



RES

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PRESENTATION

In an ever changing world and in a Church constantly in the spotlights, the important informations, and the meaning we are to give them, may be buried under a mass of commentaries, opinions and fake news. At a time when it is urgent to restore the magisterium and pontifical authority so the Church may continue its mission received from Christ, *Res Novae* intends to be an informational and analysis tool at the service of the petrian power.

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Editor in Chief : Rev Fr. Claude Barthe.
Rome Correspondant : Don Pio Pace
Contact : resnovaeroma@free.fr
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THE ÉDITORIAL

The ordination of married priests and the future of the Church

The liberal interpretation of Vatican II, which is the one in use in Rome today, plans to develop to its maximum capacity the *aggiornamento* set about by the Council. On a doctrinal basis, the two Synodal assemblies on the family and the exhortation *Amoris laetitia* that followed have operated a liberalization of the moral of marriage, and to a larger extent of christian moral. On an institutional basis, the assembly of the Synod on the Amazon has prepared a measure which will have considerable effects : the ordination of married men, via the ordination of married permanent deacons (final document of the assembly of the Synod, no. 111).

The sacred value of priestly celibacy

It is true that the ordination of married priests has to do with ecclesiastic discipline and not directly with ecclesiology. In Catholic Eastern Churches, following what was established by the Council in *Trullo* of 692, the possibility exists for future ministers to marry before being ordained to the diaconate, to then become priests (priests of a second order, since bishops can only be chosen among celibate priests, often from religious orders). In the Latin Church Herself, though exceptionally, married protestant ministers, converted to Catholicism and asking for orders, were sometimes ordained.

The discipline in the Latin Church, Roman in particular, stayed faithful to the association of consecrated celibate with the priesthood, to the assumed imitation of Christ, for the good of the whole Church. In this regard, the Gregorian reform was an important step to maintain this way. The numerous work on the subject, such as for example the work of Christian Cochini, s.j., *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (1), insists on the specific aspect of clerical continence (2) in relation to consecrated virginity : one chooses priestly celibacy as much as consecrated virginity to make a total gift of self for the Kingdom of God ; but the main reason for the priestly consecration is the sacrificial availability of the priest to his sacrificial mission. It is important then to insist on the fact that the ecclesial right derives, here more than in any other domain, from the most holy obligations : it is the priestly service of the Spouse of Christ which drives the Church to prescribe this consecration to the celibate, prescription in the same order than the obligation to assume the divine office, that is the official prayer of the Spouse.

The canonical rules, in this case, have a sacred institutional value. Thus, the argument most often brought forward against priestly celibacy, the rarefaction of vocations, bears no weight. Like Paul VI reminded us, in his encyclical *Sacerdotalis cælibatus*, of 24 June 1967, « *the harvest of God's kingdom is great, but the laborers, as in the beginning, are few* », and yet, « *the counsels and prudence of man cannot supersede the hidden wisdom of Him who, in the history of salvation, has challenged man's wisdom and power by His own foolishness and weakness.* » Furthermore, as we know, the crisis of vocations concerns, in the same way, the Christian Anglican and protestant Churches who already have married clergy.

The fact is, the dispute on priestly celibacy is no longer, as during the time of the protestant crisis, a sort of political contestation of priesthood and pa-

pace. Within the modern world in its current state, this dispute is more insidious and more radical : as it is, some would like to do away with the priesthood by rendering it banal.

A shy and retiring pastoral

The advent of married priests is going to institute a sort of second class priesthood, these priest additionally carrying out a professional life, unless retired, in order to provide for their family, what dioceses are today totally unable to do. These married priests will be, due to the circumstances, less engaged in ministerial life and, at least, less visible to the community (what is less the case in the East due to the a lesser secularization of religion : the orthodox priest, even married, remains above all a consecrated person in the middle of his flock). In the West, the de-clericalization, which Church officials have adopted as their program, or at least their slogan, will be greatly increased.

High-ranking prelates are the ones, today, denouncing clericalism, being themselves quite authoritarian in doing so, as well as bishops and theologians who wish to utilize the lay ministry to make up for the decreasing number of vocations. They even pretend seeing there a « chance » for the promotion of lay ministry. It is to the point that, and we are not exaggerating, some priestly communities and seminaries are now given difficulties when they present themselves with a priestly identity and are successful in filling their ranks, two proofs of an unbearable « clericalism ».

