

Reflections on *Presbyterorum Ordinis*

LAWRENCE J. WELCH

Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

St. Louis, Missouri

and

GUY MANSINI O.S.B.

Saint Meinrad School of Theology

St. Meinrad, Indiana

ALTHOUGH the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, is novel in conception and expression relative to a narrowly Tridentine view of the priesthood, this originality functions to assert more important continuities with the greater breadth of Scripture, the ancient liturgy, and the Fathers.¹ The Decree is a synthesis of two conceptions of the priesthood, one stressing the consecration of the presbyter effected in the sacrament of Holy Orders, the other stressing the mission of the presbyter received in the sacrament. Archbishop François Marty famously summarized the intention of the conciliar commission charged with producing the text of the Decree:

As to the specific nature of the ministry and life of presbyters: On this matter, there have been expressed two conceptions which seem to differ at first glance. For one of them insists more on the consecration of the presbyter worked by the sacrament of Orders, and on the personal union of the presbyter with Christ, who is the font of holiness and spiritual efficaciousness. The other conception, however, insists on the mission of the presbyter, which mission he receives from Christ through the sacrament: that is, the presbyter, since he becomes a member of the Order of presbyters, by that fact becomes a helper of

¹ By a narrowly Tridentine view, we mean one that relies solely on the Dogmatic Decree on Orders of the 23rd Session of 1563.

the Order of bishops, so that he acts in the person of Christ unto the building up of the Church.

In fact, each of these two conceptions puts in light an aspect of great importance in the ministry and life of presbyters. Therefore, our commission will take care to show how these two conceptions combine with one another harmoniously and indeed complete each other, so that they go together in the unity of presbyteral ministry.²

In fact, the final text of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* arrived at such a combination in §2 of the Decree. On the one hand, the Decree could frame the priesthood in the theology of mission that reaches its summit in the sacrifice of the Mass, where the spiritual sacrifice of the life and works of the faithful are joined to the sacrifice of Christ. On the other hand, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* could explain the priest as consecrated to act *in persona Christi capitis* not only at the Eucharist but in the whole of his ministry in teaching, sanctifying, and ruling, which are precisely the *munera* constitutive of his mission. The priest-presbyter is consecrated in order to extend the mission of Christ in world.³

Hardly was the Council concluded than the contestation of the Catholic priesthood began.⁴ To many, the Council itself seemed to give impetus to this movement.⁵ Did it not recognize the positive elements of truth and holiness in the Protestant churches and positively express a desire for Church unity? But then, what did this say about the possibilities of Church order? And the Council seemed to privilege the local, particular church in a way hitherto unknown in modern magisterial teaching, both

² *Concluding Relatio* of F. Marty, Archbishop of Rheims, October 16, 1965, presenting the “textus recognitus,” *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II*, vol. IV/5 (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970), 70–71. Hereafter, AS, and indicating volume, part, and page.

³ For the history of this synthesis in more detail, see our commentary on *Presbyterorum Ordinis* in the forthcoming volume marking the fortieth anniversary of the council, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ See already in 1971 the list of troubles in the “Description of the Situation” in the statement of the Synod of Bishops on the ministerial priesthood, *Ultimis temporibus*. This can be found in *Vatican Council II*, vol. 2, *More Postconciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 672–94. The date given there, 1967, is incorrect.

⁵ Walter Kasper, “Priestly Office,” in idem, *Leadership in the Church: How Traditional Roles Can Help Serve the Christian Community Today*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Herder, 2003), 46: “[O]ne cause of the present difficulties [about priests and priesthood] results from theological confusions and distortions. More precisely, it is rooted in a superficial and one-sided reception of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.”

