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CELIBACY

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Reverend

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— The Editor.

PRIESTLY CELIBACY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

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I A LIVELY ISSUE

In 1969, a Melbourne priest was travelling through Europe and America on his way back from Rome. Frequently, he was asked by fellow priests: "What do the Australian priests think about celibacy?" His usual reply was: "I don't really know. I move around amongst priests a great deal and I have never heard them discuss the matter seriously. I don't think it's a problem for most of them."

His questioners were surprised that Australian priests seemed to show so little concern for what they considered one of the important issues facing the Church today. Or, perhaps, Australian priests, generally speaking, are realistic enough to see that there are far more important problems facing the Church and much deeper issues to be resolved than the question of celibacy?

In May, 1970, four hundred priests from all over Australia came together in Sydney for the first-ever National Convention of Priests. Their purpose — to discuss the situation of the Church in Australia and the role of the priest in the 1970's. The agenda for the three day meeting was drawn up on the basis of 1100 replies to a questionnaire sent out to all priests throughout Australia. The topics listed for discussion are a revealing commentary on the mind of the Australian priest:

- the meaning of the Gospel for today's world
- the spiritual life of the priest
- the involvement of the priest in secular and social problems
- in-service training of priests
- communications within the Church and beyond it
- the future of the ministry in Australia

Of the 1100 priests who replied to the questionnaire, less than 90 suggested that the question of celibacy should be discussed. So little interest was indicated that the topic was included for discussion as a small segment of the work-shop on the future ministry of the priest.

On the last night of the Convention, a group of priests moved to canvass the views of those present on their attitude towards celibacy. The motion was discussed but withdrawn, with a recommendation that it be considered again at a later date.¹

So much for the importance of the celibacy "debate" in the minds of most Australian priests.

A similar lack of interest in the problem of celibacy was evident at the "Wood Hall" National Conference of Priests, held in June, 1970, and attended by priests from all over England and Wales.²

EUROPE AND AMERICA

In France, Germany and the Netherlands, the 'debate' is waged with much more vigour than in Australia or Great Britain. Almost without exception, however, the attack is not against celibacy itself, which is recognised as an ideal to be freely sought after, but rather against the "law" of obligatory celibacy for all who aspire to the priesthood. In this situation of conflict, little notice seems to have been taken of the two decrees of the Vatican Council — "Priestly Formation" and "Ministry and Life of Priests" — and of what the Council had to say about celibacy. Pope Paul's encyclical on celibacy ("Sacerdotalis Caelibatus") has failed to settle the argument, even though it examined in detail the current objections to "obligatory" celibacy.

Some European theologians would say with Hans Kung, "The Church will know no peace until the candidate for the priesthood is permitted to decide for himself whether or not he wishes to marry. This is how it was in the beginning and peace will not return until an ecclesiastical law introduced in very problematical circumstances is once and for all annulled."³ On the other hand, many would agree with L. Hodl when he says, "Historically, the Church has handled the matter of 'the law of continence' with considerable discretion. This combination of

prudence and steadfastness, of understanding and concern, is still noticeable, and worth noting, today."³

Somewhere in between these views are those of scholars of the calibre of Father Schillebeeckx O.P. who conclude that the decisive motive behind the development of priestly celibacy is its Biblical origin and that the reasons for maintaining the law have become increasingly Christianized over the centuries.⁴

In America, the situation is similar to that in Europe. The ideal of celibacy itself is not under attack. But there is a growing questioning of the "law" of compulsory celibacy for priests. The debate is being conducted at various levels — historical, scriptural, psychological and pastoral.⁵

The most encouraging feature to emerge from the discussion has been the many positive attempts to understand the role of celibacy in the life of the Catholic Church. More than ever before in the history of the Church, there is a growing awareness of the spiritual significance and value of celibacy.

However, the discussion on priestly celibacy cannot be dismissed as simply as one bishop seemed to do recently, when, with a wave of his hand, he said: "Celibacy still remains *essential* to the priesthood." History and the Second Vatican Council⁶ are against such a statement.

3. Quoted from "Concilium: Pastoral Theology: No. 5" p. 87.

4. "Clerical Celibacy Under Fire" — E. Schillebeeckx O.P.

5. For example, "Celibacy, Ministry, Church" — Joseph Blenkinsopp. See also "Celibacy — The Necessary Option" — ed. George H. Freine.

6. "Decree on The Ministry and Life of Priests" N. 16 — "It (celibacy) 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. In these Churches, in addition to all bishops and those others who by a gift of grace choose to observe celibacy, there also exist married priests of outstanding merit."

1. See the official report on The National Priests' Convention, issued on August 12, 1970.

2. As reported in "The Catholic Herald", June 5 and 12, 1970.

II A LIVING HERITAGE

Like so many other aspects of the Church's life, celibacy cannot be evaluated adequately without some knowledge of the reasons for its origin and development during the course of the centuries.

One of the main causes of confusion in the current discussion is the failure to distinguish between *celibacy* in the strict sense (i.e. the prohibition of marriage) and *continence* which was at the heart of clerical "celibacy" right up to the time of the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.