There is something suicidal, or at least shy and retiring, and that is not from God, in the pastoral vision today favored by the high-ranking prelates of the Church : they consider the situation of collapse of the number of priests, in the West but not only there, is an irreversible given to which the structure of Catholicism must be fitted. They don't even wonder, notably in face of the success of the priestly communities accused of « clericalism », if to the contrary, it is not a re-appreciation of the priestly ministry, of course purged of any clerical dregs, that should be put into practice.

The request for the institution of a diaconate for woman – demagogic desire to conform to the way of thinking of the world and often openly presented as the first step towards a priesthood of women – goes along the same line, the conformation of the ecclesiology to a situation of lack of priests where lay persons, men and more often women, already assume more and more functions.

The most serious historical data, those presented particularly by Aimé-Georges Martimort, show that the diaconate for women, which was very limited in time, was never on the same foot of equality as the diaconate of men : there was never a diaconate order for ordained women, in the precise and sacramental sense it had for the men's diaconate (the role of the deaconesses was specifically the baptism of adult women, for reasons of modesty). But, this does not bother the supporters of a women's diaconate which would require no less than the institution of a « women's ministry » which still would

not pretend to a sacramental character. The generalization of altar girls, which in the end was rendered valid in a response of the Congregation for Divine Worship on 15 March 1994, evidently is used as a lift to their petition. A tactical approach, in stages, could be the way for them to advance their ideas, as the assembly of the Synod for the Amazon did, when it made the proposition of the ordination of married men having previously received the « permanent » diaconate. In the same way, some women, religious or secular, having already liturgical responsibilities, like sometimes in funerals with the distribution of communion, singing and the equivalent of a predication, could be elevated to a rank of « diaconate ministers ».

Application of Vatican II

There's no doubt that all this « progress », and first of all the priestly ministry of married men, represents an interpretation certainly, dynamic, but entirely coherent, of Vatican II and of its immediate application. It is Vatican II indeed which constituted, for the latin world, contrary to the antique discipline of celibacy, a diaconate as a « permanent » and hierarchical degree in itself, for deacons who, till this day, were not destined to the priesthood, eventually married (*Lumen gentium*, no. 29). It is Paul VI who, contrary to the most ancient tradition of the Roman Church, abrogated the sub-diaconate and the minor orders by his *motu proprio Ministeria quaedam*, of 15 August 1972. He replaced them by simple « instituted ministries » of lector and acolytes, whose recipients are and remain simple lay persons. It is, most of all, the liturgical reform of the mass, by the same Paul VI, which partially erased the ritual manifestation of the sacrificial character of the eucharist (3), to which the sacrament of the order is ordained and conformed in all of its degrees (4).

In this conciliary line, those who presently condemn clericalism have created clericalized laities. It results, the shy and retired aspect of their pastoral ministry brings chain reaction consequences : the laities enrolled in this clerical sub-category, instead of taking part in their proper role which is the political care of the City, act in the functions proper to those who have, by nature, to spread the sacraments of Christ and to participate, as collaborators of the bishops, in the mission of « *He that heareth you, heareth me.* »

Though, it is possible that strong oppositions materialize. In the actual state of anglicanisation of the Catholic Church, for lack of a clear reference to the perennial Magisterium, everyone falls on its own creed – including the most orthodox who feel obligated to defend the *Credo* against members of the hierarchy. A sort of a high Church, to stay within the metaphor of anglicanism, in itself a strong mark catholicism made of a variety of groups, will definitely reject the option of marriage for priests.

Finally, a strong ambiguity must be noted, as it can be noted for any of the reforms since Vatican II : they are made with the intention to draw a line under the Triden-

tine Church, but they do it in a Tridentine way, using all the apparatus of centralized authority that the XVI century council had, not created, but particularly reinforced for the good of orthodoxy. To revolutionize the ecclesial institution, those who support reforms today are using powers given to them by this same institution, like in the manner of enlightened monarchs or magistrates in the age of Enlightenment. They, too, have an ambiguous way to operate, for they are far from wanting the disappearance of their own clerical power. Thus, we would agree that never a pope had, since the start of the collegiality by Vatican II, as much exhorted than the present pope on “synodality” and that, never had we seen, in the same time, a pontiff exercising so jealously his authority.

Communities as celebrant

Thus, high ranking Church officials are overtaken by a theology more radical and, in a sense, more substantial, calling for a priesthood emerging from the community of the laities, or even, to a certain extent, in which there would no longer be clerics nor laity, but a simple temporary determination of services based on how useful it could be to all.

