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the CELIBACY of the PRIEST

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PAUL VI

The Celibacy of the Priest

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The Celibacy of the Priest

**To the bishops, to his brothers in the priesthood,
and to the faithful of the entire Catholic world**

Consecrated Celibacy Today

1. 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.

Amid the modern stirrings of opinion, a tendency has also been manifested, and even a desire expressed, to ask the Church to reexamine this characteristic institution of hers. It is said that in the world of our time its observance has come to be of doubtful value and almost impossible.

A Promise We Made

2. 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. (1) 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 God opinions and petitions which have come to us from all over the world, notably from some pastors of God's Church.

Breadth and Gravity of the Question

3. The great question concerning the sacred celibacy of the clergy in the Church has long been before our mind in its deep seriousness: must that grave, ennobling obligation re-

main today for those who have the intention of receiving major orders? Is it possible or appropriate nowadays to observe such an obligation? Has the time not come to break the bond linking celibacy with the priesthood in the Church? Could the difficult observance of it not be made optional? Would this not be a way to help the priestly ministry and facilitate ecumenical approaches? And if the golden law of sacred celibacy is to remain, what reasons are there to show that it is holy and fitting? What means are to be taken to observe it, and how can it be changed from a burden to a help for the priestly life?

Facts and Problems

4. Our attention has rested particularly on the objections which have been and are still made in various forms against the retention of sacred celibacy. In virtue of our apostolic office we are obliged by the importance, and indeed complexity, of the subject to give faithful consideration to the facts and the problems they involve, at the same time bringing to them as it is our duty and our mission to do, the light of truth which is Christ. Our intention is to do in all things the will of Him who has called us to this office and to show what we are in the Church, the servant of God's servants.

Objections against Priestly Celibacy

Celibacy and the New Testament

5. It may be said that today ecclesiastical celibacy has been examined more penetratingly than ever before and in all its aspects. It has been examined from the doctrinal, historical, sociological, psychological and pastoral point of view. The intentions prompting this examination have frequently been basically correct although reports may sometimes have distorted them.

Let us look openly at the principal objections against the law that links ecclesiastical celibacy with the priesthood.

The first seems to come from the most authoritative source, the New Testament which preserves the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. It does not demand celibacy of sacred ministers but proposes it rather as a free act of obedience to a special vocation or to a special spiritual gift (cf. Matt. 19, 11-12). Jesus Himself did not make it a prerequisite in His choice of the Twelve, nor did the Apostles for those who presided over the first Christian communities (cf. 1 Tim. 3, 2-5; Tit. 1, 5-6).

The Fathers of the Church

6. The close relationship that the Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers made over

the centuries between the ministering priesthood and celibacy has its origin in a mentality and historical situations far different from ours. In patristic texts more frequently we find exhortations to the clergy to abstain from marital relations rather than those which recommend that they observe celibacy; and the reasons justifying the perfect chastity of the Church's ministers seem often to be based on an over-pessimistic view of man's earthly condition or on a certain notion of the purity necessary for contact with sacred things. In addition, it is said that the old arguments no longer are in harmony with the different social and cultural milieus in which the Church today, through her priests, is called upon to work.

Vocation and Celibacy

7. Many see a difficulty in the fact that in the present discipline concerning celibacy the gift of a vocation to the priesthood is identified with that of perfect chastity as a state of life for God's ministers. And so people ask whether it be right to exclude from the priesthood those who, it is claimed, have been called to the ministry without having been called to lead a celibate life.

Celibacy and Shortage of Priests

8. It is asserted, moreover, that the maintaining of priestly

celibacy in the Church does great harm in those regions where the shortage of the clergy—a fact recognized with sadness and deplored by the same Council (2)—gives rise to critical situations; that it prevents the full realization of the divine plan of salvation and at times jeopardizes the very possibility of the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Thus the disquieting decline in the ranks of the clergy is attributed by some to the heavy burden of the obligation of celibacy.

Difficulties of Celibacy

9. Then there are those who are convinced that a married priesthood would remove the occasions for infidelity, waywardness and distressing defections which hurt and sadden the whole Church. These also maintain that a married priesthood would enable Christ's ministers to witness more fully to Christian living, by including the witness of married life, from which they are excluded by their state of life.

Violence to Nature?

10. There are also some who strongly maintain that priests by reason of their celibacy find themselves in a situation that is physically and psychologically detrimental to the development of a mature and well-balanced human personality. And so it happens, they say, that priests often become hard and

lacking in human warmth; that, excluded from sharing fully the life and destiny of the rest of their brothers, they are obliged to live a life of solitude which leads to bitterness and discouragement.

Is all this perhaps indicative of unwarranted violence to nature and an unjustified disparagement of human values which have their source in the divine work of creation and have been made whole through the work of the redemption accomplished by Christ?

Inadequate Formation

11. Again, in view of the way in which a candidate for the priesthood comes to accept an obligation as momentous as this, the objection is raised that in practice this acceptance results, not from an authentically personal decision, but rather from an attitude of passivity, the fruit of a formation that is neither adequate nor one that makes sufficient allowance for human liberty. For the degree of knowledge and power of decision of a young person and his psychological and physical maturity fall far below—or at any rate are disproportionate to—the seriousness of the obligation he is assuming, its real difficulties and its permanence.

Corrects Point of View

12. We well realize that there are other objections that can be made against priestly celibacy.

It is a very complex question and one which touches intimately on the ordinary view of life, to which it brings the shining light of divine revelation. A never-ending series of difficulties will present themselves to those who “cannot receive this precept” (Matt. 19, 11), and who do not know or who forget the “gift of God” (cf. John 4, 10), and who are unaware of the higher logic of that new concept of life, its wonderful efficacy and abundant riches.

Testimony of the Past and Present

13. The sum of these objections would appear to drown out the solemn and age-old voice of the pastors of the Church and of the masters of the spiritual life and to nullify the living testimony of the countless ranks of saints and faithful ministers of God, for whom celibacy has been the object of the total and generous gift of themselves to the mystery of Christ, as well as its outward sign. But no, this voice, still strong and untroubled, is the voice not just of the past but of the present too. Ever intent on seeing things as they are, we cannot close our eyes to this magnificent, wonderful reality: that there are still today in God’s holy Church, in every part of the world where she exercises her beneficent influence, great numbers of her ministers—subdeacons,

deacons, priests and bishops—who are living their life of voluntary and consecrated celibacy in the most exemplary way. Nor can we overlook the immense ranks of religious men and women at their side, of laity and of young people too, united in the faithful observance of perfect chastity. They live in chastity, not out of disdain for the gift of life, but because of a greater love for that new life which springs from the paschal mystery. They live this life of courageous self-denial and spiritual joyfulness with exemplary fidelity and also with relative facility. This magnificent phenomenon bears testimony to an exceptional facet of the Kingdom of God living in the midst of modern society, to which it renders humble and beneficial service as the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth” (cf. Matt. 5, 13-14). We cannot withhold the expression of our admiration; the spirit of Christ is certainly breathing here.

Validity of Celibacy Confirmed

14. Hence we consider that the present law of celibacy should today continue to be firmly linked to the ecclesiastical ministry. This law should support the minister in his exclusive, definitive and total choice of the unique and supreme love of Christ; it should uphold him in the entire dedication of himself to the public

worship of God and to the service of the Church; it should characterize his state of life both among the faithful and in the world at large.