Up until that time, priests were recruited not only from unmarried men who were prepared to lead continent lives (i.e. to abstain from all sexual activity) but also from men who were already married. Only with the institution of seminaries for the training of the secular, or diocesan, clergy did the universal practice develop in the Western Church of restricting ordination to unmarried men. Since that time, celibacy has become identified with the obligation to renounce marriage.

Prior to the sixteenth century, when it was the common practice to ordain men who were already married, celibacy meant continence i.e. the obligation to abstain, after ordination, from the use of marriage. For the unmarried priest, continence was a necessary virtue; for the married priest, it was a free but binding renunciation.

For the period before the Council of Trent, therefore, we should speak more precisely of continence rather than celibacy.

However, even during this very long period of the Church's history, although the practice was to ordain men already married, there was never a tradition of permitting men already ordained to marry.

According to Hippolytus,⁷ Pope Callixtus I (217-222) did permit priests who married to continue on in their ministry — a policy

7. Hippolytus: "Philosophumena", Book 10.

it would seem hard to uphold unless he had the support of public opinion in the Roman community.

Nor did Clement of Alexandria⁸ (c. 200 A.D.) have any difficulty about permitting married priests to exercise their marriage rights — "how can we fail to admit also that the husband of one wife, be he priest, deacon, or layman, if he uses marriage without reproach, 'will be saved through bearing children.' (1 Tim. 2:15)."

Nevertheless, the voices raised today, demanding that priests should be allowed to marry, will find very little support in two thousand years of tradition — in either the Western or the Eastern Churches.

FIRST TWO CENTURIES

Another cause of confusion in the current discussion is the false assertion that the obligation of priestly celibacy was introduced into the Western Church as late as the twelfth century.⁹ As a matter of history, the obligation to continence on the part of both married and unmarried priests was in force from before the end of the third century.

From the Scriptural evidence we know that Saint Peter, the first Pope, was married. (Matthew 8:14-15). Whether he was a widower, or whether he continued to live in a husband-wife relationship or not, we do not know. However, we do know that when Peter said to Jesus: "we have left all and followed you", Our Lord replied: "there is no one who has left house, or parents, or brothers, or wife, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive much more in the present time, and in the age to come life everlasting." (Luke 18:28-30). Did Peter's "all", then, include his wife?

We know, also, that some of the first bishops and deacons were married, and that this appears to be the anticipated situation: "To want to be a presiding elder is to want to do a noble work. That is why the president must have an impeccable

8. Quoted by Jean Paul-Audet in "Structures Of The Christian Priesthood" p. 10.

9. Joseph Blinkensopp — op. cit. page 58.

character. He must not have been married more than once, and he must be temperate, discreet, courteous . . . He must be a man who manages his own family well and brings his children up to obey him and be well behaved; how can any man who does not understand how to manage his own family have responsibility for the Church of God? . . . Deacons must not have been married more than once, and must be men who manage their children and their families well." (1 Tim. 3:2-12). (See also Tit. 1:6-9).

But, again, there is no evidence to indicate whether these people continued to exercise their marriage rights or whether they chose to live in continence "for the sake of the kingdom of God."

The fact that the *Didascalia Apostolorum*¹⁰ (c. 100 A.D.) requires that, except in special circumstances, the bishop is to be at least fifty years of age, may indicate that continence was expected of him after consecration.

Generally speaking, all that we can say for certain about the situation in the first two or three centuries is that the Church's pastoral concern was for the service of the Word and the Sacraments and the service of the ecclesial community rather than for the style of life of the ministers. The first step towards clerical celibacy seems to have been continence within marriage — at first in patterns of behaviour, then by custom, and finally by regulations.

FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES

In the year 305 A.D., the Council of Elvira (Spain) expressly decreed that all men in holy orders must abstain from the use of marriage contracted before ordination. Failure to observe this obligation carried the penalty of expulsion from the ministry. (Canon 33).

The rule made by the Council pre-supposed two already accepted situations:

1. Continence embodied a spiritual ideal which the whole community recognized.

10. "*Didascalia Apostolorum*" — trans. and ed. R. Hugh Connolly.

2. Continence was concerned not so much with setting the minister free from his family cares in favour of availability to the community but was directed towards the service of the altar. (Canon 19).

In the same century, Saint Epiphanius, Pope Siricius, and the Council of Carthage all declared that clerical continence was a tradition in the Church from the time of the apostles. No appeal was ever made against the explicit provisions of obligatory continence to a contrary tradition.

But what of the wives to whom these men were already bound prior to ordination by the indissoluble bond of marriage? In the first place, no one could be ordained without the express consent of his wife; in the second place, the wives received just maintenance from the Church and a settlement that excluded as far as possible the danger of incontinence.

By the middle of the fifth century, penalties against priests who failed to observe the obligation of continence included excommunication and exclusion from the sacraments. In 461, the Council of Tours mitigated these severe penalties and limited the sanction to dismissal from the ministry.

