

A Priest Forever

Reflections on the Sacrament of Holy Orders

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Foreword and English translation by
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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
You Are a Priest Forever	3
Married Priests	11
Women Priests?	32
Conclusion	40

Foreword

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

I daily thank God that the Spirit brought Father Libardo Rocha to Central Texas in 2015. A font of wisdom and experience, with more than 20 years of presbyteral ministry within the Roman Catholic Church—many years as a professor of dogmatic theology at a pontifical university in Rome and as a postulator for the causes of saints at the Vatican—Father Libardo draws life-giving waters from a deep spiritual and theological well, always improving the lives of those whom he teaches and to whom he preaches. Father Libardo is a veritable gift to the people he serves, and, just as importantly, he is a gift to Inclusive Catholicism!

Sadly, as Father Libardo points out in this work, some of our brothers of the Roman Catholic Church hurl arrows at him, at me, and at the truly remarkable servants of God who comprise the Inclusive Catholic tradition. To be certain, we have plenty of good, upright and honorable brother priests in the Roman Church. This book is not written in response to them. It is written in response to the ignorant, to those who don't know what they don't know, and who thus spread lies and mistruths about the beautiful manifestation of the Spirit that is Inclusive Catholicism.

A single example suffices. In 2011, after more than ten years of ministry as a priest, I left the Roman Catholic Church. The bishop who ordained me had greatly empowered me, and I now found myself in an unhappy marriage with his successor, appointed by the archconservative Papa Ratzinger. Things came to a head when we were embroiled in a public spat, with the bishop choosing to side with monied conservatives over the immigrant community, all due to his myopic views on women's reproductive health. After I had "excommunicated" myself, to use his words, he shared a communication with all parishes in the diocese stating that my sacraments "might be gravely illicit or invalid." Any seminarian with only a semester of studies immediately recognizes that this bishop either does not understand the basics of sacramental theology or was purposefully choosing to disingenuously mislead the People of God. As Father Libardo so eloquently points out in this work, the Church has long possessed the belief that the sacrament of Holy Orders leaves an "indelible mark" on the recipient, causing him, her or them to be "a priest forever" (Ps. 110:4).

We love our brothers of the Roman Church—and we recognize their blindness in attacking the apostolic succession and sacraments of the Inclusive Catholic tradition: By disparaging the apostolic succession of Inclusive Catholic bishops, they make a mockery of their own apostolic succession, which derives from exactly the same source, and, by assaulting our priesthood and/or our sacraments, they impale their own, since, in many cases, we were ordained by the same Roman Catholic bishops. Worse, by imitating the Pharisees (Mt. 23:13), they detract from the credibility of Jesus' message of love, peace and unity they preach!

Presuming that such clergy do possess a rudimentary understanding of sacramental theology, we trust that a future work will explore the psychology which underlies this dynamic by Roman Catholic priests and bishops. We teach our elementary and middle school students not to bully others, and we create schools that are “no place for hate,” while the leaders of contemporary churches continue to crucify others.

You can imagine my joy at reading Father Libardo's words: No group of persons has been crucified for a longer time than our sisters who, though they enjoyed a place in Jesus' “discipleship of equals” (Gal. 3:28) and greater esteem in the early Church, have been definitively excluded from ordained ministry for nearly three quarters of our history as a Church. As Inclusive Catholics, history and the gospel are on our side, and the “boys club” that has excluded women and married priests—two topics explored here by Father Libardo—will be harshly judged by history for its sexism, racism and ironic homophobia.

As followers of Jesus, we are called from darkness and lies, to light and truth (1Pet. 2:9). We are called to leave behind the ancient heresy of Gnosticism—that we, as individuals, possess a personal “truth” that supersedes *the* Truth. We are called not only to “talk the talk,” but to “walk the walk” and to practice Jesus' gospel of love and forgiveness.

Let us join together in thanking God for our well-formed, mature, knowledgeable brother priests of the Roman Church, who see us as true collaborators in the Lord's vineyard—and who see a path to the ordination of women and of married persons. May we take advantage of this “pearl of great price” (Mt. 13:45-46) by Father Libardo to educate ourselves and those “shepherds” (Mt. 7:15) who mislead and scatter the People of God, poisoning their minds and hearts, and detracting from Jesus' vision of unity (Jn. 17:21).

I conclude with an invitation: If you have any questions about this work, please invite Father Libardo and/or me to coffee or dinner. Better yet, invite along your favorite Roman Catholic priest or bishop as well!

You Are a Priest Forever

The Independent Catholic Church in Central Texas has two columns. The first is Holy Family Catholic Church, whose pastor is Father Jayme Mathias. I consider it a very solid pillar, worth taking into account, since, from a pastoral perspective, it is some ten years old. The second column is Saint Jude Catholic Church, where I serve as pastor. It was founded more recently, and, in pastoral terms, we might refer to it as a leaner column now growing in visibility and strength. In Central Texas, these two columns represent the Independent Catholic Church and offer another valid option for the diverse pastoral needs of our brothers and sisters who thirst for sacraments and spiritual guidance.

We note an initial problem: The priests of these two churches are rejected by some brother priests of other Catholic churches, who fail to take into account the fact that they are truly brothers. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, they were clothed with the same priestly powers, yet some priests sow doubts in the hearts of simple, humble people about the pastoral work, efficacy and liceity of the sacraments celebrated by these priests.

This situation causes me think of the first community of the apostles, when they began their ministry. They also make me think of the words of Gamaliel, the great rabbi, the son of Simon and the grandson of another great rabbi, Hillel. St. Paul wrote of him:

“Brothers and fathers [sic], listen now to my defense.” When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.” (Acts 22:1-3)

There is another biblical passage where Gamaliel himself speaks, reminding us of the difficult situation that the priests of these two Catholic churches sometimes experience, feeling persecuted and discriminated against by their brother priests, merely for the fact that they are not part of the Roman Catholic Church.

“Therefore, in the present case, I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God!” (Acts 5:38-39).

Many of our brothers of the Roman Catholic Church are unfamiliar with the phrase “Independent Catholic Church.” They don’t know what it is, and they create confusion for those who go to these churches.

Another books remains to be written, to make known this other face of the Catholic Church, which is one, holy and catholic, despite its lack of dependence on Rome.

The need has arisen for us to publish literature to help people to understand the Independent Catholic Church and to recognize the validity of its sacraments. Just as there exist the Coptic, Orthodox, Maronite, Melkite, Ethiopian, Byzantine, Armenian, Syriac, Syro-Malankar, Chaldean, Syro-Malabar, Anglican and Episcopalian churches, among others, there also exists the Independent Catholic Church. All of these churches lead to salvation, through the valid sacraments they celebrate, and the same is true of the Independent Catholic Church. Its ministers are validly ordained and are part of the Mystical Body of Christ, as Saint Paul writes:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit, so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one

part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1Cor. 12:12-32)

This twelfth chapter of the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians is worth reading and rereading. It contains the essence of Pauline theology on the theme of unity in diversity.

If the Church is a single body, made up of many members, as Saint Paul so masterfully explains in this letter, one might ask how a church can be “independent,” since the parts of the body cannot live independent of it. Our “independence” is not from the Mystical Body of Christ, but from the Roman Catholic Church. The Independent Catholic Church does not depend on Rome, and is not under Rome’s jurisdiction. “Independent” is a pedagogical word, indicating that we are Catholics who are not under the authority of Rome. Like other Catholic churches that are independent of Rome, we have our own bishops who govern and sanctify the people of God in Christ.

Why do we refer to Rome? We all know that the Roman Catholic Church enjoys preeminence in Latin America. It is larger, and “independent” clarifies a matter of jurisdiction. Like the Roman Catholic Church, though, the Independent Catholic Church another member of the Mystical Body of Christ!

