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THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

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OF THE AUDIENCE GIVEN BY THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE
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The Holy Father has carefully examined the two documents containing the proposals expressed by the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the themes, "The Ministerial Priesthood" and "Justice in the World", which had been put before the Assembly for study.

As he has already announced in his address at the General Audience of 24 November, the Holy Father desires that the aforementioned documents be made public.

His Holiness now accepts and confirms all the conclusions in the two documents that conform to the current norms: in particular, he confirms that in the Latin Church there shall continue to be observed in its entirety, with God's help, the present discipline of priestly celibacy.

The Holy Father reserves to himself to examine carefully in due course whether the proposals—and which of them—contained in the recommendations of the Synodal Assembly should be convalidated as directive guidelines or practical norms.

JOHN CARDINAL VILLOT
Secretary of State

THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, especially since the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is experiencing a profound movement of renewal, which all Christians should follow with great joy and with fidelity to the Gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit is present to illumine, strengthen and perfect our mission.

Every true renewal brings the Church undoubted benefits of great value. We well know that through the recent Council priests have been fired with new zeal and that they have contributed much to fostering this renewal by their daily solicitude. We have before our minds our many heroic brothers who, in fidelity of their ministry, live lives dedicated to God with joy, either among the peoples where the Church is subjected to a harsh yoke or in mission lands. At the same time, however, the renewal also entails difficulties, which are especially felt by all in the priesthood, whether bishops or priests.

We should all scrutinize the signs of the times in this age of renewal and interpret them in the light of the Gospel (cf. *GS* 4), in order that we may work together in distinguishing between spirits, to see if they come from God, lest ambiguity cloud the unity of the Church's mission or excessive uniformity hinder needed adaptation. Thus, by testing everything and holding fast to what is good, the present crisis can give occasion for an increase of faith.

In accordance with its importance, the Holy Father put forward the ministerial priesthood for discussion by this year's Synod. Before the Synod many episcopal conferences examined this theme together with priests and quite frequently with lay people. Some priests were also called to the Synod as "auditores", to assist the bishops in dealing with important questions.

We wish to fulfil our duty with the evangelical simplicity which befits

pastors who are serving the Church. Considering our responsibility before the fraternal community of the Church, we desire to strengthen the faith, uplift the hope and stimulate the love both of our brothers in the ministerial priesthood and of all the faithful. May our words bring solace to the People of God and the priests dedicated to their service and renew their joy!

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION

1. The extent of the Church's mission was illustrated at length by the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, the Church's relationship with the world was the subject especially of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Many good results followed from a closer consideration of this matter: it is more clearly seen that salvation is not an abstract category outside, as it were, of history and time, but that it comes from God and ought to permeate the whole of man and the whole history of men and lead them freely to the Kingdom of God, so that at last " God may be all in all " (1 Cor 15:28).

However, as is understandable, difficulties have also arisen: some priests feel themselves estranged from the movements which permeate society and unable to solve the problems which touch men deeply. Often too the problems and troubles of priests derive from their having, in their pastoral and missionary care, to use methods which are now perhaps obsolete to meet the modern mentality. Serious problems and several questions then arise, especially from real difficulties which they experience in exercising their function and not—although this is sometimes the case—from an exasperated spirit of protest or from selfish personal concerns. Is it possible to exhort the laity as if from the outside? Is the Church sufficiently present to certain groups without the active presence of the priest? If the situation characteristic of a priest consists in segregation from secular life, is not the situation of the layman better? What is to be thought of the celibacy of Latin-rite priests in present-day circumstances, and of the personal spiritual life of the priest immersed in the world?

2. Many priests, experiencing within themselves the questionings that have arisen with the secularization of the world, feel the need to sanctify worldly activities by exercising them directly and bring the leaven of the Gospel into the midst of events. Similarly, the desire is developing of cooperating with the joint efforts of men to build up a more just and fraternal society. In a world in which almost all problems have political aspects, participation in politics and even in revolutionary activity is by some considered indispensable.

3. The Council emphasized the pre-eminence of the proclamation of the Gospel, which should lead through faith to the fullness of the celebration of the sacraments. But current thinking about the religious phenomenon fosters doubts in many minds concerning the sense of a sacramental and cultic ministry. Many priests not suffering from a personal identity crisis ask themselves another question: What methods should be used so that sacramental practice may be an expression of faith really affecting the whole of personal and social life, in order that Christian worship should not be wrongly reduced to a mere external ritualism?

Since priests are very concerned with the image of herself that the Church seems to present to the world, and at the same time are deeply conscious of the singular dignity of the human person, they desire to bring about a change within the Church herself in inter-personal relationships, in relations between person and institutions, and in the very structures of authority.

4. And still, relationships between bishops and priests and between priests themselves are growing more difficult by the very fact that the exercise of the ministry is becoming more diversified. Present-day society is divided into many groups with different disciplines, which call for differing skills and forms of apostolate. This gives rise to problems concerning brotherhood, union and consistency in the priestly ministry.

