

# CELIBACY FOR THE REIGN OF GOD



## Christ as Spouse

[cf. Gianpietro DePaoli, CSS, *Spiritualità del Presbitero*.

*Reflessioni sul Pastores Dabo Vobis*. June 12, 1993, pp. 39-56 –

given as Conference, by Rev. Joseph C. Henchey, CSS, North American College, May 1999]

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## CELIBACY FOR THE REIGN OF GOD - Christ as Spouse

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**Introduction:** Texts from Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, March 25, 1992:

[1] **# 3:** ...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 come **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..."

[2] **# 12:** "... the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this **multiple and rich inter-connection of relationships, which arise from the Blessed Trinity**, and are prolonged in the communion of the Church as a **sign and instrument** of Christ, of **communion with God and with all of humanity...**"

[3] **# 22 c:**

[a] "...Christ's **Gift of Himself** to His Church, the fruit of His love, is described in terms of that **unique Gift of Self** made by the **Bridegroom** to the **Bride**, as the sacred texts often suggest. Jesus is the true **Bridegroom** who offers to the Church the wine of salvation [cf. Jn 2:11]. He Who is the **Head** of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its savior [cf. Ep 5:23], 'loved the Church and **gave Himself up for her**, that He might satisfy her, having cleansed her by the washing of water, with the Word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish..."

[b] **# 22 d:**"...Hence, Christ stands 'before' the Church and 'nourishes and cherishes her' [cf. Ep 5:29] giving His life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the **Spouse** of the community as a believer along-side his other brothers and sisters who having 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 regarding to the community. '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 front of the Church' (Seoul). 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 living people with a heart that is new, generous and pure - with genuine self-detachment, with full and constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of '**divine jealousy**' [cf. 2 Co 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. Ga 4:19]."

**[4] # 23:**

**[a] c:** "... 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 **gave Himself up** for her' [Ep 5:25], and the same must be true for the priest. With **Pastoral Charity**, which distinguishes the exercise of the priestly ministry, as an *amoris officium*, [St. Augustine], 'the priest, who welcomes the call to the ministry, is in a position to make this a loving choice, the result of which the Church and souls become the first interest and with concrete spirituality he becomes capable of loving the universal Church, and that part of it entrusted to him with the deep love of a **husband for his wife**. This **Gift of self** has no limits, marked as it is by the same apostolic and **missionary** zeal of Christ the Good Shepherd, who said: 'Other sheep have that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So, there will be one flock and one shepherd...' [cf. Jn 10:16]."

**[b] e:** "... the **Gift of self** to the Church concerns her insofar as she is the Body and the **Bride** of Jesus Christ. In this way, 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..."

**[c] f:** "... Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the **Eucharist**. As the Council states 'The pastoral charity flows mainly from the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the center and the 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**' [cf. PO 14]. Indeed, the Eucharist **re-presents, makes present once again**, the sacrifice of the **Cross, the full Gift of Christ to the Church**, the Gift of His Body given and His Bloodshed, as the supreme witness of the fact that He is the Head, Shepherd, Servant and **Spouse** of the Church. Precisely because of this, the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from 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...**"

**[5] # 27 d:** "... For all Christians, without exception, the radicalism of the Gospel represents a fundamental, undeniable demand, flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate Him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with Him brought about by the Spirit [cf. Mt 8:18, ff.; 10:37, ff. Mk 8:34-38; 10:17-21; Lk 9:57, ff.]...A particularly significant expression of the radicalism of the Gospel is seen in the different 'evangelical counsels' which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount [cf. Mt 5-7], and among them the intimately related counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty...' [Proposition # 9 of the Synod]."

**[6] # 29 a:** "... Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that 'preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father [cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Co 7:7] in order to more easily devote themselves to God alone with **an undivided heart** [cf. 1 Co 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 as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of **spiritual fertility** in the world. In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of the 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 **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: 'in virginity or celibacy**, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, **the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself/herself completely to the Church** in the hope that Christ may **give Himself** to the Church in the full truth of eternal life [cf. FC # 16]..."