Power of the Church

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 (cf. # 5, 7). 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.

Purpose of the Encyclical

16. In a spirit of faith, therefore, we look on this occasion afforded us by Divine Providence as a favorable opportunity for setting forth anew and in a way more suited to the men of our time, the fundamental reasons for sacred celibacy. If difficulties against faith “can

stimulate the mind to a more accurate and penetrating grasp" of it, (3) the same is true of the ecclesiastical discipline which guides and directs the life of the faithful.

We are deeply moved by the joy this occasion gives us of contemplating this aspect of the divine riches and beauty of the Church of Christ. Her beauty

may not always be immediately apparent to the human eye, because it is the fruit of the love of the divine Head of the Church and because it reveals itself in that perfection of holiness (cf. Eph. 5, 25-27) which moves the human spirit to admiration, since it finds the resources of the human creature inadequate to account for it.

Part I

I. Reasons for Sacred Celibacy

The Council and Celibacy

17. Virginity undoubtedly, as the Second Vatican Council declared, "is not, indeed, demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is evident from the practice of the primitive Church and from the tradition of the Eastern Churches." (4) But at the same time the council did not hesitate to confirm solemnly the ancient, sacred and providential present law of priestly celibacy. In addition, it set forth the motives which justify this law for those who, in a spirit of faith and with generous fervor, know how to appreciate the gifts of God.

New Light on Old Arguments

18. Consideration of the "manifold suitability" (loc. cit.) of celibacy for God's ministers is not something recent. Even if the explicit reasons 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 (cf. John 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. (5)

The Christological Significance of Celibacy

The Newness of Christ

19. 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. (6) The minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God (1 Cor.

4, 1), therefore, looks up to Him directly as his model and supreme ideal (cf. 1 Cor. 11, 1). The Lord Jesus, the only Son of God, was sent by the Father into the world and He became man, in order that humanity which was subject to sin and death might be reborn, and through this new birth (John 3, 5; Tit. 3, 5) might enter the kingdom of heaven. Being entirely consecrated to the will of the Father (John 4, 34; 17, 4), Jesus brought forth this new creation by means of His paschal mystery (2 Cor. 5, 17; Gal. 6, 15); thus, He introduced into time and into the world a new form of life which is sublime and divine and which transforms the very earthly condition of human nature (cf. Gal. 3, 28).

Matrimony and Celibacy in the Newness of Christ

20. Matrimony according to the will of God continues the work of the first creation (Gen. 2, 18); and considered within the total plan of salvation, it even acquires a new meaning and a new value. Jesus, in fact, has restored its original dignity (Matt. 19, 3-8), has honored it (John 2, 1-11) and has raised it to the dignity of a sacrament and of a mysterious symbol of His own union with the Church (Eph. 5, 32). Thus, Christian couples walk together toward their heavenly fatherland in the exercise of mutual love, in the

fulfillment of their particular obligations, and in striving for the sanctity proper to them. But Christ, Mediator of a more excellent Testament (Heb. 8, 6), has also opened a new way, in which the human creature adheres wholly and directly to the Lord, and is concerned only with Him and with His affairs (1 Cor. 7, 33-35); thus, he manifests in a clearer and more complete way the profoundly transforming reality of the New Testament.

Celibacy and Priesthood in Christ the Mediator

21. Christ, the only Son of the Father, by the power of the Incarnation itself was made Mediator between heaven and earth, between the Father and the human race. Wholly in accord with this mission, Christ remained throughout His whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified His total dedication to the service of God and men. This deep connection between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and in the mission of the Mediator and eternal Priest; this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and blood. (7)

Celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven

22. Jesus, who selected the first ministers of salvation,

wished them to be introduced to the understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13, 11; Mark 4, 11; Luke 8, 10), to be co-workers with God under a very special title, and His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5, 20). He called them friends and brethren (John 15, 15; 20, 17), for whom He consecrated Himself so that they might be consecrated in truth (John 17, 19), He promised a more than abundant recompense to anyone who should leave home, family, wife and children for the sake of the kingdom of God (Luke 18, 29-30). More than this, in words filled with mystery and hope, He also commended (8) an even more perfect consecration to the kingdom of heaven by means of celibacy, as a special gift (Matt. 19, 11-12). The motive of this answer to the divine call is the kingdom of heaven (ibid. v. 12); similarly, the ideas—of this kingdom (Luke 18, 30), of the Gospel (Mark 10, 29), and of the name of Christ (Matt. 19, 29), are what motivate those invited by Jesus to the difficult renunciations of the apostolate, by a very intimate participation in His lot (cf. Mark loc. cit.).

Testimony to Christ

23. 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 Saviour and renders the choice of celibacy desirable and worthwhile on the part of those called by Our Lord Jesus. Thus, they intend not only to participate in Christ's priestly office, but also to share with Him His very condition of living.

Fullness of Love

24. The response to the divine call is an answer of love to the love which Christ has shown us so sublimely (John 15, 13; 3, 16). This response is included in the mystery of that special love for those souls, who have accepted His most urgent appeals (cf. Mark 10, 21). Grace with a divine force increases the longings of love. And love, when it is genuine, is total, exclusive, stable and lasting, an irresistible spur to all forms of heroism. And so, the free choice of sacred celibacy has always been considered by the Church "as something that signifies and stimulates charity": (9) it signifies a love without reservations, it stimulates to a charity which is open to all. Who can see in such a life so completely dedicated and motivated as shown above, the sign of a spiritual poverty, of self-seeking, and not rather see that celibacy is and ought to be a rare and very meaningful example of a life whose motivation is love, by which man expresses

his own unique greatness? Who can doubt the moral and spiritual richness of such a consecrated life, consecrated not to any human ideal no matter how noble, but to Christ and to His work to bring about a new form of humanity in all places and for all generations?

Invitation to Study

25. This biblical and theological vision 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 we invite you, eager students of Christian doctrine and masters of the spiritual life, and all 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.

The Ecclesiological Significance of Celibacy

Celibacy and the Love of Christ and of the Priest for the Church

26. "Made captive by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3, 12) 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 (cf. Eph. 5, 25-27).

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 (John 1, 13). (10)

Unity and Harmony of the Priest's Life: the Ministry of the Word

27. The priest dedicates himself to the service of the Lord Jesus and of His Mystical Body with complete liberty, which is made easier by his total offering, and he realizes more fully the unity and harmony of the priestly life. (11) His ability increases for listening to the Word of God and for prayer. Indeed, the Word of God, as preserved by the Church, stirs up in the priest, who daily meditates on it, lives it and preaches it to

the faithful, echoes that are vibrant and profound.

Divine Office and Prayer

28. Like Christ Himself, His minister is wholly and solely intent on the things of God and the Church (cf. Luke 2, 49; 1 Cor. 7, 32-33), and he imitates the great high Priest who stands in the presence of God ever living to intercede in our favor (Heb. 9, 24; 7, 25). So, he receives joy and encouragement unceasingly from the attentive and devout recitation of the Divine Office, by which he dedicates his voice to the Church who prays together with her Spouse, (12) and he recognizes the necessity of continuing his diligence at prayer, which is the profoundly priestly occupation (Acts 6,4).