Happily the recent Council recalled the traditional and fruitful teaching on the common priesthood of the faithful (cf. *LG* 10). That, however, gives rise, as by a swing of the pendulum, to certain questions which seem to obscure the position of the priestly ministry in the Church and which deeply trouble the minds of some priests and faithful. Many activities which in the past were reserved to priests—for instance, catechetical work, administrative activity in the communities, and even liturgical activities—are today quite frequently carried out by lay people, while on the other hand many priests, for reasons already mentioned, are trying to involve themselves in the condition of life of lay persons. Hence a number of questions are being asked: Does the priestly ministry have any specific nature? Is this ministry necessary? Is the priesthood incapable of being lost? What does being a priest mean today? Would it not be enough to have for the service of the Christian communities presidents designated for the preservation of the common good, without sacramental ordination, and exercising their office for a fixed period?

5. Still more serious questions are posed, some of them as a result of exegetical and historical research, which show a crisis of confidence in the Church: Is the present-day Church too far removed from its origins to be able to proclaim the ancient Gospel credibly to modern man? Is it still possible to reach the reality of Christ after so many critical investigations? Are the essential structures of the early Church well enough known to us that they can and must be considered an invariable scheme for every age, including our own?

6. The above-mentioned questions, some of them new, others already long familiar but appearing in new forms today, cannot be understood outside of the whole context of modern culture, which has strong doubts about its meaning and value. New means of technology have stirred up a hope based excessively on enthusiasm and at the same time they have aroused profound anxiety. One rightly asks whether man will be capable of being master of his work and directing it towards progress.

Some, especially the young, despair of the meaning of this world and look for salvation in purely meditative systems and in artificial marginal paradises, abandoning the common striving of mankind.

Others dedicate themselves with ardent utopian hope devoid of reference to God to the attainment of some state of total liberation, and transfer the meaning of their whole personal lives from the present to the future.

There is therefore a profound cleavage between action and contemplation, work and recreation, culture and religion, and between the immanent and the transcendental aspects of human life.

Thus the world itself is obscurely awaiting a solution to this dilemma and is paving a way whereby the Church may go forward proclaiming the Gospel. Certainly, the only complete salvation offered to men is Christ himself, Son of God and Son of Man, who makes himself present in history through the Church. He joins inseparably together love for God and the love which God has until the end for men as they seek their way amid the shadows, and the value of human love whereby a man gives his life for his friends. In Christ, and only in him, do all of these become one whole, and in this synthesis the meaning of human life, both individual and social, shines forth. The mission of the Church, Christ's Body, far from being obsolete, is therefore rather of the highest relevance for the present and the future: the whole Church is the witness and effective sign of this union, especially through the priestly ministry. The minister's proper task

in the Church's midst is to render present, by the word and sacrament, the love of God in Christ for us, and at the same time to promote the fellowship of men with God and with each other. All this of course demands that we should all, especially those who perform the sacred office, strive to renew ourselves daily in accordance with the Gospel.

7. We know that there are some parts of the world in which that profound cultural change has hitherto been less felt, and that the questions raised above are not being asked everywhere, nor by all priests, nor in the same way. But since communications between men and peoples have today become more frequent and more speedy, we judge it good and opportune to examine these questions in the light of faith and to give humbly but in the strength of the Holy Spirit some principles for finding more concrete answers to them. Although this response must be applied differently according to the circumstances of each region, it will have the force of truth for all those faithful and priests who live in situations of greater tranquillity. Therefore, ardently desiring to strengthen the witness of faith, we fraternally urge all the faithful to strive to contemplate the Lord Jesus living in his Church and to realize that he wishes to work in a special way through his ministers; they will thus be convinced that the Christian community cannot fulfil its complete mission without the ministerial priesthood. Let priests be aware that their anxieties are truly shared by the bishops, and that the bishops desire to share them still more.

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Moved by this desire, the Synod Fathers, in the spirit of the Gospel, following closely the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and considering also the documents and addresses of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI, intend to set forth briefly some principles of the Church's teaching on the ministerial priesthood which are at present more urgent, together with some guidelines for pastoral practice.

PART ONE
PRINCIPLES OF DOCTRINE

1. *Christ, Alpha and Omega.*

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Word, "whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world" (*Jn* 10:36), and who was marked with the seal of the fullness of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk* 4:1, 18-21; *Ac* 10:38), proclaimed to the world the Good News of reconciliation between God and men. His preaching as a prophet, confirmed by signs, reaches its summit in the paschal mystery, the supreme word of the divine love with which the Father addressed us. On the cross Jesus showed himself to the greatest possible extent to be the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep in order to gather them into that unity which depends on himself (cf. *Jn* 10:15ff.; 11:52). Exercising a supreme and unique priesthood by the offering of himself, he surpassed, by fulfilling them, all the ritual priesthoods and holocausts of the Old Testament and indeed of the pagans. In his sacrifice he took on himself the miseries and sacrifices of men of every age and also the efforts of those who suffer for the cause of justice or who are daily oppressed by misfortune. He took on himself the endeavours of those who abandon the world and attempt to reach God by asceticism and contemplation as well as the labours of those who sincerely devote their lives to a better present and future society. He bore the sins of us all on the cross; rising from the dead and being made Lord (cf. *Phil* 2:9-11), he reconciled us to God; and he laid the foundation of the people of the New Covenant, which is the Church.