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## 1. **These Texts are to be Pondered:**

**a.** This perfect continence for the reign of heaven has always been held in high regard by the Church:

- as a sign and stimulus to charity;
- and, as a special source of fecundity in the world [cf. LG 42].

In virginity and celibacy chastity maintains its original meaning, that of a human sexuality lived as an authentic manifestation and precious *service to the love of communion and inter-personal self-giving*.

**b.** This significance subsists fully in virginity, which realizes, even in the renunciation of marriage, the **sponsal** meaning of the body, through a **communion** and a **personal self-giving** to Jesus Christ and to His Church, which pre-figure and anticipate the perfect and definitive communion and gift of the world to come. It is most important that the priest comes to grasp the theological motivation for the ecclesiastical law of celibacy.

**c.** In so far as it is indeed a Law, celibacy expresses the Will of the Church - even before any given individual might express his willingness to accept it, his availability for it. Furthermore, the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the **bond** that celibacy has with sacred ordination, which **configures** the priest to Jesus Christ, as Head and **Spouse** of the Church. The Church, as the **Spouse of Jesus Christ**, wishes to be loved by the priest in the **total and exclusive manner** with which Jesus, Head and **Spouse**, has loved her. Priestly celibacy, therefore, is a Gift *in and with* Christ to His Church and expresses the service of the priest toward the Church *in and with* the Lord.

**d.** For a proper spiritual life in the priest it is necessary that celibacy be considered and lived *not* as an isolated and purely negative element, *but* rather as an aspect of a positive orientation, one that is specific and characteristic of the priest: he leaves his father and mother, follows Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in an **apostolic communion**, in the **service** of the People of God.

**e.** Celibacy is, then, to be accepted with a free and loving decision, that must be continuously renewed:

- as an inestimable gift of God;
- as a stimulus to pastoral charity;
- as a singular participation in the paternity of God and in the fecundity of the Church.

## **2. Celibacy in the Light of Christ:**

### **a. Ecclesiastical Celibacy:**

1.] As Vatican II declared, virginity is not required by the very nature of the priesthood. This is quite clear in the practice of the Early Church and the tradition of the Eastern Churches... but, it is not just today that one might reflect on the multiple fittingness of celibacy for the ministers of God [cf. Paul VI, ***Sacerdotalis Caelibatus***, # 18].

2.] The connection between both charisms is not immediately evident, nor in themselves, nor in the history of Church discipline. However, the Church has chosen and wills this bond with her free, historical, positive, motivated decision. There is no doubt concerning the *legitimacy* in itself of this ecclesial decision, for all those who freely offer themselves for the ministry. Its characteristics have been deputed by Christ to delineate.

3.] For our reflections here it might be more meaningful to ponder on the *motivations* that are behind this ecclesial discipline, that we might live its values in a more convinced and joyful manner. Paul VI's text [of June 24, 1967] in presenting in a very rich manner the reasons for celibacy, treats of its **Christological**, its **Ecclesiological**, as well as its **Eschatological** meanings [cf. ## 17-35, in: EV 2, 1431-1448].

**b. In the Light of Christ:**

1.] The ministerial priesthood can be understood solely in the light of **the newness of Jesus Christ**. The Minister of Christ and the Administrator of the Mysteries of God has in Him the direct **Model** and the supreme **Ideal**. The Lord Jesus consecrated Himself **totally** to the Father's Will, and carried out through His Paschal Mystery, the **New Creation**, introducing into the world a new, sublime divine form of life that transforms the very earthly condition of humanity.

2.] This profound connection between virginity and the Priesthood in Christ is reflected in those who have the destiny to share in the dignity and in the mission of the Eternal Mediator and Priest. This participation will be all the more perfect the more the sacred minister will be freed from the bonds of flesh and blood [cf. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, # 21].

3.] While celibacy as a commitment, and celibacy as a gospel choice may be distinguished in one's reflection, they are found joined in his life. It is precisely the comprehension of the reasons behind this ecclesial commitment that opens up the appreciation and the acceptance of celibacy as a gift in the priestly ministry.

