



MICHAŁ KOSCHE

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1715-0510> * michal.kosche@kul.pl

Received: 17 Feb 2021; Reviewed: 10 Sep 2021; Accepted: 06 Dec 2021

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARGUMENT FOR CELIBACY IN SELECTED DOCUMENTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THE DOCUMENTS ISSUED AFTER VATICAN II

Abstract

The following article is one of the voices in the debate about the universality of priestly celibacy. It attempts to track the development of the theological and personalist arguments for celibacy contained in the most significant documents of the Magisterium of the Church. A special emphasis has been put on contemporary texts, issued after the Second Vatican Council. This choice has been caused by two major reasons. First, post-conciliar documents introduce a new quality to the argument of the universality of celibacy. Second, they have a far bigger impact on the discipline of the Church than previous texts.

Keywords: Celibacy, Synod of Elvira, Council of Trent, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis

ROZWÓJ ARGUMENTACJI NA TEMAT CELIBATU W WYBRANYCH DOKUMENTACH MAGISTERIUM *ECCLESIAE* ZE SZCZEGÓLNYM UWZGLĘDNIENIEM DOKUMENTÓW WYDANYCH PO SOBORZE WATYKAŃSKIM II

Abstrakt

Niniejszy tekst jest jednym z głosów we współczesnej debacie na temat celibatu. Jego specyfiką jest próba prześledzenia rozwoju argumentacji teologicznej i personalistycznej zawartej w najważniejszych dokumentach Urzędu Nauczycielskiego Kościoła. Szczególny nacisk został położony na teksty współczesne, wydane już po Soborze Watykańskim II. To uwrażliwienie podyktowane jest dwoma zasadniczymi powodami. Po pierwsze, dokumenty posoborowe wprowadzają zupełnie nową jakość do argumentacji na temat powszechności celibatu. Po drugie, mają one o wiele większy wpływ na dzisiejszą dyscyplinę Kościoła niż teksty wcześniejsze.

Słowa kluczowe: celibat, synod w Elwirze, Sobór Trydencki, Paweł VI, Jan Paweł II, Benedykt XVI, Franciszek

INTRODUCTION

Celibacy is one of the most important issues related to the discipline of the sacraments in the Latin Church. It has been known and valued since antiquity as a manner of complete self-dedication in the service of God. However, for centuries, up until the adoption of the reforms of the Council of Trent, celibacy was not obligatory for all men ordained as presbyters. In modern times, the issue of the universality of celibacy regained interest thanks to the Synod dedicated to the problems of the Amazon region. In the final document of the Pan-Amazon Synod titled *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, the Synod Fathers opted for a possibility to ordain as priests appropriate men (the so-called *virī probati*) who have a good reputation in the community, are permanent deacons and live in a functional, long-term family (2019, 111).

The Synod Fathers' proposal has sparked a reflection on the relationship between celibacy and the ministerial priesthood in dogmatic and historical perspectives. The text that follows is one of the opinions voiced in the emerging discussion about the universality of celibacy in the Latin Church and its significance for priestly service. The article attempts to track theological and personalist arguments contained in the most significant documents of the Magisterium of the Church. A special emphasis, however, will be put on contemporary texts, issued after Vatican II. This choice is caused by two major reasons. First, post-conciliar documents introduce a completely new quality to the debate on the universality of celibacy. Second, they have a far bigger impact on today's discipline of the Church than previous texts.

1. BIBLICAL BASIS

Jesus' speech concerning the unmarried state for the sake of the kingdom of heaven was written down by St. Matthew in Chapter Nineteen of his Gospel. Discussing with Pharisees, Jesus starts to outline the original vision of marriage that he understands as an unbreakable bond of man and woman, by which they both become one flesh (Mt 19:4-6). Pharisees are unable to comprehend the teaching, so they ascertain that it is better not to marry. Christ replies with the following words, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it" (Mt 19:11-12). In this way, Christ reveals two human vocations – for marriage and for celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