He is the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Tim* 2:5), "for in him were created all things" (*Col* 1:16; cf. *Jn* 1:3ff.) and everything is brought together under him, as head (cf. *Eph* 1:10). Since he is the image of the Father and manifestation of the unseen God (cf. *Col*

1:15), by emptying himself and by being raised up he brought us into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit which he lives with the Father.

When therefore we speak of the priesthood of Christ, we should have before our eyes a unique, incomparable reality, which includes the prophetic and royal office of the Incarnate Word of God.

So Jesus Christ signifies and manifests in many ways the presence and effectiveness of the anticipatory love of God. The Lord himself, constantly influencing the Church by his Spirit, stirs up and fosters the response of all those who offer themselves to this freely given love.

2. *Coming to Christ in the Church.*

The way to the person and mystery of Christ lies ever open in the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures understood in the living tradition of the Church. All the Scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, must be interpreted as intimately inter-linked and inter-related by their single inspiration. The books of the New Testament are not of such differing value that some of them can be reduced to mere late inventions.

A personal and immediate relationship with Christ in the Church should still for the faithful of today sustain their whole spiritual lives.

3. *The Church from Christ through the Apostles.*

The Church which he had declared would be built on Peter, Christ founded on the Apostles (cf. LG 18). In them are already manifested two aspects of the Church: in the Group of the Twelve Apostles there are already both fellowship in the Spirit and the origin of the hierarchical ministry (cf. AG 5). For that reason, the New Testament writings speak of the Church as founded on the Apostles (cf. *Rev* 21:14; *Mt* 16:18). This was concisely expressed by ancient tradition: "The Church from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, Christ from God".¹

The Church, which was founded on the Apostles and sent into the world and is a pilgrim there, was established to be a sacrament of the salvation which came to us from God in Christ. In her, Christ is present and operative for the world as a saviour, so that the love offered by

¹ TERTULLIAN, *De Praescr. Haer.* XXI, 4; cf. also I Letter of CLEMENT *Ad Cor.* XLII, 1-4; IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH *Ad Magn.* VI and passim; IRENAEUS *Adv. Haer.* 4, 21, 3; ORIGEN *De Princip.* IV, 2, 1; SERAPION, Bishop of Antioch, in EUSEBIUS *Hist. Eccl.* VI, 12.

God to men and their response meet. The Holy Spirit stirs up in and through the Church impulses of generous free will by which man participates in the very work of creation and redemption.

4. *The origin and nature of the hierarchical ministry.*

The Church, which through the gift of the Spirit is made up organically, participates in different ways in the functions of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King, in order to carry out her mission of salvation in his name and by his power, as a priestly people (cf. *LG* 10).

It is clear from the New Testament writings that an Apostle and a community of faithful united with one another by a mutual link under Christ as head and the influence of his Spirit belong to the original inalienable structure of the Church. The Twelve Apostles exercised their mission and functions, and "they not only had helpers in their ministry (cf. *Ac* 6:2-6; 11:30; 13:1; 14:23; 24:17; *1 Th* 5:12-13; *Phil* 1:1; *Col* 4:11 and *passim*), but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate cooperators, as a kind of testament, the duty of perfecting and consolidating the work begun by themselves (*Ac* 20:25-27; *2 Tim* 4:6 taken together with *1 Tim* 5:22; *2 Tim* 2:2; *Tit* 1:5; Saint Clement of Rome to the Corinthians 44:3), charging them to attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God (cf. *Ac* 20:28). They appointed such men, and made provision that, when these men should die, other approved men would take up their ministry (cf. Saint Clement of Rome to the Corinthians 44:2)" (*LG* 20).

The letters of Saint Paul show that he was conscious of acting by Christ's mission and mandate (cf. *2 Cor* 5:18ff.). The powers entrusted to the Apostle for the Churches were handed on to others insofar as they were communicable (cf. *2 Tim* 1:6), and these others were obliged to hand them on to yet others (cf. *Tit* 1:5).

This essential structure of the Church—consisting of a flock and of pastors appointed for this purpose (cf. *1 Pt* 5:1-4)—according to the Tradition of the Church herself was always and remains the norm. Precisely as a result of this structure, the Church can never remain closed in on herself and is always subject to Christ as her origin and head.

Among the various charisms and services, the priestly ministry of the New Testament, which continues Christ's function as mediator, and which in essence and not merely in degree is distinct from the common priesthood of all the faithful (cf. *LG* 10), alone perpetuates the essential work

of the Apostles: by effectively proclaiming the Gospel, by gathering together and leading the community, by remitting sins, and especially by celebrating the Eucharist, it makes Christ, the head of the community, present in the exercise of his work of redeeming mankind and glorifying God perfectly.

Bishops and, on a subordinate level, priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Orders, which confers an anointing of the Holy Spirit and configures to Christ (cf. *PO* 2), become sharers in the functions of sanctifying, teaching and governing, and the exercise of these functions is determined more precisely by hierarchical communion (cf. *LG* 24, 27-28).

The priestly ministry reaches its summit in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source and centre of the Church's unity. Only a priest is able to act in the person of Christ in presiding over and effecting the sacrificial banquet wherein the People of God are associated with Christ's offering (cf. *LG* 28).