By the end of the fifth century, the obligation of continence extended even to sub-deacons. This very fact shows how deeply rooted the conviction had become that all sacred ministers were bound by this obligation.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA (325 A.D.) refused to make celibacy obligatory for priests and deacons because the bishops feared that the Council, in so doing, might appear to be supporting the Encratites and other heretics who attacked the holiness of sex in marriage, claiming there was no difference between marriage and fornication. Nevertheless, the Council did forbid marriage after the reception of sacred orders "according to an ancient tradition of the Church".

However, it does appear that the predominant factor in the development of the continence-celibacy question, both prior to and subsequent to the Council of Nicea, was the incompatibility believed to exist between the "sacred" and the

"profane", between the "pure" and the "impure"; the use of sex, even married sex, was considered to belong to the latter categories!

Side by side with this development, there was also a growing trend to emphasise the service of the altar rather than the service of the word and the service of the ecclesial community, as the principal function of clerics.

Thus, *Saint Ambrose*: "You who have received the grace of sacred ministry, to whom all conjugal relations are unknown, you know that you must be sure of an unhindered and spotless ministry, which must not be profaned even by any conjugal relations." (*De officiis ministerorum*.)

And *Innocent I*: "He who has been defiled by sexual desire, what shame shall be his when he turns to the sacrifice." (In this letter to *Victricius* of Rouen in 404 A.D., he is speaking of sex in marriage.)

Was the same thought pattern operative at the Council of Laodicea (mid 4th C.) when it ruled that "women must not enter the sanctuary"? (Canon 44.)

SIXTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

In later centuries, in the Western Church, the observance of the law of continence (but never the law itself) was subject to many vicissitudes. A number of factors led to the flouting of continence-celibacy, not only by priests but also by bishops. However, in the face of a seemingly irretrievable situation, the Gregorian reformers¹¹ set to work to remedy the position and succeeded in re-establishing the traditional discipline, thus preparing the way for a flourishing Church life in the following centuries.

THE SECOND LATERAN COUNCIL¹², in 1139, established holy orders as a diriment impediment to marriage i.e. it declared null and void marriages contracted by men in sacred orders. Prior to that, such marriages were illegal but valid.

11. Philip Hughes: "History Of The Church" Vol. II Ch. VI.

12. Lateran II, canon 7. See also Lateran I, canon 21; Lateran III, canon 11; Lateran IV, canon 14.

The first sustained attack on the law of continence-celibacy came from the "reformers" of the sixteenth century — Anglicans, Lutherans, Protestants etc. This led to the solemn reaffirmation of traditional celibacy by the Council of Trent.¹³

From then on, the Law of Celibacy remained relatively unchallenged in the Catholic Church until recent years.

REASONS

During all this long development, especially in the early centuries, various influences were at work, the more notable being: an inadequate appreciation of the value and dignity of married love, the growth of monasticism, the emergence of numerous ascetical practices and mystical writings. As a consequence, the reasons advanced in support of the traditional practice of clerical continence were many and varied. For example:

- an opposition between the use of married sex and the holiness and perfect purity of body and soul required in the exercise of the ministry;
- freedom from other occupations or stable commitment, especially that of family ties, to enable ministers to dedicate themselves completely to the sacred ministry;
- exclusive dedication by ministers to the service of God and His People;
- greater spiritual efficacy of prayer;
- the minister's example in support of the Gospel message calling all men to total union with God.

However, underlying all these reasons was a deep awareness of the value of celibacy in the service of God and His People. This value is exemplified in the Person and life of Christ himself; it is inspired by his invitation to leave all, including wife (Luke 18:29), and to "become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom" (Matthew 19:12); it is supported by Saint Paul's opinions, as a celibate (1 Cor. 7:25), that it is "a good thing" not to marry (1 Cor. 7:8, 27) and that "an unmarried man can devote

13. Council of Trent session XXI can. 6; sess. XXII, can. 1; sess. XXIII, can. 17; sess. XXIV, cans. 9 and 14.

himself to the Lord's affairs, all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord; but a married man has to bother about the world's affairs and devote himself to pleasing his wife." (1 Cor. 7:32-34).

CONCLUSIONS

Before moving on to discuss the *value* of celibacy and, in particular, the connection between celibacy and the priesthood, it might be useful for us to comment on the historical *facts* relating to clerical celibacy.

1. The present laws of celibacy grew out of the ancient practice of continence within marriage required of deacons, priests and bishops.

2. From the very beginning, there has been a recognized connection between celibacy and priesthood. Many of the reasons advanced to explain this connection may appear irrelevant, mis-guided, or unconvincing to our twentieth century minds; but the fact remains that for nearly two thousand years men have found reasons and motives sufficiently compelling to choose the life of the celibate minister. Even if the reasons are challenged or rejected, the values they sought to explain are not thereby proved false. Somewhere in the Christian consciousness is an awareness of the meaning and value of a rich and glorious heritage. Perhaps it is up to the theologians and spiritual writers of the twentieth century to articulate the inner meaning of the Catholic preference for a celibate clergy in terms that are relevant to our present life situation.

3. The universal practice of the Western Church has been to call to Holy Orders only men who have freely chosen and accepted the obligation to lead continent lives — either in the married state (Canon 987 of the Code of Canon Law) or in the unmarried state (Canon 132). This practice existed as a custom well before it received the force of law at the Council of Nicea.