by the renewal of the theology of the episcopate (*Lumen Gentium*, §§20 ff.) and by a first step into the ecclesiology of communion (*Lumen Gentium*, §26). What did this say about the local church's capacity to restructure Church order? Furthermore, the theology of the laity expounded by the Council seemed to many a sort of invitation to obscure the distinction between the priesthoods of laity and orders, priesthoods that elsewhere the Council declared distinct in kind. How could an egalitarian Church of the People of God be at the same time a hierarchical Church? In the desire of the Council to make Scripture a more immediately animating principle of theology, some read an invitation to read the Scriptures as read by liberal Protestantism, that is, in the absence of the Rule of Faith, independently of the patristic tradition of Church order and liturgy, and to read each book extra-canonically, independently of the others. In this way, the Council, or at least its upshot, seemed to countenance every criticism of the priesthood made by the Reformers.⁶ Moreover, where one hermeneutical norm, the Rule of Faith, is taken away, another will replace it. Postconciliar readings both of Scripture and of the Council tended more and more to be post-modern readings, which meant that they brought with them the suspicion that all distinction and all discriminations are nothing but concealments of the will to power. In some treatments of the Catholic priesthood after the Council, one discerns the influence of Nietzsche more than of any reformer or historian.⁷

After the Council, the two conceptions noted by Marty became the opposition of Protestant and Catholic readings for the New Testament on ministry. Many who championed the ministry of the word and a theology of mission opted for an increasingly Protestant, even Congregationalist

⁶ See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notifikation bezüglich einiger Veröffentlichungen von Professor Dr. Reinhard Meßner" (Notification on Some Publications of Professor Dr. Reinhard Meßner), November 30, 2000, on Meßner's reconstruction of the Church order of "early Catholicism": "Neu ist allenfalls, daß diese klassische Vision protestantischer Dogmengeschichtsschreibung hier als katholische Theologie vorgetragen . . . wird" ("what is new is the fact that this classical vision of Protestant history of dogma is presented here as Catholic theology"). For Ratzinger, the Protestant interpretation of Christian ministry and worship returns the Church to the synagogue; see "Life and Ministry of Priests." This paper was delivered in 1995 for the symposium on the priesthood, *Priesthood: A Greater Love*, for the thirtieth anniversary of the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* sponsored by the Congregation for Clergy, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_24101995_prh_en.html.

⁷ This was especially true in some of the more shrill accusations formulated apropos of the ordination of women and celibacy. See for example the essays in *The Non-Ordination of Women and the Politics of Power* (*Concilium*, 1999), ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Hermann Häring (London: SCM Press, 1999).

view of ecclesial office, and the conciliar text was characterized as including undigested—by which it was meant still unfortunately unreputed—cultic and sacral elements in its view.⁸ Where was the legacy of the Council with regard to priesthood to be found?

We will take up three issues. First, there is the complex question of apostolicity, Eucharistic presidency, and the relation of the priest to the community. Second, there is the question of the priest's representation of Christ. Third, there is celibacy.⁹

Apostolicity and History, Eucharist and Presidency, Relation to Community

The issues here can be put narrowly or broadly. Narrowly, the questions are whether succession of officers is necessarily included in the apostolicity of the Church, and whether presbyteral ordination is a necessary condition of Eucharistic presidency. Broadly, the issue is whether and how the priest's relation to the community is built into the very understanding of the nature of priesthood.

The issue of what is comprised in the reality of apostolic succession emerged very quickly after the Council. A historical-critical reading of the New Testament where tradition was bracketed produced a sort of dehistoricized version of apostolic ministry. This in turn set the stage for reconceiving and refashioning Roman Catholic Church order. By a dehistoricized view, we mean a view according to which apostolicity is first and fundamentally predicated of the Church as a whole, but within which there is no structure guaranteeing apostolicity that the Church herself, independently of and subsequently to Christ, is not responsible for. There is no question, in other words, of a dominical institution of and historical

⁸ Christian Duquoc, "Clerical Reform," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 297–308; and in the same vein, the concluding remarks of Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether in *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism*, ed. Bianchi and Ruether (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 247–60. More recently, see Peter Hünermann, "A Half-Hearted Reform: The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests," in *The History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 457–65. Hünermann believes that the Decree's presentation of the essence of priesthood does not correspond to that of *Lumen Gentium*.

