowed them to

¹⁵ Lk 18:28-30; translation is from *Revised Standard Version*. *Wife* is not listed in the parallel passages of Mt 19:27-30 and Mk 10:28-31, although it may be implied that a man who leaves house and children also leaves his wife.

¹⁶ Cf. Mt 8:14 (Peter's mother in law) and 1 Cor 7:7-8 (Paul's celibacy); cf. also Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 82, and above, 12.

¹⁷ Cochini lists some Fathers who held this thesis, such as Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), Tertullian (d. 220), St. Jerome (d. 419), and Isidore of Pelusium (d. 425); cf. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 79-83; cf. above, 12-13.

follow Jesus in his itinerant life. Having been formed by Jesus during his public life, the Apostles made Christ present to the Church through their ministry. One manner in which the Apostles accomplished this task was through their words and example: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you” (1 Cor 11:1-2). Paul states boldly to the Corinthians that Christ is present to them through his own exemplary life. This statement of Paul has affinities with the words of Christ himself to the twelve: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Mt 10:40).¹⁸

Another example of the manner in which the apostolic ministry makes Christ present to the Church is through the ministry of reconciliation, which Paul describes in his second letter to the Corinthians:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).¹⁹

¹⁸ In the Gospels, Jesus spoke of the manner in which he would be encountered in his followers and identified himself with ever wider circles of such followers: Jesus identifies himself with the twelve (cf. Mt 10:40), with the seventy two (cf. Lk 10:16), with anyone whom he sends (cf. Jn 13:20), and with a child (cf. Mk 9:37). See Paul McPartlan, “Catholic Perspectives on Sacramentality,” *Asian Christian Quarterly* 1.3 (2007): 76-97, at 81.

¹⁹ Exegetes are divided on the different meanings of *us* in 2 Cor 5:18: “Christ reconciled *us* to himself and gave to *us* the ministry of reconciliation.” The former seems to point to the whole Christian community, while the latter signifies the apostles. Cf. Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1997), 304.

Paul teaches that the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to the ministers of the Church (“we are ambassadors for Christ”) who preach the message of reconciliation to the Corinthians. Through this ministry of reconciliation the Apostles are making Christ present to the Church.²⁰

As Paul and the other Apostles were sent by Christ through his Church in the service of the Gospel,²¹ so too did Paul and the Apostles send their successors in order to continue the apostolic ministry. Eph 4:11-12 describes this ministry: “The gifts he [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”²² Within this context of an apostolic ministry understood as a representation of Christ himself, who was celibate, there are grounds to believe that celibacy or perfect continence formed part of the apostolic mission. Moreover, Paul describes this mission to the Romans as a “priestly service”:

²⁰ In Second Corinthians Paul seeks to justify the apostolic ministry to the faithful of the local Church. Within this context, “ambassadors for Christ” refers to the apostolic ministry, which includes the work of reconciliation. Jan Lambrecht stated: “Like Christ, [Paul] is God’s mediator: One must realize that ambassadorship means more than just proclamation of words; the whole apostolic existence with all its trials is involved (cf. for example, 6:3-10)”: cf. Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, vol. 8 of *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 100.

²¹ Cf. Acts 9:15-16, 10:1-33, 11:19-20.

²² Cf. Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, n. 44, who mentioned that the Apostles appointed bishops and “afterwards [the Apostles] provided a continuance, that if [the bishops] should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministrations,” in J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 76. *The Apostolic Tradition*, § 3, 3-4, contains an episcopal ordination prayer that reflects the apostolic origins of the episcopacy: cf. Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *Apostolic Tradition*, 30; McPartlan, *Priesthood, Priestliness, and Priests*, 72-73.

[On some matters] I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the *priestly service* of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:15-16; emphasis added).

Paul himself, one of the earliest examples of the apostolic ministry that he describes here as “priestly,” was celibate and encouraged others to adopt that state because it facilitated union of mind and body in Christ so as to be busy with his concerns (cf. 1 Cor 7:25-40). The words of Paul concerning his own undivided heart can be understood as applying to his celibate life: “I wish that all were as I myself am” (1 Cor 7:7), and a fittingness of celibacy for those who will minister in the Church as priests can be discerned.

It was thus a belief in Christ’s Resurrection as the cause of the resurrection of the elect that made celibacy a real option for Christians: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). Further, celibacy was particularly appropriate for those who would leave all to follow Jesus in apostolic ministry and for the succeeding generations of ministerial leaders. In continuity with the apostolic tradition, the bishop and the ministerial priest participate in the priestly office of Jesus Christ and fittingly share in his celibate way of life. This christological significance of priestly celibacy is thus not a mere incidental added to the ministerial priesthood, but can be seen as part of the priestly life itself, as Crescenio Sepe described:

Christ willed, harmoniously and intimately, to combine the virginal state with his mission as eternal priest and mediator between heaven and earth. We can therefore affirm that chastity and virginity are not simply additional or secondary to Christ’s priestly existence, but belong to its very essence. “Don’t you see”, St Ambrose writes, “that Christ *is* chastity,

Christ *is* integrity?”²³ In becoming priest by virtue of the hypostatic union, the Son of God committed himself to the Father, offering him his total and exclusive love, and consecrated himself entirely to performing the work of redemption.²⁴

As Christ is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8), so priestly celibacy has been understood through the ages and still today as a significant aspect of participation in the life and ministry of Christ.

In sum, according to Catholic theological tradition, the christological dimension of priestly celibacy is rooted in New Testament references to radical discipleship (cf. Mt 19:11-12 and 1 Cor 7:25-40). Such passages refer to celibacy or continence in general, but not to the Church’s ministers. However, Lk 18:28-30 and the words of Paul noted above give some evidence for the existence of apostolic celibacy and continence that form the basis for an ongoing practice of celibacy by those who exercise the continuing apostolic ministry.²⁵

²³ Cf. Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, 18; *PL* 16, 271.

²⁴ Crescenio Sepe, “The Revelance of Priestly Celibacy Today,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_revel_en.html, 1993.

²⁵ Cf. above, 14-18, for a summary of a patristic interpretation of 1 Tim 3:2, 12, and Tit 1:6 that links the phrase “man of one wife” to the requirement of perfect continence for married ministers in the early Church.

b). The Christological Dimension as an Aid to Understanding Priestly Celibacy as a Charism and a Discipline

Since the time of the Second Vatican Council many theologians have questioned whether the institutional Church has the right to “legislate” celibacy.²⁶ The middle term in their argument is the charismatic nature of celibacy. In other words, if celibacy is a charism, it cannot be enforced *as a discipline* by Church authority on men who are called to the ministerial priesthood. A charism, according to Vatican II, is a special grace that the Holy Spirit distributes among all the faithful:

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he will (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. . . . Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church.²⁷

A charism is thus a gift of grace given to the faithful to make them fit and ready to undertake the many tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church. Of its nature, a charism is not imposed by Church authority but freely given by the Holy Spirit to an individual. Celibacy is one such charism, a divine gift, given to men and women who are called to it.²⁸

²⁶ For example, see John McIntyre, “Married Priests: A Research Report,” *CLSA Proceedings* 56 (1994): 130-152, at 143, and Richard Sipe, *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990), 56.

²⁷ Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 12.

²⁸ Cf. Mt 19:12, and Raniero Cantalamessa, *Virginity: A Positive Approach to Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven*, trans. Charles Serignat (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1995), 53-67; hereafter cited: *A Positive Approach to Celibacy*.

Since celibacy is required of all candidates for the priesthood in the Latin Church, it also belongs to the category of *discipline*. The distinction between charism and discipline thus raises the question as to how Church authority can require the charism of celibacy for candidates to the priesthood through a disciplinary decree in canon law. For example, canon 1037 mandates:

A candidate for the permanent diaconate who is not married, and likewise a candidate for the priesthood, is not to be admitted to the order of diaconate unless he has, in the prescribed rite, publicly before God and the Church undertaken the obligation of celibacy, or unless he has taken perpetual vows in a religious institute.²⁹

The question, then, concerns the nature of the relationship between ecclesiastical law and clerical celibacy as charism and discipline. Some of the Fathers of Vatican II did not hesitate to raise this question. For example, João Batista da Mota y Albuquerque, archbishop of Vitoria-Espirito Santo, Brazil asked in a written intervention:

An answer needs to be found in particular to the following problem: total continence is a charism. Why then is a charism imposed as a universal obligation upon Latin priests? Is it perhaps that the West has reserved the ministerial function for charismatics? In what sense?³⁰

²⁹ “Promovendus ad diaconatum permanentem qui non sit uxoratus, itemque promovendus ad presbyteratum, ad ordinem diaconatus ne admittantur, nisi ritu praescripto publice coram Deo et Ecclesia obligationem caelibatus assumpserint, aut vota perpetua in instituto religiosi emiserint,” c. 1037.

³⁰ “Il faudrait notamment trouver une réponse au problème suivant: La continence total est un charisme. Pourquoi ce charisme est-il imposé comme une obligation universelle aux prêtres latins? Est-ce parce que l’Occident tient à réserver la fonction ministérielle aux charismatiques ? En quel sens?”, *AS IV/V*, 275-94, at 286; cf. above 130, where this passage was also cited.

Heinz-Jürgen Vogels continued this line of thought by noting how in the Eastern Churches the candidate for the priesthood “chooses” celibacy, while in the Latin Church it is “imposed.” Vogels saw a contradiction:

[. . .] The obligation inherent in the law as *lex coercens* can be interpreted in two ways: Either the law seeks to force God to grant to all candidates for priesthood and ordained priests the gift of celibacy; or, it demands from all candidates and those ordained that they wrest the gift from God.³¹

According to this argument, Church authority cannot demand from candidates for the priesthood, who feel the call to serve in the ordained ministry, a charism that it cannot bestow. The tension over this charism-discipline polarity has existed for centuries and has not been resolved fully. Stickler, referring to medieval canonists who debated this issue, wrote:

All the canonists agree that the prohibition against marriage for the higher clergy can be traced back to the apostles and their example but, in part, also to their command. The prohibition on the use of marriage contracted before ordination is attributed by some to the apostles, by others to later legislative norms, above all to the Roman Pontiffs beginning with Pope Siricius. In seeking to explain the reasons for such a prohibition, they are at times contradictory. Some referred to a *votum*, either *expressum* or *tacitum*, or *ordini adnexum, solemnizatum*, that is, annexed to the order or solemnized by legitimate authority.³²

Stickler hinted at part of the larger question that has persisted throughout the centuries: how can the Church authority require a charism to be present in candidates for ordination, particularly when it has no control over the distribution of charismatic gifts?

³¹ Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Celibacy: Gift or Law?*, trans. G. A. Kon (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1993), 62.

³² Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 48. See also Schillebeeckx, *Celibacy*, 70-73, 134-42; Schillebeeckx outlines some difficulties with *celibacy as a charism* being imposed by the institutional Church on candidates for the priesthood.

In 1970, the International Theological Commission addressed the connection between priestly ministry and celibacy. In its document on priestly ministry, the Commission stated:

When the hierarchy links virginity and ministry, it does not alter the nature of the charism but rather emphasizes its communitarian reference and intent, as belongs essentially to every charism. The fact that the Church requires a charismatic gift in those who exercise the ministry witnesses to the transforming power of the sacrament (word and Spirit), which confers the ministry and animates the apostle throughout his life. A radical separation between charism and law ignores the specific character that the Church derives from the Incarnation. By the Incarnation God submits himself to place and time; he receives the human nature from Mary; he depends on a few apostles and on a Church as the witnesses of his life and his words.³³

The Commission argued that one should not drive a wedge between charism and ecclesiastical law. While charisms such as celibacy are by definition *gifts*, within the ecclesial context they need to be affirmed by Church authority, to which Christ has given the authority to rule the People of God.³⁴ Thus in a broader theological view the authority to judge and regulate charisms has been given to the hierarchical Church.

Moreover, Paul VI wrote in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 15 that “the gift of a priestly vocation” is distinct from that which leads a person to choose celibacy in the consecrated life. But the priestly vocation, although inspired by God, is not confirmed and operative without having been tested and accepted by those in the Church who have the authority and bear the responsibility for the ordained ministry. Paul VI then stated:

³³ International Theological Commission, “The Priestly Ministry” (1970) in *Texts and Documents 1969-1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 3-87, at 73.

³⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, arts. 874-887, 894-896.

It is therefore the task of those who hold authority in the Church to determine in accordance with the varying conditions of time and place, [those] who in actual practice are to be considered *suitable candidates* for the religious and pastoral service of the Church, and what *should be required* of them.³⁵

In answer to the question, therefore, as to whether the Church has the right to impose the vow of celibacy, the International Theological Commission and Paul VI taught that Church authority has a divine mandate to test and accept candidates according to their suitability for Orders, and has the competence to determine criteria for suitability, such as, for instance, that those to be ordained must have the gift of celibacy, and live it with an appropriate discipline. In other words, Church authority chooses candidates for the priesthood in the Latin Church from among those discerned as having the charism of celibacy³⁶ and every charism, or gift, requires discipline in order to live it faithfully.³⁷

In addition to attention to the legitimate role of Church authority in setting requirements for priestly ordination, what other perspective may help to resolve the tension between charism and discipline? One possible principle is the *christological*

³⁵ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 15; emphasis added. Paul VI describes priestly celibacy as both a *gift* and a *discipline*; cf. nn. 7, 16. In n. 22, the pope cites Mt 19:11 as evidence of celibacy being a gift: “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is *given*,” emphasis added.

³⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 15, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1579; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*, n. 59.

³⁷ Henri de Lubac said in an interview: “If I become a priest, it is not for myself, but for the service of God and men within the Church; by presuming to define for myself the conditions of this service, I am denying the Church the freedom to which she has a right by her very mission,” Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church: Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk*, trans. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 358-59; hereafter cited: *The Motherhood of the Church*.

dimension of priestly celibacy, which proposes the notion of the celibate priest as an icon of Jesus Christ. In other words, celibacy enables the priest to imitate Christ more perfectly and to be configured to him more closely in his own priestly life.

It is unfortunate that the life and mission of Jesus are often not mentioned in discussions concerning priestly celibacy. Rather, contemporary arguments tend to focus on the ecclesiastical aspect of the question: how can the Church impose a charism? However, when theology focuses on the life of Christ as the exemplar of the priestly life, then celibacy is more clearly seen as a charism suitable for the priest so that he may live more freely in union with Christ, rather than being seen as simply a discipline imposed by Church authority that has little or nothing to do with the priest's vocation.

The celibate priest looks directly to Christ as his model in the apostolic ministry, which seems to have included celibacy at the start. Paul VI stated with regard to the christological dimension of priestly celibacy:

The Christian priesthood, being of a new order, can be understood only in the light of the newness of Christ, the Supreme Pontiff and eternal Priest, who instituted the priesthood of the ministry as a real participation in His own unique priesthood. The minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God, therefore, looks up to Him directly as his model and supreme ideal.³⁸

In a footnote to the final sentence, Paul VI referred to 1 Cor 11:1: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." By citing 1 Cor 11:1 the pope seemed to be stating that Paul was conscious of the role that celibacy played in his own imitation of Christ.

Christ, the mediator between heaven and earth by virtue of the Incarnation, lived his life in the state of celibacy, which witnesses to his total dedication to the service of

³⁸ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 19.

God and humankind. It is fitting, therefore, that the ministerial priest, who is called by Christ to follow him wherever he goes (cf. Lk 9:57), should be celibate and should live a life of priestly celibacy with a heart full of pastoral charity. The celibate priest understands in a special way the mission and life of Christ and has the opportunity to be a co-worker with him in evangelization, with a heart not divided by cares of the world and of family (cf. 1 Cor 7:33-34). In every aspect of his life, the celibate priest strives to imitate the life of Christ. John Paul II has described the importance of focusing on Christ as the model of the ministerial priesthood:

The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest. The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christians and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood.³⁹

In brief, the debate about celibacy as a charism-discipline can be put into proper perspective when celibacy is seen as an *imitation of Christ*. Whenever discussions concerning celibacy focus solely on ecclesial and canonical perspectives, the danger is that the full understanding of priestly celibacy in the life of the Church is lost. The christological dimension guides a theology of priestly celibacy to consider first and foremost the nature of priestly celibacy in its relation to Christ, the exemplar whom the celibate priest imitates. Basil Hume described well this christological motivation for celibacy:

For my part, two things are important: first, the fact that our Lord was celibate. Whatever reasons were important to him, I want to make mine.

³⁹ John Paul, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 12.

Our Lord was a virgin. That too is important. We should ponder on these truths in prayer.⁴⁰

Imitation of Christ as model and exemplar for the celibate priest in his ministry and life, however, is not the only source of understanding the priest's identity. The study of Christ (christology) leads to knowledge of his Body, the Church (ecclesiology). Thus the christological dimension of priestly celibacy seen *as an imitation of Christ* is related to the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy seen *as an aspect of the priest's relationship with the Church, the Body of Christ*. Paul VI mentioned both of these perspectives in his description of the reason for priestly celibacy:

The true, profound reason for dedicated celibacy is, as we have said, the choice of a closer and more complete relationship with the *mystery of Christ and the Church* for the good of all mankind: in this choice there is no doubt, that those highest human values are able to find their fullest expression.⁴¹

Following this indication of Paul VI, one can say that theology can explore the underlying motives for priestly celibacy in at least two dimensions. First, the *christological* dimension: celibacy is chosen for a “closer and more complete relationship with the mystery of Christ.” Second, the *ecclesiological* dimension: celibacy is chosen for a “closer and more complete relationship with the mystery of . . . the Church,” as will be presented in the next section.

⁴⁰ Basil Hume, *Searching for God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow and New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1977), 52; Cardinal Hume was speaking to monks, all of whom were priests.

⁴¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 54; emphasis added.

2. The Ecclesiological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

The ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy refers to the way in which celibacy touches upon the priest's relationship to the Church.⁴² Various magisterial documents address this dimension in differing, yet complementary ways. One such reference is found in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* of Paul VI:

The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born but not of flesh and blood.⁴³

Although the ecclesiological dimension can be associated with several images of Christ, such as *Head, Spouse, Servant, and Shepherd*, most magisterial teaching since Vatican II favors the spousal image. Therefore the scriptural references cited below deal primarily with the spousal image as the basis for the ecclesiological dimension of celibacy.

a). New Testament Foundations of the Ecclesiological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

The ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy, derived from the christological and related to the eschatological dimensions, arises from the bond established between Christ and his Church, to which Christ is related as Head, Shepherd, Servant, and Spouse. The ordained priest represents Christ to the Church through the sacrament of Holy Orders, which gives a participation in the apostolic ministry instituted by Christ.⁴⁴ The

⁴² For example, cf. above, 159-61, 182-86, and 200-04.