A more in-depth analysis of this *logion* shows us three fundamental features of Christ's teaching about celibacy. First, it clearly applies to a gift, a particular charism that God himself grants in his freedom, "not all can accept [this] word, but

only those to whom that is granted” (v.11). The passive voice used here indicates that it is God who is at work. He endows us with his gift in a free manner. Second, man also accepts the gift of unmarriedness for the kingdom of heaven by his own free will. Jesus explicitly differentiates between the unmarried because of their inability to marry and those who “have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (v.12). Third, the essence of perfect continence implies the discernment of such a lifestyle as the will of Christ himself. Therefore, the Master of Nazareth concludes, “Whoever can accept this ought to accept it” (v.12) (Obiorah 2015, 15-17).

Thus, on the one hand, Christ’s teaching included in the Gospel of St. Matthew gives us an unprecedented validation of celibacy, as far as it is chosen with regard to the kingdom of God. On the other hand, in his speech Jesus does not necessarily associate unmarriedness with the priesthood. The issue of universality or necessity of celibacy of priests has not thus been unambiguously sanctioned; nevertheless, what needs to be borne in mind is the fact that Christ’s teaching must be interpreted by means of a hermeneutic horizon, which in this case comes down to the lifestyle of the Mater of Nazareth himself, who chose the path of celibacy as the most adequate for his salvific mission.

It is St. Paul who speaks in a similar vein in the First Letter to the Corinthians. In Chapter Seven, the Apostle to the Nations states, “Now in regard to virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. So this is what I think best because of the present distress: that it is a good thing for a person to remain as he is” (v. 25-26). In his teaching, St. Paul embraces Jesus’ logic, according to which unmarriedness allows us to be fully dedicated to God because “An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord” (v. 32), whereas matrimony entails the anxiety about “the things of the world” and how to please the spouse (v. 33-37). By no means does the Apostle belittle marriage, yet he steadfastly encourages virginity (v. 40). Moreover, it results from the First Letter to Timothy that in Paul’s opinion being an exemplary husband of one wife ought to be perceived as praiseworthy and glorious when it comes to deacons and bishops (3:1-13).

2. FROM THE SYNOD OF ELVIRA TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

In the Ancient Church celibacy used to be regarded as Christ’s great gift because of two major reasons. First, the Master of Nazareth himself chose this particular lifestyle as the most appropriate for the mission of the salvation of mankind. Second, Christ made it clear that there was a calling to unmarriedness, or a charism of continence, which happens to be given to certain people for the sake of the kingdom of God. The first regulations concerning the practice of celibacy date back to the period of time from 300 to 309 AD, when the Synod of Elvira is said to have taken place (Hess 2002, 40-42). The Synod dealt with, among

others, the issue of the cohabitation of priests and women. However, what seems to be most important is that Canon 33 forbade bishops, presbyters and deacons to have sexual intercourse with their wives and to beget offspring under penalty of the loss of the clerical state (Denzinger 1976, 119). As Brundage underlines, the reason for this prohibition was a fear that ritual purity during the celebration of the Eucharist would not be kept (Brundage 1987, 69-70). This motivation will continue to underlie similar prohibitions formulated in the centuries to come.

Canons of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD) echo the teaching of the Synod of Elvira. They reiterate the ban on the cohabitation of priests with women with the exception of mothers, sisters, aunts or persons beyond all suspicion, including wives (*Decrees* 1990, 7). The subsequent ecumenical councils of Constantinople (381 AD) and Ephesus (431 AD) do not address the issue of celibacy whatsoever. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) – Christology-wise the most significant council in the history of the Church – forbids priests-to-be (lectors and cantors) to marry women of different faith. If, however, children were to be born of such relationships, it demands that they be baptized in the universal Church (*Decrees* 1990, 93-94).