To speak of a man being "constrained" to a life of celibacy or of an obligation "imposed" is to show ignorance of the truth. The Church does not, in fact cannot, impose such an obligation on anyone. The obligation to celibacy is the result of a free choice on the part of a man, at an age when, in Australia,

fifty per cent of the male population have already made a permanent commitment to the obligations of marriage.

4. Since the Second Lateran Council, sacred ordination has been a deriment impediment to marriage (Canon. 132 and 1072). This means that a minister (sub-deacon, deacon, priest, bishop) cannot contract a valid marriage without a special dispensation — at present granted only on the condition that the minister ceases to exercise his powers of priesthood and returns, as it were to the lay state — the process of laicization.

5. Since the Council of Trent, the general practice of the Church has been to confer Holy Orders only on unmarried men who have already freely chosen and accepted the obligation to lead celibate lives. The ordination of married men has been the rare exception.

THE CENTRAL ISSUE

The vocation to celibacy is obviously separate from the vocation to priesthood, so the question may be asked: is the Church acting wisely and justly in restricting the call to the priesthood to men who have already chosen celibacy as their style of life commitment? In other words: is the Church acting for the better when it makes freely chosen celibacy a necessary condition for entry into Holy Orders?

This is the central, and only really relevant, issue in the whole celibacy "debate."

The intimate personal choice of his life-style is up to the individual. The public choice of her ministers is up to the Church. And the Church certainly has a right to make celibacy the normal necessary condition for ordination, especially if there is such a close link or affinity between the vocation to celibacy and the vocation to priesthood that, generally speaking, the vocation to celibacy rather than to marriage is a more apt life-style for the fruitful exercise of the priesthood.

III CELIBACY AS A LIFE COMMITMENT

In itself, celibacy need have no particular value or significance. For example, a person may remain unmarried simply because he (or she) has not had the opportunity to enter a life commitment with a person of the opposite sex. In this case, the celibate person accepts this life-style because he has no other choice. No personal decision is involved.

Again, a person may choose to remain unmarried because, psychologically or physically, he has no interest in married love. He may have no desire to commit himself for life to another person; he may even have an unhealthy aversion to sex. In this case, the choice is rather to reject marriage than to embrace a life of celibacy. A personal decision is involved; but it is negative, maybe even selfish and unreasonable.

On the other hand, a person may positively choose to live a life of celibacy for very good reasons. Pursuit of a career, dedication to a profession, involvement in a particular form of social work, may be so compelling that a person freely chooses to remain unmarried so that he can give all his time and energy to his life's work. His choice of his special life-style is so total, so demanding, that it precludes the possibility of marriage. A positive personal decision is involved. Even for the secular world celibacy has a meaning and a value.

CHRISTIAN SIGNIFICANCE

Christian celibacy freely chosen "for the sake of the kingdom", also has a meaning and a worth. The celibate has to choose between two Christian values — devotion to Christ through the love of a wife and pursuit of the kingdom through a family as a "minature Church" OR a more direct devotion to Christ without any human intermediary and pursuit of the kingdom through the wider community of the Church in a particular diocese or region.

Here, we must not fall into the trap of comparing the two vocations — Christian marriage and Christian celibacy — and trying to suggest which has the greater worth. That would be like trying to compare the importance of a doctor, a nurse and a dustman in the local community. On the face of it, we might be inclined to opt for the doctor; but, if the dustmen go on strike, the community soon realizes their important and unique contribution to the health of the community. Each state of life in the community has its own special contribution to make to the well-being of the whole community; and there is no basis for comparisons of relative merit and worth.

Likewise, in the Christian community, there is no basis for comparisons between the celibate state and the married state. Each is a God-given vocation; each has its special contribution to make to the welfare of the Church; each, ultimately, is an expression of faith in the Risen Lord.

As Ida Friederike Gorres so well explains: "The two ways of love — marriage and celibacy — appear as two different realizations, on different planes, of the same mystery: the sacrament of union (with God). Even sacramental marriage is imperfect, temporary, perhaps even distracting from the great reality it symbolises, i.e. union between Christ and His Church. This insight leads to a decision to achieve the goal by a shorter route with less use of intermediaries i.e. by Christian celibacy. Priestly celibacy represents the marriage of Christ with the Church."¹⁴

Neither marriage nor celibacy is an end in itself; each is only a means of growing in holiness and contributing to the welfare of the whole Church. "The saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ. In this way, we are all to come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself." (Eph. 4:12-13).

Christian marriage and Christian celibacy are, therefore, two different expressions of Christian living; both vocations are of

14. "A Laywoman's View Of Priestly Celibacy" — Ida Friederike Gorres in "Is Celibacy Outdated?"

Christian value and significance only in so far as they are a means of drawing us closer to God.

The celibate sees devotion to Christ and involvement in His mission as values so compelling that he is prompted to give himself completely to a life-time pursuit of these objectives to the exclusion of the possibility of marriage. This insight is, perhaps, the actual grace, the "charism", that lies at the very heart of Christian celibacy.