The priest is a sign of the divine anticipatory plan proclaimed and effective today in the Church. He makes Christ, the Saviour of all men, sacramentally present among his brothers and sisters, in both their personal and social lives. He is a guarantor both of the first proclamation of the Gospel for the gathering together of the Church and of the ceaseless renewal of the Church which has already been gathered together. If the Church lacks the presence and activity of the ministry which is received by the laying on of hands with prayer, she cannot have full certainty of her fidelity and of her visible continuity.

5. Permanence of the priesthood.

By the laying on of hands there is communicated a gift of the Holy Spirit which cannot be lost (cf. *2 Tim* 1:6). This reality configures the ordained minister to Christ the Priest, consecrates him (cf. *PO* 2) and makes him a sharer in Christ's mission under its two aspects of authority and service.

That authority does not belong to the minister as his own: it is a manifestation of the "exousia" (i.e. the power) of the Lord, by which the priest is an ambassador of Christ in the eschatological work of reconciliation (cf. *2 Cor* 5:18-20). He also assists the conversion of human freedom to God for the building up of the Christian community.

The lifelong permanence of this reality, which is a sign, and which is a teaching of the faith and is referred to in the Church's tradition as the priestly character, expresses the fact that Christ associated the Church with

himself in an irrevocable way for the salvation of the world, and that the Church dedicates herself to Christ in a definitive way for the carrying out of his work. The minister whose life bears the seal of the gift received through the sacrament of Orders reminds the Church that the gift of God is irrevocable. In the midst of the Christian community which, in spite of its defects, lives by the Spirit, he is a pledge of the salvific presence of Christ.

This special participation in Christ's priesthood does not disappear even if a priest for ecclesial or personal reasons is dispensed or removed from the exercise of his ministry.

6. For the service of fellowship.

Even if he exercises his ministry in a determined community, the priest nevertheless cannot be exclusively devoted to a particular group of faithful. His ministry always tends towards the unity of the whole Church and to the gathering together in her of all men. Each individual community of faithful needs fellowship with the bishop and the universal Church. In this way the priestly ministry too is essentially communitarian within the presbyterium and with the bishop who, preserving communion with the Successor of Peter, is a part of the body of bishops. This holds also for priests who are not in the immediate service of any community or who work in remote and isolated territories. Religious priests also, within the context of the special purpose and structure of their institute, are indissolubly part of a mission which is ecclesially ordered.

Let the whole life and activity of the priest be imbued with a spirit of catholicity, that is, with a sense of the universal mission of the Church, so that he will willingly recognize all the gifts of the Spirit, give them freedom and direct them towards the common good.

Let priests follow Christ's example and cultivate with the bishop and with each other that brotherhood which is founded on their ordination and the oneness of their mission so that their priestly witness may be more credible.

7. The priest and temporal matters.

All truly Christian undertakings are related to the salvation of mankind, which, while it is of an eschatological nature, also embraces temporal matters. Every reality of this world must be subjected to the lordship of Christ. This however does not mean that the Church claims technical competence in the secular order, with disregard for the latter's autonomy.

The proper mission entrusted by Christ to the priest, as to the Church, is not of the political, economic or social order, but of the religious order (cf. *GS* 42); yet, in the pursuit of his ministry, the priest can contribute greatly to the establishment of a more just secular order, especially in places where the human problems of injustice and oppression are more serious. He must always, however, preserve ecclesial communion and reject violence in words or deeds as not being in accordance with the Gospel.

In fact, the word of the Gospel which he proclaims in the name of Christ and the Church, and the effective grace of sacramental life which he administers should free man from his personal and social egoism and foster among men conditions of justice, which would be a sign of the love of Christ present among us (cf. *GS* 58).

PART TWO
GUIDELINES FOR THE PRIESTLY LIFE AND MINISTRY

Considering the priestly mission in the light of the mystery of Christ and the communion of the Church, the Fathers of this Synod, united with the Roman Pontiff and conscious of the anxieties which bishops and priests are experiencing in the fulfilment of their common role today, present the following guidelines to clarify certain questions and to give encouragement.

I. PRIESTS IN THE MISSION OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

1. *Mission: Evangelization and sacramental life.*

a) " By their vocation and ordination, the priests of the New Testament are indeed set apart in a certain sense within the midst of God's people. But this is so, not that they may be made distant from this people or from any man, but that they may be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has raised them up " (PO 3). Priests thus find their identity to the extent that they fully live the mission of the Church and exercise it in different ways in communion with the entire People of God, as pastors and ministers of the Lord in the Spirit, in order to fulfil by their work the plan of salvation in history. " By means of their own ministry, which deals principally with the Eucharist as the source of perfecting the Church, priests are in communion with Christ the Head and are leading others to this communion. Hence they cannot help realizing how much is yet wanting to the fullness of that Body, and how much therefore must be done if it is to grow from day to day " (AG 39).

b) Priests are sent to all men and their mission must begin with the preaching of God's Word. " Priests have as their duty the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to all ... For through the saving Word the spark of faith is struck in the hearts of unbelievers and fed in the hearts of the faithful " (PO 4). The goal of evangelization is " that all who are made

sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in her sacrifice and to eat the Lord's supper " (SC 10). The ministry of the Word, if rightly understood, leads to the sacraments and to the Christian life, as it is practised in the visible community of the Church and in the world.