The Ministry of Grace and of the Eucharist

29. The rest of a priest's life acquires a greater richness of meaning and sanctifying power. In fact, his individual efforts at his own sanctification find new incentives in the ministry of grace and in the ministry of the Eucharist, in which all the riches of the Church are contained (13): acting in the person of Christ, the priest unites himself most intimately with the offering, and places on the altar his entire life, which bears the marks of the holocaust.

A Life Most Full and Fruitful

30. What other considerations

can we make to describe the increase of the priest's power, of his service, his love and his sacrifice for the entire People of God? Christ spoke of Himself: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12,24). And the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to expose himself to a daily death, in order to obtain among his faithful glory in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 15, 31). In a similar way, by a daily dying to himself, and by giving up the legitimate love of a family of his own for the love of Christ and of His kingdom, the priest will find the glory of an exceedingly rich and fruitful life in Christ, because like Him and in Him, he loves and dedicates himself to all the children of God.

The Celibate Priest in the Community of the Faithful

31. In the community of the faithful committed to his charge, the priest is Christ present. 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 as well as 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 nour-

ishes the faith and the hope of all Christians, who, because they are such, are bound to observe chastity according to their proper state of life.

The Pastoral Efficacy of Celibacy

32. The consecration to Christ, by virtue of a new and lofty title like celibacy, evidently 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 (2 Cor. 12,15). (14) It also guarantees him obviously a greater freedom and flexibility in the pastoral ministry, (15) in his active and loving presence in the world, to which Christ has invited him (John 17, 18), so that he may pay fully to all the children of God the debt due them (Rom. 1, 14).

The Eschatological Significance of Celibacy

The Longing of the People of God for the Heavenly Kingdom

33. The kingdom of God which is not of this world (John 18,36) is present here on earth in mystery, and will reach her perfection with the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus. (16) The Church here below consti-

tutes the seed and the beginning of this kingdom. And as she continues to grow slowly but surely, she longs for the perfect kingdom and desires vehemently with all her energy to unite herself with her King in glory. (17)

The pilgrim People of God, as seen in history, is on a journey toward its true homeland (Phil. 3, 20), where the divine sonship of the redeemed (1 John 3, 2) will be fully revealed and where its splendor will be definitively attained by the transformed loveliness of the Spouse of the Lamb of God. (18)

Celibacy as a Sign of Heavenly Treasures

34. Our Lord and Master has said that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22, 30). In the world of man, so deeply involved in earthly concerns and too often enslaved by the desires of the flesh (cf. 1 John 2, 16), the precious divine gift of perfect continence for the kingdom of heaven stands out precisely as "a singular sign of the blessings of heaven," (19) 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. 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 sits at the right hand of the Father and where our life is hidden in Christ with God until He appears in glory (Col. 3, 1-4).

II. Celibacy in the Life of the Church

Antiquity

35. Although it would be too long, still it would be quite instructive to study the historical documents on ecclesiastical celibacy. Let the following indication suffice. In Christian antiquity the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers testify to the spread through the East and the West of the voluntary practice of celibacy by sacred ministers (20) because of its profound suitability for their total dedication to the service of Christ and of His Church.

The Church of the West

36. The Church of the West, from the beginning of the fourth century, strengthened, spread, and approved this practice by means of various provincial councils and through the Supreme Pontiffs. (21) More than any others, the supreme pastors and teachers of

the Church of God, the guardians and interpreters of the patrimony of the faith and of holy Christian practices, promoted, defended, and restored ecclesiastical celibacy in successive eras of history, even when they met opposition from the clergy itself and when the practices of a decadent society did not favor the heroic demands of virtue. The obligation of celibacy was then solemnly sanctioned by the Sacred Ecumenical Council of Trent (22) and finally included in the Code of Canon Law (can. 132 #1).

The Most Recent Papal Teaching

37. The most recent Sovereign Pontiffs who preceded us, making use of their doctrinal knowledge, and spurred on by ardent zeal, strove to enlighten the clergy on this matter, and to urge them to its observance. (23) And we do not wish to fail to pay homage to their revered memory, especially to that of our well-beloved immediate predecessor which is still fresh in the hearts of men all over the world. During the Roman Synod, with the sincere approval of all the clergy of the city, he spoke as follows: "It deeply hurts us that . . . anyone can dream that the Church will deliberately or even suitably renounce what from time immemorial has been, and still remains, one of the purest and noblest glories of her priest-

hood. The law of ecclesiastical celibacy and the efforts necessary to preserve it always recall to mind the struggles of the heroic times when the Church of Christ had to fight for and succeeded in obtaining her threefold glory, always an emblem of victory, that is, the Church of Christ, free, chaste and catholic". (24)

The Church of the East

38. 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 Trullo held in the year 692, (25) and which has been clearly recognized by the Second Vatican Council, (26) 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.

We ourselves take this opportunity to express our esteem and our respect for all the clergy of the Oriental Churches, and to recognize in them examples of fidelity and zeal which make them worthy of sincere veneration.

The Voice of the Oriental Fathers

39. We find further comforting reasons for continuing to adhere to the observance of the discipline of clerical celibacy in the exaltation of virginity by the Oriental Fathers. We hear

within us, for example, the voice of St. Gregory of Nyssa, reminding us that, "the life of virginity is the image of the blessedness that awaits us in the life to come".(27) We are no less assured by the treatment of the priesthood by St. John Chrysostom, which is still a fruitful subject for reflection. Intent on throwing light on the harmony which must exist between the private life of him who ministers at the altar and the dignity of the order to which his sacred duties belong he affirmed, ". . . it is becoming that he who accepts the priesthood be as pure as if he were in heaven". (28)

Significant Signs in Eastern Tradition

40. Further, it is by no means futile to observe that in the East only celibate priests are ordained bishops, and the priests themselves cannot contract marriage after their ordination to the priesthood. This indicates that these venerable Churches also possess to a certain extent the principle of a celibate priesthood. It shows too that there is a certain appropriateness for the Christian priesthood, of which the bishops possess the summit and the fullness, of the observance of celibacy. (29)

The Faithfulness of the Church of the West to Her Own Tradition

41. In any case, the Church of

the West cannot weaken her faithful observance of her own tradition. 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 juridical prescriptions stifled the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace.

Particular Cases

42. In virtue of the fundamental norm of the government of the Catholic Church, to which we alluded above (#15), while, on the one hand, the law requiring a freely chosen and perpetual celibacy of those who are admitted to Holy Orders remains unchanged, on the other hand, 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 the celibacy.