The question of the sacramental discipline related to celibacy reappeared during the Gregorian reform. As Morris points out, the aforementioned reform focused on the purification of the clergy, who are considered channel of sacramental salvation. What prevailed was a way of thinking in terms of cult purity and continence, whereby there is no room for intercourse with women (Morris 1975, 100-101). The Lateran Councils took a similar stance. The first one of 1123 introduced a ban on the matrimony of presbyters, deacons, subdeacons and monks (*Decrees* 1990, 194). What it signified was that priests could no longer enter into a marriage, but the ones who were already married could be ordained. Successive councils of the Lateran of 1139, 1179 and 1215 had like opinions. Hence, the Gregorian reform did not contribute to the universalization of celibacy in the Latin Church despite what some historians claim (Ryś 2019, 83-86). It confirmed, nonetheless, an approach to celibacy as a means of retaining cult purity.

A stricter Church's discipline concerning celibacy of priests was not introduced until 250 years later by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). It was not achieved by means of canonical prohibitions – as those, in general, repeated the legislation of the Lateran – but rather thanks to the widespread introduction of seminaries by the decree *Cum Adolescentium Aetas* (Ryś 2019, 134-136). The practice of ordaining unmarried men was confirmed in later documents such as *Mirari Vos* (1834), *Qui Pluribus* (1848), *Haerent Animo* (1908), *Ad Catholicum Sacerdotium* (1935), *Menti Nostrae* (1950), and *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia* (1959). The Second Vatican Council was the one to speak out about celibacy. In the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, we come across a statement that celibacy is not required for the priesthood by its very nature, which is testified by the history of the universal Church as well as the tradition of the Eastern Churches. However,

the Council Fathers go on to note that “celibacy has a many-faceted suitability for the priesthood. For the whole priestly mission is dedicated to the service of a new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, has aroused through his Spirit in the world and which has its origin ‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God’ (Jn 1:13)” (Second Vatican Council 1965, 16).

This feature that shows the history of the popularization of priestly celibacy is an exceptionally important basis for the reflection on the post-conciliar doctrine since it helps us better understand the place where the Church finds herself in today (O’Loughlin 2004, 586). First and foremost, it needs to be noted that the universality of celibacy did not catch on in the Latin Church until the Council of Trent; what is more, it did not happen because of regulations, but the set-up of seminaries. Second, practically speaking, before Vatican II the assumption that celibacy was required on account of cult purity was prevalent. Such a motivation cannot be further from Christ’s perception of the value of unmarriedness for the kingdom of God, which is found in Chapter Nineteen of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

3. SACERDOTALIS CÆLIBATUS (PAUL VI, 1965)

Paul VI decided to write an encyclical regarding celibacy because of, as he put it, the promise he had made to the Council Fathers to give new luster and new power to priestly celibacy (Paul VI 1965, 2). This is the first ever and, thus far, the only document signed by the pope that is entirely dedicated to celibacy. In its first part, the Holy Father focuses on collecting frequently expressed objections to the universality of celibacy (Paul VI 1965, 5-12). The first and the essential one consists in the fact that Christ did not explicitly tie the priesthood with celibacy. The New Testament only encourages the path of unmarriedness for the kingdom of heaven. According to the hermeneutic in question, its supporters interpret a tradition of connecting celibacy with the priesthood, as voiced by a number of the Church Fathers, as a demand of the past, which in modern times is no longer defensible. They put forward the proposal to enable persons that do not feel the call to celibacy to undertake priestly duties. The second argument against the obligation of unmarriedness is based on a belief that such a Church discipline is detrimental in the parts of the world that suffer from shortages in the number of priests. By the way, it needs to be added that this argument was raised by the final document of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region (October 6-27th, 2019) entitled *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology* (2019, 111). Another argument flows from a conviction that a large amount of painful abuse committed by priests, which threatens the entire Church, would not have happened but for universal celibacy. Currently, the argument in question breaks out again in both public and Church debates due to numerous sex and pedophilia scandals in which prominent priest and hierarchs are involved. Yet another reason against universal celibacy is strictly connected

to the previous one. It hinges on the premise that celibacy forces man to live in a great bodily and spiritual tension that upsets emotional and mental balance. Therefore, celibacy would become an unnecessary burden that almost deprives a priest or seminarian of human freedom. This type of argument often refers to psychoanalytical psychology that, however, has to be labeled as reductive and non-personalist (Nuttin 1975; Grulowski 2007).