The sacraments are celebrated in conjunction with the proclamation of the Word of God and thus develop faith by strengthening it with grace. They cannot be considered of slight importance, since through them the word is brought to fuller effect, namely communion in the mystery of Christ.

Let priests then perform their ministry in such a way that the faithful will " have recourse with great eagerness to the sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life " (SC 59).

An enduring evangelization and a well-ordered sacramental life of the community demand, by their nature, a *diaconia* of authority, that is, a serving of unity and a presiding over charity. Thus the mutual relationship between evangelization and the celebration of the sacraments is clearly seen in the mission of the Church. A separation between the two would divide the heart of the Church to the point of imperilling the faith, and the priest, who is dedicated to the service of unity in the community, would be gravely distorting his ministry.

Unity between evangelization and sacramental life is always proper to the ministerial priesthood and must carefully be kept in mind by every priest. And yet the application of this principle to the life and ministry of individual priests must be made with discretion, for the exercise of the priestly ministry often in practice needs to take different forms in order better to meet special or new situations in which the Gospel is to be proclaimed.

c) Although the pedagogy of faith demands that man be gradually initiated into the Christian life, the Church must nevertheless always proclaim to the world the Gospel in its entirety. Each priest shares in the special responsibility of preaching the whole of the Word of God and of interpreting it according to the faith of the Church.

The proclamation of the Word of God is the announcement in the power of the Spirit of the wonders performed by God and the calling of men to share the paschal mystery and to introduce it as a leaven into concrete human history. It is the action of God in which the power of the

Holy Spirit brings the Church together interiorly and exteriorly. The minister of the word by evangelization prepares the ways of the Lord with great patience and faith, conforming himself to the various conditions of individuals' and peoples' lives, which are evolving more or less rapidly.

Impelled by the need to keep in view both the personal and social aspects of the announcement of the Gospel, so that in it an answer may be given to all the more fundamental questions of men (cf. *CD 13*), the Church not only preaches conversion to God to individual men, but also, to the best of her ability, as the conscience of humanity, she addresses society itself and performs a prophetic function in society's regard, always taking pains to effect her own renewal.

As regards the experiences of life, whether of men in general or of priests, which must be kept in mind and always interpreted in the light of the Gospel, these experiences cannot be either the sole or the principal norm of preaching.

d) Salvation, which is effected through the sacraments, does not come from us but from God; this demonstrates the primacy of action of Christ, the one priest and mediator, in his body, which is the Church.

Since the sacraments are truly sacraments of faith (cf. *SC 59*), they require conscious and free participation by every Christian who has the use of reason. This makes clear the great importance of preparation and of a disposition of faith on the part of the person who receives the sacraments; it also makes clear the necessity for a witness of faith on the part of the minister in his entire life and especially in the way he values and celebrates the sacraments themselves.

To bishops and, in the cases foreseen by law, to episcopal conferences is committed the role of authentically promoting, in accordance with the norms given by the Holy See, pastoral activity and liturgical renewal better adapted to each region, and also of determining the criteria for admission to the sacraments. These criteria, which must be applied by priests, are likewise to be explained to the faithful, so that a person who asks for a sacrament may become more aware of his own responsibility.

Let priests, with consciousness of their office of reconciling all men in the love of Christ and with attention to the dangers of divisions, strive with great prudence and pastoral charity to form communities which are imbued with apostolic zeal and which will make the Church's missionary spirit present everywhere. Small communities, which are not opposed to

the parish or diocesan structure, ought to be inserted into the parochial or diocesan community in such a way that they may serve it as a leaven of missionary spirit. The need to find apt forms of effectively bringing the Gospel message to all men, who live in differing circumstances, furnishes a place for the multiple exercise of ministries lower than the priesthood.

2. *Secular and political activity.*

a) The priestly ministry, even if compared with other activities, not only is to be considered as a fully valid human activity but indeed as more excellent than other activities, though this great value can be fully understood only in the light of faith. Thus, as a general rule, the priestly ministry shall be a full-time occupation. Sharing in the secular activities of men is by no means to be considered the principal end nor can such participation suffice to give expression to priests' specific responsibility. Priests, without being of the world and without taking it as their model, must nevertheless live in the world (cf. *PO* 3, 17; *Jn* 17:14-16), as witnesses and stewards of another life (cf. *PO* 3).

In order to determine in concrete circumstances whether secular activity is in accord with the priestly ministry, inquiry should be made whether and in what way those duties and activities serve the mission of the Church, those who have not yet received the Gospel message and finally the Christian community. This is to be judged by the local bishop with his presbyterium, and if necessary in consultation with the episcopal conference.

When activities of this sort, which ordinarily pertain to the laity, are as it were demanded by the priest's very mission to evangelize, they must be harmonized with his other ministerial activities, in those circumstances where they can be considered as necessary forms of true ministry (cf. *PO* 8).

b) Together with the entire Church, priests are obliged, to the utmost of their ability, to select a definite pattern of action, when it is a question of the defence of fundamental human rights, the promotion of the full development of persons and the pursuit of the cause of peace and justice; the means must indeed always be consonant with the Gospel. These principles are all valid not only in the individual sphere, but also in the social field; in this regard priests should help the laity to devote themselves to forming their consciences rightly.