Let us also take into account the famous Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, the symbol of our Christian faith, promulgated at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and expanded at the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) to state that the Church is: “one, holy [and] catholic.” Many members are part of the same body, which is the same Mystical Body of Christ.

Several priests of the Independent Catholic Church belonged to the Roman Catholic Church and were validly and licitly ordained by bishops of that church. If a priest of the Roman Catholic Church joins the Independent Catholic Church, he remains a priest for all intents and purposes.

With regard to the criticisms and attacks suffered by the priests of the Independent Catholic Church, we also note that the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was convened in Trent, a city in northern Italy, as a response

to the Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther, to clarify various doctrinal matters. Among other things, the Council of Trent established the seven sacraments of the Holy Mother Church. (Canon VI, January 13, 1547). The *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, published in 1992, affirms the same: that there are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders.

Let us examine the most enriching text in this respect:

The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. This article will discuss what is common to the Church's seven sacraments from a doctrinal point of view. What is common to them in terms of their celebration will be presented in the second chapter, and what is distinctive about each will be the topic of the Section Two. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1113)

In this matter, Roman Catholics and Independent Catholics agree. The Independent Catholic Church also maintains unaltered the matter and form of the seven sacraments. But we go further.

"Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions, and to the consensus...of the Fathers [sic]," we profess that "the sacraments of the new law were . . . all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Council of Trent [1547] DS 1600-1601; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1114)

The Independent Catholic Church also agrees on this.

Now we address sacramental character. Among the seven sacraments, the Catholic Church teaches that there are three that imprint "character": Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. What does the sacramental character mean? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "It is an indelible spiritual mark impressed by these three sacraments."

The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental character or "seal" by which the Christian shares in Christ's priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible. It remains forever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a

promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church. Therefore these sacraments can never be repeated. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1121)

Note that these sacraments can never be repeated. What a shame that some priests of the Roman Catholic Church do not accept the Baptism celebrated by priests of the Independent Catholic Church, but they re-baptize these children. This mistake is always either the fruit of ignorance or of bad faith!

Let us enrich our understanding of sacramental character. Alexander of Hales (1185-1245), considered the monarch of scholastic theologians at the beginning of the 13th century, wrote: "Character is an ontological reality that intrinsically adheres to the soul and marks forever those who are part of the flock of Christ, configures them in Christ, and disposes them to receive grace." Also, we cannot ignore the great Italian saint and Roman Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), who noted that the sacramental character is "like a certain power that disposes the baptized to receive the other sacraments, and conforms the soul to the priesthood of Christ. This teaching makes evident the Christological significance of character for Baptism, for Confirmation, and for Holy Orders" (*Sententiis IV 4,1; Summa theologicae III, 63*).

This jewel in the crown of the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* and of some theologians of the same church allows the priests of the Independent Catholic Church to confect the sacraments of the Church without there the slightest doubt of the validity of what are they celebrating. Furthermore, if a priest has left the Roman Catholic Church for any reason and has joined any other catholic church, the sacraments he celebrates *are* valid – because he is still a priest! The sacrament of Holy Orders has an indelible character, a seal that cannot be erased, even with excommunication.

Regarding the subject of the sacramental character, an anecdote exists of the famous Girolamo Maria Francisco Mateo Savonarola (1452-1498), the theologian and Dominican friar who organizing the famous "bonfires of vanities" in the Renaissance Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici and his family. Savonarola preached against luxury, wealth, the depravity of the powerful, and the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. Because of his strong criticism of Pope Alexander VI, he was excommunicated on May 13, 1497, imprisoned, and condemned to be burned at the stake in the Florence town square by a tribunal of the Inquisition. After Savonarola was sentenced to death on May 22, 1498, before being executed as a heretic, the inquisitor stripped him of his ecclesiastical

titles. Savonarola responded: “You can strip me of my Dominican habit, but not my priesthood, for I am a priest for all eternity – and not even the pope can cancel the sacrament of Holy Orders that I received!” Savonarola knew that the Sacrament of Holy Orders imprints “character,” an indelible character that no one, including any ecclesiastical authority, can erase or cancel.

The Lord says to my lord:

“Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of your enemies!”

Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.

Arrayed in holy splendor,

your young men will come to you

like dew from the morning’s womb.

The Lord has sworn and will not reverse:

“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

(Ps. 110)

We have talked about the promulgation of the seven sacraments and about character, but there is something else that we cannot ignore and that we must highlight: the effects or “fruits” that the sacraments generate. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1130) states:

The Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord “until he comes,” when God will be “everything to everyone” (1Cor. 11:26 & 15:28) Since the apostolic age, the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit’s groaning in the Church: *Marana tha!* (1Cor. 16:22). The liturgy thus shares in Jesus’ desire: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you...until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 22:15). In the sacraments of Christ, the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and even now shares in everlasting life, while “awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:13). The “Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come . . . Come, Lord Jesus!’” (Rev. 22:17 & 20). St. Thomas sums up the various aspects of sacramental signs: *“Unde sacramentum est signum rememorative eius quod praecessit, scilicet passionis Christi; et demonstrative eius quod in nobis per Christi passionem, scilicet gratie; et prognosticum, id est, praenuntiativum futurae*

gloriae (Therefore a sacrament is a sign that commemorates what precedes it: Christ's Passion; demonstrates what is accomplished in us through Christ's Passion: grace; and prefigures what that Passion pledges to us: future glory)." (*Summa theologiae* III,60,3).

Some people become nervous when the validity of the sacraments performed by the priests of the Independent Catholic Church is questioned. For this reason, we have journeyed from the Council of Trent to the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, explaining what character means and noting that the sacraments of any validly-ordained priest anywhere in the world are valid. Beyond the validity of the sacraments, though, we should also be concerned with the "fruits" or effects of the sacraments. Almost no one questions this issue, either due to lack of knowledge or due to a lack of interest in the soteriological dimension of the sacraments. We turn again to that precious treasure, the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, to give the final touch to this argument.

1131. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites, by which the sacraments are celebrated, signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.

1132. The Church celebrates the sacraments as a priestly community structured by the baptismal priesthood and the priesthood of ordained ministers.

1133. The Holy Spirit prepares the faithful for the sacraments by the Word of God and the faith which welcomes that Word in well-disposed hearts. Thus, the sacraments strengthen faith and express it.

1134. The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church, on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness.

It would be a worthy exercise for our brother priests of the Roman Catholic Church to read the previous documents, and to read and reread the priceless hymn of Saint Paul that expands on his teaching of respect, love and charity towards others, which I invite us to meditate on together:

If I speak in human or angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all that I possess to the poor and give over my body to difficulties, that I may boast, but I do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part will disappear. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put the ways of my childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love.” (1Cor. 13)

Now let us turn our attention to other thorny issues that cannot go unnoticed in this little essay, since to do so would be to leave this work without a limb. As the scriptures tell us: “Some of the Pharisees who were among the people said to Jesus: ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples.’ He replied: ‘I tell you that, if they are silent, the stones will cry out’” (Lk. 19:29-40).

Married Priests

In the history of the Church, there is a theme that has caused rivers of ink to flow from theologians of the different disciplines within theology. It is the theme of the “celibacy” of the priests of the Roman Catholic Church.

I will limit myself here to a few, small brushstrokes, since the subject of celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church is very extensive, and I do plan to write another work on this very fascinating subject. Here, I clarify that, in the Independent Catholic Church, priests can be married and have families.

We begin with a biblical text: “When Jesus arrived at Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law in bed with a fever. Jesus touched her hand, and her fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him” (Mt. 8:14-15). This biblical text clearly states that Peter was married: Peter had a mother-in-law, and, of course, anyone with a mother-in-law has a spouse! It doesn’t take a Ph.D. in biblical hermeneutics to figure that out. Furthermore, the fact that Peter was married was not an impediment for Jesus to choose Peter as one of his disciples.