**c. Jesus' Choice of Celibacy:**

1.] **Jesus' Celibacy:** why did Jesus remain a celibate? In Jesus' life, nothing is just "casual" - every gesture is a "sign", a choice. This is certainly true in the matter at hand. If it is true that the celibacy of Jeremiah [cf. 16:1, ff.] served as a symbol of Israel's desolation, that of Jesus is a sign of the vocation of humanity to communion with God, into communion with its Lord. If the celibacy of Jesus is loaded with signification, it is above all because this is inscribed into a plan of life,

which itself is full of meaning to announce the Reign” [cf. Thevenot X]. Beyond the demonstrative value of the individual texts, what is decisive is the value that Christ has chosen for Himself during His earthly life. Jesus is “**Spouse**” and it is this **sponsality** of His that explains His celibacy: **He does not marry, because He is a Spouse.**

**2.] Jesus as Spouse: from a Sign, to Life [cf. Cardinal Biffi]:** it is already quite clear that in presenting Pastoral Charity, the Post-Synodal Exhortation, PDV expresses itself through the image of Christ, as Head, Shepherd, but at the same time: **Spouse**. Christ as **Spouse** is constantly present in the different NT traditions. The **Sponsality** of Christ is a theme that is amply present in the Early Church.

**a.]** The catechesis found in the **Synoptics** presents this particularly in its parables:

- that of the Nuptial Banquet of the King’s Son [cf. Mt 22:2];
- that of the ten bridesmaids [cf. Mt 25:1];
- that of the Master of the household who returns from the wedding in the middle of the night [cf. Lk 12: 36];
- and it is helpful to remember that *loghion* recorded by all three Synoptics in which Jesus is presented as the **Spouse**, and His Disciples are those **invited to the Nuptials** [cf. Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34].

**b.]** The **Fourth Gospel** attributes to John the Baptizer the identification of Jesus as the **Spouse** Who comes to take His Spouse [cf. Jn 3:29: “... the Bride is only for the Bridegroom.. He must grow greater; I must grow smaller...”

The **Apocalypse** presents the inauguration of the reign of God as the **nuptials of the Lamb** to which the **spouse** has been prepared: she has been able to dress herself in dazzling white linen...! [cf. Rv 19:7, f.] Here, too, the text speaks as in the Synoptics of the “invited”: blessed are those invited to **the wedding banquet of the Lamb!** [cf. Rv 19:9].

**c.]** **St. Paul**, still with the **sponsal image**, calls the **Christian community the “Spouse” of Christ** [cf. 2 Co 11:2]. In the light of this figure, he fathoms the depths of the bond that unites Christ to His Church [cf. Ep 5:22-32]. It is precisely this last noted text of Paul that helps us to understand better Jesus’ celibacy: Christ gives Himself to the Church **sponsally, in the fullness of truth, to humanity: this is a wondrous sign: this is the Great Mystery!**

**d.]** Yet, all this is not simply a "sign". One Who is Himself the realization of the **Nuptials of God with Humanity** could ever be held to the limits of human matrimony. This would mean that the One Who is its *reality* would have chosen to take on its *figure*. By the mere fact that the common marriage of all derives its reality from Christ as **Spouse**, Christ then cannot reduce His choice to marriage which is *the sign of His Truth*.

**3.] The Meaning of Christ's Sponsality: for the Church:** in Ep 5:22-30, Jesus indeed is the **Spouse** [cf. Card. Biffi]:

**a.]** This has broad implications:

- this means that Christ is the **Head** of the Church - which is therefore, His **Body** and hence, subject to Him;
- this means that the Church has been taken out of the corruption of the world; Jesus has given her His Name, and thus He has saved her: He is *the Savior of His Body, the Church*;
- this means that He has loved her, and still does - to the point of **giving Himself** for her'
- this means that He has re-generated her and He purifies her continuously by means of the sacraments and the Word of God;
- this means that He awaits on her work of sanctification, in such a way that she will be without spot and without wrinkle, but she will be holy and immaculate;
- this means that *He nourishes her, and cares for her*, as the Shepherd does for His Flock.