In circumstances in which there legitimately exist different political, social and economic options, priests like all citizens have a right to select

their personal options. But since political options are by nature contingent and never in an entirely adequate and perennial way interpret the Gospel, the priest, who is the witness of things to come, must keep a certain distance from any political office or involvement.

In order that he may remain a valid sign of unity and be able to preach the Gospel in its entirety, the priest can sometimes be obliged to abstain from the exercise of his own right in this matter. Moreover, care must be taken lest his option appear to Christians to be the only legitimate one or become a cause of division among the faithful. Let priests be mindful of the laity's maturity, which is to be valued highly when it is a question of their specific role.

Leadership or active militancy on behalf of any political party is to be excluded by every priest unless, in concrete and exceptional circumstances, this is truly required by the good of the community, and receives the consent of the bishop after consultation with the priests' council and, if circumstances call for it, with the episcopal conference.

The priority of the specific mission which pervades the entire priestly existence must therefore always be kept in mind so that, with great confidence, and having a renewed experience of the things of God, priests may be able to announce these things efficaciously and with joy to the men who await them.

3. *The spiritual life of priests.*

Every priest will find in his very vocation and ministry the deep motivation for living his entire life in oneness and strength of spirit. Called like the rest of those who have been baptized to become a true image of Christ (cf. *Rom* 8:29), the priest, like the Apostles, shares besides in a special way companionship with Christ and his mission as the Supreme Pastor: "And he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach" (*Mk* 3:14). Therefore in the priestly life there can be no dichotomy between love for Christ and zeal for souls.

Just as Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit, was impelled by his deep love for his Father to give his life for men, so the priest, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, and in a special way made like to Christ the Priest, dedicates himself to the work of the Father performed through the Son. Thus the whole rule for the priest's life is expressed in the words of Jesus: "And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth" (*Jn* 17:19).

Following the example of Christ who was continually in prayer, and led by the Holy Spirit in whom we cry, "Abba, Father," priests should give themselves to the contemplation of the Word of God and daily take the opportunity to examine the events of life in the light of the Gospel, so that having become faithful and attentive hearers of the Word they may become true ministers of the Word. Let them be assiduous in personal prayer, in the Liturgy of the Hours, in frequent reception of the sacrament of penance and especially in devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist. Even if the Eucharist should be celebrated without participation by the faithful, it nevertheless remains the centre of the life of the entire Church and the heart of priestly existence.

With his mind raised to heaven and sharing in the communion of saints, the priest should very often turn to Mary the Mother of God, who received the Word of God with perfect faith, and daily ask her for the grace of conforming himself to her Son.

The activities of the apostolate for their part furnish an indispensable nourishment for fostering the spiritual life of the priest: "By assuming the role of the Good Shepherd, they will find precisely in the pastoral exercise of love the bond of priestly perfection which will unify their lives and activities" (PO 14). In the exercise of his ministry the priest is enlightened and strengthened by the action of the Church and the example of the faithful. The renunciations imposed by the pastoral life itself help him to acquire an ever greater sharing in Christ's Cross and hence a purer pastoral charity.

This same charity of priests will also cause them to adapt their spiritual lives to the modes and forms of sanctification which are more suitable and fitting for the men of their own times and culture. Desiring to be all thing to all men, to save all (cf. *1 Cor* 9: 22), the priest should be attentive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in these days. Thus he will announce the Word of God not only by human means but he will be taken as a valid instrument by the Word himself, whose message is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (*Heb* 4: 12).

4. Celibacy.

a) The basis for celibacy.

Celibacy for priests is in full harmony with the vocation to the apostolic following of Christ and also with the unconditional response of the person who is called and who undertakes pastoral service. Through celibacy, the

priest, following his Lord, shows in a fuller way his availability, and embarking upon the way of the Cross with paschal joy he ardently desires to be consumed in an offering which can be compared to the Eucharist.

If celibacy is lived in the spirit of the Gospel, in prayer and vigilance, with poverty, joy, contempt of honours, and brotherly love, it is a sign which cannot long be hidden, but which effectively proclaims Christ to modern men also. For words today are scarcely heeded, but the witness of a life which displays the radical character to the Gospel has the power of exercising a strong attraction.

b) Convergence of motives.

Celibacy, as a personal option for some more important good, even a merely natural one, can promote the full maturity and integration of the human personality. This is all the more true in regard to celibacy undertaken for the Kingdom of heaven, as is evident in the lives of so many saints and of the faithful who, living the celibate life, dedicated themselves totally to promoting human and Christian progress for the sake of God and men.

Within modern culture, in which spiritual values are to a great extent obscured, the celibate priest indicates the presence of the Absolute God, who invites us to be renewed in his image. Where the value of sexuality is so exaggerated that genuine love is forgotten, celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ calls men back to the sublimity of faithful love and reveals the ultimate meaning of life.