Christian celibacy, then, like marriage, is a particular form of response to the vocation to holiness, to which all Christians are called.

SIGN OF FAITH

"The followers of Christ are *called* by God, not according to their accomplishments, but according to His own purpose and grace.

"All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are *called* to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.

"In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must *use their strength* according as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. In this way they can *follow* in His footsteps and mould themselves in His image, *seeking* the will of the Father in all things, *devoting* themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour." (Vatican Council II — "Dogmatic Constitution on The Church", Art. 40.)

In short, the Christian life depends on two things: a *call* on the part of God and a *response* to that call on the part of the individual.

Our response to God is what we call Faith. It involves devotion to the Person of Jesus Christ, an acceptance of what he teaches, a self-giving to God, a "yes" to His invitation to share His life.

Although our response to God is made within the community of His People, each person must make his own individual act of faith. Each response of faith is individual and personal. Each person is left free to choose the degree or extent to which he

is prepared to commit himself and, within the limits of God's Law, the precise way in which he will respond.

For example, when young people fall in love, their engagement and marriage are stages of a process of development of love between them.

The marriage act is the great expression and sign of their mutual love and trust. It is an act of faith in one another, the sign of their total, exclusive and permanent self-giving to one another.

A similar development occurs in our love relationship with Christ. The more we give ourselves to Christ, the more exclusively we centre our interest on Him and His affairs. Our interest in other people and other things becomes more Christ-like. We love them because Christ loves them; we become involved because Christ is involved. But our interest is primarily Christ-centered.

A celibate sees the life of celibacy as an expression of his readiness to give himself totally and fully to the direct service of Christ and His Church rather than to the service of a wife and family, as a means of loving God.

Just as the marriage act is the great sign of a man's total surrender to another human person, so celibacy is the expression of a total, exclusive and permanent self-giving in love to another person — not a human person but a Divine Person — Christ.

Celibacy then is a special expression of our act of faith. This total surrender of faith in Jesus Christ lies at the very heart of Christian celibacy.

And because celibacy is a sign of faith, it must always remain something of a mystery; because the act of faith itself is a supernatural mystery.

MISSION

"For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God, the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment

of this goal is called the apostolate, and the Church carries it on in various ways through her members.

"For by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate." (Vatican II — "Decree on The Apostolate of the Laity", Art. 2.)

Our call to holiness implies also a call to the apostolate; we cannot share in the life of Christ unless we share also in His mission. Devotion to the Person of Christ implies dedication to His work, involvement in His saving activity.

Of course, we are all free to determine the extent and the manner of our response. "In the Church, there is diversity of service but unity of purpose." (Vatican II, "Decree on The Laity", Art. 2). Some of us will spend our lives in the midst of temporal affairs and secular activities, bearing witness to Christ and promoting the salvation of men in the family, at work, in the places we take our recreation. Others will want to give some of their time to the more directly spiritual aspects of the Church's mission through a limited participation in organized apostolic groups such as Family Movement, Legion of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Y.C.W. and so on. But our participation will be limited because of our other obligations to our family, our trade or profession, our local community affairs and any other number of time-consuming occupations that form part of the complexity of modern living.

Some men, however, wish to become directly involved in the Church's life and mission, to the total exclusion of all else. They see the value of Christ's work as so compelling that they are prepared to give up the possibility of marriage and a family in order to give themselves to it entirely. They "become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom". (Matthew 19:12).

Celibacy, therefore, is a life-style which enables a man to become integrated into the mission of Christ to the utmost limit of his strength and time. It is the ultimate expression of the vocation to which all Christians are called.

SIGN OF LOVE

Although theologians may distinguish between faith and love, in practice, the two virtues are inseparable. Faith is an expression of love; the intensity of our love is a measure of the depth of our faith.

What has been said of celibacy as a sign of faith, therefore, may also be said of celibacy as a sign of love.

But Christian love adds a new aspect, another dimension, to merely human love:

"By this shall men know that you are my disciples — that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 13: 34-35).

"A new commandment I give you — that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15: 12).

The standard set for us is the love of Christ himself, who gave himself completely that we might live in a new community of love with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christ's love — God's love — is a creative love, establishing a new creation, a new people of God, a new covenant of love between God and man. In all Christian love, then, there should be found this aspect of community building.

Married Christian love between husband and wife leads to the building up of the Christian family — "The miniature Church", as the Vatican Council expressed it.

Celibate Christian love enables a man to look to the building up of the wider community of the Church itself. Thus, the celibate experiences a "marriage", not in the narrow space of two individuals but on the broader spiritual plane of Christ's marriage with the Church. The essence of sacramental marriage — the giving of oneself to another person in creative love — is not excluded from the life of a celibate. Celibacy is the great sign of Christ's "marriage" with the Church.

As the American Scripture scholar, Father Eugene H. Maly¹⁵ so well put it: "The goal of God's saving action is the ultimate union of man with God.

"The celibate expresses in his person the goal of God's saving action.

"The celibate is dedicated, by reason of the very sign he is, to the establishment of community among men.