The Pope, though treating the aforementioned reservation with full respect, does not tilt toward the opinion that celibacy should be abolished. Furthermore, he confirms the existing practice of the Church, claiming that “the present law of 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; 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” (Paul VI 1965, 14).

The most important part of the document is directly devoted to a theology of celibacy. Paul VI begins with the reference to the teaching of Vatican II, whereby the priesthood does not call for virginity by its own nature, which nonetheless is highly beneficial for priestly service (Second Vatican Council 1965, 16). He moves on to describe a threefold meaning of priestly unmarriedness for the sake of the kingdom of God, its importance in the practical Church life and the influence thereof on experiencing one’s own humanity.

A Christological meaning of celibacy is revealed in light of the novelty of Christ’s priesthood. The Master of Nazareth is the strongest role model for any priest, who in fact participates in the one and true priesthood of Christ. In Paul VI’s opinion, “this deep concern 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 eternal Priest; this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and blood” (Paul VI 1965, 21). Celibacy allows a priest to be fully geared toward getting to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and spreading them. It also enables him to experience the abundance of God’s gifts that were promised by Christ to those who, imitating the Savior, would give up their house, family, wife and children (Lk 18:29-30). All of it makes the priesthood and celibacy enter into a highly obvious relation with each other that lets celibates concentrate exclusively on loving Christ and his Church (Paul VI 1965, 22-25).

An ecclesiological meaning of celibacy is noticeable in the love a priest has for the Church in the image of Christ himself, who loves the Church as his bride. The participation in Jesus’ love of his Mystical Body requires a voluntary and total dedication of oneself and consecration. It is seen especially during the celebration of the Eucharist and the devoted recitation of the breviary, as well as other forms of everyday prayer. Celibacy makes it possible for a priest to make time for constant

prayer that constitutes his specific duty. What is more, it helps him adopt an attitude of being of continuous service to the Church and, in the image of Christ, love all children of God with a selfless love. Paul VI is also convinced that a priest who has given himself up to Christ and his Church through a life of celibacy has an immense impact on others' minds and hearts (Paul VI 1965, 26-32).

An eschatological meaning of celibacy manifests itself in the lifestyle that refers to Christ's teaching about the future world, where after the resurrection no one will marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven (Mt 22:30). The priest is a sign of God's will concerning the future condition of the resurrected man, who is redeemed by the grace of Christ. Likewise, he should be a sign of the fact that God has already started to grant divine gifts to humanity. It makes it easier for man, a pilgrim on earth, to believe with certainty in the fulfilment of God's promise about the realization of the kingdom of God in the eschatological times (Paul VI 1965, 33-34).

Heeding a threefold meaning of celibacy and the Church's practice of holy celibacy that is manifest in the history, Paul VI arrives at two conclusions, "while on the one hand, the law requiring a freely chosen and perpetual celibacy of those who are admitted to Holy Orders remains unchanged, on the other hand, a study may be allowed of the particular circumstances of married sacred ministers of Churches or other Christian communities separated from the Catholic communion, and of the possibility of admitting to priestly functions those who desire to adhere to the fullness of this communion and to continue to exercise the sacred ministry. The circumstances must be such, however, as not to prejudice the existing discipline regarding celibacy" (Paul VI 1965, 42). This might be the most important excerpt from the doctrine contained in *Sacerdotalis Cælibatus*. On the one hand, it confirms the universal practice of celibacy in the Latin Church; on the other, it allows for some exceptions, to which we shall return in the sections to follow.

The Pope also tackles the influence of continence on the experience of celibate's own humanity. What he notes is that perfect continence, though may cause some difficulties as it entails the loss of a number of values and goods that reach deep in man's soul, enriches man and gives luster to his love. The Holy Father points out that it is God's grace that inclines a young man to choose celibacy; the grace does not destroy nature but rather makes it more perfect and endows it with supernatural abilities and strength. God knows what burden he may put on man that he created and redeemed; thus, he provided an indispensable support so that man may realize what the Creator and Redeemer demands of him (Paul VI 1965, 51). Paul VI firmly rejects the idea that celibacy goes against human nature. Rather, he points to a contrary argument, noticing that man, created in the image and likeness of God himself, fulfils himself most through the relationship with his Creator. Celibacy does not oppose human sexuality and sexual attraction, but directs man toward the highest values (Paul VI 1965, 53-56).