⁴³ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 26.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1536, which describes Orders as “the sacrament of apostolic ministry.” See also Claudio Hummes, “The Radical Importance of the Graced Gift of Priestly Celibacy,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 11

Apostle Paul participated in this apostolic ministry as a celibate (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34). In his total dedication to the affairs of Christ and of his Body, Paul had the spiritual freedom to dedicate himself in total service of all people. Likewise the celibate priest has the spiritual freedom to dedicate himself totally to the affairs of Christ and his Body; he surrenders himself in service to all people.

The New Testament foundations of the ecclesiological dimensions of priestly celibacy rest upon the Old Testament notion of the covenant that God established with Israel on Mount Sinai. The richness of this revealed covenantal theology can be seen most notably in its nuptial dimension.⁴⁵ The story of the chosen people is the story of God's faithfulness to the spousal covenant with the virgin Israel, despite her unfaithfulness.⁴⁶ Ignace de la Potterie wrote:

The fundamental idea of the entire Bible is that God wishes to draw up a covenant with humankind. From the beginning to the end, from the very first prophets up to the Book of Revelation, this covenant is described under the image of marriage. As such the union between a man and a woman enables marriage to serve as the fundamental symbol of the Covenant: God is the Groom and Israel the Bride (many times unfaithful).

(March 14, 2007): 8-10. Cardinal Hummes summarized well the threefold scheme, particularly the ecclesiological dimension.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ex 19:5, Hosea 1-2, Is 37:22, Lam 2:13 ("the virgin Zion"), and Jer 18:13, Amos 5:2, Ez 16:8-14 (the "virgin Israel"); see also de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, xxv-xxx. The Song of Songs expresses in a spiritual level of interpretation Israel's spousal relationship with the Lord God. It is noteworthy, however, that the Song of Songs, the nuptial book par excellence in the Old Testament, has no explicit covenantal imagery.

⁴⁶ Cf. Is 50:1, 54:5-8, 62:4-5; Jer 2:2; Mal 2:14; see also Susan F. Mathews, "Called to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Covenantal Spousal Imagery from Genesis to Revelations," in *Chaste Celibacy: Living Christ's Own Spousal Love*, ed. Edward G. Mathews, Jr. (Omaha: The Institute for Priestly Formation, 2001), 39-48, at 41; hereafter cited: "Called to the Wedding Feast."

What is said in the Old Testament of the relation between Yahweh and Israel is found again in the messianic era for the relationship between Christ and the Church.⁴⁷

The revelation in the Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, who established the New Covenant in his person and through his death and resurrection (cf. Heb 1:1, Jn 1:17, 16:14). The New Covenant is not a reality totally disconnected from the Old Covenant. Rather, the New Covenant flows from the Old in a mysterious yet organic way (cf. Jer 31:31-34); Jesus himself said that he did not come to abolish the Law and the prophets but to fulfill them (cf. Mt 5:17). He anticipated his sacrificial offering on the Cross (cf. Mk 14:24) at the Last Supper: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:25). Scott Hahn commented on the Lucan institution narrative:

Luke alone of the Synoptic Gospels specifies the cup as the “*new covenant in my blood*” (Luke 22:20), which alters the most immediate OT reference from Exodus 24:6-8 (the Sinaitic Covenant) to Jeremiah 31:31. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 is explicitly said to be *unlike* the broken covenant of Sinai (Jer 31:32). . . . In fact, the new covenant *is not a complete novum*, it is *the renewal of the Davidic covenant*.⁴⁸

Hence the New Covenant is built upon the Old and continues God’s nuptial relationship with his people, who are now those baptized faithful summoned or assembled into the Church (ἐκκλησία), the Body of Christ. In virtue of the Incarnation, the God-man Jesus

⁴⁷ De la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, xxiv. *Inter Insigniores 5* contains a pithy description of the biblical development of this concept.

⁴⁸ Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 226; original emphasis.

Christ is related to the faithful *in* and *through* the Church, as Head of the Body and as Bridegroom of the Bride.

The first public miracle of Jesus, the wedding feast of Cana (cf. Jn 2:1-11), can be seen as foreshadowing the New Covenant. On the literal level, it is a Jewish nuptial banquet. On the symbolic level, the feast portrays Jesus as the Bridegroom who establishes his Covenant through the miraculous transformation of the water into wine:

The miracle which he performed was a sign, a symbol wherein Jesus manifested himself as the *divine Bridegroom* of the new people of God, with whom he wishes to conclude a new and definitive covenant, which finds its final achievement in the Paschal mystery.⁴⁹

At Cana, Jesus manifests himself as the messianic Bridegroom who signifies the establishment of the New Covenant with his espoused messianic people: “Cana is a sign, a symbol of the New Covenant.”⁵⁰ Further, the superabundance of this wine signifies the realized eschatology of Jesus the Messiah, as Rudolf Schnackenburg wrote:

As a gift of Jesus, however the wine also is significant; it is given at the end, and it is so precious and copious that it is the eschatological gift of the Messiah. In the O.T. (Amos 9:13; Hos 2:24; Joel 4:18; Is 29:17; Jer 31:5) and in late Judaism [. . .] wine in abundance (along with oil or milk) is a sign of the age of salvation; in the ancient blessing of Jacob it is a characteristic of the Messiah from Judah (Gen 49:11ff).⁵¹

Jesus thus ushers in the age of salvation and fulfilled the Old Covenant with the New and everlasting Covenant.

⁴⁹ De la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 200; original emphasis.

⁵⁰ André Feuillet, *Etudes johanniques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 19.

⁵¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, Volume 1: *Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1-4* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 338.

Mary, on her part, can be seen as a symbol of the people of God, who, through her response “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5), invites all potential disciples to enter into the New Covenant. Aristide Serra stated: “John puts on the lips of Mary the profession of faith that the whole community of the chosen people pronounced one day in front of Sinai.”⁵² The substance of Mary’s words hearkens back to Israel’s promise of obedience to God in response to his offering of the covenant: “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”⁵³ In her urging to the complete obedience she herself had shown (cf. Lk 1:38), Mary personifies the new Israel, the Church of Christ.⁵⁴ Thus the wedding feast at Cana can be seen as a sign whereby Jesus manifests himself as the divine bridegroom of the Church with whom he establishes a New Covenant. As John McHugh argued, scriptural references to the Church as the bride of Christ clearly imply that Christ was regarded as the heavenly bridegroom (cf. 2Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25; Rev 19:7, 21:9).⁵⁵

Another text that contributes to a greater understanding of New Testament nuptial ecclesiology is 2 Cor 11:2, in which Paul describes the church in Corinth as a woman

⁵² Aristide Serra, *Maria a Cana e presso la Croce* (Rome: Centro di Cultura Mariana Mater Ecclesiae, 1978), 30, cited by de la Potterie in *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 190.

⁵³ Ex 19:8; cf. Ex 24:3-7 and Dt 5:27. The people of Israel continually renewed this promise, e.g. Josh 24:24, Neh 5:12.

⁵⁴ Cf. de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 189-90.

⁵⁵ Cf. John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, ed. Graham N. Stanton (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 193; see also Mathews, “Called to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb,” 44. Mt 9:15, Mk 2:19-20, and Lk 5:34-35 contain bridegroom imagery that Christ applies to himself. Further, the kingdom of heaven is often compared to a wedding feast: Mt 22:1-14, 25:1-13; Lk 14:15-25. Jn 3:29 relates the same image used by John the Baptist.

whom he has prepared for Christ: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”⁵⁶ Paul speaks of his “divine” jealousy toward the Christians of Corinth, using the Old Testament image of the jealousy of God for his bride, the people of Israel.⁵⁷ He exhorts the Corinthians to remember that they are espoused to Christ, to whom they must be faithful. As their father, Paul’s role was to “betroth” the faithful of the church of Corinth, married and unmarried alike, to Christ in virginal integrity and purity of faith.⁵⁸ Here Paul does not image Christ himself, but rather works on behalf of Christ.

While 2 Cor 11:2 describes Paul as betrothing the local Church of Corinth to Christ, Ephesians 5:21-32 points out that it is Christ who takes the whole church to himself.⁵⁹ The Ephesians text uses the image of husband and wife to illustrate the relationship between Christ and his Church. Eph 5:23 states this succinctly: “For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church, the body of which he is the Savior.” While Ephesians 5 does not contain the term “bridegroom,” it nevertheless establishes the union of Christ with his Church as the archetype and example

⁵⁶ In 2 Cor 11:2 Paul describes himself here as the father of the bride: “[Paul] retells their foundational story from the perspective of the Jewish father of the betrothed, whose responsibility it is to see that his daughter is kept pure for the occasion of her marriage,” Paul Sampley, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, New Interpreter's Bible, vol. XI (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 147-48.

⁵⁷ Cf. Isaiah 50, 54; Jeremiah 3; Hosea 1-3; cf. Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 173.

⁵⁸ Leo the Great wrote: “Discat Sponsa Verbi non alium virum nosse quam Christum,” *Epistolae*, 12, 3 (PL 54, 648 B).

⁵⁹ Cf. Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 242.

of the love of husband and wife.⁶⁰ Eph 5:25-27 describes the goal of Christ's self-sacrifice for the Church:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

The “washing of water by the word” can be understood as a reference to baptism. The word of the Gospel empowers those who hear it to believe and be baptized.⁶¹

The final verse, 5:32, speaks of a “mystery” (*μυστήριον*). It describes the close union of man and wife in human marriage and relates it to the heavenly marriage covenant between Christ and the Church: “This is a great mystery, but⁶² I am applying it to Christ and the Church”.⁶³ Within this spousal relationship, Christ loves the Church and gives himself up for her in a self-giving love, and the Church in turn offers him a reciprocal love. Christ brought about this new relationship through the Incarnational “marriage.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

⁶⁰ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 943.

⁶¹ Cf. John Paul Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 246.

⁶² The word *δέ* (*ἐγὼ δέ λέγω* in Eph 5:32) can be translated *but* as well as *and*. The former emphasizes that the mystery refers to the relationship between Christ and the Church, while the latter refers it to human marriage. Here I depart from the *New Revised Standard Version*, which uses *and*. Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 775, 779.

⁶³ Although there is no explicit covenantal spousal image in Genesis 1-3, the union of Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 2:24, 3:11) nevertheless served as a type of the New Covenant that Eph 5:21-33 utilized. On the relationship between Gen 1-3 and Eph 5:21-33, see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 503ff.

The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for “the wedding-feast of the Lamb.”⁶⁴

The Incarnation thus effects an everlasting and intimate union between the Word and humanity. Eph 5:21-32 refers to Christ in his role as Head and Bridegroom of the Church, not directly to priestly continence and celibacy. This passage, however, does underline Christ’s spiritual marriage to the Church, a concept from which the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of clerical celibacy would later be drawn.⁶⁵

With regard to New Testament indications of the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of clerical celibacy, the Pastoral Letters contain references to it through the phrase “man of one wife” as applied to the episkopos (cf. 1 Tim 3:2), presbyteros (cf. Tit 1:6), and diakonos (cf. 1 Tim 3:12). This biblical phrase was understood by some Fathers such as Ephrem, Siricius, and Leo the Great as requiring that the married candidate for the ordained ministry be bound by perfect and perpetual continence.⁶⁶ This particular reading of the phrase was often accompanied by a spiritual interpretation: by virtue of

⁶⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1612. *Gaudium et Spes* 22 states: “For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.”

⁶⁵ By Tertullian, for example, who wrote: “Si uero non sufficis, monogamus incurrit in spiritu, unam habens ecclesiam sponsam, secundam figuram quam apostolus in *illud magnum sacramentum* interpretatur in *Christum et ecclesiam*, competentes carnali monogamiae per spiritalem,” *De monogamia* 5,7 in *Le Mariage Unique*, Sources Chrétiennes, ed. Paul Mattei, vol. 343 (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 152; emphasis added.

⁶⁶ Cf. above, 14-18, and Ephrem the Syrian, *Advers. Haer. Panar.*, 59, 4, PG 41, 1024, Siricius *Ep. Ad Himerium Tarraconensem episcopum* 7, PL 13, 1139, and Leo the Great, *Epistula XII. Ad episcopos Mauritaniae* 3, PL 54, 648.

his ordination the minister was bound to one spouse, the Church. In this sense, the celibate bishop or priest himself is a “man of one wife.”⁶⁷

Finally, the Book of Revelation contains an abundance of nuptial language that describes the relationship between Christ and the glorified, bridal Church:

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2).⁶⁸

The eternal bond of God with his people in the kingdom of heaven is here described in terms of a marriage.⁶⁹ The heavenly Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, symbolizes the faithful people of the New Covenant. This passage is a representative of others also in Revelation that use spousal-covenantal language.⁷⁰

This brief review of New Testament biblical passages highlights the spousal-covenantal relationship between Christ and the Church. Although no New Testament references mention either celibacy or continence for ordained ministers in the early Church – with the possible exception of the phrase “man of one wife” in the Pastoral Letters⁷¹ – the Church Fathers and subsequent theologians nevertheless drew upon these

⁶⁷ For example, Augustine applied the phrase “man of one wife” to the bishop in *De bono coniugali*, 18, 21 (*PL* 40, 3 87-388) and *De continentia*, 9, 23 (*PL* 40, 364).

⁶⁸ Rev 19:5-22:9 can be seen as a narrative unit that deals with the nuptial Church in her relationship with Christ: cf. Kevin E. Miller, “The Nuptial Eschatology of Revelation 19-22,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 301-318, at 302-09.

⁶⁹ Cf. Mathews, “Called to the Wedding Feast,” 43.

⁷⁰ For example, see also Rev 19:7 and 22: 17.

⁷¹ Cf. above, 14-18.

texts to develop the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy.⁷² In recent times, the Magisterium began to incorporate elements of the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension into its teaching on priestly celibacy.⁷³ It can thus be seen that, although not explicit in Scripture, the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy has scriptural roots and can be considered as a legitimate development of scriptural doctrine.

The following passage from John Paul II is a clear example of the way in which magisterial teaching has built upon the scriptural foundation indicated above. Although the pope dealt here with the ecclesiological dimension of *priestly ministry*, one can nonetheless see the manner in which priestly celibacy harmonizes with the priest's relationship to the Church as described here:

The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church. Of course, he will always remain a member of the community as a believer alongside his other brothers and sisters who have been called by the Spirit, but in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community. In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love toward the Church, his bride. Therefore, the priest's life ought to radiate this spousal character, which demands that he be a witness to Christ's spousal love and thus be capable of loving people with a heart which is new, generous and pure, with genuine self-detachment, with full, constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of "divine jealousy" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2) and even with a kind of maternal tenderness, capable of bearing "the pangs of birth" until "Christ be formed" in the faithful (cf. Gal. 4:19).⁷⁴

⁷² Cf. Ephrem the Syrian, *Advers. Haer. Panar.*, 59, 4, PG 41, 1024, Siricius Ep. *Ad Himerium Tarraconensem episcopum* 7, PL 13, 1139, Thomas Aquinas, *In I ad Tim.*, c. III, lect. 1, in *Opera Omnia XIII*, and Bonaventure, *Liber II Sententiarum*, d 16, a 2, q 2, in *Opera Omnia II*; below, 317-19.

⁷³ This teaching appeared at the Second Vatican Council: cf. above, 115-46.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22; cf. above, 205-06.

b). The Ecclesiological Dimension as a Development of the Ritual Purity Argument

Since the time of Vatican II, the Magisterium has not used the ritual purity argument as a justification of priestly celibacy.⁷⁵ It has opted instead for other arguments, particularly through an ample use of the threefold dimension. The ritual purity argument highlighted the question of the relationship between priesthood and human sexuality, and it may be said that the ecclesiological dimension is a more satisfactory way of addressing the nature of this relationship because it contains within it a notion of nuptiality.

In *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Paul VI listed among the objections to mandatory priestly celibacy in the Latin Church the resistance to the idea of the need for the priest to maintain ritual purity:

The reasons justifying the perfect chastity of the Church's ministers seem often to be based on an overly pessimistic view of man's earthly condition or on a certain notion of the purity necessary for contact with sacred things.⁷⁶

Although the pope did not directly respond to this criticism, he seemed to allude to it in a subsequent passage:

Consideration of the "manifold suitability" (cf. *PO* 16) of celibacy for God's ministers is not something recent. Even if the explicit reasons [in favor of celibacy] have differed with different mentalities and different situations, they were always inspired by specifically Christian

⁷⁵ With the exception of a statement by Benedict XVI in 2009: see below, 285-86.

⁷⁶ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 6. Robert Garrity has argued that an anti-corporeal bias motivates the Magisterium's law that imposes perfect continence on major clerics: Robert Garrity, "Spiritual and Canonical Values in Mandatory Priestly Celibacy," *Studia Canonica* 27 (1993): 217-260, at 246.

considerations; and from these considerations we can get an intuition of the more fundamental motives underlying them.⁷⁷

The appeal to ritual purity seems to belong to those considerations that have pertained to “different mentalities and different situations” but which “were always inspired by specifically Christian considerations.” Nonetheless, he said, there are “more fundamental motives” that underlie them. Paul VI expounded these deeper considerations in his account of the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy and in particular as indicating the deeper ecclesiological considerations that underlie the ritual purity argument.

The assertion that ritual purity was inspired by Christian considerations would strike many today as erroneous. Joseph Komonchak maintained that Paul VI did not utilize the ritual purity argument because of its inadequacy to address the relationship between celibacy and human sexuality:

It is not surprising that Pope Paul’s encyclical does not mention ritual purity as a motive, since his own teaching on sexuality and marriage in *Humanae Vitae* represents a substantial development (not to say correction) of the view of sexuality often reflected when that motive was invoked in the past.⁷⁸

Whatever may have been his opinion on the theological value of the ritual purity argument, Paul VI underlined that priestly celibacy derives from other, more fundamental motives. His decision to omit the use of the ritual purity argument does not necessarily imply that he judged it to be an erroneous justification for celibacy, particularly since its long standing use in patristic and magisterial theological tradition had provided it with some substantial weight. His decision, however, to forego using the ritual purity

⁷⁷ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 18.

⁷⁸ Komonchak, “Celibacy and Tradition”: 13.

argument in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* suggests that he had found arguments for priestly celibacy that he considered more adequate.

Ritual Purity in the Judaic Law⁷⁹

The “purity laws” are those laws in the Pentateuch that qualify certain actions, states of being, persons, or things as *tahor* (“clean,” “pure,” וְטָהֵר) or *tame* (“unclean,” impure,” אֵי־טָהוֹרָה). There are several types of purity laws: ritual, moral, genealogical and dietary.⁸⁰ Among these regulations, *ritual* purity refers primarily to one’s ability to participate in the cultic acts in the Temple. Underlying the notion of ritual purity was the understanding that everything to do with the weakness and mortality of humans must be kept separate from the holiness of the Lord God and from the holy space that is God’s Temple. Separation is the concrete, visible expression of the exalted holiness of God, and the ritual purity laws maintained this protective system of separation.⁸¹

On the other hand, ritual *impurity* signifies a usually temporary condition resulting from the normal cycle of human life: birth, disease, sexual activity and death. The elements of this cycle of human life are necessary and unavoidable for any person living in society. John Meier wrote:

⁷⁹ This section outlines the Jewish understanding of ritual purity, which served as a background for the Catholic understanding of the relationship between human sexuality and the divine liturgy. This study will provide a foundation for understanding the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy in its nuptial perspective.