**b.]** As is clearly seen, the **sponsal character** of Jesus Christ brings to mind all these **services** of His: Guide - Master - Shepherd. In His Risen state, He still presents Himself as having the **mandate** from the Father and that He is the **"Apostle" by excellence**. He thus associates the apostles to Himself by bringing them into **His Mission**, by *sending* them Himself, as the Father had already sent Him: as the Father sent Me, I now send you! [cf. Jn 20:21]. The tasks that have been entrusted to them in their priestly ordination are all to be understood under this **sponsal light**. [Card. Biffi, Sept. 12, 1988, to the Priests of Bologna].

**4.] The Ordained Minister is a "Spouse" for the Church:** therefore, the ordained minister can be presented as a Sacramental Sign of Christ as Spouse, in the richness and multiplicity of **His Being-For-the-Church**, nourished at the fount of

the Pastoral Charity with which Christ **loves His Church-Spouse**. For such a man, too, he could not be reduced for seeking out a *sign* when he is already called to live it, even though in its historical dimension. The priest lives this truth through his **configuration to Christ the Spouse, given for His Church, for humanity**. It is not without meaning that both in the Eastern Church [for the deacons and priests, but not for bishops], as in the Latin Church [for the permanent deacons] there is the possibility for the married man to become ordained - but, it is still not possible for one who is ordained to get married.

**a.]** The **charism of the celibate** is the yearning of the baptized for **sponsal communion** with Christ, to be assimilated, without sacramental mediations, to the Church. In her profound reality, the Church is already the **eschatological Spouse of the Lamb**. This is a manner of living, in one's own person, the mystery of the love which the Church nourishes for her Lord, beyond the sacramental manner of matrimony (which does not signify a different dimension of charity).

**b.]** The **commitment of the celibate** places the presbyterate in the light of **Christ as Spouse**, in relationship with His Church, sharing in His mediation, making visible the redemptive love of the human-divine heart of Christ Himself. On the theological level, one can defend the *propriety*, the **con-venience** [in the most pregnant sense of the term, and not only its disciplinary legitimacy] that the celibate as a commitment would suppose the charism - one cannot presume to render himself subject of the Pastoral Charity of Christ, if there is not already enkindled within us the will of adhering without reserve to Him and to become with Him one sole reality. This is what the **Church-Spouse** is, it has become "one flesh" with her **Spouse**. Anyone who says that Jesus right now gives Himself sponsally to the Church, can be fascinated by the desire to enter as co-principle into this ineffable **self-giving** [Card. Biffi].

## **5.] The Image of the Spouse, an Eschatological Announcement:**

**a.]** In the Resurrection one does not marry! [cf. Mt 22:30; Lk 20:35, f.]. Even if "celibacy", as such, is not the direct object of the discourse here there is illuminated the announcement of the **future life** that it contains. There is no longer required the service of the life of matrimony when life itself is no longer placed under the mark of death.

**b.]** It is justified in the perspective of faith: it is important to make clear that while *matrimony* can be lived well, even without any faith, *celibacy*

*for the Reign of Heaven* has sense only in the perspective of faith. Therefore, celibacy opens out to a dimension which transcends the earthly evaluation of values. Celibacy places before the eyes of all the faithful that wonderful **union** established by God that is has be fully established by God and which ought to be fully manifested in the future world by means of which the Church has Christ as her sole **Spouse** [cf. PC 12].

**c.]** St. Paul offers an explicit invitation to celibacy [cf. 1 Co 7:25-40]. This passage must be brought together with others, such as Ep 5:22, ff. The values of the Reign of God can be announced by *every form of life*, in every truly *Christian* project, one that is worked out in the light of the Gospel, by Christ's genuine *disciples* - this is the **Gospel plan** that is achieved in celibacy in an original manner. There is always the real possibility to fail in it, because of the egoism from which observance does not preserve one, because of our being made wretched for the divine capacity of mercy, love and universality.