The third and last part of *Sacerdotalis Cælibatus* is devoted to the formation of priests. Paul VI, as it were, follows the path of the Council of Trent, which, as has been mentioned above, popularized celibacy not by means of canons and anathemata, but thanks to laying the foundations for a sensible education of seminarians. The Pope underlines that the education for the priesthood should be passed with utmost care in seminaries. In the given context, it is worth quoting his claim that “the complete education of the candidate for the priesthood should be directed to help him acquire a tranquil, convinced and free choice of the grave responsibilities which he must assume in conscience before God and the Church” (Paul VI 1965, 69).

4. *PASTORES DABO VOBIS* (JOHN PAUL II, 1992)

Pastores Dabo Vobis does not focus entirely on the issue of celibacy, as was the case with *Sacerdotalis Cælibatus*. The document written by John Paul II features a far broader perspective of understanding priestly formation in modern world. The Pope examines the issue of celibacy from the viewpoint of a personal call to love and participation in Christ’s love of his bride – the Church. The key category that elucidates the essence of the call in question is, as often happens in the Pope’s theological personalism, the conciliar category of the “gift of self.” According to the Holy Father, “the essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ. Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ’s love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us” (John Paul II 1992, 23).

Christ’s love linked to the pastoral love of the Church grows and develops in proportion to the logic of the evangelical counsels. It concerns obedience, poverty and celibacy (John Paul II 1992, 49). The practice of the evangelical counsels enables a priest to form his personality on the model of the Master of Nazareth, in whom these counsels have their origin and find their perfect fulfilment. In this respect, celibacy appears to be a way of experiencing spousal love. Making reference to his previous teaching in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981, 98), the Pope states, “in virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come: In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life” (John Paul II 1992, 29).

John Paul II's perspective of presenting celibacy as spousal love combines a vertical (the communion with Christ) with a horizontal (service of the community of the faithful) dimensions. It also highlights a humanistic aspect of unmarriedness, describing celibacy as a way of forming the fulness of humanity through love. If "man cannot live without love" (John Paul II 1979, 10) if he cannot comprehend himself until love reveals itself to him, until he touches it and makes it his own, celibacy gives a one-of-a-kind opportunity to abandon oneself completely to this Love, perhaps even more so than in matrimony. Hence, over the course of history unmarriedness for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, experienced in poverty and obedience, has come to be named "state of perfection" (*status perfectionis*). However, it seems worthwhile to repeat John Paul II's opinion that the perfection of Christian life is measured with the measure of love, of a personal relationship with the Triune God and with our neighbors. Therefore, living in the "state of perfection" aids a lot in achieving perfect love of God and people, but it does not work automatically. Moreover, married people are able to attain even greater degree of perfection of love than those that follow the path of the evangelical counsels (John Paul II 2006, 428-432).

In regard to the above argument, a proper formation of priests becomes a key issue and task. Likewise, it applies to the appropriate experience of the priesthood according to the evangelical counsels. The Pope notes that obedience and poverty, on a par with celibacy, can be embraced by a candidate for the priesthood who displays emotional maturity. Thus, seminaries should aid seminarians with their emotional development, as well as educate them for mature love in an authentic freedom (John Paul II 1992, 44). The maturity should be visible in an approach to celibacy that does not reduce it to a merely legal rule, even if right and desirable, but sees it "rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd and spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry. Celibacy is to be considered as a special grace, as a gift, for 'not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given' (Mt 19:11). Certainly it is a grace which does not dispense with, but counts most definitely on, a conscious and free response on the part of the receiver. This charism of the Spirit also brings with it the grace for the receiver to remain faithful to it for all his life and be able to carry out generously and joyfully its concomitant commitments" (John Paul II 1992, 50).