"In fact, he must be eager about this or he will not be true to his commitment. His celibacy cannot be separated from his

15. Eugene H. Maly — "Celibacy" in "The Bible Today", Feb. 1968.

ministry of reconciling man to man and man to God, the work of atonement."

Freedom from the cares of a human family should set a man free for the cares of God's family. This complete availability and total concern for all people is at the heart of the vocation to celibacy. The man who wishes to belong entirely to God must be willing to belong to all men. And nothing frees the celibate from the feeling of being alone and insecure as does his loving care of others.

A SIGN OF TOTAL COMMITMENT

Celibacy then is a sign of that total commitment of faith and love to which all Christians are called.

This is not to say, of course, that the celibate always necessarily lives up to the measure of Christian perfection, of which his celibacy is the sign. He is human; he is subject to human frailty just as any other man; he carries his celibacy in a vessel of clay. The degree of his own perfection depends on the extent to which he lives his vocation under the influence of God's redeeming grace.

The question which the celibate must be continually asking himself is: "Am I a really dedicated celibate or simply a comfortable bachelor?"

Nevertheless, no matter what the failings of the man himself, his celibacy always remains a sign, beckoning all Christians to that complete devotion to God which is the vocation of all Christians, reminding all men that we do not have a lasting home in this life, and inspiring them to seek first the kingdom of heaven.

"For the secular world and for other Christians, Christian celibacy is a continual summons, which makes the heart of the kingdom of God and of the Church visible in human history and places it in the midst of the world."¹⁶

16. E. Schillebeeckx O.P. - op. cit. p. 108.

IV CELIBACY AND THE PRIESTLY LIFE

LEADERSHIP

Winston Churchill, Ho Chi Min, Mao Tse Tung, John F. Kennedy were all effective leaders of our time. They set goals which called for big sacrifices from the people they led and they were able to inspire their people to great heights of achievement.

One of the main reasons for their success as leaders was that they summed up in their own individual lives the hopes, the aspirations, the strivings of their people. They expressed in a tangible way something of what their people were struggling to become. Their followers were able to "identify" with them in their role as community leader. The people saw themselves symbolized in the qualities of their leaders. There is a lesson here for the Christian community.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

One of the key themes of the Good News proclaimed to us by Christ our Saviour is that God loves us and wishes to share his life with us in a Community of Love. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to myself . . . I have come that you may have life more abundantly . . . whoever believes in me will never die . . . the eternal life which was with the Father has been made visible to us . . . we are in union with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. . ."

Jesus himself is the great Sign of God's active, saving presence amongst his people; the Sign of God's love reconciling all men to himself. In the Person of Jesus, humanity is already united with God, sharing in the life and activity of God himself. (We call this union by the special name of "hyperstatic".)

Not only is Christ the sign of God's love for men which draws us into union with himself; but Jesus is also the sign of man's loving response to the Father. "I always do the will of him who sent me . . . not my will but thy will be done . . ."

Before he ascended back to the Father, Our Lord established his Church, a community of people who had received Him and accepted Him. It is in the Church that we continue to receive God's message of saving love; it is within the Church that we continue to make our response of loving acceptance.

Our acceptance of Jesus Christ and his message is what we call "faith". Through faith and the sacraments, especially baptism and Holy Communion, we are being drawn into ever closer union with Christ in his life with the Father.

This faith, this dedication to the Person of Christ, this dynamic acceptance of God, expresses itself by the love we show towards God and towards all those God wishes to reconcile to himself. Our faith also inspires within us the hope, the confidence, the trust, that God will provide us with all the means necessary to bring our union with Christ to its final perfection at the hour of death.

Like Christ its Head, the Church is a visible expression of

- God's redeeming love for men — it is a community in which men are being given a share in the life of God; it is a "sanctifying" community i.e. a community which makes men holy.

- man's loving response to God — it is a community of people who worship God "in spirit and in truth"; it is a "worshipping community".

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God." (1 Peter 2:9).

The Church, then, is a visible expression of what we are and of what we are still in the process of becoming — a priestly community called together through faith and baptism, united in love, inspired by hope in the Risen Lord.

PRIESTS AS LEADERS

By their very vocation as Christians, every member of the People of God is called to a life of holiness in union with Christ; every member is called to exercise his royal priesthood in union with Christ, especially at Mass; every member

is called to proclaim the good news of God's saving actions in the example of his daily life. The way in which we live our lives must show that we are in deed and in word members of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart.

Just as Christ called some men to be the leaders of the first Christian community, he continues to call men to be full-time leaders of the People of God today — men who will be engaged fulltime in the service of God and his people for the building up of the community.

Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, a man — a member of the community — is consecrated by the seal of the Holy Spirit and is drawn into a new and special relationship with Christ, so that his whole being is radically changed. The priest is able to represent Christ who is present in his Church; he acts in the name of Christ who came to serve and not to be served.

When a man is ordained, he is appointed and empowered to act as a leader of God's people. The life of the whole community is in some way reflected, particularly expressed, especially realized, made visible, personified in the ministerial priest.