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Mt. 10:1-4)

Furthermore, the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church has always taught that Peter was the first “pope” of the Catholic Church, based on this famous text:

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt. 16:16-19).

It is worth noting that this famous text, which appears in only one gospel, is not recognized by many serious theologians inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church. If Jesus considered the founding of a church to be so important, the other evangelists would not have ignored this story! This issue is worthy of a separate study. Until then, the debate remains open. Let's remain, though, with the figure of Peter.

I reiterate: Peter's marriage was no impediment for Jesus to choose him and make him, in the minds of some Roman Catholics, the visible head of his Church. What is known of the other disciples? We have no evidence that other apostles were married, nor do we have evidence that Paul or Jesus were married.

The important thing to note here is that Jesus chose, as his most important disciple, a married man. Why couldn't Peter be married and have a family and, at the same time, be a priest chosen by God to feed God's sheep and to lead them to salvation?

Celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church is not of divine origin. Instead, it is of a disciplinary nature. The sacred scriptures do not suggest that Jesus explicitly asked his disciples to be celibate. Only indirectly did Jesus recommend the practice of celibacy, when he spoke of "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven":

The disciples said to him, "If this is the case between a husband and wife, it seems better not to marry." Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." (Mt. 19:10-12)

Much has been said and written about this text, so it would not be fair for me not to say anything here. Jesus continues by noting that there were some people at that time who were unable to receive his words and who would not be able to be "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was not inventing a concept of celibacy. Rather, he was part of a long tradition that prized celibacy: from the Hebrew scriptures, with some prophets who remained celibate, to Greek philosophers and Buddhist monks, who practiced celibacy long before Jesus.

Another detail worth highlighting in this text is the fact that Jesus explains in another translation: "There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom

of heaven” (Mt. 19:12). It is possible that Jesus was referring here to the Essenes, a sect of Jews who maintained that marriage was not suitable for their condition, since they lived in community. Like monks, they separated themselves from the world, to live a life of contemplation and dedication to the study of the Torah. In the Hebrew culture, women could not be part of established groups. Further, even before the First Jewish War (66-73 A.D.) and the famous rebellion of the Maccabees (175 B.C.), the anthropological and sociological environment of the Jewish people was influenced by Greek culture, philosophy and anthropology, leading them to believe that the body was a prison for the soul.

The Essenes were observant Jews who withdrew from the city to live in the desert, where they awaited the Messiah. They also observed celibacy. The famous philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. to 45 A.D.) wrote about the Essenes, noting the influence of Greek culture on the Jewish people. This jewel is worth reading, despite its extremely negative characterization of women.

Furthermore, [the Essenes] avoid marriage because they clearly understand that it would be the one and only reason for the breakdown of their brotherhood. They also observe the truly exceptional practice of continence. For this reason, no Essene takes a wife, for a woman is a selfish creature, extraordinarily jealous, cunning in straining a man’s character and dominating it with the persistent action of his charms. Indeed, she uses flattering words and other arts as if she were acting on stage, and when she has bewitched the eyes and ears, and these, as subordinate faculties, are deceived, the main faculty is dominated, that is, the spirit. If children are born, they are proud and daring in their language. Whereas she once spoke with false composure, she now speaks with defiant insolence and shamelessly insists on hostile claims to the brotherhood. Then the man, whether he has submitted to the loving charms of the woman or concerned about his instinct to care for her children, is no longer the same in his treatment of other men. Little by little, he becomes another man. He is not free, but is a slave. (From the *Apologia pro judaeis*, in Eusebio of Caesarea’s *Preparatio evangelica*).

Though he was a philosopher of great stature, with quite an argument in defense of celibacy, Philo’s offense toward the dignity of women is considerable, and, had I lived in that era, I would have gotten married simply to prove him wrong!

Along the same lines, highly influenced by Greek philosophy, years later we find the famous theologian and saint of the Catholic Church, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), painting sexuality with the horns and tail of a demon.

We note one other feature of the famous text of “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven”: Jesus does not mandate this for his disciples. Instead, he is extremely respectful and does not force this on anyone.

This biblical text has resulted in very bad interpretations. Origen famously became a eunuch, and Tertullian tells us about Democritus, who poked out his eyes because he could not look at women without coveting them. These anecdotes express the misinterpretations of some in their desire to attain celibacy. Not much has changed since those times.

This scriptural text is important because it provides the spiritual justification by which the Roman Catholic Church has defended celibacy throughout history, all the while knowing that celibacy was not part of the Church from the beginning.

What is clerical celibacy? It is the condition of those who, by choice, do not marry. This “choice,” the Roman Catholic Church says, is made in exchange for a total dedication to religious service, through priestly ordination. The cleric renounces an active sexual life, to channel all his [sic] energy and his entire person into his relationship with God.

Originally, the first Catholic priests were *not* celibate. Throughout history and for many reasons that are more disciplinary in nature, celibacy came to be highly valued by the Roman Catholic Church. The precedence for it was set in the 3rd and 4th centuries, with the celibate practices of monasticism: Like the Essenes, the monks who retired to the desert opted for celibacy in order to dedicate themselves completely to prayer and contemplation.

The argument for celibacy gained strength in the 11th century, when popes like Leo IX and Gregory VII feared for the moral degradation of their clergy. Celibacy was instituted by the two Lateran Councils (1123 and 1139 A.D.), which decreed that “clerics cannot marry or associate with concubines.” Celibacy was further defended at another Lateran Council (1215) and at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Edison Veiga of the British Broadcasting Corporation has written, “Many say that, starting in the 10th century, the Church was enriched by celibacy, since the Church did not have to share fiefdoms with the children of priests.” Much truth is found in this ironic phrase.

In the 20th century, the issue of clerical celibacy resurfaced with Pope Pius XII, who defended celibacy in the encyclical *Sacra virginitas* (1954).

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Pope Paul VI also released a document, *De priestio ministeriali*, evidently defending celibacy.

In addition, so that no one might accuse us of being impartial or of hiding or ignoring highly-valuable arguments of the Roman Catholic Church in defense of clerical celibacy, I share here the full 2007 reflection by Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, which is exceptional, but is not without criticism.

The Radical Importance of the Graced Gift of Priestly Celibacy

Reflection by Cardinal Cláudio Hummes
on the 40th anniversary of the encyclical
Sacerdotalis caelibatus of Pope Pablo VI

At the beginning of the 40th anniversary of the publication of the encyclical *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* of His Holiness Paul VI, the Congregation for the Clergy deems it opportune to recall the magisterial teaching of this important papal document.

Indeed, priestly celibacy is Christ's precious gift to his Church, a gift one needs to meditate on anew and to strengthen, especially in today's profoundly secularized world.

Scholars note that the origins of priestly celibacy date back to apostolic times. Father Ignace de la Potterie writes: "Scholars generally agree that the obligation of celibacy, or at least of continence, became canon law from the fourth century onwards...." However, it is important to observe that the legislators of the fourth and fifth centuries affirmed that this canonical enactment was based on an apostolic tradition.

"The Council of Carthage (390), for instance, said: 'It was fitting that those who were at the service of the divine sacraments be perfectly continent (*continentes esse in omnibus*), so that, what the Apostles taught and antiquity itself maintained, we, too, may observe'" (*Il fondamento biblico del celibato sacerdotale*, in *Solo per amore. Riflessioni sul celibato sacerdotale*, Cinisello Balsamo, 1993, pp. 14-15).

In the same way, A.M. Stickler mentions biblical arguments of apostolic inspiration that advocate celibacy (in Ch. Cochini, *Origines apostoliques du Célibat sacerdotal*, Preface, p. 6).