⁸⁰ Cf. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 4: *Law and Love* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), 343-50.

⁸¹ Cf. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 345.

There was nothing morally evil or sinful about these processes, if they were handled properly. However, these key activities of human existence involve major transitions from one human condition to another. They betoken a certain crossing of a threshold (hence the designation “liminal” experiences) and often unleash mysterious and powerful fluids connected with the conferral or diminution of life.⁸²

All who had come into contact with these bodily fluids were considered to be ritually impure until they had undergone certain purification rites. These bodily fluids were believed to possess some aspect of life, and thus were the objects that served as vehicles for transmitting ritual impurity. Blood in particular was seen as imbued with divine life, and semen was understood to be a form of blood. To come into contact with blood was to come into contact with the divine and thus one contracted a ritual impurity, “a holy contamination,” rather than a moral impurity. Through activities such as war and hunting, sexual activity, and the touching of a corpse, a person came into contact with blood outside of their normal place.⁸³ A person who was “contaminated” in this way had to undergo a process that would lead him from impurity to purity, which then would allow him to enter the temple or to handle sacred things like sacrificial food.⁸⁴ For example, after childbirth a woman had to offer a holocaust and a sin offering (cf. Lev 12:1-8). Since the Jewish people considered marriage as something holy and childbirth as the greatest blessing, the new mother was not rendered morally impure by giving birth,

⁸² Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 4, 344.

⁸³ Cf. Jacob Neusner, “Purity and the Priesthood in the Hebrew Scriptures and Rabbinic Tradition,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy / docu_ments/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_purity_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/docu_ments/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_purity_en.html). See also Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 108.

⁸⁴ Cf. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Volume 4, 345.

but rather having “touched” the creative power of the Lord God, she had to be ritually purified before she could resume normal, day to day activities.⁸⁵

In the Mosaic Law there were particularly stringent rules regulating worship in the Temple. The Levites and priests were required by the Mosaic Law to practice ritual continence during their time of service in the temple (cf. Ex 19:15, Lev 15). A priest became ritually impure through sexual activity outside specified times (cf. 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:11) and was required to undergo certain purification rites before he could participate again in the liturgy.⁸⁶ An overemphasis on this exterior purity, however, eventually led to a type of formalism against which the prophets preached; they strove to teach the people to recognize the importance of an interior purity of mind and heart (cf. Hos 6:6; Amos 4:1-5; Is 6:5; Jer 13:27).

Ritual Purity in the Patristic Tradition

Although the Catholic Church grew from this Jewish tradition, it did not accept all of the laws concerning ritual purity. Cochini described the Church’s adaptation of Old Testament purity laws to the ministerial priesthood:

If we first go back to the Old Testament’s prescriptions concerning the sanctity of priests, we cannot help but be struck by the fact that only the sexual interdictions survived the deep mutations that put a definitive end

⁸⁵ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 726.

⁸⁶ Cf. Lev 15:16-18. Paradoxically, in certain rabbinic texts the liturgical objects themselves were understood to “pollute”: e.g. the handling of a sacred scroll would “soil the hands” of the rabbi and he was required to wash his hands *after* reading it. See *Mishnah Yadaim*, 3:2, as cited in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 522. Even today the sacred vessels used at Mass are said to be *purified* when elements of the sacred species are removed.

to the rules on purity and impurity. Neither the defilement incurred by contact with a corpse; nor bodily infirmities, leprosy, or the prohibitions against certain categories of food; nor any irregularities of the old Judaic Code were retained in the law of patristic times – abolished, just like circumcision, those imperfect practices of a past Covenant!⁸⁷

Indeed, almost all of the requirements for attaining ritual purity were dropped, such as bathing. Hence ritual purity in the early Church was limited to the rules dealing with sexual behavior in relation to either participating in or celebrating the Eucharist.⁸⁸

Early evidence of sexual continence in relation to prayer is found in 1 Cor 7:5-7, in which the Apostle Paul described the close relationship between prayer and the abstention from conjugal intercourse:

Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind (1 Cor 7:5-7).

Paul saw this abstention from sexual relations to be a condition for intimacy with God through prayer. The patristic meditation upon 1 Corinthians 7 consequently linked efficacy in prayer, particularly in the intercessory prayer of the priest, to *purity*, the Latin of which is *pudicitia* (*chastity*).⁸⁹ According to the Fathers, a violation of this chastity

⁸⁷ Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 429; the English translation of this passage is rather awkward.

⁸⁸ “Ritual purity” may not be an adequate term because of its association with pagan or philosophical themes that are not always consonant with authentic Christianity. The Fathers preferred to use words such as “the service of the altar” or “the priestly ministry” to describe what it was that required celibacy; cf. Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 252-53, n. 250.

⁸⁹ Cf. J. Francis Stafford, “Eucharistic Foundation of Sacerdotal Celibacy,” *Origins* 23 (1993): 211-16, at 212.

occurred when a married priest had conjugal relations with his wife.⁹⁰ The purpose of Christian ritual purity therefore was not for the sake of physical cleanness but for the dedication of one's life to prayer to God and to the service of the Church. Perpetual priestly continence and celibacy were considered a precondition for the unceasing prayer required of the priest if he were to fulfill well his intercessory role.⁹¹

However, it can be affirmed that the concept of ritual purity in some cases had become a vehicle for expressing tendencies that are hostile to human sexuality. Some Fathers used language in the context of ritual purity that cast doubts upon the integral goodness of human sexuality and marriage.⁹² Peter Brown described the reaction to Jerome's view of marriage in the latter's *Against Jovinian*:

Roman Christians were shocked by Jerome's assertion that even first marriages were regrettable, if pardonable, capitulations to the flesh, and that second marriages were only one step away from the brothel. He went on to suggest that priests were holy only in so far as they possessed the purity of virgins. The married clergy were mere raw recruits in the army of the church, brought in because of a temporary shortage of battle-hardened veterans of lifelong celibacy.⁹³

Despite such excesses, most of the Fathers and subsequent theologians gave a more positive evaluation of human sexuality and of the holiness of the conjugal act. Clement of Alexandria, for example, promoted a liturgical purity that was accompanied by a positive attitude toward the sexual act; sexual intercourse is holy for baptized

⁹⁰ Cf. for example, Ambrose, *De Officiis* III (PL 104b-5a, 247-48).

⁹¹ For example, see Origen, *Hom. 6, 6 in Lev.* (GCS Orig. 6, 370, 2).

⁹² Cf. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, I.13, 15: 231c-232b, 234d, and Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis* (PL 2, 913-930). Ambrosiaster wrote an answer to Jerome on this matter: Ambrosiaster, *In I Cor 7:9* (CSEL 82/2, 74).

⁹³ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 377.

couples, and even semen is sacred.⁹⁴ One can argue that much of the Christian understanding of ritual purity was free from unhealthy views of human sexuality and marriage. It seems, however, that some of the modern misunderstanding of the patristic concept of ritual purity stems from the Fathers' use of the vocabulary of levitical ritualism even though they did not necessarily subscribe to the Jewish or even pagan beliefs that the words conveyed. The patristic language of ritual purity at times was ambiguous and did not have the distinctions that would correct and purify any anti-corporeal sentiment conveyed by the vocabulary. This ambiguity frustrated the Fathers' attempt to express the relationship between human sexuality and the celebration of the Eucharist. A case in point is the following statement of Siricius:

If intercourse is a defilement, then the priest ought to stand in readiness to carry out his heavenly function, [he] who is to pray for the sins of another, lest he himself be found unworthy.⁹⁵

Siricius' use of "defilement" (*pollutio*) seems to imply that sin is involved in the marital act itself. While in some cases this may have been true, the majority of such expressions reflect an ambiguity of language. Cochini argued along this line in his interpretation of the Fathers' use of "defilement" and of similar expressions:

When "defilement" is mentioned, it is because the sanctuary where the liturgy is celebrated is not, to the Fathers' minds, a suitable place to bring even the thought of activities whose whole value is merely earthly, and it

⁹⁴ Cf. *Stromata*, 3, 6, 46, 5 (*GCS Clem. Alex.* 2/4, 217, 23-25).

⁹⁵ "Si commixtio pollutio est, utique sacerdos stare debet ad officium coeleste prae paratus, qui pro alienis peccatis est postulaturus; ne ipse inveniatur indignus," Siricius, *Ad Gallos Episcopos*, PL 13, 1186; cf. John E. Lynch, "Marriage and Celibacy of the Clergy: The Discipline of the Western Church: An Historico-Canonical Synopsis," Part I, 25.

would be difficult to find words that would express this idea in a genteel way. Both the nobility of the conjugal act and its unsuitability to be brought within the sanctuary are true things, and the Fathers believed both were true. Although they tried with all their might to explain the problem correctly, they were not always successful.⁹⁶

c). The Nuptial-Ecclesiological Dimension, Pastoral Charity, and the Eucharist

Following the lead of Paul VI,⁹⁷ this section will consider the principal “specific considerations” that motivate the Catholic notion of ritual purity and the relation between the ministerial priesthood and the celebration of the Eucharist. This relationship is effectively expressed through the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy. In other words, the patristic understanding of ritual purity, which influenced magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy for the succeeding centuries, successfully separated itself from both pagan and Jewish understandings of ritual purity because of its eucharistic focus. Concerning the difference between the Christian notion of celibacy and Jewish or pagan understandings, Henri de Lubac pointed to the Eucharist as the distinguishing factor:

[. . .] This consecration through celibacy is understood and justified only if the very idea of Christian ministry is received in faith and retained in its proper originality instead of being equated with profane pagan or Jewish models . . . in short, only if we keep alive the holy reverence for the

⁹⁶ Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 252. Ambrosiaster wrote: “Compared to the stars, the light of a lamp is but fog; while compared to the sun, the stars are obscure; and compared to the radiance of God, the sun is but night. Thus are the things which, in relationship to us, are licit and pure, and are as if illicit and impure with respect to the dignity of God; indeed, no matter how good they are, they are not appropriate to the person of God,” *Questiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, 127 (CSEL 50, 415); quoted in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 252 (footnote 248).

⁹⁷ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 18.

Eucharist which was evident from the beginning at the center of every Christian community and which is the very heart of the Church.⁹⁸

The centrality of the Eucharist, rather than the moral or ascetical state of the priest, is a hermeneutical key for understanding the motivation that underlies the concept and practice of ritual purity with regard to priestly celibacy in the Catholic tradition.

Cochini affirmed this view:

It is the liturgy, and the Eucharistic liturgy in particular, that, making the Pascal mystery become a reality, leads the Christian people and, in a special and permanent role, “the servant of the altar” to an identification with Christ praying and offering himself to the Father for the salvation of the world. Christ himself is present, God-Man, associating his ministers with his person and his sacrifice, and not an impersonal or abstract divinity generating irrational taboos. There is as much difference between “ritual continence” and the celibacy-continence of the priests of Jesus Christ as there is between the pagan rituals, no matter how respectable they are, and the sacrifice of the Cross.⁹⁹

As will be shown below, the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy is itself closely related to the Eucharist. It also provides a framework in which marriage, human sexuality and celibacy may be understood in their inter-relationships. The ecclesiological dimension provides the language and concepts that can help to avoid the ambiguous expressions of the patristic era that at times have been understood as promoting negative attitudes toward matrimony and human sexuality.

In order to show the link between the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy and the Eucharist, a brief argument will be advanced in the following manner:

(1) the ecclesiological dimension qua *nuptial* expresses the priest’s exclusive relationship

⁹⁸ De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 132-34.

⁹⁹ Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 253.

to the bridal Church, (2) priestly celibacy and pastoral charity are intrinsically united and mutually perfect each other, and (3) both priestly celibacy and pastoral charity flow forth from and are oriented toward the Eucharist.

First, the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy refers to various roles that the priest has, in *persona Christi*, vis-à-vis the Church, such as Head, Shepherd, Servant, and Spouse.¹⁰⁰ With regard to its *nuptial* perspective, the ecclesiological dimension signifies the priest's relation to the Church insofar as he stands in the person of Christ, the Bridegroom. Paul VI wrote the following about the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy:

[“Laid hold of by Christ”] unto the complete abandonment of one's entire self to Him, the priest takes on the likeness of Christ most perfectly, even in the love with which the eternal Priest has loved the Church His Body and offered Himself entirely for her sake, in order to make her a glorious, holy and immaculate Spouse.¹⁰¹

The pope underscored that the celibate priest becomes more like Christ through the love with which “the eternal Priest has loved the Church His Body and offered Himself entirely for her sake.” The priest participates in this same love that Christ has for his Church. The faithful on their part reciprocate that love. John Paul II emphasized this nuptial relationship between the priest and the faithful:

The Church, as Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self *in* and *with* Christ *to*

¹⁰⁰ Cf. above, 201-04, and John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 3.

¹⁰¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 26.

his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.¹⁰²

John Paul II taught that the Church enjoys an exclusive, “marital” claim on Christ her Spouse. In other words, as Christ and ministerial priests have an exclusive, nuptial relationship to the Church, the Church also has an exclusive, nuptial relationship to the priest. The priest's exclusive relationship with the Church thus suggests the incongruity of his having a human, nuptial relationship.¹⁰³

Second, an effect of this spousal relationship between Christ and his Church is an innate desire of the faithful to be loved by the priest. In magisterial documents this priestly love is called *pastoral charity*, which animates and guides the priest in his ministry.¹⁰⁴ The pastoral charity of the priest is a participation in Christ's own pastoral charity and it enables the priest to give himself totally to the Church:

The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ. “Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ's love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us.” The gift of self, which is the source and synthesis of pastoral charity, is directed toward the Church. This was true of Christ who “loved the Church and

¹⁰² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29; cf. above, 205-06.

¹⁰³ Cf. above, 206.

¹⁰⁴ For example, see Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 14, and John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 22-23. Augustine describes pastoral charity as an *amoris officium*: Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 123, 5: CCL 36, 678.

gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25), and the same must be true for the priest.¹⁰⁵

Pastoral charity is the primary motivation of the priest’s ministry and life, and it enables the priest to imitate Christ in his service. Celibacy, which is part of the priest’s imitation of the life of Christ, becomes fruitful and efficacious to the extent that pastoral charity informs and perfects it.

If pastoral charity animates and perfects the priest in his celibacy, then the converse is also true. Priestly celibacy facilitates growth in pastoral charity, as both Vatican II and Paul VI taught:

[Celibacy] is at the same time a sign and a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world.¹⁰⁶

And so the free choice of sacred celibacy has always been considered by the Church “as something that signifies and stimulates charity:” it signifies a love without reservations; it stimulates to a charity which is open to all.¹⁰⁷

Celibacy is a both a sign of and a stimulus to pastoral charity. In the context of service to the Church the celibate priest imitates Christ who “loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). The priest through his celibate life is in a position to place the Church and its members as his first interest, and with this concrete spirituality he becomes capable of loving the universal Church and that part entrusted to him with a

¹⁰⁵ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23; the footnote to the citation within this text states: “Homily at eucharistic adoration, Seoul (Oct. 7, 1989), 2: Insegnamenti XII/2 (1989), 785.”

¹⁰⁶ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

¹⁰⁷ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 24.

deep pastoral charity. For his celibate love to become perfected, the priest first must look to Christ himself in order to receive his own pastoral charity:

[. . .] The primary point of reference of the priest's charity is Jesus Christ himself. Only in loving and serving Christ the head and spouse will charity become a source, criterion, measure and impetus for the priest's love and service to the Church, the body and spouse of Christ.¹⁰⁸

Third, the *Eucharist* is the source and goal of *pastoral charity* and *priestly celibacy*. The celibate priest is most effective in his ministry to the extent that he is imbued with pastoral charity. Vatican II taught that the Eucharist is the source of pastoral charity:

This pastoral charity flows mainly from the eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the center and root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice.¹⁰⁹

The priest's *pastoral charity* flows from the celebration of the Eucharist, from which the priest receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a sacrificial dimension.¹¹⁰

Consequently, the graces given to the priest to live a fruitful and life giving *celibacy* are also drawn from the Eucharist. Vatican II stated:

[. . .] The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. . . . From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

¹⁰⁹ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 14; cf. *LG* 28 and *PO* 2. John Paul II built upon this conciliar teaching in stating that the sacrament of Holy Orders is the *specific* source of pastoral charity: "Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist," John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

¹¹⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way.¹¹¹

Here the Eucharist is described as the universal source of grace for all the faithful and the goal of all activities of the Church. Therefore the charism of priestly celibacy, as with pastoral charity, has its source and ultimate goal in the Eucharist.

Furthermore, the priest's relationship with the faithful is realized most intimately in the celebration of the Eucharist, where the priest assumes the sacramental role of Christ the Bridegroom in virtue of acting in the person of Christ the Head and Bridegroom of the Church. John Paul II elaborated this theme in *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

We find ourselves at the very heart of the Pascal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because "he has given himself": his body has been "given," his blood has been "poured out" (cf. Lk 22:19-20). In this way "he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The "sincere gift" contained in the sacrifice of the cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God's love. As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. *The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.* The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who "creates" the Church, his body. Christ is united with this "body" as the bridegroom with the bride.¹¹²

Implicit in the pope's statement is the idea that during the celebration of the Eucharist the priest stands in the person of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. John Paul II outlined this teaching in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*:

Hence Christ stands "before" the Church and "nourishes and cherishes her" (Eph. 5:29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church (*MD* 26). . . . In his

¹¹¹ Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 10.

¹¹² John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26; original emphasis.

spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love toward the Church, his bride.¹¹³

Indeed, the Eucharist re-presents, makes once again present, the sacrifice of the cross, the full gift of Christ to the Church, the gift of his body given and his blood shed, as the supreme witness of the fact that he is head and shepherd, servant and spouse of the Church.¹¹⁴

Hence the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of celibacy denotes the priest's exclusive, marital relationship to the bridal Church. The priest's celibacy and the pastoral charity that motivates him in this nuptial relationship are bound together and mutually perfect each other. Furthermore both priestly celibacy and pastoral charity flow forth from and are oriented toward the Eucharist, which is the very celebration of the act which seals the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church, namely his sacrifice on the Cross.