And that the authority of the Church may not hesitate to exercise her power in this matter can be seen from the recent

Ecumenical Council which foresaw the possibility of conferring holy diaconate on men of mature age who are already married. (30)

Confirmation

43. All this, however, does not signify a relaxation of the existing law, and must not be interpreted as a prelude to its abolition. There are better things to do beside promoting this hypothesis, which tears down that vigor and love in which celibacy finds security and happiness, and which obscures the true doctrine that justifies its existence and exalts its splendor. It would be much better to promote serious studies in defense of the spiritual meaning and moral value of virginity and celibacy. (31)

Confidence of the Church

44. Holy virginity is a very special gift. Nevertheless, the whole present-day Church, solemnly and universally represented by the pastors responsible for her welfare (with due respect, as we have said, for the discipline of the Eastern Churches) manifested her absolute faith in the Spirit "that the gift of celibacy so helpful for the priesthood of the New Testament, will be liberally granted by the Father, on condition that those who participate in Christ's priesthood through the sacrament of Orders, and indeed the whole

Church, humbly and perseveringly ask for it." (32)

The Prayer of the People of God

45. We wholeheartedly call on the entire People of God to do their duty in bringing about an increase in priestly vocations. (33) We ask them fervently to beg the Father of all, the divine Spouse of the Church, and the Holy Spirit, her principle of life, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and of His Church, to pour out, especially at present, this divine gift, which the Father certainly does not wish to give stintingly. They should also fervently pray, in like manner, that souls may dispose themselves to receive it by a profound faith and a generous love. In this way, in our world, which needs God's glory (cf. Rom. 3, 23), priests, ever more perfectly conformed to the one and supreme Priest, will be a real glory to Christ (2 Cor. 8, 23), and, through them, "the glory of the grace" of God will be magnified in the world of today (cf. Eph. 1, 6).

The World of Today and Consecrated Celibacy

46. Yes, venerable and well-beloved brothers in the priesthood, whom we cherish "with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1, 8), it is truly this world in which we live, tor-

mented by the pains of growth and change, justly proud of its human values and human conquests, which urgently needs the witness of lives consecrated to the highest and most sacred spiritual values. This witness is necessary in order that the refined and incomparable light, radiating from the most sublime virtues of the spirit, may not be wanting to our times.

The Numerical Scarcity of Priests

47. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not hesitate to confide the formidable task of evangelizing the world, as it was then known, to a handful of men to all appearances lacking in number and quality. He bade this "little flock" not to lose heart (Luke 12, 32), for, thanks to His constant assistance (Matt. 28, 20), through Him and with Him, they would overcome the world (John 16, 33). Jesus has taught us also that the Kingdom of God has an intrinsic and unobservable dynamism which enables it to grow without man's awareness of it (Mark 4, 26-29). The harvest of God's Kingdom is great, but the laborers, as in the beginning, are few. Actually, they have never been as numerous as human standards would have judged sufficient. But the Lord of the Kingdom demands prayers, that it may be He, the Lord of the harvest, Who will send out laborers into His harvest (Matt.

9, 37-38). The counsels and prudence of man cannot supersede the hidden wisdom of Him who, in the history of salvation, has challenged man's wisdom and power by His own foolishness and weakness (1 Cor. 1, 20-31).

The Courage of Faith

48. We appeal to the courage of faith to express the Church's deepest conviction that a more energetic and generous answer to grace, a more explicit and substantiated hope, a more complete and open witness to the mystery of Christ, will never be the cause of her failing in her salvific mission to all mankind. It is necessary for us to learn to do all things in Him who alone gives strength to souls (Phil. 4, 13) and increase to His Church (1 Cor. 3, 6-7).

The Root of the Problem

49. It is simply not possible to believe that the abolition of ecclesiastical celibacy would considerably increase the number of priestly vocations: the contemporary experience of those Churches and ecclesial communities which allow their ministers to marry seems to prove the contrary. The cause of the decrease in vocations to the priesthood is to be found elsewhere, especially for example, in the fact that individuals and families have lost their sense of God and of all that is holy, their esteem for the Church as the institution of salvation through

faith and sacraments, the institution which must study the true roots of the problem.

III. Celibacy and Human Values

Celibacy and Love

50. As we said above (cf. # 10), the Church is not unaware that the choice of consecrated celibacy, since it involves a series of hard renunciations which affect the very depths of a man, presents also grave difficulties and problems to which the men of today are particularly sensitive. In fact, it might seem that celibacy conflicts with the solemn recognition of human values by the Church in the recent council. And yet a more careful consideration reveals that the sacrifice of human love as experienced in a family and as offered by the priest for the love of Christ, is really a singular tribute paid to that superior love. Indeed, it is universally recognized that man has always offered to God what is worthy of both the giver and the receiver.

Grace and Nature

51. On the other hand, the Church cannot and should not set aside the fact that the choice of celibacy—provided that it is made with human and Christian prudence and responsibility—is governed by grace which, far from destroying or doing violence to nature, elevates it and

imparts to it supernatural powers and vigor. God, who has created and redeemed man, knows what He can ask of him and gives him everything necessary to be able to do what his Creator and Redeemer asks of him. St. Augustine, who had fully and painfully experienced in himself the nature of man, exclaimed: "Grant what You command, and command what You will." (34)

The Real Weight of the Difficulties

52. A true knowledge of the real difficulties of celibacy is very useful, even necessary, for the priest, so that he may be fully aware of what his celibacy requires to be genuine and beneficial. But with equal fidelity to the truth, these difficulties must not be given greater value or weight than they actually have in the human or religious sphere, or declared impossible of solution.

Celibacy is Not Contrary to Nature

53. After what science has now ascertained, it is not just to continue repeating (cf. #10) that celibacy is against nature because it runs counter to lawful physical, psychological and affective needs or to claim that a completely mature human personality demands fulfillment of these needs. Man, created to God's image and likeness (Gen. 1, 26-27), is not just flesh and

blood; the sexual instinct is not all that he has; man is also, and preeminently, understanding, choice, freedom, and thanks to these powers he is, and must remain, superior to the rest of creation; they give him mastery over his physical, psychological and affective appetites.

The Deep Reason for Celibacy

54. The true, deep 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.

Celibacy as an Exaltation of Man

55. The choice of celibacy does not connote ignorance, or the despisal of the sexual instinct and affectivity. That would certainly do damage to the physical and psychological balance. On the contrary it demands clear understanding, careful self-control and a wise sublimation of the psychological life on a higher plane. In this way celibacy sets the whole man on a higher level and makes an effective contribution to his own perfection.

Celibacy and the Development of Personality

56. The natural and lawful desire a man has to love a wom-

an and to raise a family are renounced by celibacy, but marriage and the family are not said to be the only way for fully developing the human person. In the priest's heart love is by no means extinct. His charity is drawn from the purest source (cf. 1 John 4, 8-16), practiced in the imitation of God and Christ, and no less than any other genuine love is demanding and real (cf. 1 John 3, 16-18). It gives the priest a limitless horizon, deepens and gives breadth to his sense of responsibility—a sign of mature personality—and inculcates in him as a sign of a higher and greater fatherhood, a generosity and refinement of heart (35) which offer a superlative enrichment.

Consecrated Celibacy and Marriage

57. All of God's People must give testimony to the mystery of Christ and His Kingdom but this witnessing does not take the same form for all. The Church leaves to her married children the function of giving the necessary testimony of a genuinely and fully Christian married and family life. She entrusts to her priests the testimony of a life wholly dedicated to the ever new, absorbing realities of God's Kingdom.