Historical development

The Church's solemn Magisterium has never ceased to reaffirm the measures regulating ecclesiastical celibacy. The Synod of Elvira (300-303?) prescribed in can. 27: "A bishop, like any other cleric, should have with him either only one [religious] sister or consecrated virgin; it is established that in no way should he have an extraneous woman"; in can. 33: "The following overall prohibition for bishops, presbyters and deacons and for all clerics who exercise a ministry has been decided: they must abstain from relations with their wives and must not beget children; those who do are to be removed from the clerical state" (Cf. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. P. Hünermann., Bologna, 1995, nn. 118-119, p. 61).

Pope Saint Siricius (384-399), in his letter to Bishop Himerius of Tarragona dated February 10, 385, affirmed: "The Lord Jesus...wished the figure of the Church, whose Bridegroom he is, to radiate with the splendor of chastity....All of us, as priests, are bound by the indissoluble law of these measures...so that, from the day of our ordination, we may devote our hearts and our bodies to moderation and modesty, to please the Lord our God in the daily sacrifices we offer to him" (*Ibid.*, op. cit., n. 185, p. 103).

At the First Lateran Ecumenical Council of 1123, we read from canon 3: "We absolutely forbid priests, deacons or subdeacons to cohabit with concubines or wives and to cohabit with women other than those whom the Council of Nicaea (325) permitted to live in the household" (Cf. *ibid.*, op. cit., n. 711, p. 405).

So too, at the 24th session of the Council of Trent, the absolute impossibility of contracting marriage for clerics bound by Sacred Orders or for male religious who had solemnly professed chastity was reasserted; and with it, the nullity of marriage itself was declared, together with the duty to ask God, with an upright intention, for the gift of chastity (*Ibid.*, op. cit., n. 1809, p. 739).

In more recent times, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council reaffirmed in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis* (no. 16), the close connection between celibacy and the Kingdom of God. It saw in the

former a sign that radiantly proclaims the latter, the beginning of a new life to whose service the minister of the Church is consecrated.

With the encyclical *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* of June 24, 1967, Paul VI kept a promise he had made to the Council Fathers two years earlier. In it, he examined the objections raised concerning the discipline of celibacy. Subsequently, by placing emphasis on their Christological foundation and appealing to history and to what we learn from the first-century documents about the origins of celibacy and continence, he fully confirmed their value.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops, both in the pre-synodal program *Ministerium presbyterorum* (February 15) and in the final document *Ultimis temporibus* (November 30), affirmed the need to preserve celibacy in the Latin Church, shedding light on its foundations, the convergence of motives and the conditions that encouraged it (*Enchiridion* of the Synod of Bishops, 1, 1965-1988 ed. General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, Bologna, 2005, nn. 755-855; 1068-1114; especially nn. 1100-1105).

The new Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church in 1983 reasserted the age-old tradition: "Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and therefore are obliged to observe celibacy, which is a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind" (Code of Canon Law, can. 277, 1).

Along the same lines, the 1990 Synod resulted in the Apostolic Exhortation of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, in which the Pontiff presented celibacy as a radical Gospel requirement that especially favors the style of spousal life and springs from the priest's configuration to Jesus Christ through the Sacrament of Orders (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 25 March 1992, n. 44).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1992 and which gathers the firstfruits of the great event of the Second Vatican Council, reaffirms the same doctrine: "All the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, with the exception of permanent deacons, are normally chosen from among men

[sic] of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain celibate ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1579).

At the most recent Synod on the Eucharist itself, according to the preliminary unofficial draft of its final *propositiones* authorized by Pope Benedict XVI, in *propositio* no. 11, “the importance of the priceless gift of ecclesiastical celibacy in the practices of the Latin Church is recognized” despite the scarcity of clergy in certain parts of the world as well as the “Eucharistic hunger” of the People of God. With the reference to the Magisterium, particularly that of the Second Vatican Council and of the most recent Pontiffs, the Fathers asked that the reasons for the relationship between celibacy and priestly ordination be properly described, with full respect for the tradition of the Eastern Churches. Some of them referred to the matter of the *viri probabi*, but the hypothesis was judged to be a way not to be taken.

Only recently, on November 16, 2006, Pope Benedict presided at one of the regular meetings held in the apostolic palace of the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. On that occasion, the value of the choice of priestly celibacy in accordance with the unbroken Catholic tradition was reasserted and the need for the sound human and Christian formation of seminarians and ordained priests was reaffirmed.

Reasons for Holy Celibacy

In his encyclical *Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, Paul VI begins by presenting the situation of priestly celibacy at that time from the viewpoint of the appreciation of it and of the objections to it. His first words are crucial and ever timely: “Priestly celibacy has been guarded by the Church for centuries as a brilliant jewel, and retains its value undiminished even in our time when the outlook of men [sic] and the state of the world have undergone such profound changes” (Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 1).

Paul VI revealed what he himself meditated upon, questioning himself on the subject in order to be able to respond to the objections. He concluded: “Hence, we consider that the present law of holy celibacy should today continue to be 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 and of the Church; 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 distinguish his state of life both among the faithful and in the world at large" (*Ibid.*, n. 14).

"It is true," the Pope added, "that virginity, as the Second Vatican Council declared, is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the early Church and the tradition of the Eastern Churches (cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 16). 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" (*Ibid.*, n. 17).

It is true. Celibacy is a gift that Christ offers to men [sic] called to the priesthood. This gift must be accepted with love, joy and gratitude. Thus, it will become a source of happiness and holiness.

Paul VI gave three reasons for sacred celibacy: its Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological significance.

Let us start with its Christological significance.

Christ is newness. He brings about a new creation. His priesthood is new. He renews all things. Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son of the Father sent into the world, "became man in order that humanity which was subject to sin and death might be reborn, and through this new birth might enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Being entirely consecrated to the will of the Father, Jesus brought forth this new creation by means of his Paschal Mystery; thus, he introduced into time and into the world a new form of life which is sublime and divine and which radically transforms the human condition" (*Ibid.*, n. 19).

Natural marriage itself, blessed by God since creation but damaged by sin, was renewed by Christ, who "has raised it to the dignity of a sacrament and of a mysterious symbol of his own union with the Church.... But Christ, 'Mediator of a more excellent covenant' (cf. 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; thus, he manifests in a clearer and more complete way

the profoundly transforming reality of the New Testament" (*Ibid.*, n. 20)

This newness, this new process, is life in virginity, which Jesus himself lived in harmony with his role as 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 [sic]" (*Ibid.*, n. 21). The service of God and men [sic] means that total love without reserve which distinguished Jesus' life among us: virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of God!

Now Christ, by calling his priests to be ministers of salvation, that is, of the new creation, calls them to be and to live in newness of life, united and similar to him in the most perfect way possible. From this derives the gift of sacred celibacy as the fullest configuration with the Lord Jesus and a prophecy of the new creation. He called his Apostles "friends." He called them to follow him very closely in everything, even to the Cross. And the Cross brought them to the Resurrection, to the new creation's completion.

We know, therefore, that following him with faithfulness in virginity, which includes sacrifice, will lead us to happiness. God does not call anyone to unhappiness; he calls us all to happiness. Happiness, however, always goes hand in hand with faithfulness. The late Pope John Paul II said this to the married couples whom he met at the Second World Meeting of Families in Rio de Janeiro.

Thus, the theme of the eschatological meaning of celibacy is revealed as a sign and a prophecy of the new creation, in other words, of the definitive Kingdom of God in the parousia, when we will all be raised from the dead.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, "She [the Church] is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 5). Virginity, lived for love of the Kingdom of God, is a special sign of these "final times," because the Lord announced that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (*Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 34).