In contrast to the ritual purity argument, which arises from a self-evaluating perspective of physical and moral worthiness to celebrate the Eucharist, the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension considers the wider demands of the relationship expressed between Christ and the Church when the Eucharist is celebrated. The question then is not so much whether the priest is ritually pure insofar as he has abstained from sexual

¹¹³ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22. Along these lines de Lubac wrote: "The minister represents Christ in two ways, both within the central act of the eucharistic celebration to which I like to refer. Christ is the head of the Church, as Saint Paul says, and the Church is his body; he appears before the Father. Well, on earth, the minister, at the head of the Christian community, represents Christ facing the Father. On the other hand, Christ is also and at the same time the spouse of the Church, again, according to Pauline symbolism; he is the savior of the community; now, in the celebration of the Eucharist, when the minister speaks in the name of Christ and pronounces the words of consecration, he is, as it were, facing the community, he occupies the role of the spouse," Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 353-54.

¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

contact, but whether he has given himself fully to the bridal Church in sacrificial, pastoral charity. Standing in the person of Christ, the Head and Bridegroom of the Church, the celibate priest is called to give his whole body and soul, in service to the People of God.

Consequently, the *purity* required with regard to the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy is the purity of the priest's *pastoral charity in service to the Church*, which culminates in his self-offering in the Eucharist. The priest's effort at his own growth in holiness is aided through the centering of his life, including his celibacy, on the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained.¹¹⁵ Acting in the person of Christ the Head, the priest unites himself with the offering and places on the altar his entire life.¹¹⁶

In sum, there is a purity related to the Eucharist that is required of the priest. The ecclesiological dimension highlights it as a purity of nuptial love for the Church rather than as a purity from personal sexual defilement. Thus the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy can develop the traditional ritual purity argument in a new and fruitful direction.

Is the latter now to be considered theologically obsolete? For Benedict XVI it does not appear to be so. On June 16, 2009, the pope published a letter commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Saint John Vianney and in which he also proclaimed

¹¹⁵ Cf. Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 5.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 29.

a *Year for Priests*.¹¹⁷ Within the letter the pope described the three evangelical counsels – poverty, chastity and obedience – as providing a sure road for priests to attain the desired goal of Christian perfection. In his treatment of chastity, the virtue that animates priestly celibacy, Benedict XVI said of the chastity of the Curé of Ars:

It could be said that it was a chastity suited to one who must daily touch the Eucharist, who contemplates it blissfully and with that same bliss offers it to his flock. It was said of him that “he radiated chastity”; the faithful would see this when he turned and gazed at the tabernacle with loving eyes.¹¹⁸

It is noteworthy that *chastity*, or celibacy lived according the virtue of chastity, is described here by Benedict XVI in language that has affinities with the ritual purity notion of celibacy: the pope described John Vianney as having a resplendent chastity fitting for “one who must daily touch the Eucharist.”¹¹⁹

This is rather remarkable insofar as no pope or magisterial document has used ritual purity language since Pius XII.¹²⁰ Although the Magisterium has not explicitly repudiated this argument for priestly celibacy, it nevertheless has avoided its use.¹²¹ If

¹¹⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars,” *Origins* 39 (2009): 116-21; hereafter cited: “Year for Priests”.

¹¹⁸ Benedict XVI, “Year for Priests,” 119. The footnote to this passage cites: “*Le Sacerdoce, c’est l’amour du cœur de Jésus*,” in *Le curé d’Ars. Sa pensée – Son cœur*. Présentés par l’Abbé Bernard Nodet, éd. Xavier Mappus, Foi Vivante, 1966, p. 112.

¹¹⁹ Benedict XVI’s concern with the sacred liturgy is particularly expressed in Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000).

¹²⁰ Cf. Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, nn. 23-24, and above, 60-61.

¹²¹ Cf. above, 156, and Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 18.

the argument is retrieved in future magisterial teaching, then the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy will still be useful to help correct any defective elements in the ritual purity argument.

3. The Eschatological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

The term *eschatology* signifies the ensemble of doctrines about the “last things,”¹²² i.e. the end of the existing world and the ultimate destiny of each human person. The Bible itself refers to a future time when the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can speak of an entirely new state of reality.¹²³ In his Second Letter, Peter looks forward to “new heavens and new earth” (2 Pet 3:13) and in the Acts of the Apostles he explains the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as already the gift of the “last days,” fulfilling the prophecy of Joel (cf. Acts 2:16-17; Joel 3:1-5).

According to magisterial documents, the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy refers to the prophetic witness of the celibate priest to the end times, to the kingdom of God and the heavenly realities that will never pass away. Vatican II stated in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16:

Moreover they [celibate priests] are made a living sign of that world to come, already present through faith and charity, a world in which the children of the resurrection shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage (cf. Lk 20:35-36).¹²⁴

¹²² ἔσχατοα, from ἔσχατον, which generally means “end times.” Cf. “Eschatology in Early Judaism,” in Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1st ed.

¹²³ Cf. “Eschatology” in David Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed.

¹²⁴ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

Priestly celibacy impacts the faithful in three significant ways: (1) it reminds them that the final stages of salvation have already begun here on earth (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31), (2) it points to the final, heavenly goal of their earthly pilgrimage,¹²⁵ and (3) it serves as a warning of the danger of over-involvement with earthly concerns, enslavement to the desires of the flesh, and of inordinate attachment to created goods, even to marriage. Celibacy lived authentically directs a person's focus to heaven and to what is necessary on the journey to attain that end. Since the time of Vatican II, the Magisterium has attributed such an eschatological significance to the celibacy of priests, both diocesan and religious.¹²⁶ In contrast, *Perfectae Caritatis* 12 – summarizing traditional Catholic teaching – attributes an eschatological witness primarily to religious, who through their vow of chastity become signs of the age to come.¹²⁷

a). New Testament Foundations of the Eschatological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

The scriptural passage most commonly used for establishing the eschatological significance of celibacy is Mt 22:30, where Jesus states that in the Resurrection “they [men and woman] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in

¹²⁵ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 34, and above, 161-62.

¹²⁶ For a detailed theological study on the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy after Vatican II, see Joseph Höffner, “Pour le royaume des cieux: dix thèses sur le célibat des prêtres,” in Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat: Etudes historiques et théologiques*, 573-82.

¹²⁷ “Thus for all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse,” Vatican Council II, *PC*, n. 12.

heaven.”¹²⁸ In this passage Jesus teaches that marriage will give way to a new form of life in heaven.¹²⁹ Here one sees a clear difference between Jewish and Christian notions of eternal life. In the Old Testament, it was necessary for the Jew to marry because there was no clear understanding of the resurrection of the body.¹³⁰ Since the Jews believed that in a certain manner they would “survive death” by living through their children, celibacy was practically non-existent among the Jewish people, and barrenness was a cause of shame (cf. Lk 1:25).

With the Resurrection of Jesus, however, Christians could believe in and hope for their own resurrection. Since Jesus rose from the dead and would bring to life those who died believing in him (cf. Jn 6:40, Rom 8:11), the Christian now had the option of forgoing marriage for the sake of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ own celibacy functions as a prophecy of the new and eternal life of heaven, fundamentally linked to his Resurrection.

The Apostle Paul continues the teaching of Jesus on the transitory nature of the created world and the perduring reality of the kingdom of heaven. The Pauline epistles contain various eschatological references that indicate the kingdom of heaven as the final destiny of those who believe in Jesus. Paul encourages the faithful, whether married or

¹²⁸ Mk 12:24-25 and Lk 20:34-36 can also be cited in this regard.

¹²⁹ Jesus corrects both the belief of the Sadducees (no life after death) and of the Pharisees (an earthly view of life after death). Life in heaven will be of a different order, with angels giving the pattern. Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 561 and Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary; Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 406.

¹³⁰ Cf. above, 11.

celibate, to focus their eyes on the eternal, lasting things above, “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). He further exhorts them to anticipate the coming reign of God in the end times, when all will be raised from the dead (cf. 1 Thess 4:14-17).

In order to serve better the Lord and to focus on heavenly realities, Paul counsels men and women to live celibately, as he himself did (cf. 1 Cor 7:8), for “the present form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul teaches that devotion to the Lord’s affairs is the motivation for celibacy, the celibate man is freer to please the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 7:32). This rationale seems different from that given by Jesus, who proposed the *kingdom of heaven/God* (cf. Mt 19:27-30, Mk 10:28-31, and Lk 18:28-30). Paul’s motivation seems more subjective and centered on the individual in the service of Christ, rather than just the kingdom of God. On this matter Raniero Cantalamessa wrote:

[. . .] There is one difference between the two texts (Jesus’ and Paul’s) and it is important to note it. According to Jesus, a person may remain unmarried “for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven,” i.e. for a *cause*; according to Paul, marriage is renounced “for the sake of the Lord,” i.e. for a *person*.¹³¹

Cantalamessa argued that this represents an advancement of the Christian understanding of celibacy, one due not to Paul but to Jesus, who became “the Lord” by his death and resurrection.¹³² Thus the fundamental motivation for Christian celibacy is devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus.

The scriptural texts cited speak of an eschatological dimension of celibacy *in general* but do not indicate one that is particular to *ordained ministers* as such. However,

¹³¹ Cantalamessa, *A Positive Approach to Celibacy*, 21; brackets and emphasis in the original.

¹³² Cf. Cantalamessa, *A Positive Approach to Celibacy*, 21.

Lk 18:28-30 implies the eschatological significance of ministerial celibacy, when Peter speaks, seemingly on behalf of the Twelve (cf. Lk 18:31):

“Lo, we have left our homes and followed you.” And Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and *in the age to come eternal life*.”¹³³

In the Lucan text the Twelve are not only leaving the goods of this earth but they are also journeying toward something beyond this life. The rewards they could expect for making the sacrifice of leaving everything for the sake of the kingdom of God, even wife and children, will be manifold in this life and even greater in the age to come.

Other than Lk 18:28-30, the scriptural texts that are the foundation for the eschatological dimension of *priestly* celibacy refer to celibacy *in general* as a sign of the eschaton. In this respect, the eschatological dimension of apostolic, ministerial celibacy is not strongly present in Scripture, but is implicitly contained in the texts mentioned texts. In sum, the eschatological significance of priestly celibacy reflects the preeminence of the kingdom of God, which is already present already on earth in mystery, but which will reach its perfection only with the final coming of the Lord Jesus (cf. Rev 22:17, 21).

¹³³ Lk 18:28-30; translation from *The Revised Standard Version*, emphasis added. The parallel passages in Mt 19:27-30 and Mk 10:28-31 also contain an eschatological promise (“eternal life”), although “wife” is not listed in either text. The idea of “eternal life” is frequently found in the New Testament: cf. Rom 2:7, 5:21; Gal 6:8, Jude 21, and Jn 3:15-16. Luke uses it in 18:18, 30; Acts 13:46, 48. The language of “the age to come” was part of the apocalyptic (4 Ezra 7:47; 8:1) and rabbinic (*Pirke Aboth* 2:8) worldview; cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3 of *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 172, 279.

b). The Eschatological Dimension as a Corrective to a Pragmatic View of Priestly Celibacy

Mandatory priestly celibacy in the Latin Church, despite widespread disagreement among Catholics concerning its suitability, provides a practical advantage for priests by allowing the priest greater freedom and flexibility in fulfilling his pastoral work. In *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* Pope Paul VI underlined some of the practical benefits of priestly celibacy lived in the spirit of pastoral charity:

[Celibacy] gives to the priest, even in the practical field, the maximum efficiency and the best disposition of mind, psychologically and affectively, for the continuous exercise of a perfect charity. This charity will permit him to spend himself wholly for the welfare of all, in a fuller and more concrete way.¹³⁴

In addition to facilitating the sacerdotal mission by freeing the priest from the duties of marriage and family in order to serve more freely the People of God, celibacy helps the priest to grow in pastoral charity, thus orienting his ministerial activity to a supernatural purpose.¹³⁵

Although being free from the demands of domestic life can benefit the priest from a practical standpoint, this freedom is not the primary motivation for priestly celibacy. Rather, the primary motivation of priestly celibacy is *the priest's union with Christ through liturgical and intercessory prayer*. The practical benefits of priestly celibacy, such as providing the possibility for more time and energy to devote to pastoral ministry, are secondary in relation to this primary motivation.

¹³⁴ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 32.

¹³⁵ Cf. Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16; Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 24; above, 285.

Priestly celibacy first and foremost is *theocentric*. Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2006 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, highlighted the priest's total dedication to God by quoting the psalm verse: "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup, you hold my lot" (Ps 16:5). The pope then commented on the psalm:

The priest praying in this Psalm interprets his life on the basis of the distribution of territory as established in Deuteronomy (cf. 10: 9). After taking possession of the Land, every tribe obtained by the drawing of lots his portion of the Holy Land and with this took part in the gift promised to the forefather Abraham. The tribe of Levi alone received no land: its land was God himself. This affirmation certainly had an entirely practical significance. Priests did not live like the other tribes by cultivating the earth, but on offerings. However, the affirmation goes deeper. The true foundation of the priest's life, the ground of his existence, the ground of his life, is God himself.¹³⁶

Benedict XVI went on to explain that the Catholic Church, in this Old Testament interpretation of priestly life, sees helpful indications for the meaning of its own priesthood. The priest of today can make his own what the Levite said in ancient times: "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup," that is, God himself is the priest's portion of land, the external and internal foundation of his existence. The pope emphasized that the "theocentricity" of priestly existence is a necessary anchor in an entirely function-oriented world based upon calculable and ascertainable performance. The priest must know God intimately in order to be an effective apostle to humanity. If the priest fails to focus on God in his ministry, his priestly zeal quickly diminishes.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia," *L'Osservatore Romano*, (January 3, 2007): 5-7, at 6.

¹³⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia": 6.

Benedict XVI then related the theocentric notion of priestly ministry – the “land” upon which the priest builds his ministry – to priestly celibacy:

Celibacy, in force for Bishops throughout the Eastern and Western Church and, according to a tradition that dates back to an epoch close to that of the Apostles, for priests in general in the Latin Church, can only be understood and lived if it is based on this basic structure.¹³⁸

The pope thus made it clear that the primary motivation for the celibacy of the priest must be divine and not human or practical.¹³⁹ Such a desire for being free from human ties in order to be available to others in fact could develop easily into a self-centered lifestyle that spares the priest from the sacrifices demanded by matrimony, into an egoism which could lead to spiritual poverty and to a hardening of the heart.¹⁴⁰ The authentic spirituality of priestly celibacy, on the other hand, opens the priest to a life of selfless service that is motivated by a desire for divine intimacy:

The true foundation of celibacy can be contained in the phrase: *Dominus pars* - You are my land. It can only be theocentric. It cannot mean being deprived of love, but must mean letting oneself be consumed by passion for God and subsequently, thanks to a more intimate way of being with him, to serve men and women, too. Celibacy must be a witness to faith: faith in God materializes in that form of life which only has meaning if it is based on God.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia”: 6.

¹³⁹ Cardinal Angelo Sodano, in his commentary on the apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, pointed out that Benedict XVI used the threefold dimension to reject any justification of celibacy on a purely functional basis: “Renewal Depends on Faith, Eucharistic Worship,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (August 1, 2007): 8-11, at 9.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia”: 6.

¹⁴¹ Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia”: 6; original emphasis.

For Benedict, celibacy means to “be consumed by passion for God” and to enjoy a more intimate union with him. As a result of this prayerful union, the priest is better able “to serve men and women.” This priority of intimate union with God in prayer naturally leads the priest to service to the faithful in pastoral charity. Benedict XVI concluded his reflection by stating that the world needs celibacy as a divine witness that is based upon the decision to welcome God as the “land” where one finds one’s own existence. The pope implies that the celibate priest’s surrender of himself to God as his only possession is to be nurtured and sustained by his life of prayer and sacramental ministry.

In his 2006 Christmas address, Benedict taught that priestly celibacy is not purely for practical benefit in this world, e.g. giving the priest more time for ministry, but is rather a *means* by which the priest gives himself fully to God and thence more fully to service in the world. The pope’s teaching is drawn from an Old Testament text – Ps 16:5 – that centers on the election of the Levites as a priestly people. His use of this psalm verse enriches the scriptural roots of the magisterial teaching on celibacy.¹⁴² Benedict XVI provided a theocentric motivation for priestly celibacy, which foremost consists of a prayerful union with God. This account, however, is incomplete insofar as it does not address liturgical prayer, which is the most eminent *priestly* prayer. The priest’s total dedication to God and to the Church in *liturgical worship* is a way in which the eschatological dimension of *priestly* celibacy can be understood more fully.

¹⁴² Joseph Ratzinger already used this application of Psalm 16:5 to priestly celibacy in an interview some years prior to his election to the papacy. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium. An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), 194-95.

One possible way of entering into such a liturgical understanding of priestly celibacy is through Paul VI's description of the eschatological dimension:

Our Lord and Master has said that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30). In the world of man, so deeply involved in earthly concerns and too often enslaved by the desires of the flesh, the precious divine gift of perfect continence for the kingdom of heaven stands out precisely as “a singular sign of the blessings of heaven,”¹⁴³ it proclaims the presence on earth of the final stages of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31) with the arrival of a new world, and in a way it anticipates the fulfillment of the kingdom as it sets forth its supreme values which will one day shine forth in all the children of God.¹⁴⁴

Although the content of this passage is not specifically priestly because this witness can be attributed also to consecrated religious,¹⁴⁵ Paul VI applied it here to the ministerial priest, whose celibacy “anticipates the fulfillment of the kingdom as it sets forth its supreme values” which will one day shine forth in all the blessed in heaven. Recalling that in the liturgy “we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ”¹⁴⁶ it seems that the priest's celibacy can be particularly related to the liturgy over which he presides. His celibacy harmonizes with the eschatological nature of the liturgy itself. The heavenly life itself will be a liturgy of praise and adoration (cf. Rev 5:6-14, 7:9-12). Although an unceasing life of prayer is not literally possible in this earthly life, priests still are able to approach it by dedicating themselves to a life of prayer and intercession

¹⁴³ Vatican Council II, *PC*, n. 12. The Flannery translation of n. 12 is clearer: Religious chastity is “a special symbol of heavenly benefits.”

¹⁴⁴ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 34.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Vatican Council II, *PC*, n.12 and *LG*, n. 42.

¹⁴⁶ *The Sacramentary*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co, 1985), 562; cf. Titus 2:13.

through their sacerdotal celibacy, thus being “like the angels in heaven.” Such an understanding of the primary motivation of priestly celibacy deepens and corrects a purely practical view of the charism.