If this means that the priest is without a direct personal experience of married life, he will by his training, his ministry and the grace of his office, certainly

not lack a knowledge, perhaps a deeper knowledge, of the human heart. This will allow him to meet those problems at their source and give solid support by his advice and assistance to married persons and Christian families (cf. 1 Cor. 2, 15). The presence in the Christian family of the priest who is living his life of celibacy to the full will underscore the spiritual dimension of every love worthy of the name, and his personal sacrifice will merit for the faithful united in the holy bond of matrimony the grace of a true union.

The Solitude of the Celibate Priest

58. The priest by reason of his celibacy is a solitary: that is true, but his solitude is not emptiness because it is filled with God and the brimming riches of His Kingdom. Moreover, for this solitude, which should be an internal and external plenitude of charity, he has prepared himself, if he has chosen it with full understanding, and not through any proud desire to be different from the rest of men, or to withdraw himself from common responsibilities, or to alienate himself from his brothers, or to show contempt for the world. Though set apart from the world, the priest is not separated from the People of God, because he has been appointed to act on behalf of men (Heb. 5, 1), since he is consecrated completely to char-

ity (cf. 1 Cor. 14, 4 ff.) and to the work for which the Lord has chosen him. (36)

Christ and the Loneliness of the Priest

59. At times loneliness will weigh heavily on the priest, but not for that reason will he regret having generously chosen it. Christ, too, in the most tragic hours of His life was alone—abandoned by the very ones whom He had chosen as witnesses to, and companions of, His life, and whom He had loved unto the end (John 13, 1), but He stated, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16, 32). He who has chosen to belong completely to Christ will find, above all, in intimacy with Him and in His grace, the power of spirit necessary to banish sadness and regret and to triumph over discouragement. He will not be lacking the pro-

tection of the Virgin Mother of Jesus nor the motherly solicitude of the Church, to whom he has given himself in service. He will not be without the kindly care of his father in Christ, his bishop; nor will the fraternal companionship of his fellow priests and the comfort of the entire People of God be lacking to him. And if hostility, lack of confidence and the indifference of his fellowmen make his solitude quite painful, he will thus be able to share, with dramatic clarity, the very experience of Christ, as an apostle who is not above Him by whom he has been sent (cf. John 13, 16; 14, 18), as a friend admitted to the most painful and most glorious secret of his divine Friend who has chosen him to bring forth the mysterious fruit of life in his own life, which is only apparently one of death (cf. John 15, 15-16, 20).

Part II

I. Priestly Formation

An Adequate Formation

60. Our reflection on the beauty, importance and intimate fittingness of holy virginity for the ministers of Christ and His Church makes it incumbent on the Teacher and Pastor of that Church to assure and promote its positive observance, from the first moment of preparation to receive such a precious gift.

In fact, the difficulties and problems which make the observance of chastity very painful or quite impossible for some, spring, not infrequently, from a type of priestly formation which, given the great changes of these last years is no longer completely adequate for the formation of a personality worthy of a *man of God* (1 Tim. 6, 11).

The Execution of the Norms of the Council

61. The Second Vatican Council has already indicated wise criteria and guidelines to this end. They are in conformity

with the progress of psychology and pedagogy as well as with the changed conditions of mankind and of contemporary society. (37) It is our will that apposite instructions be drawn up with the help of truly qualified men treating with all necessary detail the theme of chastity. They should be sent out as soon as possible to provide those who, within the Church, have the great responsibility of preparing future priests, with competent and timely assistance.

Personal Response to the Divine Vocation

62. The priesthood is a ministry instituted by Christ for the service of His Mystical Body which is the Church. To her belongs the authority to admit to that priesthood those whom she judges qualified: that is, those to whom God has given, along with other signs of an ecclesiastical vocation, the gift of a consecrated celibacy (cf. #15).

In virtue of such a gift, corroborated by canon law, the individual is called to respond with free judgment and total

dedication, subordinating his own ego to the will of God who calls him. Concretely, this divine calling manifests itself in a given individual with his own definite personality structure which under normal circumstances, is not violently mastered by grace. In the candidates for the priesthood, therefore, the sense of receiving this divine gift should be cultivated; so too a sense of responsibility in their meeting with God, with the highest importance given to supernatural means.

The Plane of Grace and the Plane of Nature

63. It is likewise necessary that exact account be taken of the biological and psychological state of the candidate in order to guide and orient him toward the priestly ideal; so a truly adequate formation should coordinate harmoniously grace and nature in the man in whom one clearly sees the objective conditions and effective capabilities of receiving the gift of chastity. These conditions should be ascertained as soon as signs of his holy vocation are first indicated; not hastily or superficially, but carefully, with the assistance and aid of a doctor and of a competent psychologist. A serious investigation of hereditary factors should not be omitted.

The Unfit

64. Those who are discovered

to be unfit—either for physical, psychological or moral reasons—should be quickly removed from the path to the priesthood. Let educators appreciate that this is one of their very grave duties. Let them not abandon themselves to false hopes and to dangerous illusions and let them not permit the candidate to nourish these hopes in any way, with resultant damage either to himself or to the Church. The life of the celibate priest, which engages the whole man so totally and so delicately, excludes in fact those of insufficient psycho-physical and moral balance. Nor should anyone pretend that grace supplies for the defects of nature in such a man.

Development of the Personality

65. After the capability of a man has been ascertained and he has been admitted to the course of studies leading to the goal of the priesthood, care should be taken for the progressive development of his personality through the means of physical, intellectual and moral education directed toward the control and personal dominion of his instincts, sentiments and passions.

The Necessity of Discipline

66. This will be proved by the firmness of the spirit with which he accepts the personal and community type of discipline demanded by the priestly life. Such a regime, the lack or

deficiency of which is to be deplored because it exposes the candidate to grave dangers, should not be borne only as an imposition from without. It should be interiorized and implanted within the context of the spiritual life as an indispensable component.

Personal Initiative

67. The educator should skillfully stimulate the young man to that totally evangelical virtue of sincerity (cf. Matt. 5, 37) and to spontaneity by approving of every good personal initiative, so that he will come to know, and properly evaluate himself, assume wisely his own responsibilities, and train himself to that self-control which is of such importance in the priestly education.

The Exercise of Authority

68. The exercise of authority, the principle of which ought to be held to firmly, will be animated by wise moderation and by a pastoral attitude. It will be used in a climate of dialogue and will be implemented in a gradual way which will afford the educator an ever deepening understanding of the psychology of the young man, and will appeal to personal conviction.

Conscious Choice

69. The complete education of the candidate to the priesthood ought to be directed to help him acquire a tranquil, convinced

and free choice of the grave responsibilities which he must assume in conscience before God and the Church. Ardor and generosity are marvelous qualities of youth; illuminated and supported, they merit, along with the blessing of the Lord, the admiration and confidence of the whole Church as well as of all men. None of the real personal and social difficulties which their choice will bring in its train should remain hidden to the young men so that their enthusiasm will not be superficial and illusory. At the same time it will be right to highlight with at least equal truth and clarity the sublimity of their choice, which on the one hand leads to a certain physical and psychic void, but on the other, brings with it an interior richness capable of elevating the person most profoundly.