### **3. Reflections for a proper Choice of Celibacy**

#### **a. Commitment:**

- *celibacy is to take on a commitment* :this is the *positive* aspect of the choice, even if this implies at the same time a *renunciation* - one chooses a kind of life and with this, celibacy constitutes a fundamental element of this;

- *it is a choice made for the sake of Christ and His Realm* - this is its motivation, both mystical as well as apostolic. This expresses the dominating poles of the ordained minister living as a celibate;
- *it does not commit one solely to chastity*, i.e., to the dominion over one's sexual impulses. This is obviously already obligatory for everyone, according to their state in life. The object of the solemn commitment is that manner of living permanent continence, with a view to the fruits that are the liberation from the love, tenderness, compassion, receptivity, the gift, the truth and the simplicity of sexual relations;
- *in permanent continence*: abstention from genital please voluntarily brought about implies a style of life on the global level which would allow this, even a necessary practice of asceticism. Perfection is that ideal that is never achieved, but the pathway toward this ideal is an evangelical demand that commits one every single day.

**b. Demands**

- not all can grasp this [cf. Mt 19:10-12]. It is a gift from on high, and not only a “choice”, or some human commitment, n matter how feasible this might seem. Celibacy has an evangelical foundation, even in the strict sense, since it is affirmed by Jesus Himself.
- celibacy, chosen for the sake of the Reign of God, is a particular charism, a gift of God, for a special vocation. IT is necessary that this be *recognized and lived* this way. It is not a matter of one’s own commitment of will, but supposes a constant care of values which are its foundation and root. Therefore, for its reception [as for the acceptance of every divine grace] there is needed a climate of prayer, of prudent custody, of asceticism, vigilance over oneself, and especially to nourish a passion for the Reign of Heaven, and this with constancy.
- it is a gift and, as such, it should be invoked and cultivated through assiduous prayer, continuously nourished in communion with Christ.
- the classical preachers would refer to the episode of Hannah, the sterile wife of Elcanah [cf. 1 S 1:1: cf. Classical Commentary of St. Gregory the Great] - and would apply this to the priesthood! How many priests, the classical sermons would go - who never reach the age of mature perfection, so that the might build up the body of Christ [cf. Ep 4:12] - they simply do not have that ability to provide nourishment for others [cf. Sgs 8:8]. The Lord will find fault with them because they do not find their nourishment in prayer: they only “mis-carry”, unable to provide spiritual nourishment for others [cf. Ho 9:14].

**4. Celibacy and Witness:** some “anthropological” reflections are provided by the cultural context of today - adding an entire gamut of further considerations on what is already a vast theme.

**a.** Sexual conduct has profoundly changed over recent decades. The emphasis on the value of the person and his/her freedom has brought attention both to the human body as well as its pleasure and well being. There is a near cult of the human body as beauty, harmony and attraction. There is a flourishing of new “temples” at the service of human beings for the increase of this harmony and beauty - even more there is the culture of pleasure as a quieting of desire, and each and every kind of desire. It is not even easy any more to find space for spiritual values in a context - where, while it does indeed further some authentic values - is powerfully conditioned and deviated by a culture that is permeated by materialism, hedonism, utilitarianism.

**b.** This different view reflects also on the life of marriage: after centuries of a view, that many thought negative, finally in the Conciliar teaching there is the recognition of the joyous richness of living, *sharing* on the part of the couple which rightfully expresses the finality of marriage, equal to *fecundity*.

**1.]** In the joy of the rediscovery of a value, we can *not* be resigned to the loss of others. This value of the inter-personal relationship in the couple can *not* arrive - as, in fact, it seems to be doing - even to the exclusion of the fecundity of love.

**2.]** *Even less* when the pleasure of remaining together dies down, when the communion of life asks for sacrifice and a courageous re-beginning, a celebrated marriage is often said that it is 'losing its meaning'. This is often used as the pretext for the desire to recover a freedom that is clearly marked in a plan of life together, but not "for good."