This extension of Paul VI’s teaching into a specifically liturgical understanding of the eschatological dimension, however, may seem to be somewhat forced. Nonetheless, support for this connection can be found in Catholic theological tradition. Origen (d. 254), for example, provided two homilies that can serve as an avenue for arriving at a liturgical understanding of the eschatological dimension. In his twenty third homily on the book of Numbers, Origen described the various liturgical feast days and he speaks also of a metaphorical “feast of feasts” that has no interruption: the feast of unceasing prayer.¹⁴⁷ Mindful of the periodic continence observed by lay people before attending the Eucharist,¹⁴⁸ Origen wrote about the necessity of unceasing prayer (cf. 1 Thess 5:17) and refers to Paul’s counsel that married couples should agree to remain continent for a period of time in order to pray (cf. 1 Cor 7:5).¹⁴⁹ Christ, however, commanded believers to pray always (cf. Lk 18:1). Does it not follow then that believers should practice perpetual continence? Origen answered:

[Since Paul recommends temporary continence for married people] it is certain that the perpetual sacrifice is impeded in those who serve conjugal needs. This is why it seems to me that the offering of a perpetual sacrifice

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Ancient Christian Texts, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) 139-47; *Hom. 23, 3 in Num (GCS Orig. 7, 215, 11-16)*.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, 141-42. In the early Church married lay couples were exhorted to observe temporary continence on the days when the liturgy was celebrated: cf. Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in the East and West*, 144-178.

belongs to that one alone who has pledged himself to perpetual and continual chastity. But there are other feast days for those who perhaps are not able to offer the sacrifices of chastity perpetually.¹⁵⁰

These “other feast days” indicate that marriage and conjugal union are not obstacles to prayer as such; the prayer life of married couples however is not “perpetual” because of conjugal union. Those who are perpetually continent or celibate, on the other hand, are able to approach more closely a life of unceasing prayer because their prayer is not interrupted by satisfying conjugal needs.

Who are these Christians who live a celibate or perfectly continent life for the sake of unceasing prayer and as a sign of the kingdom of heaven? Origen provided part of the answer in his sixth homily on Leviticus, where he focused on priests and their intercessory prayer.¹⁵¹ Origen saw Moses as a prototype of the celibate priest of the New Testament. Just as the success of the Exodus depended upon Moses’ intercession, the successful mission of the Church depends on the mediation of the priest of Jesus Christ:

[Moses] does not rush to battle; he does not fight against enemies. But what does he do? He prays and as long as he prays his people prevail. If “he should relax and lower his hands” (Ex 17:11), his people are defeated and are put to flight. Thus let the priest of the Church also pray unceasingly that the people who are under him may defeat the invisible Amalachite hosts who are the demons that assail those “who want to live piously in Christ (2 Tim 3:12).”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, 142.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Origen, Homily 6 in *Homilies on Leviticus 1-16*, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Thomas P. Halton (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1990), 116-128; *Hom. 6, 6 in Lev. (GCS Orig. 6, 370, 2)*.

¹⁵² Origen, Homily 6 in *Homilies on Leviticus 1-16*, 128.

As Moses could not let his arms of intercession drop, so too the priest of the New Covenant cannot afford to let his arms weaken. His perseverance in prayer is a guarantee of the salvation of the faithful. For Origen the theology of priestly intercession is governed by this principle, and the obligation to celibacy and perfect continence derives from it. It follows that, being always in the presence of God in intercession – especially in liturgical ministry – the priest does not have the leisure needed for married life.¹⁵³

Origen's witness to the connection between celibacy and priestly-liturgical prayer was affirmed at the Second Council of Carthage (380), which promulgated laws regulating clerical continence in relation to the offering of the sacraments:

Bishop Genethlius says: "As was previously said, it is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the Levites, i.e., those who are in *the service of the divine sacraments*, observe perfect continence, so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us also endeavor to keep."

The bishops declared unanimously: "It pleases us all that bishop, priest, and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal intercourse] with their wives, so that *those who serve at the altar* may keep a perfect chastity."¹⁵⁴

Perfect continence was to be observed for the sake of prayer "so as to obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God" (*quo possint simpliciter quod a Deo postulant impetrare*). The Council's reference to those who are "in the service of the divine

¹⁵³ Jerome wrote: "If a layperson, or any believer, is not able to pray unless he abstains from conjugal intercourse, the priest, who must always offer sacrifices for the people, must always pray. If he must always pray, he therefore must always abstain from the use of marriage," Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, 257a, quoted above, 38. Cf. also Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 251.

¹⁵⁴ Second Council of Carthage, CC 149, 13, emphasis added; cf. Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in 1 Cor 7:5* (CSEL 81, 2, 71, 19-72, 3); above, 35-37.

sacraments” and “who serve at the altar” affirms the priestly-cultic nature of this motivation. “Service of the divine sacraments,” however, is not restricted to celebration of the Eucharist, as Ambrosiaster stated:

Is all that is allowed in the presence of others also allowed in the presence of the Emperor? So much the more is it so in the affairs of God. That is the reason why God’s priests must be purer than others; indeed he appears as his personal representative, and he is effectively his vicar; so that what is permitted to others is not permitted to him. It is necessary that he take the place of Christ every day; whether by praying for the people or by offering the Sacrifice or administering Baptism.¹⁵⁵

The prayer of the priest includes the Eucharist but also encompasses the celebration of the other sacraments, prayer in general, and other exercises of the *munus sanctificandi*.¹⁵⁶

For example, Ambrosiaster wrote:

[Priests and deacons] have to be present at the church every day. . . . They have to offer the sacrifice every week for the local population, and even if not every day for strangers, it’s at least twice a week for the local populations. And furthermore, there is no shortage of sick people to baptize nearly every day. . . . If [the Apostle] orders laymen to abstain temporarily [from conjugal relations] in order to attend to prayer, how much more [incumbent is it] on deacons and priests, they who have to pray day and night for the people entrusted to them.¹⁵⁷

The pastoral activity of the priest thus includes more than the simple celebration of the Eucharist: it embraces the wide range of priestly ministry. Nonetheless, the priest’s prayerful intercession is most excellently accomplished in the Eucharist, which is the high point of priestly ministry.

¹⁵⁵ Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (CSEL 50, 414-15); translation in Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 167.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Siricius, *Cum in Unum*, PL 13, 1160a; above, 33-35.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Timotheum primam*, III, 12-13 (PL 17, 470b-71b); translation from Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 166.

Throughout the centuries Catholic theology has noted that celibacy facilitates priestly prayer. For example, Raymond of Peñafort singled out priestly prayer as a key motivation for celibacy when he wrote:

The reason [for priestly celibacy] is twofold: sacerdotal purity, in order that they may obtain in all sincerity that which with their prayers they ask from God . . .; the second reason is that they may pray unhindered (1 Cor 7:5) and exercise their office. They cannot do both things together: that is, to serve their wife and the Church.¹⁵⁸

Raymond of Peñafort, drawing from the patristic tradition, underlined various motivations that can be advanced in favor of priestly celibacy and not just that of purity.¹⁵⁹ He actually listed three such motivations, since his second reason includes two parts: (1) ritual purity (“sacerdotal purity”); and (2) unhindered prayer (“that they may pray unhindered”) and (3) priestly ministry in general (“exercise their office”). Only the third reason would include “practical” aspects of priestly ministry, the other two relate to the priest’s prayer life, which includes his liturgical prayer.

It can be said, therefore, that the pragmatic argument for priestly celibacy should more deeply be expressed in terms of the priest’s dedication to God in prayer¹⁶⁰ and that,

¹⁵⁸ Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa Iuris Canonici*, ed. J. Rius Serra (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1945), 59; translation from Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 50.

¹⁵⁹ Gryson maintained that the Fathers saw ritual purity as the sole motivation for clerical celibacy-continence: cf. *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique*, 200, 203. For arguments against an exclusively cultic derivation of celibacy in the early Church, see Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*, 338-39, and Henri Crouzel, “Le Célibat et la continence ecclésiastique dans l’Eglise primitive: Leurs motivations,” in Joseph Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat: Etudes historiques et théologiques*, 331-71.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia”: 6.

since the prayer which is most characteristic of the priest, namely the liturgical prayer over which he presides, is intrinsically eschatological,¹⁶¹ the eschatological dimension of celibacy has a particular relevance for the priest, who proclaims the presence on earth of the final stages of salvation with the arrival of the new world, and ultimately anchors his practical service of men and women.¹⁶² The celibate priest in his liturgical prayer is thus able to pray efficaciously in adoration of God and in prayerful intercession for the Church and the world. He participates in the “here and now” of the kingdom of God already present on earth. In his prophetic witness of the kingdom of heaven, the celibate priest points to God as the source and goal of all human life in this age.

It can also be said that the liturgical motivation for priestly celibacy which has often in the past been interpreted in terms of ritual purity (i.e. the priest must be pure in order to exercise his liturgical ministry) can now be interpreted more satisfactorily in eschatological terms (i.e. it is appropriate for the priest to be celibate since that is the life of the Kingdom and the liturgy over which he presides is a foretaste of the Kingdom). The eschatological dimension therefore serves as a corrective both to a pragmatic view and also to a ritual purity view of priestly celibacy.

¹⁶¹ “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until he our life shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory,” Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 8.

¹⁶² Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 34.

The celibate priest is helped in his eschatological witness by other members of the People of God, who contribute in their own ways to proclaiming the coming kingdom of heaven.¹⁶³ However, that which distinguishes the celibate priest from the consecrated religious or lay faithful as a witness to the kingdom of heaven is the manner in which he accomplishes this task of witness *as a priest*, i.e. by the giving himself over to divine worship and priestly intercession, primarily through the celebration of the Eucharist.

José Saraiva Martins has summarized the way in which the eschatological witness of priestly celibacy benefits the whole Church:

Although on account of his celibate choice the priest *does not pass on physical life*, nonetheless, with his open-hearted experience and loving service for all, *he gives meaning to [it]* as Christ has done, and in a mysterious continuation of Christ's ministry. In this sense, the eschatological dimension of celibacy becomes a concrete contribution to the humanization of life and to its education, in the truest transcendent sense of the human condition. In fellowship with families and married people, the priest feels himself to be an authentic witness and educator of life and of its absolute meaning, lighting up human history, people's joys and hopes, their sorrows and anxieties.¹⁶⁴

Celibacy witnesses to eternal values and constitutes an invitation to look beyond the ephemeral and to realize that there is more to life than simply the present moment. Perhaps an implicit sense of this significance may be a reason why the world has been uneasy about religious celibacy. At the vigil of the end of the Year for Priests (June 10, 2010) Benedict XVI commented on the witness of priestly celibacy:

¹⁶³ Cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, nn. 48-51; *SC*, n. 8.

¹⁶⁴ José Saraiva Martins, "Training for Priestly Celibacy," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregationis/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_train_en.html, 1993; original emphasis. Cf. de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 126, who spoke of the "eschatological anticipation" of priestly celibacy, which is a "dialectic of eternal life" that puts an end to the "dialectic of carnal life."

One great problem of Christianity in today's world is that it does not think anymore of the future of God. The present of this world alone seems sufficient. We want to have only this world, to live only in this world. So we close the doors to the true greatness of our existence. The meaning of celibacy as an anticipation of the future is to open these doors, to make the world greater, to sow the reality of the future that should be lived by us already as present.¹⁶⁵

The eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy invites the People of God to a deeper prayer life insofar as it signifies the eternal values of the kingdom of heaven and it calls them to a deeper participation in the liturgy which is a foretaste of the Kingdom (cf. Heb 11:14). Celibacy reminds the lay faithful and the clergy that the ministerial priesthood of the New Testament is not a functional concept, but is rather a participation in the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ, who came to glorify the Father (cf. Jn 17:4) and who "lives forever to make intercession" for the world (Heb 7:25).¹⁶⁶

4. Summary

The threefold dimension has proven to be a useful tool for elaborating and developing the theology of priestly celibacy. Chapter 4 has evaluated the way in which the threefold dimension can contribute to the development of the theology of priestly celibacy. First, the christological dimension of priestly celibacy can promote a deeper understanding of priestly celibacy as both a charism and a discipline, Second, the ecclesiological dimension is very useful for clarifying and correcting the ritual purity argument, particularly through a focus on pastoral charity and the Eucharist. Third, the

¹⁶⁵ Benedict XVI, "A Sacrament, a New Life to Make Room for God," *L'Osservatore Romano* (June 16, 2010), 1, 6-7, 10, at 7.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Stickler, *A Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 105-06.

eschatological dimension can help to correct an overly pragmatic understanding of priestly celibacy.

CHAPTER 5 SOME ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Since *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 teaches that celibacy is not essential to the priesthood, the Magisterium in post-conciliar documents has sought to formulate a teaching that expresses the suitability of sacerdotal celibacy without making it a necessary element. The threefold dimension is a means to accomplish this task. It emphasizes the multifaceted value of sacerdotal celibacy while at the same time not denying that a married priest participates in the same priesthood of Jesus Christ.

A cautionary note, however, must be given with regard to the threefold dimension: it enables a fruitful, but not necessarily an exhaustive, analysis of priestly celibacy. There are various priestly roles, such as that of spiritual fatherhood, which do not seem to fit with the threefold dimension, at least as it has so far been elaborated in magisterial teaching. In addition, there are various issues and unanswered questions that continue to accompany the study of priestly celibacy, and it seems appropriate to consider some of these issues and questions in this final chapter, in light of the threefold dimension. Three issues or questions in particular will be addressed in connection with the respective elements of the threefold dimension: (1) the way in which Orthodox and Catholics differ in their understanding of clerical celibacy, (2) the suitability of employing nuptial imagery to justify priestly celibacy, and (3) the search for a distinctive eschatological dimension of *priestly* celibacy. The nature of the issues will be explored in relation to successive elements of the threefold dimension in the sections below.

The content of this chapter constitutes a form of exploratory theology that answers the call of Paul VI, who after presenting the threefold dimension in *Sacerdotalis*

Caelibatus, encouraged theologians to delve more deeply into the meaning of priestly celibacy in order to discover its hidden riches:

This biblical and theological view [of celibacy] associates our ministerial priesthood with the priesthood of Christ; it is modeled on the total and exclusive dedication of Christ to his mission of salvation, and makes it the cause of our assimilation to the form of charity and sacrifice proper to Christ our Saviour. This vision seems to us so profound and rich in truth, both speculative and practical, that we invite you, venerable brothers, and you, eager students of Christian doctrine and masters of the spiritual life, and all [you] priests who have gained a supernatural insight into your vocation – to persevere in the study of this vision, and to go deeply into the inner recesses and wealth of its reality. In this way, the bond between the priesthood and celibacy will be seen in an ever improving union, owing to its clear logic and to the heroism of a unique and limitless love for Christ the lord and for His Church.¹

1. The Christological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 29 made a statement that sheds light on the christological dimension of priestly celibacy: “The will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, *which configures the priest to Jesus Christ*, the head and spouse of the Church.”² Alphonse Stickler commented on this statement of John Paul II: “These words can be considered the central nucleus of the theology of celibacy which has been developed in the apostolic exhortation and which has been offered as the *foundation for future development, study and consideration*.”³ Stickler recognized that the configuration of the celibate priest to Christ is the foundation of celibacy (the christological dimension). It is through union with

¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 25.

² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 29; emphasis added.

³ Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 101-02; emphasis added.

Christ, the Head of the Church, that the priest is related to the Church as Christ's Body (the ecclesiological dimension) and stands as a sign of the coming age (the eschatological dimension).

Sara Butler wrote about the christological dimension in priestly life:

Pastores dabo vobis asserts that the primary point of reference for the identity of the priest is Christological. By his ordination, the priest is configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church. He is taken into a new relationship with Christ, and by reason of sharing in his office as Head and Shepherd the priest also assumes a new relationship with the rest of the baptized, Christ's body and his flock. In other words, he becomes a sacramental sign of Christ vis-à-vis, or in relation to, the Church.⁴

United with Christ in his headship most perfectly is the bishop who stands in the midst of the local church as the high priest, representing Jesus Christ.⁵ He exercises most preeminently the ministerial priesthood. This is not exclusively a Catholic teaching, it is also shared by the Orthodox – a fact that brings a new perspective to the divergence between Orthodox and Catholics regarding clerical celibacy.

Episcopal Celibacy as an Aid in Resolving an Impasse in Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue

A long standing difference between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches with regard to clerical continence and celibacy has hampered understanding between these churches, namely, presbyters are celibate in the West, but normally married in the East.

⁴ Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 88.

⁵ Cf. Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 41; *LG*, n. 21.

The interpretation of the historical data still varies and there seems to be no resolution of the argument regarding the origins and nature of priestly celibacy.⁶

Similarly, there are differences concerning the origins and nature of episcopal celibacy. For example, an Orthodox theologian, Peter L'Huillier, wrote:

At first sight, [the] trend toward episcopal celibacy seems to have been a part of the larger current in favor of clerical continence, which affected both East and West during Late Antiquity. On this issue, the Western Church was more radical – and more consistent – than the Eastern Church. After all, praise for virginity and sexual abstinence was widespread among Christians in the entire church, and as we have seen, some Eastern writers also held the view that this state of life was “superior” and, therefore, the most appropriate for those in sacred orders. Be that as it may, this was not the main factor at work in limiting the married episcopacy. More significant was the consideration that a married bishop might be tempted *to favor his family in distributing the church’s wealth.*⁷

In view of this disparity between the two traditions, it seems appropriate to sketch an ecumenical theology that might help bridge the divide between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concerning clerical celibacy. The keystone to this proposal is a focus on *episcopal* celibacy seen as the preeminent manifestation of *priestly* celibacy, a direction recommended by Laurent Touze, who pointed to episcopal celibacy as an important locus for future study and development of the theology of priestly celibacy. While claiming that “celibacy is neither dogma nor discipline,” Touze stated:

⁶ Cf. Kevin Coyle, “Recent Views on the Origins of Clerical Celibacy: A Review of the Literature from 1980-1991,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 34 (1993): 480-531; above, 20-40.

⁷ L'Huillier, “The First Millenium: Marriage, Sexuality, and Priesthood,” in *Vested in Grace*, 22-65, at 35; original emphasis. Many Orthodox theologians argue that the development of the universal rule requiring celibacy for bishops actually constituted a movement away from Apostolic Tradition as embodied in the Scriptures; cf. Najim, “Two Ways in the East,” in *Vested in Grace*, 225-264, at 250.

The Church is understanding more and more the relation between priesthood, episcopate and celibacy. It is something that could be likened to the revelation of a dogma, though it isn't so at this time; one tends increasingly to understand that a practice must be promoted among all priests and also among Eastern Catholic priests which is truly similar to the one lived in the first centuries. [Episcopal celibacy] is very different, both theologically as well as historically. What's more, with the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II defined that the episcopate is the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. It is necessary to discover the specificity of the episcopate and, hence, episcopal celibacy. And it can be demonstrated with the fact that for the celibacy or continence of a bishop an exception has never been made.⁸

Whether or not Touze was correct in his prediction about the future development of the theology and praxis of priestly celibacy, he at least was accurate in his assessment of episcopal celibacy. The celibate witness of bishops is a subject matter that is relatively underdeveloped.