Among many others, Jean Rigal, in *Découvrir les ministères* (6), theorized the natural handling by lay persons of tasks considered, till recently, as belonging to the priest. In « *I Sacramenti come luogo di elaborazione di identità ecclesiale e di differenza sessuale* » (7), Andrea Grillo, professor of sacramental and liturgical theology at the university of Saint Anselm, in Rome, advocates for women to gain access to presiding the sacraments. He explains that, if Saint Thomas dismissed women from certain acts of worship, it was because of the sociological conceptions of the time, now outdated. As to the apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, of 22 May 1994, which intended to confirm, once and for all, that women could not have access to the priesthood, Grillo relies on explanations from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of 28 October and 19 November 1995, to assert that it is an infallible document (8). This allows him to ask that the Church assumes the passage from a state of a pre-modern world, where women were dismissed from roles of responsibilities, to an all different comprehension of the role of women in a later modernity.

All these theories rely on the more general affirmation that christian communities must – and thus can – give themselves all means to have a sacramental existence, in particular eucharistic. The sacrament, and specially the eucharist, is no longer conceived as a divine gift but as a service which emanates from them and, easier all the more, that the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist disappears, as well as the obsession on its validity which these theories deem obsolete. In fact, it’s the whole community which is wanted as celebrant by God, actually just like the liturgical reform emphasizes it, community within which women and men assume, for a certain time, the service of presiding and of gestures “that have a particular signification”. In this frame, if we speak of women’s diaconate or priesthood, it is within a variable number, evolving

according to needs, and of a ministry more « instituted » than ordained.

These theories rely, themselves too, on a situation already existing in regards to the management of functions that used to be clerical, according to needs. And as the traditional degrees of the priesthood, deacons, priests and, in the end, even bishops, will enter in competition with non-sacramental ever more so active ministries, they will be able little by little to merge into a vast ensemble of services emanating from the community. Furthermore, through this lens sacraments dim away, just as much as ministers do. There must be « *transfer to the whole Church of the classic notion of “sacrament”* », writes Christoph Theobald, S.J., in *Urgences pastorales. Comprendre, partager, réformer* [9] (Pastoral emergencies). And, in this movement, the « *“actual” sacraments* » acquire an other tonality, not to say an other nature, within the « *sacramental ensemble* » more vast than the missionary community is itself : baptism certainly has its importance, but maybe less than the « *rite of welcoming, centered on the parental experience of the gift of a name to their child* » ; or again, confession cannot be reduced to « *the ritual only and we cannot be satisfied with saying that only some have the “power” to forgive* » ; but especially, regarding the eucharist, « *probably we should highlight the link between our daily meals as moments and places to sustain ourselves and meet others and the “eucharistic meal” of the community gathered around the same table - the table both of God’s word and of Christ’s body (Dei verbum, no. 21) - and not in front of the altar of a temple.* »

Ultimately, whether the model of the liberal reformers today in office in the Church is established, as we can see it presently, or whether we go further with the propositions of post-liberal theologians, one can only wonder what, soon, will be left of Catholicism ? And for what result ? The old liberal ideology gives tokens ever more important to modernity, today under its most advanced form, and climbs down more and more to try to recover, from the world, a new legitimacy. Except that this additional role it begs for from the « *withering pity of the victorious* » (10) is ever less granted. The last usefulness that might still be seen in this post-catholicism will be how it could lend a hand to democratic power, to opinion and medias, to marginalize whatever is left, seen as unbearable in spite of its feeble state, of Tridentine Catholicism in its various movements.

Paradox against paradox : we were saying that the Tridentine Church, intrinsically hierarchical, is pushed out through hierarchical channels ; but, in the same time, She survives, against the hierarchy, through the Catholic faith of « the base ». The resistance is the one of the *sensus fidelium*, of the instinct of faith. To the eyes of God, if we take a step back, what weight carry the mundane stands of an assembly of the Synod, in comparison to the blood of martyrs and their glorious confession. The fact is, we know, the Church has probably never been so oppressed as it is today by the violent and murderous persecutions.

Certainly, in this decisive stage of the post council that we see unfolding today, we must hope that an adequate reaction of a certain number of members of the hierarchy will be up to the task in facing present and future issues. If, at this time, it is mostly a manifestation of the *sensus fidelium* within the christian people that we see, it could be the goad, as in other times and as in other crisis, of a salutary surge in the hierarchy.