**3.]** And *even less* can love have much meaning outside of the context of marriage as if it were enough to enjoy a sexual life together with no further responsibilities.

**4.]** And *still less* is a sexual life even thinkable on the level of a kind of game, or "arrangement", beyond any thought of real love, reduced to the game of pleasure. The Church could never accept any vision of life, such as:

- one in which *instinct* is accompanied simply by a superficial tenderness confused with authentic love;
- where *matrimony* itself is seen as a situation which imprisons and mortifies;
- where *procreation* is seen as a limitation of one's freedom in leading his/her own life;
- where *virginity* is a mis-nomer.

**c.** When pleasure and desire become the imperative, on the personal as well as on the social level, no limits then are accepted and every ethical dictate is seen as an invasion of one's rights, a limitation of freedom a kind of obscurantism. The *radical culture*, predominant in our context, does not accept any reference to norms which precede a human being and which do not arise in his/her own personal choice. This attitude seems to characterize our social life and in it, in particular manner, the general attitude regarding sexuality.

**1.]** It would suffice just to reflect on its almost obsessive presence in the buying and selling of sexuality as an “object”, and on the collapse of any sense of *shame*: whenever this would be invoked, it is when it is practically irrisory. The same might be said in the uncontrolled use of language, so often sinking down into foul language.

**2.]** The banalization of sex has brought about not only a diverse comportment, but also the obscuring of those values bearing on civility, in terms such as *love, matrimony, fecundity, virginity*.

**3.]** One example of this might suffice: it is news when one hears of the consecration of virgins [the Order of Virgins], perhaps even more when there is the consecration of celibacy in priests, or the religious profession in Institutes, which have their commitment on the social and cultural level. These instances lead far less to the appreciation of the individuals making these consecrations of chastity as a “sign” - whereas they are appreciated for the service in society and the field of education which they offer. Their gift of celibacy is negligible, if not contradicted.

**d.** Yet, even in some of this, there may be some authentic values such as the following:

- the care of the human body - its exercise;
- the surpassing of forms of Phariseism which delighted in ‘exteriors’;
- the re-evaluation of the sexual life as qualifying a person in his/her identity and in one’s social and professional situation;
- there has been a further theological study on the life of marriage and its own specific spirituality;
- there is a deeper appreciation of love and an education toward its authenticity.

**e.** These ‘positive’ aspects are indeed genuine, even though they are often accompanied in the Christian community - and also among religious and priests - there is frequently uncertainty in evaluating trends and in one’s own conduct. Even though there has been achieved perhaps a greater serenity - at the cost of great effort, when one thinks of the formation of some time ago - unfortunately there are still not lacking situations of genuine confusion and contradiction - quite far removed from that sense of security of long ago.

## 5. A Witness for the Present

a. The life of chastity in celibacy does not deny the person, his freedom, the appreciation both joyful and operative of one's corporal nature - the appreciation of one's own and others' sexuality, the balance and gratifying experience which accompanies the inter-personal style of life, and relationship. The values which the cultural context places before each one: the human person, freedom, pleasure, the body ... all these constitute a reason also for chastity, as a contradiction of the distorted modalities of these values in some segments of society. There is also brought to the fore the capacity of celibates to assume responsibilities in behalf of the Reign of God, purifying these values and elevating them into the light of the Word of God.

b. In *the choice of celibacy*, as a *consecration*, there is realized a *separate* way of being, set aside, for God. One places some distance in his way of living from that of others, but without giving up the human dimension of living: indeed in consecration, there is proposed a serving of the *new creation*, in which the space for the Lordship of God is given ample leeway. The relationship with this world is presented, therefore, as a kind of *dialectic*, in the refusal of whatever is signed with sin, and witness is given of this newness represented by living in accord with the Gospel. This *distancing*, separation is justified with a *function of rediscovering* and testifying to a humanity that is reconciled, free, in the commitment and tension nourished by the transforming power of the Spirit, from every alienation, rebellion and sin. There is thus opened up the possibility of a new human relationship, in an attitude of balance and harmony of values.

c. There is need to fathom what it means to be *set aside for God*. Already in the light of the OT, the *being consecrated* is understandable as a radical *belonging* to God. This means living in harmony with Him and for His Plan, a belonging to Him. Still in the OT an image renders this sense of belonging quite well: the *temple*. Prefigured already as a Tent of Meeting in the desert, it is the place where there are conserved the signs and the guarantees of the divine promise, the temple is the place of meeting with God. In it, the faithful of Israel noted that they found themselves in the tabernacles of God, of leaving the profane aspects of life. What joy, says the Psalmist, I experienced when they said to me: we are going to the House of the Lord!