An Asceticism for the Maturation of the Personality

70. The young candidates for the priesthood should convince themselves that they are not able to follow their difficult way without a special type of asceticism more demanding than that which is asked of all the other faithful, which is proper to themselves. It will be a demanding asceticism but not a suffocating one which consists in the deliberate and assiduous practice of those virtues which make a man a priest: self-denial in the highest degree—an es-

sential condition if one would follow Christ (Matt. 16, 24; John 12, 25), humility and obedience as expressions of internal truth and of a guided liberty; prudence, justice, courage and temperance, virtues without which it is impossible for true and profound religious life to exist; a sense of responsibility, of fidelity and of contemplation and action; detachment and a spirit of poverty which will give tone and vigor to evangelical freedom; chastity, the result of a persevering struggle, harmonized with all the other natural and supernatural virtues; a serene and secure contact with the world for the service of which the young man will dedicate himself for Christ and for His Kingdom.

In such a way the aspirant to the priesthood will acquire, with the help of divine grace, a balanced personality, strong and mature, a combination of inherited and acquired qualities, harmony of all of his powers in the light of the faith and in intimate union with Christ, whom he has chosen for himself and for the ministry of salvation to the world.

Periods of Experimentation

71. However, to judge with better certainty the fitness of the young man for the priesthood and to have successive proofs of his attained maturity on both the human and supernatural levels, in consideration

of the fact that "It is more difficult to conduct oneself correctly in the service of souls because of dangers coming from outside" (38), it will be advisable to have the obligation of holy celibacy observed during specified periods of experimentation before it becomes something stable and definitive with the priesthood.(39)

The Choice of Celibacy as of a Gift

72. Once moral certainty has been obtained that the maturity of the candidate is sufficiently guaranteed, he will be in a position to take on himself the heavy and sweet burden of sacerdotal chastity as a total gift of himself to the Lord and to His Church.

In his way, the obligation of celibacy, which the Church adds as an objective condition to Holy Orders, becomes the candidate's own accepted personal obligation under the influence of divine grace and with full reflection and liberty, and evidently not without the wise and prudent advice of competent spiritual directors who are concerned not to impose the choice, but rather to dispose the candidate to become more conscious in his choice. Hence, in that solemn moment when the candidate will decide once and for his whole life, he will not feel the weight of an imposition from outside, but rather the interior joy that accompanies a

choice made for the love of Christ.

II. The Priestly Life

An Unending Conquest

73. The priest must not think that ordination makes everything easy for him and screens him once for all from every temptation or danger. Chastity is not acquired all at once but results from a laborious conquest and daily affirmation. Our world today stresses the positive values of love between the sexes but has also multiplied the difficulties and risks in this sphere. In order to safeguard his chastity with all care and affirm its sublime meaning, the priest must consider clearly and calmly his position as a man exposed to spiritual warfare against the seductions of the flesh in himself and in the world, continually renewing his resolution to give an ever increasing and ever better perfection to the irrevocable offering of himself which obliges him to a fidelity that is complete, loyal and real.

Supernatural Means

74. Christ's priest will receive new strength and joy daily as he deepens in his meditation and prayer the motives for his gift and the conviction that he has chosen the better part. He will ask humbly and perseveringly for the grace of fidelity, never denied to those who ask

it sincerely. At the same time he will use the natural and supernatural means at his disposal. In particular he will not disregard those ascetical norms, guaranteed by the Church's experience and no less necessary in modern circumstances than in former times. (40)

Intense Spiritual Life

75. The priest should apply himself above all else to developing with all the love grace inspires in him, his close relationship with Christ searching the inexhaustible and enriching mystery; he should also acquire an ever deeper sense of the mystery of the Church. There would be the risk of his state of life seeming unreasonable and unfounded if seen apart from this mystery.

Priestly piety, nourished at the table of God's Word and the Holy Eucharist, lived within the cycle of the liturgical year, inspired by a warm and enlightened devotion to the Virgin Mother of the Supreme and Eternal High Priest and Queen of the Apostles (41), will bring him to the source of a true spiritual life which alone provides a solid foundation for the observance of celibacy.

The Spirit of the Priestly Ministry

76. In this way the priest with grace and peace in his heart will face with generosity the manifold tasks of his life and

ministry. If he performs these with faith and zeal he will find in them new occasions to show he belongs entirely to Christ and His Mystical Body, for his own sanctification and the sanctification of others. The charity of Christ which urges him on (2 Cor. 5, 14) will help him not to renounce his higher feelings but to elevate and deepen them in a spirit of consecration in imitation of Christ the High Priest, who shared intimately in the life of mankind, loved and suffered for them (Heb. 4, 15), and of Paul the Apostle who shared in the cares of all (1 Cor. 9, 22; 2 Cor. 11, 29), in order to bring the light and power of the Gospel of God's grace to shine in the world (Acts 20, 24).

Defense against Dangers

77. Rightly jealous of his full self-giving to the Lord, the priest should know how to guard against sentimental tendencies which imperil an effectiveness not sufficiently enlightened or guided by the Spirit. He should beware of looking for spiritual or apostolic pretexts for what are in fact dangerous inclinations of the heart.

Virile Asceticism

78. The priestly life certainly requires an authentic spiritual intensity in order to live by the Spirit and to conform to the Spirit (Gal. 5, 25); it requires a

truly virile asceticism both interior and exterior in one who, belonging in a special way to Christ, has in Him and through Him crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5, 24), not hesitating to face arduous and lengthy trials in order to do so (cf. 1 Cor. 9, 26-27). In this way Christ's minister will be the better able to show to the world the fruits of the Spirit which are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, chastity" (Gal. 5, 22-23).

The Brotherhood of Priests

79. Moreover, priestly chastity is increased, guarded and defended by a way of life, surroundings and activity suited to a minister of God. For this reason the "close sacramental brotherhood" (42) which all priests enjoy in virtue of their ordination must be fostered to the utmost. Our Lord Jesus Christ has taught the urgency of the new commandment of charity. He gave a wonderful example of it when He instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Catholic priesthood (John 13, 15, and 34-35), and prayed to His Heavenly Father that the love the Father bore for Him from all eternity should be in His ministers and that He too should be in them (John 17, 26).

Unity of Priests in Spirit and Life

80. So the unity of spirit among priests should be perfect and they should be active in their prayers, friendship and help of all kind for one another. One cannot sufficiently recommend to priests a life lived in common and directed entirely toward their sacred ministry; the practice of having frequent meetings with a fraternal exchange of ideas, counsel and experience with their brother priests; the movement to form associations which encourage priestly holiness.

Charity for Fellow Priests in Danger

81. Priests should reflect on the advice of the council (43) which reminds them of their common sharing in the priesthood so that they may feel a lively responsibility for fellow priests troubled by difficulties which gravely endanger the divine gift they have. They should have a burning charity for those who have greater need of love, understanding and prayer, who have need of prudent but effective help, and who have a claim on their unbounded charity as those who are, and should be, their truest friends.

Renewal of the Choice

82. Venerable brothers in the episcopacy, priests and ministers of the altar, by way of completing and leaving a remembrance

of this written conversation with you, we should like to suggest this resolution to you: that on the anniversary of his ordination, or on Holy Thursday when all are united in spirit commemorating the mystery of the institution of the priesthood, each one should renew his total gift of himself to Christ Our Lord, reviving in this way the awareness that He has chosen you for His divine service, and repeating at the same time, humbly and courageously, the promise you have of unswerving faithfulness to His love alone in your offering of perfect chastity (cf. 12, 1).