Furthermore, one rightly speaks of the value of celibacy as an eschatological sign. By transcending every contingent human value, the celibate priest associates himself in a special way with Christ as the final and absolute good and shows forth, in anticipation, the freedom of the children of God. While the value of the sign and holiness of Christian marriage is fully recognized, celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom nevertheless more clearly displays that spiritual fruitfulness or generative power of the New Law by which the apostle knows that in Christ he is the father and mother of his communities.

From this special way of following Christ, the priest draws greater strength and power for the building up of the Church; and this power can be preserved and increased only by an intimate and permanent union with Christ's Spirit. The faithful people of God wish to see in their pastors this union with Christ, and they are able to recognize it.

Through celibacy, priests are more easily able to serve God with undivided heart and spend themselves for their sheep, and as a result they

are able more fully to be promoters of evangelization and of the Church's unity. For this reason, priests, even if they are fewer in number, but are resplendent with this outstanding witness of life, will enjoy greater apostolic fruitfulness.

Priestly celibacy, furthermore, is not just the witness of one person alone, but by reason of the special fellowship linking members of the presbyterium it also takes on a social character as the witness of the whole priestly order enriching the People of God.

c) Celibacy to be kept in the Latin Church.

The traditions of the Eastern Churches shall remain unchanged, as they are now in force in the various territories.

The Church has the right and duty to determine the concrete form of the priestly ministry and therefore to select more suitable candidates, endowed with certain human and supernatural qualities. When the Latin Church demands celibacy as a necessary condition for the priesthood (cf. *PO* 16), she does not do so out of a belief that this way of life is the only path to attaining sanctification. She does so while carefully considering the concrete form of exercising the ministry in the community for the building up of the Church.

Because of the intimate and multiple coherence between the pastoral function and a celibate life, the existing law is upheld: one who freely wills total availability, the distinctive characteristic of this function, also freely undertakes a celibate life. The candidate should feel this form of living not as having been imposed from outside, but rather as a manifestation of his free self-giving, which is accepted and ratified by the Church through the bishop. In this way the law becomes a protection and safeguard of the freedom wherewith the priest gives himself to Christ, and it becomes " an easy yoke ".

d) Conditions favouring celibacy.

We know well that in the world of today particular difficulties threaten celibacy from all sides; priests have indeed already repeatedly experienced them in the course of the centuries. But they can overcome these difficulties if suitable conditions are fostered, namely: growth of the interior life through prayer, renunciation and fervent love for God and one's neighbour and by other aids to the spiritual life; human balance through well-ordered integration into the fabric of social relationships; fraternal association and companionship with other priests and with the bishop, through pastoral

structures better suited to this purpose and with the assistance also of the community of the faithful.

It must be admitted that celibacy, as a gift of God, cannot be preserved unless the candidate is adequately prepared for it. From the beginning, candidates should give attention to the positive reasons for choosing celibacy, without letting themselves be disturbed by objections, the accumulation and continual pressure of which are rather a sign that the original value of celibacy itself has been called in question. Let them also remember that the power with which God strengthens us is always available for those who strive to serve him faithfully and entirely.

A priest who leaves the ministry should receive just and fraternal treatment; even though he can give assistance in the service of the Church, he is not however to be admitted to the exercise of priestly activities.

e) The Law of Celibacy.

The law of priestly celibacy existing in the Latin Church is to be kept in its entirety.²

* * *

f) The ordination of married men.

Two formulas were proposed to the vote of the Fathers:³

Formula A: Excepting always the right of the Supreme Pontiff, the priestly ordination of married men is not permitted, even in particular cases.

Formula B: It belongs solely to the Supreme Pontiff, in particular cases, by reason of pastoral needs and the good of the universal Church to allow the priestly ordination of married men, who are of mature age and proven life.

* * *

² Result of the vote on this proposition: *Placet* 168. *Non placet* 10. *Placet iuxta modum* 21. Abstentions 3.

³ According to the directives of the Presidents the vote was taken not by *Placet* or *Non placet*, but by the choice of the first or second formula. The first formula, *A*, obtained 107 votes; the second, *B*, obtained 87. There were 2 abstentions and also 2 null votes.

II. PRIESTS IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH

1. *Relations between priests and bishop.*

Priests will adhere more faithfully to their mission the more they know and show themselves to be faithful to ecclesial communion. Thus the pastoral ministry, which is exercised by bishops, priests and deacons, is an eminent sign of this ecclesial communion, in that they have received a special mandate to serve this communion.

But in order that this ministry may really become a sign of communion, the actual conditions in which it is exercised must be considered to be of the greatest importance.

The guiding principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council in the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, namely that the very unity of consecration and mission requires the hierarchical communion of priests with the order of bishops, is considered fundamental to a practical restoration or renewal, with full confidence, of the mutual relationship between the bishop and the presbyterium over which the bishop presides. This principle is more concretely to be put into practice especially by the diligence of the bishops.

The service of authority on the one hand and the exercise of not merely passive obedience on the other should be carried out in a spirit of faith, mutual charity, filial and friendly confidence and constant and patient dialogue. Thus the collaboration and responsible cooperation of priests with the bishop will be sincere, human and at the same time supernatural (cf. *LG* 28; *CD* 15; *PO* 7).

Personal freedom, responding to the individual vocation and to the charisms received from God, and also the ordered solidarity of all for the service of the community and the good of the mission to be fulfilled are two conditions which should shape the Church's proper mode of pastoral action (cf. *PO* 7). The guarantee of these conditions is the bishop's authority, to be exercised in a spirit of service.