In a world like ours, a world of entertainment and superficial pleasures, captivated by earthly things and

especially by the progress of science and technology - let us remember the biological sciences and biotechnology -, the proclamation of an afterlife, of a future world, a parousia, as a definitive event of a new creation is crucial and at the same time free from the ambiguity of aporia, of din, suffering and contradictions with regard to the true good and the new, profound knowledge that human progress brings with it.

Finally, the ecclesiological meaning of celibacy leads us more directly to the priest's pastoral activity.

The encyclical *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* affirms: "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" (*Ibid.*, n. 26).

Like Christ and in Christ, the priest mystically weds the Church and loves the Church with an exclusive love. Thus, dedicating himself totally to the affairs of Christ and of his Mystical Body, the priest enjoys ample spiritual freedom to put himself at the loving and total service of all people without distinction.

"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" (*Ibid.*, n. 30).

The encyclical likewise adds that celibacy makes it easier for the priest to devote himself to listening to the Word of God and to prayer, and prepares him to offer upon the altar the whole of his life, marked by sacrifice (Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 27-29).

Value of Chastity, Celibacy

Even before it is a canonical disposition, celibacy is God's gift to his Church. It is an issue bound to the complete gift of self to the Lord.

In the distinction between the age-old discipline of celibacy and the religious experience of consecration and the pronouncement of vows, it is beyond doubt that there is no other possible interpretation or justification of ecclesiastical celibacy than unreserved dedication to the Lord in a relationship that must also be exclusive from the emotional viewpoint. This presupposes a strong personal and

communal relationship with Christ, who transforms the hearts of his disciples.

The option for celibacy of the Latin Rite Catholic Church has developed since apostolic times precisely in line with the priest's relationship with his Lord, moved by the inspiring question, "Do you love me more than these?" (Jn. 21:15), which the Risen Jesus addressed to Peter.

The Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological reasons for celibacy, all rooted in the special communion with Christ to which priests are called, can therefore be expressed in various ways, according to what is authoritatively stated in *Sacerdotalis caelibatus*.

Celibacy is first and foremost a "symbol of and stimulus to charity" (*Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 24). Charity is the supreme criterion for judging Christian life in all its aspects; celibacy is a path of love, even if, as the Gospel according to Matthew says, Jesus himself states that not all are able to understand this reality: "Not all men [sic] can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:11).

This charity develops in the classical, twofold aspect of love for God and for others: "By preserving virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, priests are consecrated in a new and excellent way to Christ. They more readily cling to him with undivided heart" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 16). St Paul, in the passage alluded to here, presents celibacy and virginity as the way "to please God" without divided interests (Cf. 1Cor. 7:32-33): in other words, a "way of love" which certainly presupposes a special vocation; in this sense it is a charism and in itself excellent for both Christians and priests.

Through pastoral charity, radical love for God becomes love for one's brethren. In *Presbyterorum ordinis* we read that priests "dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and of men [sic]. They are less encumbered in their service of his Kingdom and of the task of heavenly regeneration. In this way they become better fitted for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 16).

Common experience confirms that it is easier for those who, apart from Christ, are not bound by other affections,

however legitimate and holy they may be, to give their heart to their brethren fully and without reserve.

Celibacy is the example that Christ himself left us. He wanted to be celibate. The Encyclical explains further: "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 [sic]. This deep connection between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and mission of the Mediator and the Eternal Priest; this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and blood" (*Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 21).

Jesus Christ's historical existence is the most visible sign that chastity voluntarily embraced for God's sake is a solidly founded vocation, both at the Christian level and at that of common human logic.

If ordinary Christian life cannot legitimately claim to be such if it excludes the dimension of the Cross, how much more incomprehensible would priestly life be were the perspective of the Crucified One to be put aside. Suffering, sometimes weariness and boredom and even setbacks have to be dealt with in a priest's life which, however, is not ultimately determined by them. In choosing to follow Christ, one learns from the very outset to go with him to Calvary, mindful that taking up one's cross is the element that qualifies the radical nature of the sequela.

Lastly, as previously stated, celibacy is an eschatological sign. In the Church, from this moment, the future Kingdom is present. She not only proclaims it but brings it about through the sacraments, contributing to the "new creation" until her glory is fully manifested.

While the Sacrament of Marriage roots the Church in the present, immersing her totally in the earthly realm which can thus become a possible place for sanctification, celibacy refers immediately to the future, to that full perfection of the created world that will be brought to complete fulfilment only at the end of time.

Being Faithful to Celibacy

The 2,000-year-old wisdom of the Church, an expert in humanity, has in the course of time constantly determined several fundamental and indispensable elements to foster her children's fidelity to the supernatural charism of celibacy.

Among them, also in the recent Magisterium, the importance of spiritual formation for the priest, who is called to be "a witness of the Absolute", stands out. *Pastores dabo vobis* states: "In preparing for the priesthood we learn how to respond from the heart to Christ's basic question: 'Do you love me?' For the future priest the answer can only mean total self-giving" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 42).

In this regard, the years of formation are absolutely fundamental, both those distant years lived in the family and especially the more recent years spent at the seminary. At this true school of love, like the apostolic community, young seminarians cluster round Jesus, awaiting the gift of his Spirit for their mission.

"The relation of the priest to Jesus Christ, and in him to his Church, is found in the very being of the priest by virtue of his sacramental consecration/anointing and in his activity, that is, in his mission or ministry" (*Ibid.*, n. 16).

The priesthood is no more than "living intimately united' to Jesus Christ" (*Ibid.*, n. 46) in a relationship of intimate communion, described "in terms of friendship" (*Ibid.*). The priest's life is basically that form of existence which would be inconceivable without Christ. Precisely in this lies the power of his witness: virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of God is a real element, it exists because Christ, who makes it possible, exists.

Love for the Lord is authentic when it endeavors to be total: falling in love with Christ means having a deep knowledge of him, it means a close association with his Person, the identification and assimilation of his thought, and lastly, unreserved acceptance of the radical demands of the Gospel. It is only possible to be witnesses of God through a deep experience of Christ; the whole of a priest's life depends on his relationship with the Lord, the quality of his experience of martyrdom, of his witness.

Only someone who truly has Jesus for his friend and Lord, one who enjoys his communion, can be a witness of the

Absolute. Christ is not only a subject of reflection, of a theological thesis or of a historical memory; he is the Lord who is present, he is alive because he is the Risen One and we live only to the extent that we participate ever more deeply in his life. The entire priestly existence is founded on this explicit faith.

Consequently, the encyclical says: “The priest should apply himself above all else to developing, with all the love grace inspires in him, his close relationship with Christ, and exploring this 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 it were viewed apart from this mystery” (*Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 75).

In addition to formation and love for Christ, an essential element for preserving celibacy is passion for the Kingdom of God, which means the ability to work cheerfully, sparing no effort to make Christ known, loved and followed.

Like the peasant who, having found the precious pearl, sold all he had in order to purchase the field, so those who find Christ and spend their whole lives with him and for him cannot but live by working to enable others to encounter him.

Without this clear perspective, any “missionary urge” is doomed to failure, methodologies are transformed into techniques for maintaining a structure, and even prayers can become techniques for meditation and for contact with the sacred in which both the human “I” and the “you” of God dissolve.

One fundamental and necessary occupation, a requirement and a task, is prayer. Prayer is irreplaceable in Christian life and in the life of priests. Prayer should be given special attention.

The Eucharistic Celebration, the Divine Office, frequent confession, an affectionate relationship with Mary Most Holy, Spiritual Retreats and the daily recitation of the Holy Rosary are some of the spiritual signs of a love which, were it lacking, would risk being replaced by unworthy substitutes such as appearances, ambition, money and sex.

The priest is a man of God because God calls him to be one, and he lives this personal identity in an exclusive belonging to his Lord, also borne out by his choice of celibacy. He is a

man of God because he lives by God and talks to God. With God he discerns and decides in filial obedience on the steps of his own Christian existence.