III. Lamentable Defections

True Responsibility

83. Now with fatherly love and affection, our heart turns anxiously and with deep sorrow to those unfortunate priests who always remain our dearly beloved brothers and whose misfortune we keenly regret: those who, retaining the sacred character conferred by their priestly ordination, have been or are unfortunately unfaithful to the obligations they accepted when they were ordained.

Their sad state and its consequences to priests and to others move some to wonder if celibacy is not in some way responsible for such dramatic occurrences and for the scandals they inflict on God's People. In fact the responsibility falls not

on consecrated celibacy in itself but on a judgment of the fitness of the candidate for the priesthood which was not always adequate or prudent at the proper time, or else it falls on the way in which sacred ministers live their life of total consecration.

Reasons for Dispensations

84. The Church is very conscious of the sad state of these sons of hers and judges it necessary to make every effort to avert or to remedy the wounds she suffers by their defection. Following the example of our immediate predecessors of holy memory we also have, in cases concerning ordination to the priesthood, been prepared to allow inquiry to extend beyond the provisions of the present canon law (cf. C.I.C. can. 214) to other very grave reasons which give ground for really solid doubts regarding the full freedom and responsibility of the candidate for the priesthood and his fitness for the priestly state. This has been done to free those who, on careful judicial consideration of their case, are seen to be really unsuited.

The Church's Justice and Charity

85. The dispensations which are granted after such consideration—a minimal percentage when they are compared with the great number of good, wor-

thy priests—provide in justice for the spiritual salvation of the individual and show at the same time the Church's concern to safeguard celibacy and the complete fidelity of all her ministers. In granting such dispensations the Church always acts with heartfelt regret, especially in the particularly lamentable cases in which refusal to bear worthily this sweet yoke of Christ results from crises in faith, or moral weakness, and is thus frequently a failure in responsibility and a scandal.

A Heartrending Appeal

86. If these priests knew how much sorrow, dishonor and unrest they bring to the holy Church of God; if they reflected on the seriousness and beauty of their obligations and on the dangers to which they are exposed in this life and in the next, there would be greater care and reflection in their decisions, they would pray more assiduously, and would show greater courage and logic in forestalling the causes of their spiritual and moral collapse.

The Church's Motherly Care

87. The Church has particular interest in those young priests who are on the threshold of their ministry and full of zeal and enthusiasm. Because of the tensions to which their priestly obligations are subject, is it not to be expected that they will experience moments of diffidence,

doubt, passion, folly? Hence, it is the wish of the Church that every persuasive means available be used to lead them from this wavering state to one of calm, trust, penance, recovery. It is only when no other solution can be found for a priest in this unhappy condition that he should be relieved of his office.

The Granting of Dispensations

88. There are some whose priesthood cannot be saved, but whose serious dispositions nevertheless give promise of their being able to live as good Christian lay people. To these the Holy See, having studied all the circumstances with their bishops or with their religious superiors, sometimes grants a dispensation, thus letting love conquer sorrow. In order, however, that her unhappy but always dear son may have a salutary sign of her maternal grief and a keener remembrance of the universal need of God's mercy, in these cases she imposes some works of piety and reparation.

Encouragement and Warnings

89. Inspiring this discipline, which is at once severe and merciful, are justice and truth, prudence and reserve. It is without doubt a discipline which will confirm good priests in their determination to live lives of purity and holiness. At the same time it will be a warning to those aspiring to the priesthood. These, guided by

the wisdom of those who educate them, will approach their priesthood fully aware of its obligations, disinterested and responding generously to divine grace and the will of Christ and His Church.

Consolations

90. Finally and with deep joy, we thank Our Lord because many priests who for a time had been unfaithful to their obligations, have with the grace of the High Priest found again the path and given joy to all by becoming anew exemplary pastors. With admirable good will, they used all the means which were helpful to ensure their return, especially an intense life of prayer, humility, persevering effort sustained by regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

IV. The Bishop's Fatherliness

The Bishop and His Priests

91. There is an irreplaceable and very effective means to ensure for our dear priests an easier and happier way of being faithful to their obligations, and it is one which they have the right and duty to find in you, Venerable Brother Bishops. It was you who called them and destined them to be priests; it was you who placed your hands on their heads; with you they are one in sharing the honor of

the priesthood by virtue of the sacrament of Orders; it is you whom they make present in the community of the faithful; with you they are united in a spirit of trust and magnanimity since, in as far as is compatible with their order, they take upon themselves your duties and care. (44) In choosing a life dedicated to celibacy they follow the ancient examples of the prelates of the East and the West; this provides a new motive for union between bishop and priest and a sound hope that they will live together more closely.

Responsibility and Pastoral Love

92. The affection which Jesus had made for His Apostles showed itself very clearly when He made them ministers of His real and Mystical Body (cf. John 13-17); and even you in whose person "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe" (45) know that you owe the best part of your hearts and pastoral care to your priests and to the young men preparing to be priests. (46) In no other way can you better show this conviction than in the conscious responsibility and sincere and unconquerable love with which you preside over the education of your seminarists, and help in every way possible your priests to remain faithful to their vocation and their duties.

A Bishop's Kindness

93. It is your fraternal and kindly presence and deeds that must fill up in advance the human loneliness of the priest, which is so often the cause of his discouragement and temptations. (47) Before being the superiors and judges of your priests, be their masters, fathers, friends, their good and kind brothers always ready to understand, to sympathize and to help. In every possible way encourage your priests to be your personal friends and to be very open with you. This will not weaken the relationship of juridical obedience; rather it will transform it into pastoral love so that they will obey more willingly, sincerely and securely. If they are your devoted friends and if they have a filial trust in you, your priests will be able in time to open up their souls and to confide in you their difficulties in the certainty that they can rely on your kindness to be protected from eventual defeat, without a servile fear of punishment, but in the filial expectation of correction, pardon and help, which will inspire them to resume their difficult journey with a new confidence.

Authority and Fatherliness

94. Venerable Brothers, all of you are certainly convinced that to restore to the soul of a priest joy in and enthusiasm for his vocation, interior peace and sal-

vation, is an urgent and glorious ministry which has an incalculable influence on a multitude of souls. There will be times when you must exercise your authority by showing a just severity towards those few who, after having resisted your kindness, by their conduct cause scandal to the People of God; but you will take the necessary precautions to ensure their seeing the error of their ways. Following the example of Our Lord Jesus, the Pastor and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2, 25), do not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Matt. 12, 20); like Jesus, heal their wounds (cf. 9, 12), save what was lost (cf. Matt. 18, 11), with eagerness and love go in search of the lost sheep and bring him back to the warmth of the sheepfold (cf. Luke 15, 4 ff.) and, like Him, try until the end (cf. Luke 22, 48), to call back the unfaithful friend.

Teaching and Vigilance

95. We are certain, Venerable Brothers, that you will leave nothing undone to foster, by your teaching, prudence and pastoral zeal, the ideal of consecrated celibacy among your clergy. We are sure too that you will never neglect those priests who have strayed from the house of God, their true home, no matter where their painful odyssey has led them, since they still remain your sons.