The Council of Priests, which is of its nature something diocesan, is an institutional manifestation of the brotherhood among priests which has its basis in the sacrament of Orders.

The activity of this council cannot be fully shaped by law. Its effectiveness depends especially on a repeated effort to listen to the opinions of all in order to reach a consensus with the bishop, to whom it belongs to make the final decision.

If this is done with the greatest sincerity and humility, and if all one-sidedness is overcome, it will be easier to provide properly for the common good.

The Priests' Council is an institution in which priests recognize, at a time when variety in the exercise of their ministry increases every day, that they are mutually complementary in serving one and the same mission of the Church.

It is the task of this Council, among other things, to seek out clear and distinctly defined aims, to suggest priorities, to indicate methods of acting, to assist whatever the Spirit frequently stirs up through individuals or groups, and to foster the spiritual life, whence the necessary unity may more easily be attained.

New forms of hierarchical communion between bishops and priests (cf. PO 7) must be found, to facilitate contacts between local Churches. A search must be made for ways whereby priests may collaborate with bishops in supra-diocesan bodies and enterprises.

The collaboration of religious priests with the bishop in the presbyterium is necessary, though their work is of valuable assistance to the universal Church.

2. Relations of priests with each other.

Since priests are bound together by an intimate sacramental brotherhood and by their mission, and since they work and plan together for the same task, some community of life or a certain association of life shall be encouraged among them and can take various forms, including non-institutional ones. This shall be allowed for by the law itself through opportune norms and by renewed or newly-discovered pastoral structures.

Priestly associations should also be fostered which in a spirit of ecclesial communion and being recognized by the competent ecclesiastical authority, "through an apt and properly approved rule of life and through brotherly assistance" (PO 8), seek to advance the aims which belong to their function and "holiness in the exercise of the ministry" (*ibid.*).

It is desirable that, as far as possible, ways be sought, even if they prove rather difficult, whereby associations which perhaps divide the clergy into factions may be brought back to communion and to the ecclesial structure.

There should be greater communication between religious priests and

diocesan priests, so that true priestly fraternity may exist between them and that they may provide one another with mutual help, especially in spiritual matters.

3. *Relations between priests and laity.*

Let priests remember "confidently to entrust to the laity duties in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. In fact, on suitable occasions, they should invite them to undertake works on their own initiative" (PO 9). The laity, "likewise sharing their cares, should help their priests by prayer and work to the extent possible, so that their priests can more readily overcome difficulties and be able to fulfil their duties more fruitfully" (*ibid.*).

It is necessary to keep always in mind the special character of the Church's communion in order that personal freedom, in accordance with the recognized duties and charisms of each person, and the unity of life and activity of the People of God may be fittingly combined.

The pastoral council, in which specially chosen clergy, religious and lay people take part (cf. CD 27), furnishes by its study and reflection elements necessary for enabling the diocesan community to arrange its pastoral programme organically and to fulfil it effectively.

In proportion as the co-responsibility of bishops and priests daily increases (especially through priests' councils), the more desirable it becomes that a pastoral council be established in each diocese.

4. *Economic affairs.*

The economic questions of the Church cannot be adequately solved unless they are carefully examined within the context of the communion and mission of the People of God. All the faithful have the duty of assisting the Church's needs.

In treating these questions account must be taken not only of solidarity within the local Church, diocese or religious institute, but also of the condition of dioceses of the same region or nation, indeed of the whole world, especially of the Churches in the so-called mission territories, and of other poor regions.

The remuneration of priests, to be determined certainly in a spirit of evangelical poverty, but as far as possible equitable and sufficient, is a duty of justice and ought to include social security. Excessive differences in this

matter must be removed, especially among priests of the same diocese or jurisdiction, account also being taken of the average condition of the people of the region.

It seems greatly to be desired that the Christian people be gradually instructed in such a way that priests' incomes may be separated from the acts of their ministry, especially sacramental ones.

CONCLUSION

To priests exercising the ministry of the Spirit (cf. *2 Cor* 3:4-12) in the midst of the communion of the entire Church, new ways are open for giving a profoundly renewed witness in today's world.

It is necessary therefore to look to the future with Christian confidence and to ask the Holy Spirit that by his guidance and inspiration doors may be opened to the Gospel, in spite of the dangers which the Church cannot overcome by merely human means.

Having always before our eyes the Apostles, especially Peter and Paul, as the examples for the renewal of the priesthood, we should give thanks to God the Father that he has given us all the opportunity of manifesting more faithfully the countenance of Christ.

Already there are true signs of a rebirth of spiritual life, while men everywhere, amid the uncertainties of modern times, look forward to fullness of life. This renewal certainly cannot take place without a sharing in the Lord's Cross, because the servant is not greater than his master (cf. *Jn* 13:16). Forgetting the past let us strive for what is still to come (cf. *Phil* 3:13).

With real daring we must show the world the fullness of the mystery hidden through all ages in God so that men through their sharing in it may be able to enter into the fullness of God (cf. *Eph* 3:19).

" We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ " (*1 Jn* 1:2-3).