The more radically a priest is a man of God through a life that is totally theocentric, as the Holy Father stressed in his Address at the Christmas Meeting with the Roman Curia on December 22, 2006, the more effective and fertile his witness will be, and the richer in fruits of conversion his ministry. There is no opposition between fidelity to God and fidelity to man: on the contrary, the former is a prerequisite for the latter.

Conclusion: A Holy Vocation

Pastores dabo vobis, speaking on the priest's vocation to holiness, having underlined the importance of the personal relationship with Christ, expresses another need: the priest, called to the mission of preaching the Good News, sees himself entrusted with it in order to give it to everyone. He is nevertheless called in the first place to accept the Gospel as a gift offered for his life, for himself, and as a saving event that commits him to a holy life.

In this perspective, John Paul II has spoken of the evangelical radicalism that must be a feature of the priest's holiness. It is therefore possible in the evangelical counsels, traditionally proposed by the Church and lived in the various states of consecrated life, to map out the vitally radical journey to which, also and in his own way, the priest is called to be faithful.

Pastores dabo vobis states: "A particularly significant expression of the radicalism of the Gospel is seen in the different 'evangelical counsels' which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount, and among them the intimately related counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty. The priest is called to live these counsels in accordance with those ways and, more specifically, those goals and that basic meaning which derive from and express his own priestly identity" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 27).

And again, taking up the ontological dimension on which evangelical radicalism is founded, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation says: "The Spirit, by consecrating the priest and configuring him to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd, creates a bond which, located in the priest's very being, demands to be assimilated and lived out in a personal, free and conscious

way through an ever richer communion of life and love and an ever broader and more radical sharing in the feelings and attitudes of Jesus Christ. In this bond between the Lord Jesus and the priest, an ontological and psychological bond, a sacramental and moral bond, is the foundation and likewise the power for that 'life according to the Spirit' and that 'radicalism of the Gospel' to which every priest is called today and which is fostered by ongoing formation in its spiritual aspect" (*Ibid.*, n. 72).

The nuptial dimension of ecclesiastical celibacy, proper to this relationship between Christ and the Church which the priest is called to interpret and to live, must enlarge his mind, illumine his life and warm his heart. Celibacy must be a happy sacrifice, a need to live with Christ so that he will pour out into the priest the effusions of his goodness and love that are ineffably full and perfect.

In this regard the words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI are enlightening: "The true foundation of celibacy can be contained in the phrase: *Dominus pars (mea)* - You are my land. It can only be theocentric. It cannot mean being deprived of love, but must mean letting oneself be consumed by passion for God and subsequently, thanks to a more intimate way of being with him, to serve men and women, too. Celibacy must be a witness to faith: faith in God materializes in that form of life which only has meaning if it is based on God. 'Basing one's life on him, renouncing marriage and family, means that I accept and experience God as a reality and that I can therefore bring him to men and women'" (Address at the Audience with the Roman Curia for the Exchange of Christmas Greetings, December 22, 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, January 3, 2007, p. 5).

This document is a jewel in the crown of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. Every priest should read it, and laity, too, but it is not immune to healthy criticism. In the following paragraphs, I share some critiques of Cardinal Hummes' words.

“Canonical provision founded on an apostolic tradition.”

This phrase of the document does not tell the whole truth, because, as I explained previously, Peter was an apostle of Jesus, and he was married. To say that celibacy is part of the apostolic tradition expresses a partial truth at best.

“The Synod of Elvira (300-303?)”

This synod did not insist that priests or consecrated persons remain married, or that they not have children. This synod was clearly dealing with a practical, disciplinary matter.

At the First Lateran Ecumenical Council of 1123, we read from canon 3: “We absolutely forbid priests, deacons or subdeacons to cohabit with concubines or wives and to cohabit with women other than those whom the Council of Nicaea (325) permitted to live in the household” (*ibid.*, n. 360, p. 134).

It seems that, by the time of the First Lateran Council (1123), the problem of priests’ wives and concubines was getting out of hand in the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church for the first time categorically “absolutely” forbade priests to marry. This smells of corruption, and the act of prohibiting was merely disciplinary in nature.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops, both in the pre-synodal program *Ministerium presbyterorum* (15 February) and in the final document *Ultimis temporibus* (30 November), affirmed the need to preserve celibacy in the Latin Church.

We note that this paragraph speaks only of the “Latin Church” – the Roman Catholic Church. This means that Catholic churches that are not of the Latin denomination are *not* called to preserve celibacy, which is an exclusive decision of the “Latin Church.” As a result, no other church (from the long list of churches that we previously shared) maintains or requires celibacy, as evidenced in the Eastern Catholic churches, where celibacy is optional.

Along the same lines, the 1990 Synod resulted in the Apostolic Exhortation of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, in which the Pontiff presented celibacy as a radical Gospel requirement.

With all the respect that Saint John Paul II deserves, this “radical evangelism,” which is how this phrase was expressed in the original work, is not positive. Rather, radical evangelism almost always degenerates into fanaticism, which is worse than heresy. Radicalism gives birth to religious fundamentalism, where people believe they possess an “absolute truth.” It accepts no criticism and leaves room for no reflection—which is what we see with the issue of celibacy in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

Some of them referred to the matter of the *virī probati*, but the hypothesis was judged to be a way not to be taken.

This issue of the *virī probati*, the permanent deacons who are married and who have families, is not new. It also emerged at the Amazonian Synod of 2019. This matter is like the secret of Pulcinella (who could not keep a secret), and Pope Francis was of the mind of approving their ordination to the priesthood. Once more, Pope Francis’ desire was frustrated. Either fear or prudence leads him to not kick this “hornet’s nest,” particularly in Rome. The Amazonian Synod suggested that permanent deacons be ordained priests, and, because it would have trespassed clerical celibacy, the idea was drowned not in the Amazon River, but in Rome.

It is true. Celibacy is a gift that Christ offers to men [sic] called to the priesthood. This gift must be accepted with love, joy and gratitude. Thus, it will become a source of happiness and holiness.

This text wreaks of irony. These words would lead us to believe that Jesus had (or has) “brothers” and “stepbrothers”: The “brothers” are those of the Roman Catholic Church, to whom he has given the “gift” of celibacy, and all the other “stepsiblings” of the Eastern Catholic churches and the Anglican and Episcopal churches have been denied the “gift” of celibacy. The Roman Catholic Church paints the situation as if all other churches have been ungrateful in not accepting the “gift” of celibacy with love, joy and gratitude. This text almost borders on discrimination, suggesting that many holy pastors and priests of other churches who do not observe celibacy and are married and with families have despised

that “gift” of Jesus Christ. As a priest, I cannot imagine the historical Jesus granting a gift to some, and not to others, playing with us like puppets. Jesus, the rabbi who preached love, unity and the kingdom of God, would not have played such Machiavellian games, giving gifts to some and not to others. Furthermore, I do not believe that married priests and priests with families are any less happy or joyful than celibate priests. I don’t imagine that they love God or the Church any less as a result of their marriage or family. This text is entirely out of place today and cannot correspond with the wishes of the true, historical Jesus.

Now Christ, by calling his priests to be ministers of salvation, that is, of the new creation, calls them to be and to live in newness of life, united and similar to him in the most perfect way possible. From this derives the gift of sacred celibacy as the fullest configuration with the Lord Jesus and a prophecy of the new creation. He called his Apostles “friends.” He called them to follow him very closely in everything, even to the Cross. And the Cross brought them to the Resurrection, to the new creation’s completion. We know, therefore, that following him with faithfulness in virginity, which includes sacrifice, will lead us to happiness. God does not call anyone to unhappiness; he calls us all to happiness. Happiness, however, always goes hand in hand with faithfulness. The late Pope John Paul II said this to the married couples whom he met at the Second World Meeting of Families in Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the theme of the eschatological meaning of celibacy is revealed as a sign and a prophecy of the new creation, in other words, of the definitive Kingdom of God in the *parousia*, when we will all be raised from the dead.