1.] The great pilgrimages, the festivals, the gradual psalms all make reference to the temple, built on the rock of Jerusalem. The people would leave behind their villages, their normal way of life, purify themselves, offer their sacrifice and would encounter God. In this, they would find themselves renewed, renewed in their faith of being the "People of God", the People of the Promise.

2.] Even more specifically, in the temple the priesthood was exercised, the offering in the name of the people the victims of expiation, so that in the life of the faithful there would be canceled every space denied to the presence of God, to the availability to His will. The people walked in the way of God. All this was so, even though there returned permanently the temptation of the desert, to make for themselves a god they could carry about on their own shoulders, along those paths that they were more familiar with, and no longer toward that unknown for which their faith would no longer seem sufficient.

3.] This availability for new *paths* opened up towards a future coming from God, not of their own story. This availability opened toward a new fraternal and human relationship, one that was universal, generous and free, opening up on that oblation way of life that qualifies their living and serving as apostles.

4.] We can say that such consecration finds in the dialogue between God and His People the coordinates of self-understanding, *within the divine initiative*, in the *jealousy* of God Who asks for, and bestows *fidelity* upon His People, in the concrete situation of a *going toward* and of a *staying with* Him in His dwelling. All this is the expression of the divine proprietorship over His People and over His land, over every primacy of being born of woman, and land, over every reality and other ownership. The offering in the temple of the first-born and the first-fruits is the expression of this belonging, of this consecration to God.

a.] In the term *consecrated*, there is the motive of being set apart as something sacred, without reference so much to the reality, or the person him/herself, but rather to the role, the vocation and the mission to which one is committed.

b.] Consecration is inseparable from the mission: rather we might even recall the trilogy: *call-consecrated-sent*, where the contents call out to each other and progressively complement one another.

d. **Love in a new dimension:**

1.] To live the choice of celibacy for the Reign of God means to leave behind that earlier manner of loving this *world*, for a dimension of **spousal love** which characterizes the world of the **new creation**: to love with the love with which *Christ* has loved His **Spouse**, the **Church**.

2.] In this path, as in the make-up of each person, sexuality and love are decisive and qualifying elements in the personal and relational harmony: so, it is obvious that a choice of celibacy would involve these aspects in giving new meaning to one's own life.

**3.]** The *celibate for the Reign of God* does not mean absence, but super-abundance - it is not a vow with which one *renounces* loving - but rather a vow by which one *loves in a radical manner*. It is testimony to the new life given by Christ, a witness to the love of Christ for His Church in the total dedication for her [cf. Jn 13:1; 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16].

**4.]** The newness to which the celibate opens toward is manifested:

- in service to human beings [cf. Mk 10:42-45];
- in the witness of peace and joy of this new world [cf. Jn 20:19-21; Lk 10:5-6, 17-20];
- in the commitment for an effective liberation on the personal and community levels [cf. Lk 11:39, 42, 46, 52].

**e. Newness in Christ:**

**1.]** In the NT, there are no longer temple, sacrifice, altar, priesthood according to Aaron - now, *priest, altar, victim* all are Jesus Christ! The God with us is the "Emmanuel", born of the Virgin Mary, the fulfillment of every expectancy and every promise. It is the reception of the Son which gives life, which opens up unto truth. It is no longer the following a God Who speaks through Moses and the Prophets, but a God Who speaks in His Son, Who makes Himself present and Guide, sharing in the human reality immersed in the truth full of its history.