Summing up the analysis of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, we cannot fail to notice that John Paul II draws extensively from the teaching of *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. There is an obvious hermeneutic of continuity when it comes to the perception of celibacy as a great gift, especially useful in the priestly life. In the teaching of both popes, unmarriedness for the sake of the kingdom of God is characterized by Christological and ecclesiological dimensions. It also serves as a sign of the eschatological meaning that directs the entire Church toward the complete

revelation of the kingdom of God at the second coming of Christ. Another thing that emerges here, beside the hermeneutic of continuity, is the hermeneutic of novelty. First of all, it comes down to the outlook on celibacy through the lens of the priest's fulfilment as a person called to love. It consists in presenting celibacy, obedience and poverty as a path of life, on which a celibate is able to realize his call to life in a perspective of a selfless gift of self.

5. RECENT DOCUMENTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH

In 2009 Benedict XVI published an Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus. Providing for Personal Ordinariates for Anglicans Entering into Full Communion with the Catholic Church*. Pursuant to this document, the Pope allowed married Anglican priests to be ordained (Benedict XVI 2009, VI §1). It was not, however, a derogation from the sacramental discipline because, according to the interpretation found in *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, “a study may be allowed of the particular circumstances of married sacred ministers of Churches or other Christian communities separated from the Catholic communion, and of the possibility of admitting to priestly functions those who desire to adhere to the fullness of this communion and to continue to exercise the sacred ministry. The circumstances must be such, however, as not to prejudice the existing discipline regarding celibacy” (Paul VI 1965, 42). In order to both retain the spirit of a theology of celibate, included in Paul VI's encyclical, and permit married Anglican priests to be ordained, Benedict XVI decreed “the Ordinary, in full observance of the discipline of celibate clergy in the Latin Church, as a rule (*pro regula*) will admit only celibate men to the order of presbyter. He may also petition the Roman Pontiff, as a derogation from can. 277, §1, for the admission of married men to the order of presbyter on a case by case basis, according to objective criteria approved by the Holy See” (Benedict XVI 2009, VI §2). Furthermore, Pope Benedict specified that unmarried Anglican priests are obliged to comply with Catholic rules on celibacy according to can. 277,1 of the Code of Canon Law. In addition, it should be emphasized that there is no question of belittling the universality of the discipline of holy celibacy in the Catholic Church.

A proposal to change the sacramental discipline was put forward in the document mentioned in Introduction – the final document of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region entitled *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*. The Synod Fathers included a following postulate, “considering that legitimate diversity does not harm the communion and unity of the Church, but rather expresses and serves it (LG 13; OE 6), witness the plurality of existing rites and disciplines, we propose that criteria and dispositions be established by the competent authority, within the framework of Lumen Gentium 26, to ordain as priests suitable and respected men of the community with a legitimately constituted and stable family, who have had a fruitful permanent diaconate and receive an adequate formation for the

priesthood, in order to sustain the life of the Christian community through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments in the most remote areas of the Amazon region. In this regard, some were in favour of a more universal approach to the subject” (Pan-Amazon Synod 2019, 111).

The Synod Fathers refer to a “legitimate diversity” of existing rites and disciplinary practices so as to advise the Pope to enable the ordination of “suitable man” (*virī probati*) that have a good reputation of the community, are permanent deacons and live in a functional, stable family. It would guarantee the communities of the Amazon region permanent access to the holy sacraments, above all the Eucharist. Nonetheless, Pope Francis did not choose to give a positive response to the Synod Father’s suggestion. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, the Holy Father pays attention to the fact that the pastoral ministry of the Amazon Church is deficient and steps ought to be taken so that the celebration of the Eucharist there may become more frequent. Yet, this urgent need does not incline the Pope to relax the discipline of holy celibate, but “to urge all bishops, especially those in Latin America, not only to promote prayer for priestly vocations, but also to be more generous in encouraging those who display a missionary vocation to opt for the Amazon region. At the same time, it is appropriate that the structure and content of both initial and ongoing priestly formation be thoroughly revised, so that priests can acquire the attitudes and abilities demanded by dialogue with Amazonian cultures. This formation must be preeminently pastoral and favour the development of priestly mercy” (Francis 2020, 90).