How can a dialogue on this particular topic be established between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches? One starting point could be the teaching of Vatican II on the episcopacy as the fullness of the priesthood. The patristic teaching on the episcopal high priesthood was recovered by Vatican II and inserted into the description of the bishop's place within the liturgical life of the Church. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* makes such a reference to the bishop as high priest:

The bishop is to be considered as the High Priest [*sacerdos magnus*] of his flock from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and upon whom it in some way depends. Therefore all should hold in the greatest esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church. They must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations,

⁸ Laurent Touze: "Married Priests Will Always Be an Exception," *Zenit*, March 9, 2010, <http://www.zenit.org/article-28589?1=english>.

especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.⁹

While the bishop governs and teaches his flock in virtue of his episcopal munera, he exercises his most eminent role through the office of sanctifying, which is fittingly described in the biblical image of the high priesthood of Christ (cf. Heb 5:1-10).

Lumen Gentium 21 contains a description of the high priesthood of the episcopacy:

In the person of the bishops, then, to whom the priests render assistance, the Lord Jesus Christ, supreme high priest [*pontifex summus*], is present in the midst of the faithful. Though seated at the right hand of God the Father, he is not absent from the assembly of his pontiffs; on the contrary indeed, it is above all through their signal service that he preaches the Word of God to all peoples and administers without cease to the faithful the sacraments of faith; that through their paternal care (cf. 1 Cor 4:5) he incorporates by a supernatural rebirth, new members into his body; that finally through their wisdom and prudence he directs and guides the people of the New Testament on their journey towards eternal beatitude.¹⁰

Unlike *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 41, this section emphasizes the threefold episcopal munera: the preaching of the Word of God (the office of teaching), the administration of the sacraments (the office of sanctifying) and the guidance of the faithful (the office of governing). In each of these ministries, it seems, the bishop exercises the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.

⁹ Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 41. The conciliar texts also describe the presbyter as the bishop's representative. For example, *SC* 42 states: "But as it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over the whole flock in his church, he must of necessity establish groupings of the faithful; and, among these, parishes, set up locally under a pastor who take the place of the bishop, are the most important, for in some way they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world," Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 42.

¹⁰ Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 21.

Lumen Gentium 21 proceeds to explain the role of the bishop in shepherding the Lord's flock as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (cf. 1 Cor 4:1). The mission entrusted to the Apostles by Christ through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8, 2:4; Jn 20:22-23) is passed on to bishops through episcopal ordination. The conciliar text highlights this ordination of the bishop and the threefold munera it imparts:

The holy synod teaches, moreover, that the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration, that fullness, namely, which both in the liturgical tradition of the Church and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood [*summum sacerdotium*], the acme of the sacred ministry.¹¹ Now, episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling. . . . Bishops, in a resplendent and visible manner take the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd and priest, and act as his representatives (*in eius persona*).¹²

The episcopacy is thus the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, or “the high priesthood.” Each bishop is configured to Jesus Christ the High Priest and is “the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,” above all in the Eucharist.¹³

There are traces of this teaching among various Orthodox theologians. For example, the international Catholic-Orthodox dialogue commission made the following statement concerning the episcopacy: “Episcopal ordination confers on the one who

¹¹ The footnote states: “In *Trad. Apost.* 3, ed. Botte, *Sources Chr.*, pp. 27-30, a ‘primacy of the priesthood’ is attributed to the bishop. Cf. *Sacramentarium Leonianum*, ed. C. Mohlberg, *Sacramentarium Veronense*, Rome, 1955, p. 199: ‘to the ministry of the high priesthood . . . Make the height of your mystery complete in your priests’ . . . Do., *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae*, Rome, 1960, pp. 121-122: ‘Grant them the episcopal throne, Lord, to rule your Church and all the people.’ Cf. *PL* 78.224.”

¹² Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 21.

¹³ Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 26.

receives it by the gift of the Spirit, the fullness of the priesthood.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Orthodox theologian Nicholas Afanasiev described the identity of the bishop in the early Church in terms of his liturgical authority as high priest:

Now, at the eucharistic assembly only the person who had a charism of high priesthood could take the place of Christ at the Last Supper, the place taken by St. Peter in the church of Jerusalem. And so the bishop became the presider of the local church by virtue of his status as a high priest. Receiving the charism of high priesthood through a special rite of ordination, the bishop thus acquired the status of the presider in the church for which he was ordained a bishop. . . . A bishop can assign the celebration of the Eucharist to whomever he wishes, and still retain the high priestly status. By virtue of this fact, several eucharistic assemblies can emerge within the borders of one local church but its unity will not be broken, for the bishop remains the one single high priest at all the assemblies.¹⁵

From a study of the high priesthood of the bishop, one can delineate what belongs to his ministry and life in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, both of which have developed a celibate-only episcopacy. The study of the bishop as high priest can serve as an effective principle of integration in the theology of celibacy between the two churches because

¹⁴ The Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God,” June 26, 1988, www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/o-rc/doc/e_orc_05_valamo.html, n. 28.

¹⁵ Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Vitaly Permiakov (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 238. Afanasiev referred to the writings of Hippolytus in which the following prayer of ordination for a bishop is found: “God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . grant that your servant, whom you have chosen for oversight, should shepherd your flock and should serve before you as high priest without blame, serving by night and day, ceaselessly propitiating your countenance and offering the gifts of your holy Church. And let him have the power of high priesthood, to forgive sins according to your command, to assign duties according to your command, to loose every tie according to the power which you gave to the apostles . . .”, Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, cited in Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 309.

both agree that the episcopacy contains the preeminent expression of the priesthood of Christ in the Church. This approach then prompts the question as to the precise rationale for married priests in the East, while at the same time showing that behind the married priesthood nevertheless lies the strong witness of celibate priesthood in the bishop.

2. The Ecclesiological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

First and foremost the priest is related to Christ, to whom he is united and configured through ordination.¹⁶ The priest's relationship to the Church flows from his relationship to Christ. Therefore it is from the christological dimension of priestly celibacy, which is the foundation of the study of priestly celibacy, that the ecclesiological dimension can be derived. Sara Butler described the ecclesiological dimension as being contained in some manner within the christological dimension:

According to John Paul II [in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 16], the priest's fundamental relationship is to Jesus Christ [cf. the christological dimension], but inscribed within this is a relationship to the Church [cf. the ecclesiological dimension]. This means that the priest not only represents Christ, at the head of the community, "facing" God the Father on its behalf; he also represents Christ "facing the Church as her Bridegroom."¹⁷

The priest's relationship to the Church has such richness that several images are needed in order to express its fullness, e.g. head, shepherd, servant and bridegroom. Among

¹⁶ Cf. above, 307-08. The priest's relationship *as priest* to Jesus Christ, however, is not primarily a spousal bond, which denotes a unity in complementarity rather than a unity in configuration. Nevertheless, Matthias Scheeben and Joseph Shehan have posited the priest's spousal relationship with Christ: cf. above, 69-70, 129.

¹⁷ Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 89.

these, the bridegroom image has gained popularity in recent magisterial teaching, particularly in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 29 of John Paul II.¹⁸

a). The Celibate Priest as an Image of Christ the Bridegroom

Despite its appearance in magisterial teaching, the image of the priest as bridegroom is not without limitations. The bridegroom image cannot fully express the nature of priestly ministry because it does not include explicitly the notion of spiritual fatherhood, which pertains to the nature of priestly ministry. One can question indeed whether a celibate priest is primarily related to the people he serves as a bridegroom, or rather as a father or even as a spiritual guardian. In view of this question, this section will review the patristic foundations of the nuptial imagery in order to evaluate whether it alone is apt for describing the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy.¹⁹

Several Church Fathers saw the bishop both as an image of Christ, the Head of his Body, the Church, and an icon of the Christ, Bridegroom of the Church.²⁰ The bishop symbolized Christ, Head and Spouse, in his spiritual marriage with the Church. Leo the Great included celibacy within this nuptial paradigm: a bishop was celibate because he had one spouse, the Church.²¹

¹⁸ Cf. above, 204-09.

¹⁹ Cf. above, 259-68, for the biblical foundations of the ecclesiological dimension.

²⁰ Ephrem the Syrian applied the notion of Christ the Bridegroom to bishops in his letter to Bishop Abraham of Nisibis: “Thou hast no wife, as Abraham had Sarah; behold, thy flock is thy wife. Bring up her children in thy faithfulness,” cited in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom. A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 151.

²¹ Cf. Leo the Great, *Epistula XII. Ad Episcopos Mauritaniae* 3, PL 54, 648.

An aspect of the notion of episcopal celibacy can be seen in the use of rings, which some bishops possessed as early as the third century. By the fifth century these rings were part of the episcopal insignia.²² In the eighth and ninth centuries, manuscripts of the Gregorian Sacramentary and a few early Pontificals contain formulae that refer to the episcopal ring as signifying the marital bond of the bishop with his people.²³ The bishop, having been espoused to his diocese, did not enter into sacramental marriage.

In the second half of the sixth century, penitential books contained penalties for a married priest or deacon who after ordination resumed conjugal relations with his spouse.²⁴ For a man to do so was comparable to committing adultery against the Church.²⁵ Such a penalty for a lawfully wedded man would only make sense if an unwritten principle was well known, namely, that the cleric, upon ordination, was considered to be living in a spousal relationship with the Church, a relationship that superseded his earthly marriage.

In the scholastic era, theologians in the West began to stress the connection between the ordained priesthood and the spousal significance of celibacy. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) taught that the bishop, mentioned by Paul in 1 Tim 3:2 (*unius*

²² Cf. James-Charles Noonan, Jr., *The Church Visible: The Ceremonial Life and Protocol of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Viking, 1996), 347.

²³ Cf. Herbert Thurston, "Rings," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1st ed., 59-60.

²⁴ Cf. above, 40-41.

²⁵ The eighth century *Floriacense Paenitentiale* stated: "Si quis clericus vel cuiuslibet superioris gradus, qui uxorem habuit et post conversionem vel honorem iterum eam agnoverit, sciat se adulterium commisisse. Idcirco si Diaconus est V annos peniteat, II ex his in pane et aqua ; Sacerdos VII annos, II ex his in pane et aqua" (n. 16), cited in Alphonso Stickler, "Le célibat en occident au Moyen Âge," in Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat: Etudes historiques et théologiques*, 381-82.

uxoris vir), should have been married only once so that he might integrally symbolize Christ in his nuptial relationship to the Church.²⁶ For Aquinas, Christ was incarnated as a man (*vir*) because he was the Head of the Church in a way analogous to a husband being the “head” of the woman in marriage (cf. Eph 5:23). Bonaventure (1221-1274) described the sacramental symbolism of the bishop imaging Christ the Head.²⁷ Referring to the ordination of bishops, Bonaventure wrote:

The other orders prepare for the episcopate, if one conducts himself well in them; but the bishop is the bridegroom of the Church: therefore, since a woman is not able to be advanced to the episcopate, but only a man, since she would not be the bridegroom of the Church, therefore it belongs only to men to be advanced to the preceding orders.²⁸

Bonaventure saw the reservation of Orders to men alone as a requirement that was rooted in the order of creation. In this passage Bonaventure not only stated that the bishop is spouse of the Church, but extended this symbolism to the preparatory ordinations as well, including the presbyters, deacons, and those in minor orders. Bonaventure linked nuptial imagery and the ministries below the episcopate. This specific theology of the spousal dimension of the priesthood and the lower ministerial orders, as distinguished

²⁶ Aquinas, *In I ad Tim.*, c. III, lect. 1, in *Opera Omnia XIII* (New York: Musurgia, 1949), 598.

²⁷ Bonaventure, *Liber II Sententiarum*, d 16, a 2, q 2, in *Opera Omnia II* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1889), 403.

²⁸ “Ordines alii praeparant ad episcopatum, si quis bene in illis conversetur; sed episcopus sponsus est Ecclesiae: ergo, cum mulier non possit ad episcopatum provehi, sed tantum vir, alioquin sponsus non esset Ecclesiae, ergo ad Ordines antecedentes promoveri est tantum virorum,” Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, d 25, a 2, q 1, d 25 in *Opera Theologica Selecta* (Quarracchi-Firenze: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1941), 638.

from the nuptial imagery applied by the Church Fathers to bishops alone, was a relatively late theological development.²⁹

This perspective of the nuptial-ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy remained constant, with few modifications, until the Second Vatican Council where it was proposed by several council Fathers as a fitting description of the celibate priest.³⁰ None of the conciliar documents, however, directly employed the image of the bridegroom in describing the celibate priest in his relationship with the Church. It was only later with *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* of Paul VI that the bridegroom image began to be incorporated clearly into magisterial documents:

The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born but not of flesh and blood.³¹

Although the bridegroom image is a valuable aid in illustrating the priest's relationship to the Church and in justifying his celibacy, other images are needed in order to present an integral account of the ministry and life of the priest vis-à-vis the Church and to complement the nuptial analogy within the ambit of the ecclesiological dimension. For example, the head-body image avoids the danger of "hypostasizing" the Church in distinction from Christ, which some theologians argue is a defect of the bridegroom

²⁹ Cf. Manfred Hauke, *Die Problematik um das Frauenpriestertum vor dem Hintergrund der Schöpfungs- und Erlösungsordnung* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1982), 447-48.

³⁰ Cf. above, 127-29.

³¹ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 26; cf. Jn 1:13.

analogy.³² Other images can provide a balance to the bridegroom image, for example, the friend of the Bridegroom and the spiritual father.

b). Augustine on the Celibate Bishop as Friend of the Bridegroom

The patristic notion of the bishop as friend of the Bridegroom places restrictions on the bridegroom analogy insofar as it prevents the bishop from appropriating to himself the spousal character of Christ. Since the celibate bishop acts for Christ the Bridegroom, but is not the Bridegroom, he is to be understood as the friend who stands *with* or *in the place of* the Bridegroom.

Among the Church Fathers, Augustine in particular made this distinction. He saw the bishop as the friend of the Bridegroom and drew his reflections from a meditation on the person and mission of John the Baptist, whom Augustine considered as fulfilling the role of the friend or “best man.”³³ Augustine taught that the bishop himself did not have the right to take to himself the Bride of Christ and therefore could not be called the Bridegroom. In his dispute with the Donatists, Augustine saw the bishop rather as the *friend* of the Bridegroom, whose role is described in the Gospel: “He who has the bride is the Bridegroom; the friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the Bridegroom’s voice” (Jn 3:29). Augustine wrote:

All good pastors are in one and are one. They tend the flock and Christ tends the flock. For the friends of the Bridegroom do not say that they rejoice in their own voice, rather, they rejoice on account of the voice of the Bridegroom. It is Christ himself, therefore, who tends the flock when

³² Cf. Paul McPartlan, “Who is the Church? Zizioulas and von Balthasar on the Church's Identity,” *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008): 271-88, at 277-86.

³³ Cf. Jn 1:27; cf. Mt 9:15, 22:1-14, 25:1-13; Lk 14:15-25.

they are tending it. He says, "I tend it," because his voice is in theirs, and in them is his love.³⁴

The authentic pastor listens to the voice of Christ and is able to speak with Christ's own voice. He finds joy in his efforts to preserve and strengthen the bond between the Bride and the Bridegroom so that the bridal Church may belong only and wholly to Christ. Accordingly Augustine argued that the bishop himself is not the Bridegroom, but the latter's best friend, who is able to facilitate the coming together of the Bridegroom and the Bride, i.e. the bishop acts in an intermediary role between Christ and the Church, rather than in the role of Christ himself.³⁵ Augustine was careful to avoid saying that the bishop was the Bridegroom of the Church, in order to preserve Christ's unique spousal role in relation to the Church.³⁶

The analogy of the friend of the Bridegroom has been helpful in defining the role the bishop or priest has toward the Church. It preserves Christ's unique and irreplaceable role with regard to the Church. However, what bearing does this imagery have upon clerical celibacy? While John the Baptist, the scriptural *friend of the Bridegroom*, was

³⁴ "Sed omnes boni pastores in uno sunt, unum sunt. Illi pascunt, Christus pascit. Non enim vocem suam dicunt amici sponsi, sed gaudio gaudent propter vocem sponsi. Idem ergo ipse pascit, cum ipsi pascunt: et dicit, Ego pasco; quia in illis vox ipsius, in illis charitas ipsius," *Sermon* 46, *PL* 38, 287.18.

³⁵ Cf. Michael Sherwin, "'The Friend of the Bridegroom Stands and Listens.' An Analysis of the Term *Amicus Sponsi* in Augustine's Account of Divine Friendship and the Ministry of Bishops," *Augustinianum* 38 (1998): 197-214, at 210-12.

³⁶ Augustine reacted against a Donatist bishop, Parmenian, whom Augustine thought regarded himself as bridegroom of the Church. Cf. *Sermo Dobeau* 26 [*Sermo* 198 augmented], eds. John E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey, *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part III, Vol. 11, Sermons (Newly Discovered Sermons), trans. by Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 452. This sermon was discovered in its complete form in 1987 in the Mainz library.

indeed celibate, the imagery does not seem to necessitate that the bishop be celibate. Marriage in itself does not negate the fulfillment of the essential role of being the friend of the Bridegroom, which is to stand by Christ the Bridegroom and to guard the bridal Church. On the other hand, celibacy accentuates better the single-heartedness and devotion of the friend toward the person and interests of the Bridegroom. Perhaps because the friend of the Bridegroom analogy does not contain a clear notion of celibacy as such, it has not become an explicit part of the theological or magisterial theology of priestly celibacy. Nevertheless, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16 hints at this imagery:

By means of celibacy, then, priests profess before men their willingness to be dedicated with undivided loyalty to the task entrusted to them, namely that of espousing the faithful to one husband and presenting them as a chaste virgin to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2). They recall that mystical marriage, established by God and destined to be fully revealed in the future, by which the Church holds Christ as her only spouse.³⁷

However, the task of espousing and presenting the bride to Christ in 2 Cor 11:2 is generally interpreted as referring to a task of the father of the bride rather than of the best friend.³⁸ Thus this passage is rather oblique with regard to the nuptial perspective of celibacy.

The analogy of the friend of the Bridegroom is useful in providing a necessary boundary to the nuptial image: it prevents any tendency for the bishop or priest to attribute to himself the role of Bridegroom of the Church and instead reminds him of his servant role: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26). Moreover, it underlines the responsibility of the bishop and priest *to assist* Christ the

³⁷ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

³⁸ Cf. above, 264, note 59, with reference to this interpretation of 2 Cor 11:2

Bridegroom in guarding the integrity of the bridal Church. This task of derived guardianship, entrusted to the bishop through ordination, can be seen as related to the meaning of *episkopos* (“overseer”).

c). The Spiritual Father

The idea of the priest as spiritual father has not been treated extensively in this study because in magisterial teaching the ecclesiological dimension tends to be interpreted in terms of nuptial imagery. Nevertheless the perspective of spiritual fatherhood is an important element of the theology of the priesthood and has been part of contemporary magisterial teaching. Some scriptural indications and theological notes will be given in this section to provide a background to this perspective on priesthood.