As the theologian, Walter Kasper,¹⁷ expresses it:

"This functional representation of the priestly office should not be misinterpreted as a purely situational reality; for, in the last analysis, it is ontological. In the realm of creatures, interpersonal relations are the highest ontological reality. They determine not only what a man does, but also what a man is as a human being. The function of community leadership, then, lays a claim on the whole humanity of a priest; it affects him not only in the concrete actions that he performs, but also in what he is as a human being involved in history and human society.

"The priestly ministry, then, is never simply a job or one's 'life work'. Here faith in Jesus becomes something more than the general foundation of one's life as a human being; it becomes the distinctive foundation of one's whole professional existence. Bearing witness to Christ in his professional life, the

17. "A New Dogmatic Outlook on the Priestly Ministry" — Walter Kasper in "Concilium: Pastoral Theology" No. 5.

priest serves as a symbol and a deputy of the community that is entrusted to his care."

St. Cyprian expressed the same thought in the third century: "The priest is the living image and the visible sign of Christ." As we have seen previously, the Church and Christ are signs of the same reality — God's reconciling love, which is drawing all men into a community of love with himself. If a priest, then, is a visible sign of Christ, he should also be seen as a visible sign of the Church.

By his very vocation as a leader of a priestly community, the ordained priest should sum up and embody within himself all that it aspires to be — a community of faith, hope and love.

As we have already seen, celibacy is a sign of total commitment in faith and love; it is a sign of complete involvement in the work of Christ.

It is fitting, therefore, that priests, as leaders of the People of God, should remain celibate so that Christians may see in their leaders that perfect devotion to God to which all of them are called and to which all are aspiring by their response to God's grace.

THE EUCHARIST

The ordained minister exercises his leadership of the priestly community especially when he presides over the Christian assembly during the Eucharistic celebration. Here, the community is visibly present to perform its priestly action of offering sacrifice to our heavenly Father.

In the offertory procession, members of the community bring up the gifts of bread and wine to the altar, indicating in a real way the desire of the whole congregation to re-dedicate themselves to God in union with Christ. At the consecration, the ordained priest gathers these gifts together and, through the power given to him in Holy Orders, he transforms them into the Gift of the Risen Christ, who continues to offer himself to the Father on our behalf.

When the Eucharistic Sacrifice is over, we return to our daily occupations, prepared and strengthened to live out as fully as

possible this act of self-giving which we have celebrated at Mass.

The priest has presided over this action of renewed community dedication; he has acted to make Christ present in his state of total self-giving for others. It is fitting, therefore, that the ordained priest, especially, be seen as a man who is prepared to live out in his daily life this complete dedication and total self-giving, which is expressed by our union with Christ at Mass.

His celibacy is the sign of the priest's readiness and intention to live the Mass to the fullest possible extent in his pastoral care of the Church. Celibacy is the visible expression of the positive, all-embracing, all-renouncing, self-sacrificing love of Christ for his people. So, if the people of God do not experience this love in their priest, his celibacy is a lie and his leadership of the Christian community is meaningless.

THE WORD

The other principal role of the ordained priest as community leader is to preach the Word of God.

When we read the Gospels, we see that Our Lord's primary activity was to preach and teach. "After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15).

There is a sense of urgency in Christ's words — the kingdom is already present in the Person of Christ; people are being challenged to make a decision for or against God revealing himself in the Word.

Christ conveyed this sense of urgency to his disciples when he sent them out to preach in his name. They must need to be ready to leave all things — home, father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, children — to carry out his mission. They are to greet no-one on the way; they must "travel light". Nothing is to hold them back from their work of preaching. The force of the message is to be supported by freedom of movement and detachment from other concerns.

The full-time disciple, the preacher of the Word, must needs be perfectly free from other commitments and fully available for the "service of the word". He is called to leave all, not because leaving is good in itself but because it is seen as a necessary condition demanded by the urgency of the gospel message.

It is worth noting here that Christ's demands for renunciation on the part of the preacher did not relate to sexuality as such but rather to the totality of family relationships. The service of the word demands a general state of freedom and mobility, one of the conditions for which ultimately involves the abandonment of married life.

There is no suggestion that the exercise of married love is in any way unfitting to preaching the Word of God. It is simply a question of a life-style best suited to meet the demands of service.

The urgency of the gospel message is still as pressing today. Through his preaching, the priest continues to challenge the indifference, the selfishness, the permissiveness, the false values of the world in which we live.

On the part of the preachers, there is still the same need for a full-time commitment to the service of the word and freedom from other cares, which will enable him to carry on the mission begun by Christ. Celibacy makes this freedom possible for the priest as preacher of God's word; it makes his commitment clear.

A CONCLUSION

From what we have said, it is impossible to conclude that celibacy is essential for the exercise of the priesthood. However, it is possible to see that the life-style of the priest is much more closely related to a life-style of celibacy than to a life-style of marriage. For, as long as the exercise of the ordained priesthood remains a full time function, it includes, at least implicitly, an intrinsic invitation to celibacy as a special way of being available for the service of God and his people.