We agree that priests are ministers of salvation, but to pretend that celibate priests are united to Christ in a more perfect way is a pure sophistry of distraction. It neglects the anthropology of the book of Genesis: “It is not good for man [sic] to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). If God is never wrong, then we must respect God’s concern that man [sic] not be alone from the beginning of creation throughout eternity. God’s love is above all things, and Marriage and Holy Orders are not exclusive or antagonistic. You can be married and be a holy priest all at the same time, as is demonstrated by the praxis of the life of holy priests of the Eastern churches and holy married pastors of other churches. They sanctify themselves each day in Christ, and they sanctify their spouses and their families.

The option for celibacy of the Latin Rite Catholic Church has developed since apostolic times precisely in line with the priest's relationship with his Lord, moved by the inspiring question, "Do you love me more than these?" which the Risen Jesus addressed to Peter.

Jesus' question of Peter ("Do you love me more than these?") does not indicate a requirement of celibacy! Instead, any correct hermeneutic would suggest that Jesus' question to Peter had everything to do with the three times that Peter denied Jesus. Three times Jesus reminded Peter of his mistake, tasking Peter with lovingly feeding Jesus' sheep. Love is a source of sacrifice, but it is also a source of happiness. Like Peter, we are fragile and weak, but we embrace our mission, with all its consequences, always with care and prudence, knowing that we, too, can fail, but that every day we strengthen ourselves by drinking from the Font of love. Our mission will never fail since, at its core, the One who acts in us is the same God in Christ. Through love, we can affirm with Saint Paul, "It is not I who lives; it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Celibacy is not required for one to love God and consecrate one's self to God. It is not necessary for any mission entrusted to us by Christ, including the consecration of priestly life. Hence, the debate remains open.

Women Priests?

Now we consider the issue that has most divided the Catholic churches as well as the churches that have arisen since the Protestant Reformation: the priesthood of women. Once again, let us turn to that precious resource that expounds millennia of wisdom with respect to faith, doctrine and morals: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Not everything in the *Catechism* is dogma, a proposition that is established as firm and true, as an undeniable principle. The *Catechism* contains assertions that are debatable. Some ideas in the *Catechism* can be changed and even erased with a single stroke, as happened with the 2007 deletion from the *Catechism* of limbo, which the Church declared “only” a theological hypothesis that is best not to be taken into account. Saint Augustine of Hippo, who created that obscurity in his dispute against Pelagius, must be rolling in his grave!

The sacrament of Holy Orders is the only sacrament that is divided into three moments or degrees, as stated in the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*: the episcopate, the priesthood and the diaconate (1536).

1537. The word “order” in Roman antiquity designated an established civil body, especially a governing body. *Ordinatio* means incorporation into an *ordo*. In the Church, there are established bodies which Tradition, not without a basis in Sacred Scripture, has since ancient times called *taxeis* (Greek) or *ordines*. The liturgy speaks of the *ordo episcoporum*, the *ordo presbyterorum*, the *ordo diaconorum*. Other groups also receive the name *ordo*: catechumens, virgins, spouses, widows.

1538. Integration into one of these bodies in the Church was accomplished by a rite called *ordinatio*, a religious and liturgical act which was a consecration, a blessing or a sacrament. Today the word “ordination” is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a man [sic] into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons, and goes beyond a simple election, designation, delegation, or institution by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a “sacred power” (*sacra potestas*) which can come only from Christ himself through his Church. Ordination is also called *consecratio*, for it is a setting apart and an investiture by Christ himself for his Church. The laying on of hands by the bishop, with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination.

1554. The divinely-instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests, and deacons. Catholic doctrine, expressed in the liturgy, the Magisterium, and the constant practice of the Church, recognizes that there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate. The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. For this reason the term *sacerdos*, in current usage, denotes bishops and priests but not deacons. Yet Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of priestly participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called "ordination," that is, by the sacrament of Holy Orders: Let everyone revere the deacons as Jesus Christ, the bishop as the image of the Father, and the presbyters as the senate of God and the assembly of the apostles. For without them one cannot speak of the Church. (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Trallianos*, 3,1.)

To introduce ourselves to the topic of the ministerial priesthood of women, let us begin with the diaconate. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1569) states:

"At a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry." At an ordination to the diaconate, only the bishop lays hands on the candidate, thus signifying the deacon's special attachment to the bishop in the tasks of his *diakonia*. (St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Traditio apostolica*, 8.)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1577) makes clear the subject of said ordinations:

"Only a baptized man (*vir*) validly receives sacred ordination." The Lord Jesus chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible.

In this context, it is important for us to note the theology of Saint Paul, Paul of Tarsus, who was important in the birth and development of the Christian religion. Many researchers are convinced that Paul, and not the historical Jesus, was the true founder of Christianity. Paul certainly contributed to the sect of messianic Judaism, but his beliefs rest upon the foundation of the Jesus of history. Paul was the great strategist among early Christian, a great intellectual, a great connoisseur of sacred scriptures who handled the scriptures very well and used them to defend his principles and beliefs. This is demonstrated by the content of his letters in the New Testament.

To prepare ourselves to reflect on the priesthood of women, we ask ourselves: Did Paul abandon Judaism? Did he always behave like a practicing Jew? How should we understand the messianic Judaism that Paul preached? Did Paul ever deny being a Jew? Finally, was Paul ever a Christian or a Catholic?

In 1960, the famous Protestant theologian and bishop Johannes Munck (1904-1965), a professor at Aarhus University in Denmark, overturned everything that researchers on Pauline theology had previously taught in Catholic universities and seminaries. Munck suggested that Paul never underwent any "conversion." Rather, Paul was always a Jew. He always observed the Jewish religion. Paul was never a Christian, much less a Catholic in the sense that we understand Catholicism today. Paul never denied his religion, and the only thing that he preached with great conviction was that Jesus was the true messiah. Paul was always a true Jew (Acts 22:3).

Another detail that we must note is the fact that, of the 13 letters attributed to Paul, only seven were written by him: 1Thessalonians, Galatians, 1Corinthians, 2Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon and Romans. In Paul's letter to the Romans, we find the word "deaconess" used of a woman: "I recommend Phoebe, our sister deaconess from the church of Cencreae" (Rm. 16.1). This certainly raises the question of how the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* (1577) might assert that only males (*viri*) can validly receive sacred ordination.

Paul's letters were written before the gospels, leading some experts in the field to conclude that Matthew and Luke are eminently Pauline gospels. Even as a "thoroughbred" Jew, Paul was very open to the possibility of granting ministries to all, regardless of sex, and we find that the most misogynistic passages attributed to Paul are contained in those letter attributed to him but not written by him.

The letter to the Romans was written around 56 A.D., when the Church resembled a sect of messianic Judaism. The Church, as we know

it today, would not come into being until the end of the second century. It is a stretch to suggest that the hierarchy possessed by the Roman Catholic Church today is somehow founded in the first community of the Twelve who accompanied the Jesus of history.

We also remember that, in his ministry, the historical Jesus broke the schemes of his time, particularly with respect to women. Women *always* appear at the most important moments in Jesus' life—and he never rejects them! On the contrary, they were part of his entourage.