V. Role of the Faithful

Responsibility of the Entire People of God

96. Priestly virtue is a treasure that belongs to the whole Church. It is an enrichment and a splendor above the ordinary, which redounds to the building up and the profit of the entire People of God. We wish therefore to address to all the faithful, our children in Christ, an affectionate and urgent exhortation. We wish that they too feel responsible for the virtue of those brothers of theirs who have undertaken the mission of serving them in the priesthood for the salvation of their souls. They should pray and work for priestly vocations; they should help priests wholeheartedly, with filial love and ready collaboration; they should have the firm intention of offering them the consolation of a joyous response to their pastoral labors. They should encourage these, their fathers in Christ, to overcome the difficulties of every sort which they encounter as they fulfill their duties with entire faithfulness, to the edification of all. They should foster in a spirit of faith and of Christian love a deep respect and a delicate reserve in their dealings with priests, on account of their condition as men entirely consecrated to Christ and to the Church.

Invitation to the Laity

97. Our invitation goes out especially to those lay people who seek God with greater earnestness and intensity, and strive after Christian perfection while living in the midst of their fellow men. By their devoted and warm friendship they can be of great assistance to the Church's ministers since it is the laity, occupied with temporal affairs while at the same time aiming at a more generous and more perfect response to their baptismal vocation, who are in a position, in many cases, to enlighten and encourage the priest. Moreover, the perfect response to a vocation that plunges him into the mystery of Christ and the Church can suffer harm from various circumstances and from contamination with a certain kind of worldliness. In this way the whole People of God will honor Christ Our Lord in those who represent Him and of whom He has said: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives Him Who sent me" (Matt. 10, 40), promising an assured reward to whoever in any way shows charity toward those whom He has sent (ibid. v. 42).

Conclusion

Mary's Intercession

98. Venerable Brothers, pastors of God's flock throughout the world, and Dearly Beloved Priests, our sons and brothers:

as we come to the end of this letter which we have addressed to you, we invite you, with a soul responsive to Christ's great love, to turn your eyes and heart with renewed confidence and filial hope to the most loving Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, and to invoke for the Catholic priesthood her powerful and maternal intercession. In her the People of God admire and venerate the image of the Church, and model of faith, charity and perfect union with Him. May Mary, Virgin and Mother, obtain for the Church, which also is hailed as virgin and mother, (48) to rejoice always, though with due humility, in the faithfulness of her priests to the sublime gift they have received of holy virginity, and to see it flourishing and appreciated ever more and more in every walk of life, so that the army of those who follow the divine Lamb wherever He goes (cf. Apoc. 14, 4) may increase throughout the earth.

Confident Hope of the Church

99. The Church proclaims her hope in Christ; she is conscious of the critical shortage of priests when compared with the spiritual necessities of the world's population; but she is confident in her expectation which is founded on the infinite and mysterious power of grace, that the high spiritual quality of her ministers will bring about an increase also in their numbers,

for everything is possible to God (cf. 10, 27; Luke 1, 37).

In this faith and in this hope, may the apostolic blessing which we impart with all our heart be for all a pledge of heavenly

graces and the testimony of our fatherly affection.

Rome, at St. Peter's June 24, 1967, feast of St. John the Baptist, fifth year of our Pontificate.
Pope Paul VI

Notes

(1) Letter of Oct. 10, 1965 to H. E. Card. E. Tisserant, read in the 146th General Congregation on Oct. 11.

(2) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Christus Dominus*, n. 35; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 1; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, nn. 10, 11; *Ad Gentes*, nn. 19, 38.

(3) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 62.

(4) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 16.

(5) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, n. 8.

(6) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 28; Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 2.

(7) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 16.

(8) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, 16.

(9) Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 42.

(10) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 42; Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 16.

(11) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 14.

(12) Cf. Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 13.

(13) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 5.

(14) Decree *Optatam totius*, n. 10.

(15) Decree *Presbyter. Ordinis*, n. 16.

(16) Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39.

(17) Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5.

(18) Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 48.

(19) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 12.

(20) Cf. Tertullian, *De exhort. castitatis*, 13: PL 2, 930; St. Epiphanius, *Adv. haer.* II, 48, 9 and 59, 4: PG 41, 869, 1025; St. Ephrem, *Carmina nisibena*, XVIII, XIX, ed. G. Bickell, Leipzig, 1866, p. 122; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstr. evang.* 1, 9; PG 22, 81; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 12, 25: PG 33, 757; St. Ambrose, *De offic. ministr.* 1, 50: PL 16, 97 ff.; St. Augustine, *De moribus Eccl. cathol.* 1, 32: PL 32, E399; St. Jerome, *Adv. Vigilant.* 2: PL 23, 340-41; Sinesius, Bishop of Ptolemais, *Epist.* 105: PG 66, 1485.

(21) The first time in the Council of Elvira in Spain (c. a. 300), c. 33: Mansi II, 11.

(22) Session XXIV, can. 9-10.

(23) St. Pius X, *Exhortation Haerent animo*, Aug. 4, 1908: AAS 41, 1908, pp. 555-577; Benedict XV,

- Letter to F. Kordac, Archbishop of Prague, Jan. 29, 1920: AAS 12, 1920, p. 57 f.; Consist. Alloc. Dec. 16, 1920: AAS 12, 1920, pp. 535-588; Pius XI, Encyclical Ad catholici sacerdotii, Dec. 20, 1935: AAS 28, 1936, pp. 24-30; Pius XII, Apostolic Exhortation Menti Nostrae, Sept. 23, 1950: AAS 42, 1950, pp. 657-702; Encyclical Sacra virginitas, March 25, 1954: AAS 46, 1954, pp. 161-191; John XXIII, Encyclical Sacerdotii Nostri primordia, Aug. 1, 1959: AAS 51, pp. 554-556.
- (24) Second Allocution to the Roman Synod. Jan. 26, 1960: AAS 52, 1960, pp. 235-236 (Latin text p. 226).
- (25) Can. 6, 12, 13, 48: Mansi XI, 944-948, 965.
- (26) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 16.
- (27) Decree De Virginitate, 13: PG 46, 381-382.
- (28) De Sacerdotio, 1. III, 4: PG 48, 642.
- (29) Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, nn. 21, 28, 64.
- (30) Constitution cit., n. 29.
- (31) Constitution cit., n. 49.
- (32) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 16.
- (33) Decree Optatam totius, n. 2; Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 11.
- (34) Confess. X, 29, 40: PL 32, 796.
- (35) Cf. 1 Th. 2, 11; 1 Cor. 4, 15; 2 Cor. 6, 13; Gal. 4, 19; 1 Tim. 5, 1-2.
- (36) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 3.
- (37) Decree Optatam totius, nn. 3-11; cf. Prefectae caritatis, n. 12.
- (38) St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa th. II^a-II^{ae}, q. 184, a. 8 c.
- (39) Decree Optatam totius, n. 12.
- (40) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, nn. 16, 18.
- (41) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 18.
- (42) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 8.
- (43) Decree cit., *ibid.*
- (44) Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, n. 28.
- (45) Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, n. 21.
- (46) Decree Presbyter. Ordinis, n. 7.
- (47) Decree cit., *ibid.*
- (48) Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, nn. 63, 64.

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