In its decree on the life and ministry of priests, the Vatican

Council¹⁸ spoke of the affinity between celibacy and priesthood only after it had explained the three essential functions of the priesthood: leadership of the community of the faithful, administration of the sacraments, and service of the word. In these three activities is to be found the essence of the priestly service of the kingdom of God, even though these activities may express themselves in numerous concrete ways according to the needs of the people.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the Church is on solid ground when it makes celibacy a necessary condition for ordination to the priesthood — as a general rule. Pastoral reasons may, perhaps, prompt exceptions in a particular region of the Church at a particular point of history. But that is another question.

The same conclusion was reached by the International Theological Commission set up by the Holy See to examine the question of priestly celibacy. In its report submitted to the Pope in October, 1970, the Commission stated that, at this point of time, marriage should not be an option for ordained priests who wish to carry out their ministry.¹⁹

18. Vatican II — "Decree On The Ministry And Life of Priests" nn. 4-6.

19. "The Advocate", October 29, 1970.

*with God all is possible & so said Holmiers
is & always has been possible - when one gives
oneself wholly to God. "first"*

V TO LIVE IS TO CHANGE

So many aspects of the Church's life — once regarded as "traditional", unchanging, unchangeable — have gone and, with them, the reasons so long advanced in their support. We have suddenly re-discovered that the Church is not a static, monolithic structure but a dynamic, living, growing, developing community of people being enlivened and guided by the Holy Spirit. And where the Spirit is leading us, who can say?

Like so many other aspects of the Church's life, celibacy is subject to development and change and it is reasonable to suppose that the patterns of behaviour and the style of life of priests will change also. Already there are indications of new forms of ministry, new and changing ways in which the priesthood will be exercised.

To conclude our thoughts of the place of priestly celibacy in the life of the Church, especially in relation to the ministry, it would be useful to indicate some of the possibilities, for the future.

1. A celibate clergy will be the normal condition of priestly service in the foreseeable future.

Because the experience of values which lead a man to choose the priesthood as a life commitment and the experience of values which is fundamental to Christian celibacy touch each other so closely, as a general principle, the ancient custom will remain of ordaining to the priesthood men who have voluntarily accepted the obligations of celibacy.

2. In the revision of the Code on Canon Law, those canons which refer to clerical celibacy may be reframed to make clearer and to underscore the fact that the Church calls as her ministerial priests men who have already freely accepted the vocation to celibacy.

3. In the training of seminarians, greater emphasis and better training will be provided towards preparing men to understand more clearly and to live more fully the vocation of Chris-

tian celibacy freely chosen "for the sake of the kingdom".

4. If and when our separated brethren return to full union with Rome, it may well be that they will be permitted to retain their own insights, traditions and practices, as has happened with the Eastern Churches. In that case, a married clergy will become a less rare life style for Catholic priests.

5. In recent years, the Church has ordained convert ministers from other communions and allowed them to continue to exercise their marriage rights.

Since the Vatican Council,²⁰ provision has been made for the setting up of a permanent married diaconate where the pastoral needs of the Church demand it. Married continence is not required as a condition.

As we saw earlier, the present law of celibacy for priests arose out of and was a development of the ancient custom of requiring continence in marriage on the part of deacons and priests. In other words, with the setting up of a married diaconate without the condition of continence, the whole tradition upon which the celibacy of the clergy was built has been disregarded. As Professor Stickler²¹ of the Salesian Pontifical University so well stated: "Vatican Council II, as regards deacons, wished to grant those already married the possibility of exercising the sacred ministry without perfect continence, though the decision was left to the Holy See in individual cases. Thus, perhaps without realizing it, it infringed a nearly bi-millenary tradition, hitherto strenuously defended."

The way is at least open for the setting up of a married priesthood along similar lines to that of a married diaconate.

The picture may well emerge of a full-time celibate clergy supported in its work of service by a part-time married clergy who maintain themselves through ordinary secular occupations. In individual cases, priests who have left the ministry to marry may, at some future time, be permitted to exercise their priest-

20. Vatican II: "Decree on Missionary Activity" n. 16; "Constitution on The Church" n. 29.

21. "Historic Note On The Celibacy Of Clerics In Sacred Orders" — Don Alfonso M. Stickler in "L'Osservatore Romano", March 19, 1970.

hood on a part-time basis, especially among small occupational or neighbourhood groups. (This small "cell" structure is already developing rapidly overseas.)

6. Remembering that the present changes going on within the the Church are by way of spiritual and pastoral renewal, we can confidently predict that celibacy will remain the normal life style of the full-time priesthood.

In the words of Ida Gorres²²: "The priestly ministry is still open to changes we cannot predict. As long as the ministry of Christ is essentially made up of current dimensions and perspectives, it will have the form proper to it. Is it possible for it to move in a direction other than a more total giving? Could it fall back on this side of its possibilities in an effort to limit it, for the sake of augmenting the private happiness of those who exercise the office?"

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22. "Is Celibacy Outdated?" — Ida Friederike Gorres.

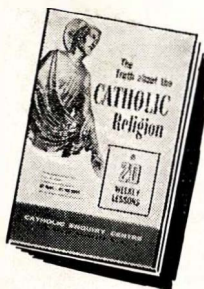
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