**2.]** Consecration was had in His becoming incarnate, to do the Will of the Father, even to the culmination of the Paschal Mystery. This *consecration* is in its height the Passion and Death on the Cross - but it is at the same time the entire existence of Christ, lived out in full harmony with the Father, pertaining to Him - *permanently* consecrated. This *being consecrated in a permanent form* is then transferred to the disciple and constitutes an indispensable reference for every form of consecration, including that of celibacy for the Reign of God.

**6. Sublimation, not Repression**

**a.** In the life of the celibate for the Reign, should there be lacking a perspective of fecundity, chastity would be reduced:

- to a ritual purity;
- to a disengagement that could easily be selfishness;
- to a satisfaction in the living a legal fidelity, in the pride of a certain dominion over oneself;

- to the risk of attitudes of superiority, judgment, harshness.

If the over-riding reason for all this is ever lacking: for the Reign of God - there might be some success in the keeping of continence, but those so doing would be little more than “old maids”, or “bachelors”.

**b.** In *sublimation* which accompanies the celibate the sexual manifestations of human love - but, not the sexual nature of every human being - would be *sacrificed*. Sublimation channels affectivity, placing it at the service of one’s over-all commitment and spiritual duties, for the furthering of the Reign of God - by promoting it, not repressing it! Whoever consecrates himself must be made conscious of making himself a *eunuch* for the Reign of God. This is a matter of an acceptable sacrifice, with a view to a possibility sought with all one’s heart: this does not imply repression, and it can never be reduced solely to *continence*.

**c.** *Repression*, however, is the attempt to remove the instinctive sphere of affection. This effort involves the alienation of a part of oneself. *Continence* is the voluntary control of the instincts, for their restraint. Repression almost always leads to a degeneration of affectivity which translates then into *aggressivity, intolerance, fanaticism, authoritarianism*.

**d.** *Celibacy is a gift which opens up on a **spousal oblativity** toward all:*

- it is a matter of a gift gratuitously received - it is a *charism*, whose presence is requested in those who show themselves available for the ordained ministry; this is accepted by a person in availability and gratitude;
- it is a gift which comes from the love of God the Father, known through the Heart of Jesus Christ, which measures itself and is grasped only in the light of that love with which Christ, constituted Mediator between heaven and earth, is *Head, Shepherd, Spouse*, for His Church. It is received in the light of Christ Who inaugurates His **Nuptials** with humanity in the Incarnation and consummates this in the **Bridal Chamber of the Cross**.
- it is an experience of consecration which is activated by choosing to be exclusively *for Him and with Him* for this world, in a complete mind of oblation, body and soul, for His Glory and for the love of one’s fellow human beings: *in **availability** to love all without binding oneself to anyone*.
- it is a charism that is sustained, as a strength and guarantee, by a fraternity among the priests, sharers in the same mission of rendering Christ present.

This opens up to another chapter of spirituality and priestly identity: ‘The presbyterate thus appears as a true family, as a fraternity, whose ties do not arise from flesh and blood but from the grace of holy orders. this grace takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as the spiritual bonds which exist among priests It is a grace that grows ever greater and finds expression in the most varied forms of mutual assistance, spiritual and material as well..’ [cf. PDV 74; PO 8].

### CONCLUSION

“... Jesus, Who selected the first ministers of salvation, wished them to be introduced to the understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to be co-workers with God under a very special title, and his ambassadors.

He called them friends and brethren, for who he consecrated himself so that they might be consecrated in truth. He promised more than abundant recompense to anyone who should leave home, family, wife and children for the sake of the kingdom of God. More than this, in words filled with mystery and hope, he also commended an even more perfect consecration to the kingdom of heaven by means of celibacy, as a special gift.

The motive of this answer to the divine call is the kingdom of heaven: similarly, the ideas - of this kingdom, of the gospel, and of the name of Christ - are what motivate those invited by Jesus to the difficult renunciations of the apostolate, by a very intimate participation in this lot. This, then, is the mystery of the newness of Christ [*Sac. Cael. #22, f.*].

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