Francis’ diagnosis follows in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and the documents *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Sacerdotalis Cælibatus*, which underline the great significance of the seminary formation with the objective of better understanding the identity of priests and their role in the liturgical assembly. The problem of shortages of priests in the Amazon region does not stem from a burdensome necessity for celibacy, but from the crisis of experiencing the priestly vocation, with a special emphasis put on what the Pope terms “priestly mercy.” This situation cannot be remedied by the change of the discipline, but rather by an appropriate formation carried out according to the principles presented in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutiones Sacerdotalis* (2016).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The universality of priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church developed gradually. Even though the message of the New Testament does not necessarily require its universality, the first canons concerning the necessity of priests’ perfect continence appeared as soon as in the sixth century AD. Eventually, celibacy became a universal practice in the Latin Church after the Council of Trent, which ordered the creation of seminaries, where seminarians were educated and prepared for

a right understanding of the essence of celibacy and the voluntary embracement thereof. After Vatican II, the issue of the universality of celibacy re-emerged as a subject of a churchwide debate. The documents such as *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Sacerdotalis Cælibatus* provided a completely new quality in the manner of argumentation in favor of the universality of celibacy. While what prevailed earlier was the argument of cult purity, contemporary popes focused on indicating three major dimensions of celibacy – Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological ones. Analyzing the progress of the doctrine of the Magisterium on celibacy, we must stress a clear hermeneutic of continuity and development. Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has gained a better awareness of celibacy as the most adequate lifestyle for the priesthood. Simultaneously, never in the Church's official teaching have we found a statement that celibacy belongs to the very nature of the priesthood. Consequently, some exemptions from universal celibacy may be accounted for, as those mentioned in *Anglicanorum Coetibus*; these do not contest the validity of the ordination. The hermeneutical tension born of the clash between the sense of great benefit that embracing the charism of celibacy brings forth with the idea that the very same celibacy does not necessarily pertain to the nature of the priesthood itself underlies, as it seems, contemporary discussion on the possibility of ordaining trustworthy married men (*viri probati*) as priests. It would be possible in a situation of a limited access to Eucharist and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Pope Francis did not choose to take this step in the Church of the Amazon region. It appears to be a clear message that contemporary popes closely connect the understanding of the priesthood with celibacy.

REFERENCES:

- Benedict XVI. 2009. *Apostolic Constitution "Anglicanorum Coetibus"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Brundage, James A. 1987. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. 2016. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Decrees of the ecumenical councils*, vol. 1: *Nicaea I to Lateran V*, edited by Norman P. Tanner, original text established by Giuseppe Alberigo and others. 1990. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Denzinger, Henricus. 1976. *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*. Würzburg: Herder.
- Francis. 2020. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Querida Amazonia"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Grulowski, Bronisław. 2007. "Celibat – sublimacja czy relacja?" *Studia Gdańskie* 21: 397-425.
- Hess, Hamilton. 2002. *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of*

- Serdica*. Oxford: Early Christian Studies.
- John Paul II. 1979. *Encyclical Letter "Redemptor Hominis"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II. 1981. *Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II. 1992. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Pastores Dabo Vobis"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II. 2006. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Pauline Books & Media.
- Morris, Colin. 1989. *The Papal Monarchy. The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*. Oxford: University Press.
- Nuttin, Joseph R. 1975. *Psychoanalysis and Personality. A Dynamic Theory of Normal Personality*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press.
- O'Loughlin, Thomas. 2004. "Celibate Clergy: The Need for Historical Debate." *New Blackfriars* 85 (1000): 583-597.
- Obiorah, Jerome M. 2015. "'Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven': Celibate Chastity and Christian Love." *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life* 11: 9-25.
- Pan-Amazon Synod. 2019. *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology. Final Document*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Paul VI. 1965. *Encyclical "Sacerdotalis Caelibatus"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Ryś, Grzegorz. 2019. *Celibat*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.
- Second Vatican Council. 1965. *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests "Presbyterorum Ordinis"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.