The texts of the Old Testament describe the role of the “father” in various ways: founder, ancestor, originator, or prototype (cf. Jabel in Gn 4:20ff; Phinehas in 1 Mac 2:54); chief minister or high ranking administrator (cf. Joseph in Gen 45:8; Eliakim in Is 22:21); one who is highly respected (cf. Naaman in 2 Kgs 5:13; Job in Job 29:16); priest (cf. Judg 17:10, 18:19); prophet (cf. 2 Kgs 2:12, 6:21) and teacher of wisdom (cf. Prov 4:1, Sir 3:1). The head of the household functions as a priest at the Passover meal (cf. Ex 12:1-14, 21-28).³⁹ The Patriarchs are fathers of God’s people in both the biological and

³⁹ Cf. Fernando Benicio Felices Sánchez, *La Paternidad Espiritual del Sacerdote* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: S.N, 2006), 23-25 and Felix Donahue, “The Spiritual Father in the Scriptures,” in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West*, Cistercian Studies Series 38, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 3-36, at 3-5.

spiritual sense, but especially the latter insofar as they passed on a spiritual inheritance.⁴⁰

Thus Abraham is described as the father of all believers (cf. Rom 4:11).

With regard to the New Testament, Jesus never refers to himself as “father” and instructed his disciples to call no man “father” (cf. Mt 23:9) in order to emphasize that all fatherhood comes from God.⁴¹ Nevertheless Jesus manifests his own fatherhood in the way in which he sometimes addressed his disciples: “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! (Mk 10:24), “Little children, yet a little while I am with you” (Jn 13:33),” and “My son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5). The Apostles speak of their ministry as one of paternity. For example, John calls his disciples his “little children” seven times in his first epistle (cf. 1 Jn 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4 and 5:21) and Peter calls Mark “my son” (cf. 1 Pet 5:13). Paul writes to the Corinthians: “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4:15). Paul also calls himself the father of Onesimus (cf. Philemon 1:10), describes his ministry to the Thessalonians as that of a father with his children (cf. 1 Thess 2:11), names Timothy his “true child of faith” (cf. 1 Tim 1:2) and “beloved son” (cf. 2 Tim 1:2) and refers to Titus as his “true child in a

⁴⁰ “[God] made them [the patriarchs] the fathers of his Chosen People not so much in virtue of their physical fatherhood of innumerable descendants but in a much deeper sense by reason of the promises he made to them, which they were to hand down to their posterity,” Bonaventure Perquin, *Abba, Father* (Middle Green, Slough, UK: St. Paul Multimedia Productions, 1965), 20.

⁴¹ Cf. Carter Harrell Griffin, “Supernatural Fatherhood through Priestly Celibacy: Fulfillment in Masculinity: A Thomistic Study” (S.T.D. diss., Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Rome, 2010); afterward cited: “Supernatural Fatherhood.” I have drawn on Griffin’s dissertation in this section on spiritual fatherhood.

common faith (cf. Tit 1:4). Paul clearly uses words that describe his fatherly relationship with those whom he has begotten in Christ.

In the patristic era the idea of spiritual paternity was applied first to the desert monks, who fathered others through their charity, instruction, and mercy.⁴² Among others, the writings of Ignatius of Antioch and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* contain references to the supernatural paternity of bishops and presbyters.⁴³ Attributing spiritual fatherhood to bishops and priests also occurs in some later patristic writings, especially those of Ambrose, Ephrem, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Gregory the Great.⁴⁴ In the medieval period Aquinas referred to priestly fatherhood in his discussion on the virtue of piety in the *Summa Theologiae*.⁴⁵ After the scholastic era several theologians wrote about the spiritual fatherhood of priests, such as John of Avila and Alphonsus Liguori.⁴⁶

The use of the title “Father” for bishops and priests has been part of the Catholic tradition, particularly in the Latin Church. Beginning in the fourth century the title “Father” began to be reserved for metropolitans in Rome, Alexandria, and Carthage. By

⁴² Cf. André Louf, “Spiritual Fatherhood in the Literature of the Desert,” in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West*, 37-63, and Sánchez, *La Paternidad Espiritual del Sacerdote*, 42-46.

⁴³ Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephes 2, 3, 6, 7; Trall 3.1, Magn 6 .1; Didascalia Apostolorum 5, 8, 9.*

⁴⁴ Cf. Sánchez, *La Paternidad Espiritual del Sacerdote*, 46-59, for a summary of the teaching of the Fathers; de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 85-91.

⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 102, 1.

⁴⁶ Cf. Sánchez, *La Paternidad Espiritual del Sacerdote*, 62-78.

the year 400, the Council of Toledo used the title “Papa” only for the Bishop of Rome, though sporadically it was still used for other bishops as well.⁴⁷ In the thirteenth century the title was used regularly again for members of the mendicant Orders, and in recent times the Anglo-Saxon world has used the title for both secular and religious priests.⁴⁸

Magisterial teaching in the twentieth century increasingly emphasized the spiritual fatherhood of priests, beginning with *Lumen Gentium*, *Christus Dominus*, and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* of Vatican II.⁴⁹ More recently, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have underlined the significance of the spiritual fatherhood of priests.⁵⁰

Although priests are those who usually are considered spiritual fathers, the stronger witness of fatherhood actually belongs to bishops. Henri de Lubac wrote:

For it is through them, successors of the first apostles, that the divine life continues to be transmitted, and it is they who have the responsibility of seeing to it that the “virginity” of the faith is preserved both intact and fruitful. . . .The bishops joined together in council are called “the Fathers.” The same holds true for those whose line extends from the beginning, assuring not only the authentic transmission of a doctrine but also the propagation of a life.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cf. Griffin, “Supernatural Fatherhood,” 227.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jerome Rono Nyathi, “Priesthood Today and the Crisis of Fatherhood: Fatherlessness in Africa with Special Reference to Zimbabwe” (S.T.D. diss., Pontifical University of St. Thomas, Rome, 2002), 49-50. Nyathi noted that Cardinal Manning was influential with regard to the application of this clerical title to diocesan as well as religious clergy.

⁴⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, nn. 6, 28, 37, 61; *PO*, nn. 9, 16; *Christus Dominus*, nn. 16, 28.

⁵⁰ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nn. 26, 31, 56, 96; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 11, 13, 16, 28, 36; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 12, 15, 16, 18, 21-23, 29; *Pastores Gregis*, nn. 7, 37, 43.

⁵¹ De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 85-86.

Therefore, whatever is attributed to priests with regard to spiritual fatherhood, can also be said in a more fundamental sense of bishops.

Theological reflection on spiritual fatherhood can complement the nuptial imagery with regard to priestly ministry and celibacy. As an image of Christ the Bridegroom, the priest is in relation to the Church itself, that is, to *the whole community of believers* (the “macro” level). Sara Butler wrote about this broader relationship:

Only if this is true [that the ministerial priesthood differs in kind and not only in degree from the common priesthood] does the ordained priest take the part of the Bridegroom vis-à-vis the Bride, and the other baptized, exercising their common priesthood, take that of the Bride vis-à-vis the Bridegroom.⁵²

On the other hand, the idea of spiritual father better describes the priest’s relationship with each *individual* member of the Church (the “micro” level).⁵³ It seems to be the experience of priests that they see themselves primarily as spiritual fathers of the people, individually and collectively, rather than as bridegroom. Spiritual fatherhood also implies an active engendering of spiritual life in the faithful whom they beget in Christ through the ministries of preaching, sanctifying and shepherding.

In his spiritual paternity, it may be said that celibacy is important to the priest in that the celibate priest accentuates his spiritual fatherhood insofar as he renounces fatherhood according to the flesh in order to exercise in the fullest possible manner

⁵² Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 91. With regard to the priest’s twofold relationship to the Church and to Christ, Augustine stated: “For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian,” *Sermo* 340, 1; *PL* 38:1483, cited in John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 20.

⁵³ The celibate priest can also relate to whole community as a father: cf. above, 322-23, on the statements of Jesus and the Apostles.

fatherhood according to the spirit.⁵⁴ The priest accomplishes this fatherhood principally through preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments, whereby he builds up the members of the body of Christ (cf. Acts 6:4). Furthermore, in that this is simply another way of imaging the relationship of Christ himself to his disciples, the celibacy of Christ is relevant to this role also.

Vatican II recognized the close link between spiritual fatherhood and priestly celibacy when it said with regard to celibacy that:

[Priests] are less encumbered in their service of his kingdom and of the task of heavenly regeneration. In this way they become better fitted for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ.⁵⁵

d). An Evaluation of the Bridegroom Image

With regard to the manner of expressing the priest's relationship to the Church, no one image or analogy fully articulates the ecclesiological dimension in all its richness. The bridegroom image needs to be complemented by others, such as those of best friend and spiritual father. Rather than being a comprehensive summary, each image is related to others and can be likened to a tessera in the theological mosaic. For example, John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* enlarged the theological analogies of *Lumen Gentium* 28, which described the priest's relationship to the Church.⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium* 28 portrayed

⁵⁴ “St. Joseph became a father in an extraordinary way, without begetting his son in the flesh. Isn't this, perhaps, an example of the type of fatherhood that is proposed to us, priests and bishops, as a model?” John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way* (New York: Warner, 2004), 141.

⁵⁵ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

⁵⁶ Cf. above, 207-08.

the ministerial priest as the sacramental representative of Christ the Head in relation to his Body and of Christ the Shepherd in relation to his flock. These images refer to relationships but not to interpersonal relationships. In *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 22, which is entitled “Configuration to Christ, Head and Shepherd, and Pastoral Charity,” John Paul II added the personal images of Servant and Bridegroom to the Head-Body and Shepherd-Flock pairs. Sara Butler commented on what the pope accomplished in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 22:

The Head-body comparison suggests the organic unity of a single person, and the Shepherd-flock comparison uses a corporate, but non-personal image to portray the Church. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* augments these biblical analogies, expanding “Head” to include “Servant,” and “Shepherd” to include “Bridegroom.” Being “Head” implies having an authority over others, but Jesus exercised his headship in the manner of the Suffering Servant of God. . . . So also, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11), and the Bridegroom loves and gives up his life for his Bride (Eph 5:25).⁵⁷

These four images – head, servant, shepherd, and bridegroom – all relate some particular aspect of *Christ’s* relationship to the Church, which the priest serves in imitation of Christ. Furthermore, these images can be complemented with others, such as father of the bride, best friend and spiritual father.

The predominance of the image of the priest as bridegroom in recent magisterial teaching may have been prompted by the movement for women’s ordination, which moved the Magisterium to elaborate on the nature of maleness vis-à-vis the ministerial priesthood. Reflections on the maleness of the ordained priesthood led to consideration of the priest’s spousal link with the Church. Magisterial texts subsequently began to

⁵⁷ Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 88.

defend the male-only priesthood through use of the nuptial image of the priesthood.⁵⁸ John Paul II employed the bridegroom-bride analogy in his defense of priestly celibacy, particularly in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.⁵⁹

While the bridegroom image does not summarize the fullness of the ecclesiological dimension, it is still a valid image for expressing the interpersonal bond of Christ and his Church. In addition, it seems to be specifically apt for Christians in a contemporary culture in which awareness of and regard for marriage and marital love – and consequently celibacy and celibate love – has weakened. For this reason, John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body* and *Pastores Dabo Vobis* sought to strengthen both marriage and the celibate priesthood through the use of the nuptial image rooted in Ephesians 5. Although the teaching of John Paul II has emphasized the nuptial aspect of the ecclesiological dimension, his teaching on this aspect nevertheless dovetails well with the broader magisterial presentation on priestly celibacy. There are indeed other images that are needed for an integral presentation of the ecclesiological dimension of the priest's ministry, such as those of best friend and spiritual father. However, a good argument can be made for priestly celibacy in those cases also.

3. The Eschatological Dimension of Priestly Celibacy

Presbyterorum Ordinis 16 breaks new ground when it attributes an eschatological witness to priestly celibacy, regardless of whether it was lived out by a diocesan or

⁵⁸ Particularly in *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5; cf. above, 181-86.

⁵⁹ “In virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community,” John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22; cf. above, 207-09.

religious priest. Nevertheless, its account of the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy is strikingly similar to the description given in *Perfectae Caritatis* 12 of the chastity of consecrated religious. Furthermore, of the three dimensions of celibacy presented in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* by Paul VI, the eschatological dimension is the least proportioned specifically to the priesthood.⁶⁰ Since magisterial teaching has made few significant distinctions between consecrated chastity and priestly celibacy from an eschatological perspective, further development of the eschatological dimension of a specifically *priestly* celibacy is needed. Such a theological development will be proposed below by way of an integration of the eschatological dimension with a *eucharistic* perspective on priestly celibacy.

A Eucharistic-Eschatological Theology of Priestly Celibacy

Although Vatican II taught that the ministerial priesthood is centered on the Eucharist,⁶¹ contemporary magisterial teaching surprisingly makes no explicit connection between celibacy and the Eucharist, even in the threefold dimension. In order to bridge this gap there is an apparent need to construct a theology of priestly celibacy that is explicitly centered on the Eucharist, without reverting to the traditional ritual purity argument.⁶²

⁶⁰ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nn. 33-34; above, 161-62.

⁶¹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 10; *LG*, nn. 21, 28; *PO*, n. 5.

⁶² Such a link with the Eucharist was constructed above with regard to the ecclesiological dimension (cf. 278-86) and with regard to the eschatological dimension also (cf. 293-303). Some further thoughts on the latter will be offered in this section.

Perfectae Caritatis 12 reaffirms Catholic teaching on the excellence of consecrated chastity as a means for attaining perfection in charity. The text describes the eschatological significance of religious chastity “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” It says nothing, however, about the different meaning that the religious vow of chastity may have for a non-ordained male or female religious in comparison to the male religious priest.⁶³ One clear distinction can be made: the female consecrated virgin makes a vow of chastity as an offering of herself to Christ her Bridegroom for the Kingdom of God, while the priest promises celibacy primarily so as to serve effectively as a mediator of Christ to his Spouse, the Church. Cochini wrote:

Let us also note that the motives invoked in favor of clerical continence are independent of the spiritual trend exhorting people to virginity. On the one hand, the consecration of a virgin (or a continent non-priest) appears to be a total gift of self to God “for the Kingdom of God.” The virgin has to please the Divine Spouse in all things, to direct all her faculties toward him, and to surrender to him without any reservations, her body and soul. The minister of Christ, on the other hand, must be continent, less in virtue of a charismatic desire to belong totally to God (though it goes without saying that such a disposition is in keeping with his state) than in order to obtain the necessary conditions for the achievement of his specific mission, or, in other words, his functions as a mediator. . . . While the call to virginity was founded in the evangelical counsels, the discipline of priestly celibacy had its origins, as we have frequently seen, in a positive will of the apostles.⁶⁴

⁶³ A religious candidate for the diaconate is required to make the promise of celibacy even though he has previously made a vow of chastity. The bond of celibacy that the candidate assumes with ordination is distinct from and added to the one contracted already by the vow of chastity, such that the religious priest or deacon who leaves his institute upon obtaining a dispensation from his vows, still has the obligation of celibacy in virtue of his promise made at diaconal ordination, cf. Egana, “Religious and the New Rite for the Ordination of the Deacon”: 105-06.

⁶⁴ Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 438.

Priestly mediation constitutes the specific difference that distinguishes celibacy from consecrated chastity. In particular, this priestly mediation is centered on the Eucharist, which provides a solid foundation for theological development on the subject of priestly celibacy.⁶⁵

Along what lines, then, can one construct a theology of priestly celibacy that is centered on the Eucharist?⁶⁶ Some magisterial texts provide a starting point for establishing a relationship between celibacy and the Eucharist, particularly in the eschatological understanding of the Eucharist. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 41, for example, gives an account of the eucharistic celebration of a local church around the bishop:

The principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.⁶⁷

This text can be understood as describing the earthly manifestation of the final eschatological assembly, which was mentioned earlier in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 8: "In

⁶⁵ Cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 26; above, 312.

⁶⁶ John Paul II refers to the Eucharist as a foundation for the whole of Christian life and mission in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "The implementation of this program of a renewed impetus in Christian living passes through the Eucharist. . . . Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination," John Paul II, *On the Eucharist – Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 60 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003), 65.

⁶⁷ Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 41. "[Parishes] set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, are the most important, for in some way they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world," Vatican Council II, *PC*, n. 42. N. 42 has a footnote referring to Ignatius of Antioch and the final eschatological assembly: "Cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch: *Magnesians*, 7; *Philadelphians*, 4; *Smyrnaeans*, 8."

the earthly liturgy we take part in the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrims.”⁶⁸

In addition, *Lumen Gentium* 23 states that the local churches gathered around their bishops are “constituted after the model of the universal Church.” Though “universal Church” often refers to the worldwide Church, the more profound sense of “universal Church” refers to the heavenly Church according to an eschatological view.⁶⁹

Paul McPartlan wrote with reference to the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist:

The eucharistic assembly around the priest, or better still around the bishop and his presbyters, is the sacrament of the Apocalypse, the gathering of the multitude around the throne of the Lamb and the circle of the elders, and the key to the Church’s identity as “sacrament of the New Jerusalem.”⁷⁰

This heavenly assembly is richly described in the Letter to the Hebrews, in a passage that seems to apply to the Christian community gathered for the Eucharist:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to

⁶⁸ Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 8; cf. Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 169, and John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1985), 149, 157-58.

⁶⁹ Paul McPartlan comments on the significance of *Lumen Gentium* 23: “Now, if ‘universal’ here means ‘of all ages,’ the final heavenly church, in other words, then we have the liturgical, eschatological vision,” in Paul McPartlan, “The Eucharist as the Basis for Ecclesiology,” *Antiphon* 6:2 (2001): 12-19, at 16-17. McPartlan notes here that *Lumen Gentium* tends to read “universal Church” to mean the worldwide Church of today, with the exception of *Lumen Gentium* 2, which rises above the geographical, earthbound view.

⁷⁰ Paul McPartlan, “The Eucharist as the Basis for Ecclesiology”: 18. The phrase “sacrament of the New Jerusalem” comes from Roger Mahony, *As I Have Done for You: Pastoral Letter on Ministry* (Los Angeles: Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2000), <http://www.archdiocese.la/archbishop/letters/ministry/index.html>.

the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24).⁷¹

Every celebration of the Eucharist opens up to this assembly of the angels and saints gathered around Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem. The eschatological dimension of the liturgy is rooted in the *present* participation in the heavenly Jerusalem through the offering of the Eucharist *here and now*. Consequently the Eucharist thrusts the worshipping assembly into the *future* reality of heavenly life, as the text above from Hebrews seems to affirm. The liturgical assembly is taken also into the *past* through the mystery of the Eucharist, as McPartlan described:

As we unpack its [the Eucharist's] manifold mystery, there are the past and the future, too, or rather there is the past *in* the future, the memorial of Calvary in the midst of the anticipation of the kingdom. Though we may appear to be looking *backward* in this celebration, by re-enacting what the Lord did at the Last Supper, it is clear that Jesus himself was looking *forward* in that sacred meal and that, therefore, in the deepest sense, so are we, as we do what he did.⁷²

Therefore the Eucharist in its threefold dimension – past, present and future – comprehends time and eternity. Each of the faithful is able to participate fully in this mystery. However, the priest who presides at the Eucharist represents Christ at the center

⁷¹ Cf. Paul McPartlan, “The Eucharist Makes the Church: Calvary Cross and Heavenly Banquet,” in *Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 1-13, at 4-5.