⁹ Even so we do not address all things; for instance, proposals that in practice divorce pastoral and sacramental ministry, or proposals for part-time and temporary priests after the council. For these last, see e.g., Hans Küng, *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 75–82. The proposal Küng makes in the book as a whole is to abolish the priesthood.

succession in office. This view was propounded by Hans Küng, who entertained the possibility even now of a so-called charismatic Church order without benefit of the imposition of hands, and for whom pastoral ministry is just one “charism” among others.¹⁰ It was the view also of Edward Schillebeeckx.¹¹ For Schillebeeckx, doctrine, not structures, were received from the apostles, and the manner of appointment to office is therefore not determinative of apostolicity. Whatever powers inhere in ecclesial office inhere first in the Church itself, and it is therefore always possible in extraordinary circumstances for the assembly of the people of God as such to erect offices and appoint the holders thereof, without prior approbation or sacramental consecration by previous office holders. Therefore, while doctrine must remain, structures are malleable; as they were once upon a time the invention and arrangement of the Church, they remain to be refashioned and rearranged as pastoral necessity dictates. Thus, in despite of *Lumen Gentium*, §18, we find a more or less congregationalist attempt to reduce the principle of apostolic succession to identity of doctrine, to the Church’s possession of the apostolic faith.

Closely connected with apostolicity is the question of the necessity of an ordained priest for the Eucharist, which Schillebeeckx raised under the title of the community’s “right” to the Eucharist. If the community or local church or congregation has such a right, it seems to follow that it therefore has also the competence to arrange for the exercise of that right. That means, in turn, that ministerial office is radically the construction of the Church, even the local church. If the ministerial structure of the Church is the construction of the Church, of the assembly, then no minister has any capacity to act as a minister that does not inhere originally in the assembly. Therefore every assembly has the wherewithal to make the Eucharist of itself and to make those presidents of the Eucharistic assembly it needs.

The response to the questions of these first two issues appears in the Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Sacerdotium Ministeriale* of 1983.¹² It is an answer in the strength of council, not just

¹⁰ Hans Küng, “What Is the Essence of Apostolic Succession?” in *Apostolic Succession, Rethinking a Barrier to Unity* (Concilium 34), ed. Hans Küng (New York: Paulist, 1968), 28–35; also, idem, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 354–59.

¹¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Ministry: A Case for Change* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 33–37.

¹² “The Minister of the Eucharist,” *Origins* 13 (September 15, 1983): 230–33. For the Latin original see *Sacerdotium Ministeriale*, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19830806_sacerdotium-ministeriale_lt.html.

by appeal to the “power” of sacerdotal character; that is, not just by appeal to Trent. Rather, succession is apprehended as the Christological and so historical moment of mission and therefore also of the Eucharist and the continuing and visible Christological headship of the Church. Section 2.b, on apostolicity, sends the reader to Trent and to *Lumen Gentium*, §20; and section 4.b, on the presidency of the Eucharist, refers us to *Lumen Gentium*, §21, and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §2. The modest and obvious point here is that the conciliar texts provide the basis for the rejection of such views as Küng’s and Schillebeeckx’s, not their starting point.¹³

That the Council could be seen as their starting point, however, brings us to the broader context, a reformulation of the “two views.” Schillebeeckx’s concern is to understand ministry, including priestly ministry, in terms of the community’s need, calling, and institution rather than in terms of one minister’s empowerment of another through the rite of ordination. The two views are supposed to exclude one another. In the first, a community of apostolic faith needs pastoral leadership, which also suitably includes presiding at the Eucharistic assembly, and so there are priests; in the second, a hierarch ordains a priest, giving him power over the Eucharist and therefore also over the community whose assembly the celebration of the Eucharist evokes. In the first, the priest says Mass because he is pastor of the community; in the second, he rules the community because he has the sacramental power to say Mass.¹⁴ The first view Schillebeeckx sees in the first millennium of the Church, and in the prohibition of absolute ordinations—that is, ordinations that were not in view of a determinate pastoral charge. The second he sees in the theology of priestly character developed especially in the thirteenth century and whose spirituality is found developed in the French School.¹⁵ Now, did not the Council begin a break with the second view, by reinserting priestly ministry into a fuller ecclesiological framework and taking express