From the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, the evangelist of Jesus' childhood, a woman appears as the protagonist: the famous Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:5). Then, at the Annunciation, we find Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk. 1:26-38). In the gospel of Luke, the words "woman" and "women" appear 40 times. Luke mentions these words more than any other book in the entire New Testament. By comparison, the Gospel of Mark mentions the words "woman" or "women" only 15 times. In the Gospel of John, we find these words 24 times. In the Gospel of Matthew, which is very close to the Gospel of Luke, the words "woman" or "women" are found 32 times. It is also worth noting that the words "widow" or "widows" appear 12 times in the Gospel of Luke, whereas we don't find this group of women mentioned even half that many times in any other gospel. The evangelist whom tradition names as Luke presents women as the recipients of the news of Jesus' resurrection:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men, in clothes that shined like lightning, stood beside them. In their fright, the women bowed down, with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember what he told you while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and, on the third day, be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. (Lk. 24:1-10)

Although the story is shared by the other three evangelists, Luke adds a detail that merits reflection: “But [the Eleven] did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Lk. 24:11).

From all the above, we can deduce that Luke places a special emphasis on women, in contrast to the other three gospels and in contrast with Roman, Greek and Jewish societies at the time. In Luke, women participate as recipients of the good news of Jesus, almost on par with the apostles. After his resurrection, Jesus doesn’t appear first to the apostles; he appears first to women! Women were not only Jesus’ disciples; they were first-class witnesses of the Lord’s resurrection!

We return to the crucial text of Paul’s Letter to the Romans:

I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a deaconess of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of God’s people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. (Rom. 16:1-2)

Some argue that Phoebe was simply a servant, but did not hold the office of deaconess. In some translations, Paul applies the masculine form of the same term, “deacon,” to Apollos (1Cor. 3:5), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), Epaphras (Col. 1:7) and Timothy (1Tim. 4:6). Interestingly, the translators of the Jerusalem Bible give the title deacon/deaconess only to Phoebe; they refer to Apollos as a “servant,” to Timothy and Titus as “ministers,” and to Epaphras as a “fellow servant.” All these titles are synonymous, but only Phoebe retains the Greek *diakona* (*διάκονα*), thus raising the question of why she alone would enjoy this distinction.

Some argue, “The main reason that the scriptures resist talking about Phoebe as a deacon is because of the prior conviction that the office of deacon is specific to the masculine gender; that is to say, it is restricted to *men*. It may also be due to fear.” In other words, some claim that to open the office of the diaconate to women would be to give women power to rule or exercise authority over men in a way that violates the teaching of “Paul” in the First Letter to Timothy (1Tim. 2:12). This thesis falls apart with the earlier observation that this pastoral letter was not written by Saint Paul. Others note that the ordination of women as deaconesses creates a “slippery slope,” which would lead to women being ordained as priests and consecrated as bishops.

With the very few brushstrokes that I have shared, the theology of the priesthood of women remains in its infancy, “in diapers,” you might say. At the same time that the question results in strong feelings of rejection for many, especially for Roman Catholics and for the Orthodox, the idea

of women priests also generates pleasure and great satisfaction for many theologians, as well as for many sisters and brother of the holy people of God who have no problem with the idea of a woman pastoring their parish. To paraphrase a popular Italian proverb, we have been “looking for Mary in Rome, and we still have not found her.”

While I refer to the writings of Saint Paul and his openness to the ministry of women, it would be a great mistake to limit the theology of the priesthood of women explicitly to the New Testament. The New Testament possesses no definitive model for the organization of the Church, so it could never provide us an outline of the future priesthood of women. The New Testament was written within the context of the sect of messianic Judaism, the daughter of a specific cultural situation. Even if we examine the New Testament with a magnifying glass, we will find there only great silence regarding a description of the priesthood as we understand it today.

The New Testament contains good news, but not long lists of liturgical or canonical norms. When we read it, we are influenced by our conceptions acquired during the course of our theological formation, which caused many of us to believe that various theological concepts were clear from the beginning of the Church. We ignore 20 centuries of Church history to our detriment, and we do ourselves a disservice when we allow misogyny and panic to overtake reason with respect to the issue of the ordination of women.

The Church is the fruit of interpretation, and, while the Holy Spirit continues to lead and guide the Church, there are some elements of the New Testament that have not been revealed. Naively or cunningly, one might suggest that the Holy Spirit has not had anything to say about the ordination of women. I respond that this cannot be true, since so many churches, thanks to God, possess a priesthood of women.

We return to Saint Paul, whose letters were written before the gospels, and who shared various models for the future Church and perhaps even for a future priesthood of women. He writes:

Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under an authority. So, in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:25-28)

In this text, Paul summarizes what it means to be a member of the Church: The full membership of the Church is open to all! Everyone can

receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit who, at Pentecost, was shared with all, men *and* women (Acts 2:1-18), as Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in the Cenacle, along with the apostles. Because women always followed Christ, why should we believe that there were no other women among the group of the apostles, simply because they were omitted in this passage?

Paul continually speaks to us of “charisms,” and we find no indication that these gifts were only intended for men:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Eph. 4:11-12)

Paul understood the diversity of charisms within the Body of Christ, without distinction to gender. In the letters truly written by him, there is no indication that the most honorable functions within the Church must be assigned to men, or that women should be content with lesser or less important functions. Rather, Paul says, to *each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The same thought is found in the First Letter of Peter, where the pseudonymous author tells us: “May each of you place the grace you have received at the service of others, as good administrators of the various graces of God” (1Pet. 4:10). Like Paul, the author here suggests that we must steward well the gifts we have received. Again, there is no indication that God’s grace depends on gender. Men and women alike are perfectly capable of administering God’s holy gifts.

The New Testament does not possess a clear distinction between clergy and laity, so we should also not imagine that it should possess a theology of the priesthood of women. Women, like men, are called to serve in diverse functions, and, yes, some women will be called to lead the Church: as bishops, priests, deacons, evangelists, teachers, apostles. All these New Testament terms are clearly used with flexibility and freedom. Further, in the scriptures, the priesthood is a function. It’s an office, not a state or an order, as it came to be defined over time within the Roman Catholic Church.

As a priest, it is not for me to determine whether any given woman should be ordained. Who am I to judge or grant the *placet*? Many theologians and masterful researchers, though, support this possibility.

The history of the Catholic Church contains documented traces of deaconesses. Canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), convened in Bithynia, in present-day Turkey, reads: “No person shall be ordained

a deaconess, unless she has reached forty years of age. If she dishonors her ministry by contracting a marriage, let her be anathema." Yes, deaconesses appear in the fourth ecumenical council of Christendom in 451 A.D.!

Pope Francis has instituted two commissions to study the issue of deaconesses in the Roman Catholic Church: one in 2016, and the other on the occasion of the Amazonian Synod of 2019. Obviously, both commissions drew negative conclusions in this regard, arguing "that it is not possible that women in the Church can even be deacons."

But the Roman Catholic Church is only one part of the Mystical Body of Christ, and, in the other churches that are also part of the same holy and venerable Body, the Holy Spirit has already spoken and has already manifested itself, allowing holy women to exercise their God-given ministry as bishops, presbyters and deacons.

Conclusion

The objective of this small work is nothing more than to enrich and teach in a simple but pedagogical way about the Independent Catholic Church and about the valid sacraments its priests share with God's people. With this work, we also admonish our brother priests of other churches that it is useless to fight against a work of God that generates salvation and spiritual health. I remind them of Gamaliel's words:

But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago, Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He, too, was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case, I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God!" (Acts 5:34-39)

I add that, on one occasion, Pope John XXIII said: "Let us look more for what unites us, than what separates us." Let us live always thinking about the words of the great Spanish mystic, Saint John of the Cross: "In the evening of our lives, we will be examined on what we have given to our neighbor in love."

This small work is nothing more than an attempt to nourish the servants of God's community who are entrusted to our care. We will continue to share literature to our brothers and sisters, to enrich them and at the same time grow in a spirituality of communion. Despite the attacks that come to us from our own brothers, we believe that this dream is worth pursuing!