⁷² Paul McPartlan, “The Eucharist Makes the Church: Calvary Cross and Heavenly Banquet,” 12. Vatican II taught that the reality of Christ's *past* redemptive work is contained in the Eucharist: “[Christ instituted the Eucharist] in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection,” Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 47.

of the heavenly liturgy to come, and both because of his imaging of the celibate Christ and because of the eschatological nature of this celebration that anticipates the age to come in which there will be no marrying and giving in marriage (cf. Lk 20:36), it is highly appropriate that he be celibate. The following words of Benedict XVI to priests seem to fit well the eucharistic-eschatological context just described:

This unification of his “I” with ours implies that we are “drawn” also into the reality of his Resurrection; we are going forth towards the full life of resurrection. Jesus speaks of it to the Sadducees in Matthew, chapter 22. It is a “new” life in which we are already beyond marriage (cf. Mt 22:23-32). It is important that we always allow this identification of the “I” of Christ with us, this being “drawn” towards the world of resurrection. In this sense, celibacy is anticipation. We transcend this time and move on. By doing so, we “draw” ourselves and our time towards the world of the resurrection, towards a new and true life.

Therefore, celibacy is an anticipation, a foretaste, made possible by the grace of the Lord, who draws us to himself, towards the world of the resurrection. It invites us always anew to transcend ourselves and the present time, to the true presence of the future that becomes present today.⁷³

The pope stated that priestly celibacy is “an anticipation, a foretaste, made possible by the grace of the Lord, who draws us to himself, towards the world of the resurrection.” Priestly celibacy can thus be connected implicitly with the Eucharist insofar as both are anticipations of the second coming of the Christ and the life and liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. The connection here is provided through an *eschatological orientation*.

The liturgical assembly with the bishop anticipates in a preeminent way the eschatological realities to which the Eucharist is oriented. Gathering around himself the presbyters and deacons, in the presence of the baptized faithful, the bishop leads the

⁷³ Benedict XVI, “A Sacrament, a New Life to Make Room for God”: 7.

assembly in the making present of the future kingdom of God. In virtue of his celibacy, the bishop – and the priest by extension – is more apt to be drawn into the heavenly Jerusalem because he is free from earthly cares that arise from marriage and family, and through the presiding of a celibate bishop or priest, the community is better able to *anticipate* the future resurrection and the kingdom of heaven through the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as to *participate* in its present reality.⁷⁴ These anticipatory and participatory characteristics of the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy achieve their most sublime expression in the Eucharist.

In view of these distinctions, a particular eschatological perspective of *priestly* celibacy comes to light. Rather than being described in terms of concepts that are also applied to consecrated religious men and women, this perspective links the priest's celibacy especially with his celebration of the Eucharist. The eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy points to the world of the Resurrection and the heavenly Jerusalem, the very realities which are anticipated in the celebration of the Eucharist. Through the grace of the Lord Jesus, celibacy invites the priest, who presides at the Eucharist, to

⁷⁴ Henri Crouzel pointed out the *here and now* quality of the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy: “Among the motivations that led to the imposition of celibacy or continence on clerics in the first centuries, the teaching of St. Paul and the Gospels plays a role that is far from exclusive, but that remains essential: it is not only an extrinsic justification. Its eschatological dimension does not lie merely in the realization of a mythical or desirable immanence of the end of the world. The Kingdom of heaven is underway from the moment of the Incarnation, and the time of the Church, if we may speak thus, is the time of an eschatology in becoming,” Henri Crouzel, “Le Célibat et la continence ecclésiastique dans l’Eglise primitive: Leurs motivations,” in Coppens, ed., *Sacerdoce et célibat: Etudes historiques et théologiques*, 331-71, at 367; translation from Marc Ouellet, *Priestly Celibacy and the Life of the Church: Contemporary Values and Challenges*, (unpublished manuscript, 2010), 13.

transcend himself and the present world in order to ascend to the heavenly reality “to the true presence of the future that becomes present today.”⁷⁵

4. Summary

This chapter has focused on the usefulness of the threefold dimension in addressing several issues and questions about priestly celibacy. First, with regard to the christological dimension, it was proposed that episcopal celibacy could serve as a starting point in ecumenical dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics on the subject of celibacy. Second, with regard to the ecclesiological dimension, the appropriateness of using nuptial imagery for the celibate priest was considered, and the images of the priest as best friend and spiritual father were seen as helpful in communicating the riches of priestly celibacy. Third, with regard to the relatively underdeveloped notion of the eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy, a eucharistic-eschatological theology of priestly celibacy was proposed as an area of growth.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, “A Sacrament, a New Life to Make Room for God”: 7.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of priestly celibacy during a period when there are multiple questions concerning its suitability in the Catholic Church. The dissertation thus has explored reasons for the charism and discipline of celibacy in the Latin Church, principally through a study of the threefold dimension recently adopted in the teaching of the Magisterium.

One question treated in this study is the “newness” of priestly celibacy, that is, whether the theology underlying the discipline of celibacy in the Latin Church was influenced by New Testament motivations that are essentially related to Christ and to the ordained ministry instituted in the Church, or whether it was drawn from the Old Testament and even from other non-Christian sources.¹ Throughout the study the former position has been argued, and the threefold dimension has been seen as useful for uncovering the multiple layers of meaning of a specifically Christian priestly celibacy.

The dissertation has noted several puzzling or ambiguous magisterial teachings with regard to clerical celibacy and continence in the past half century. For example, in the 1950s Pope Pius XII allowed for the ordination of several married former non-Catholic clergymen to the Catholic priesthood. He said nothing, however, concerning their obligation to practice perfect and perpetual continence.² This papal dispensation for ordination without the requirement for perfect continence set a precedent concerning married priests that is in discontinuity with traditional Catholic discipline. Magisterial

¹ Cf. above, 20-27.

² Cf. above, 82-83, and Goethe, “Die Offene Tur,” 117-65.

teaching and legislation since Vatican II have not clarified this significant departure from long-established practice.³

There have also been ambiguities in magisterial doctrine and legislation concerning the married permanent diaconate and continence. When Vatican II opened the door for the restoration of the permanent diaconate in *Lumen Gentium* 29, it did not mention the requirement of perfect continence for married deacons, but neither did it indicate any theological rationale for the compatibility of marriage and diaconal ordination.⁴ In 1967, Paul VI issued his apostolic letter, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, in which he formally restored the permanent diaconate.⁵ In this document the pope explicitly stated that the prescriptions of the 1917 Code were to continue to bind major clerics with regard to celibacy and continence.⁶ Presumably, his intention was to continue the ancient Latin discipline of perfect continence for married clerics when the permanent diaconate was formally restored. Adding to the confusion, canon 277.1 of the 1983 Code seems to follow the 1917 Code in requiring perfect continence for married clerics.⁷ Since neither Vatican II nor Paul VI provided reflections on diaconal continence,

³ On the other hand, John Paul II ordained two married Brazilian men to the priesthood provided that they agree to separate with their wives; cf. above, 193-94.

⁴ Cf. above, 111-13.

⁵ Cf. Paul VI, "Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem," 237-43; AAS 59 (1967): 697-704, and above, 147-49.

⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, Introduction, and above, 148.

⁷ Cf. above, 212-19.

this lack of explanation has helped to nurture the idea that celibacy and continence are simply parts of a mutable Church discipline with little or no theological rationale.

This dissertation has showed that two well established arguments for priestly celibacy have fallen out of use by the Magisterium: ritual purity and the superiority of celibacy to marriage. Although the ritual purity argument can be understood in a sense that is consonant with sound Catholic tradition,⁸ it has tended to be interpreted in an anti-corporeal manner.⁹ Perhaps for this reason the Magisterium has stepped away from using this argument.¹⁰ The Magisterium has also avoided the Tridentine doctrine on the superiority of celibacy over marriage, apparently because of the emphasis that Vatican II placed on the dignity and holiness of marriage.¹¹ The value both of celibacy and of marriage has been addressed in several magisterial texts, such as the writings of John Paul II.¹² Although the Magisterium has not repudiated explicitly these two arguments,

⁸ “The fact that the Apostle to the Gentiles did not think that – unlike other practices – the practice of abstinence-for-prayer prescribed by the Mosaic Law [see 1 Cor 7:5] was futile would explain rather well the phenomenon of selection leading to the preference for sexual abstinence in Christianity at a time when other practices of purification were abandoned,” Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 435; cf. above, 277-85.

⁹ Cf. above, 20-27.

¹⁰ With the exception of Benedict XVI: cf. Benedict XVI, “Year for Priests,” 119, and above, 286.

¹¹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *GS*, n. 49, and above, 116-18.

¹² “[Virginit] keeps alive in the Church a consciousness of the mystery of marriage and defends it from any reduction and impoverishment,” John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 16; cf. Vatican Council II, *LG*, n. 41.

the fact that they have not been included in magisterial documents since Vatican II has relegated them *de facto* to the past.

The principal contribution of this study, however, is the analysis of the threefold dimension itself, which effectively summarizes the rich biblical and patristic teaching on clerical celibacy. The Magisterium has adopted the threefold dimension in its search for new explanations for ecclesiastical celibacy. Vatican II provided the theological groundwork for the scheme in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, and Paul VI subsequently formulated it much more fully in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. The threefold dimension has proven to be one of the most significant developments in magisterial teaching on priestly celibacy and has impacted significantly the formulation of magisterial doctrine on this topic. In particular, the threefold dimension has enhanced the theological understanding of celibacy by analyzing its various aspects or dimensions. The teaching of Paul VI in this regard was a great advance over the method and content of the teaching of his predecessors in the twentieth century.¹³

Of the three dimensions, the ecclesiological – which considers the way in which celibacy touches upon the minister’s relationship to the Church – has garnered most attention from the Magisterium. One significant development of the ecclesiological dimension came from Paul VI, who broadened its perspective through the use of nuptial imagery, i.e. depicting the celibate priest as an icon of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church.¹⁴ This nuptial perspective was a significant development of the ecclesiological

¹³ See above, 51-64.

¹⁴ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 26.

dimension of priestly celibacy as initially presented in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16, and was then further elaborated by John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.¹⁵

Although the ecclesiological dimension has been emphasized in recent magisterial documents, it is only one part of the larger perspective. In fact, the christological dimension – which refers to the priest’s union with and configuration to Christ – is the foundational aspect of priestly celibacy upon which depend all the other aspects. The ministerial priest discovers his true identity through his participation in the priesthood of Christ, to whom the priest is primarily referred. From his union with Christ, the priest is related to the Church. This relationship is described through a multiplicity of images, e.g. head, servant, shepherd, and bridegroom. In addition, the priest’s union with Christ orients him toward the kingdom of heaven, principally through his celebration of the Eucharist. The ecclesiological dimension thus occupies a middle position; that is, through his union with Christ (the christological dimension), the priest serves the Church (the ecclesiological dimension); his priestly service, however, is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (the eschatological dimension).

The ecclesiological dimension encompasses the priest’s active ministry, which itself is vivified by *pastoral charity*, the priest’s gift of self to the Church after the example of Christ. Pastoral charity has an intrinsically ecclesiological dynamism that flows from and is preeminently expressed through the Eucharist:

Indeed, the Eucharist represents, makes once again present, the sacrifice of the cross, the full gift of Christ to the Church, the gift of his body given and his blood shed, as the supreme witness of the fact that he is Head and Shepherd, Servant and Spouse of the Church. Precisely because of this,

¹⁵ Cf. above, 201-09.

the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realization – just as it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a “sacrificial” dimension.¹⁶

Underlying this pastoral charity is the mystery of trinitarian communion, which is the font of all charity and the root of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and hence between the priest and the Church.¹⁷

Although the understanding of the threefold dimension has developed steadily since Vatican II and Paul VI, there are still areas for future development, two of which merit particular mention. First, the potential application of the threefold dimension to celibate lay faithful can open up a theological understanding of the particular nature and form of the charism of celibacy among the laity. Second, one could search for an integration of the threefold dimension into a unified vision, which has not been proposed in any significant magisterial teaching, even by Paul VI in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*.

An indication of how such an integration might be accomplished can be seen in *Sacramentum Caritatis* of Benedict XVI. This post-synodal apostolic exhortation deals with the “Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission,”¹⁸ and was the fruit of the 11th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2005), which focused on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 12.

¹⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity: Sacramentum Caritatis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007); hereafter cited: *The Sacrament of Charity*; Latin text: AAS 99 (2007): 105-80.

In the section, “The Eucharist and Priestly Celibacy,” Benedict XVI explained how the synod Fathers wished to emphasize that the ministerial priesthood calls for complete configuration to Christ.¹⁹ Priestly celibacy facilitates this configuration by enabling the priest to dedicate his whole person to Christ in service to the People of God. In this context the pope described celibacy with reference to two of the three dimensions:

This choice [celibacy] on the part of the priest expresses in a special way the dedication which conforms him to Christ [the christological dimension] and his exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God [the eschatological dimension]. The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes *the sure point of reference* for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church.²⁰

Benedict XVI particularly highlighted here the *christological* dimension by pointing out that Christ lived his mission in the state of virginity, a focus that does away with a purely functional explanation of celibacy and instead shows that celibacy is a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life.²¹

The pope then reaffirmed the obligation of sacerdotal celibacy in the Latin Church on the basis of the blessings that it confers upon the Church and the world:

¹⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity*, n. 24. Interestingly, Benedict XVI did not deal explicitly with the relationship between the Eucharist and priestly celibacy in this section of *The Sacrament of Charity*, despite its title “The Eucharist and Priestly Celibacy.” This omission is rather puzzling. It may be that Benedict XVI wanted to hint at the link between celibacy with the liturgy without treating the topic of ritual purity. Whatever the case may be, his mention of the Eucharist in the context of priestly celibacy can provide an indication in this closing reflection on a possible manner of integrating the three dimensions through the Eucharist.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity*, n. 24; emphasis added.

²¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity*, n. 24.

[Celibacy] has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride. In continuity with the great ecclesial tradition, with the Second Vatican Council [cf. *PO* 16] and with my predecessors in the papacy, I reaffirm the beauty and the importance of a priestly life lived in celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ [the christological dimension], to the Church [the ecclesiological dimension] and to the Kingdom of God [the eschatological dimension], and I therefore confirm that it remains obligatory in the Latin tradition. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for society itself.²²

In short, Benedict XVI reaffirmed the sign value of priestly celibacy according to the threefold dimension: it expresses the priest's total and exclusive devotion to Christ (the christological dimension), to the Church (the ecclesiological dimension) and to the Kingdom of God (the eschatological dimension).

The teaching on priestly celibacy in *Sacramentum Caritatis* is thus a good summary of recent magisterial teaching:

- (1) The christological dimension signifies the priest's union with Christ, which is the source and motivation for priestly celibacy. This is the foundational element of priestly celibacy: "The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church" (n. 24);
- (2) The ecclesiological dimension refers to the manner in which the priest is related to the Church in his ministry. This dimension particularly highlights the nuptial meaning of priestly celibacy: "This choice [celibacy] has first and foremost a

²² Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity*, n. 24.

nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride” (n. 24);²³

- (3) The eschatological dimension refers to the goal of priestly celibacy: the Kingdom of heaven, for which the priest sacrifices earthly marriage and family: “[priestly celibacy expresses the priest’s] exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God” (n. 24).

Pastoral charity is a participation in Christ’s own pastoral charity and it enables the priest to give himself totally to the Church.²⁴ Celibacy, which is part of the priest’s imitation of the life of Christ, becomes fruitful to the extent that pastoral charity informs and perfects it. As pastoral charity perfects the priest in his celibacy, so too does priestly celibacy facilitate growth in pastoral charity, as Vatican II taught:

[Celibacy] is at the same time a sign and a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world.²⁵

Similarly, Paul VI stated:

[The] free choice of sacred celibacy has always been considered by the Church “as something that signifies and stimulates charity”: it signifies a love without reservations; it stimulates to a charity which is open to all.²⁶

²³ Benedict XVI here wrote that priestly celibacy “first and foremost” has a *nuptial* meaning, which is a strong indication of the importance and centrality of the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy.

²⁴ John Paul II wrote: “The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ,” John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23; cf. Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 14.

²⁵ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 16.

²⁶ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* n. 24.

Celibacy is thus both a sign of and a stimulus to pastoral charity. In the context of service to the Church, the celibate priest imitates Christ who “loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Yet pastoral charity itself is rooted in the Eucharist, as Vatican II teaches: “Pastoral charity flows mainly from the eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the center and root of the whole priestly life.”²⁷ Thus the priest’s *pastoral charity* flows from the celebration of the Eucharist, from which the priest receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a sacrificial dimension.²⁸

Consequently, the graces given to the priest to live a fruitful celibacy should be understood as being drawn from the Eucharist: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”²⁹ The Eucharist is the universal source of grace for all the faithful and the goal of all the activities of the Church. Hence the charism of priestly celibacy, as with pastoral charity, has its own source and ultimate goal in the Eucharist.

In and through the Eucharist, the priest is perfected in his relationship with Christ, whom he represents (the christological dimension), and is more intimately related to the Church which gathers around him at that moment (the ecclesiological dimension) and to the Kingdom of heaven of which the celebration gives a foretaste (the eschatological

²⁷ Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 14; cf. *LG* 28 and *PO* 2. John Paul II builds upon this conciliar teaching in stating that the sacrament of Holy Orders is the *specific* source of pastoral charity: “Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist,” John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

²⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23.

²⁹ Vatican Council II, *SC*, n. 10.

dimension). Thus in his self-offering during the eucharistic celebration, the priest expresses in the fullest way the threefold dimension of priestly celibacy. It can be said that the priest's growth in priestly life and holiness is aided through centering his whole life, including his celibacy, on the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained.³⁰ Acting in the person of Christ the Head, the priest unites himself with the offering placed upon the altar.³¹ Through his eucharistic offering, thanksgiving, sacrifice, and communion, the priest is enabled to serve the faithful with Christ-like pastoral charity, as he and they "wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ."³²

³⁰ Cf. Vatican Council II, *PO*, n. 5.

³¹ Cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 29.

³² Cf. *The Sacramentary*, 562; cf. Titus 2:13.

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