◆
Father Claude Barthe

1. Ignatius Press ; First Thus edition, 1990.
2. Today, the term in use is Celibacy (a married man cannot be ordained and a priest ordained cannot be married) : in the Antiquity and High Middle Age, it could refer to continence (when a married man were to be ordained a priest or a bishop, he had to cease the use of marriage).
3. See in particular, Claude Barthe, *La messe de Vatican II* (the mass of Vatican II), Via Romana, 2018.

4. *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 37, a. 2.
5. Isabelle de Gaulmyn, « La fin de l'Église tridentine » (the end of the Tridentine Church), *La Croix*, 29 october 2019 : « *One can be sure : what happened in Rome, with the Synod of the Amazone which ended Sunday 27 october represents a true revolution for the Catholic Church.* »
6. Desclée de Brouwer, 2002.
7. In Andrea Grillo and Elena Massimi (edited by), *Donne e uomini : il servizio nella liturgia*, Edizione Liturgiche, 2018, pp. 39-60.
8. He actually takes advantage of the real weakness of the explanations from the Congregation, according to which *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* was an act of the non-infallible Magisterium, which affirmed that the doctrine in question was already infallible. Hence, like Grillo says, we are like in a circle where a document would get its authority from the fact that it would refer to an other document of which it would itself attest the authority.
9. Bayard, 2017.
10. Georges Bernanos, *La Grande Peur des bien-pensants*, in *Essais et écrits de combat*, Gallimard, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1971, p. 345.

▶ **A proposition of reform : continence for married permanent deacons**

Cesare Bonivento, an Italian missionary, Bishop emeritus of Vamino, Papua New Guinea, just published a book titled *L'itinerario conciliare del celibato ecclesiastico* (Cantagalli, 2019), which studies the spiritual signification of the ecclesiastic celibate, particularly for priests, from the perspective of Vatican II documents. Among other things, this work contains an appendix section most interesting in regards to the question of « *L'urgenza di una chiarificazione sui diaconi permanente sposati* » (pp. 173-197), the urgency of a clarification regarding married permanent deacons. Cesare Bonivento considers that we cannot conclude, out off *Lumen gentium* no. 29 and the successive interventions of Paul VI, that the usage of marriage is authorized for married deacons. Follows the opinion of other authors, such as Vittorio Moretto (*Il celibato dei Preti. Una sfida sempre aperta*, Elledici, 2014), who wants to impose continence to future married priests. The principal argument is as follow : both *motu proprio* on permanent diaconate (*Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*, of 18 June 1967, and *Ad pascendum*, of 15 August 1972) invoke, several times, the « *traditional discipline of the church* » (to forbid a celibate permanent deacon to marry after his ordination, or to remarry if he became

a widow). According to Cesare Bonivento, this showed the Pope's intention was to force already married deacon to be continent, as it was the practice in the past. The fact that Paul VI in the document *Sacerdotalis cælibatus*, no. 40, says that « *the authority of the Church does not hesitate to exercise her power in this matter can be seen from the recent Ecumenical Council, which foresaw the possibility of conferring the holy diaconate on men of mature age who are already married* », does not appear to him as sufficient to affirm that the right/duty of the conjugal debt is recognized for married deacons.

Can this interpretation of the texts be held ? One could easily reply to Msgr. Bonivento that if such was the intention of the legislator, in a case of this importance, and considering the fact that the opinion which stands that married deacons can make use of the marriage is generally accepted, he could have and even, should have, clarify this question. It is in fact, what the author is asking in a moving way : that the pope clearly says that married deacons are bound to continence.

But, no matter what the value of the pious interpretation of Msgr. Bonivento may be, the imposition of continence on married men ordained to the diaconate is an idea for a reform - once a true reform of the Church becomes possible – which will be able to be

applied for future ordinations to the diaconate. Requesting from married deacons that they now submit to the antique ecclesiastic discipline would be greatly beneficial for the Church and would purge today's diaconate from its secularized image.

Pio Pace

NEWS OF RES NOVAE

Res Novæ has passed the mark of its first year. Assessing today's fast changing ecclesial context, our editorial team has decided to now make *Res Novæ* available, directly on line, on the website of the bi-monthly Catholic newspaper *L'homme nouveau* (www.hommenouveau.fr), under the tab «*Res Novæ*».

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Taking the opportunity to wish you a Happy New Year 2020.