¹³ See the remarks on Schillebeeckx of Archbishop Julian Herranz Casado, “The Image of the Priest in the Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: Continuity and Projection toward the Third Millennium.” This paper was delivered in 1995 at the symposium on the priesthood, *Priesthood: A Greater Love*, for the thirtieth anniversary of the Decree, sponsored by the Congregation for Clergy, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_23101995_imp_en.html.

¹⁴ See Yves Congar, in his preface to B.-D. Marliangeas, *Clés pour une théologie du ministère: In persona Christi, In persona Ecclesiae* (Paris: Beache-sne, 1978), 13.

¹⁵ For the “modern view” of the priest, see Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 58–65, and for a summary statement of Schillebeeckx view of the history, 66–74. The history is fuller and more nuanced in his subsequent, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

note of the community to whom the priest is sent, by speaking of *munera* and *ministeria* rather than potestates; and in locating the foundation of jurisdiction in ordination, did it not take a first step in distancing the Church from the legitimacy of absolute ordination?¹⁶

The view of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* underlying Schillebeeckx's remarks is once again that the Decree is incoherent, that it took some steps in the direction of a ministry returned to the local church, but did not complete the journey. This is clear even in one of his first comments on the Decree, in which he emphasizes the "pastoral" orientation of priesthood, obliquely refers to the issue of absolute ordinations, and regards the Council as having desacralized the priest, taking from him the "aura of mystery" and regarding him as "a real human being."¹⁷ Schillebeeckx's view has been very influential, especially in the United States.¹⁸

One can say that Schillebeeckx's view breaks the synthesis so artfully constructed by the Council. It is not, however, that he takes one of the "two views" at the Council, the "mission" view, and makes that architectonic. Schillebeeckx is faithful to neither of the views in play at the Council.

We wish to say that the priest is sent empowered to say Mass, yes. He is sent by Christ, through the bishop, by ordination. He is sent to and for the sake of a community. Both things must be true. It is because he can say Mass that he rules the community, and it is because he rules the community that he can say Mass. There is no full and fully fit pastor of a parish who cannot say Mass. Also, there is no one who can say Mass (ordinarily speaking, and setting aside the question of religious priests) who does not have pastoral care of a community of faithful. But the community to whom he is sent and for whom he presides at Mass does not give him the wherewithal—the power—to represent Christ and act in his person in saying Mass. The Lord who makes a man a priest through ordination at the hands of a bishop does not send him to say Mass in a vacuum, he does not send the man to *himself* (which is not to deny the value of Mass said without a congregation).

It is just here that the issue of the origin of apostolic ministry arises. For Schillebeeckx, an apostolic community, that is, a community of apostolic faith living by the Spirit, is the sufficient empowering principle of apostolic office. As already indicated, this stance undervalues the principle of

¹⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 67; idem, *Church*, 205.

¹⁷ Eduard Schillebeeckx, *The Real Achievement of Vatican II* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 42–43.

¹⁸ See for instance Paul Philibert, "Issues for a Theology of Priesthood: A Status Report," in *The Theology of the Priesthood*, ed. Donald Goergen and Ann Garrido (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 24–24 and 38–40.

succession in office, of historical connection to the apostolic age and to Christ. In addition, it misidentifies the needs of the community to whom the priest is sent. What the community needs is precisely an apostolic ministry, which is to say, a ministry from outside of itself. Just as salvation is from *extra nos* as coming from God, just as grace is not produced by nature, just as the gospel word is not the word that comes from within our heart but enters through the ears, so also the ministry the Church needs is a ministry that comes to it from above and from outside. It is just this that Schillebeeckx denies when he denies a “direct” Christological foundation for priestly ministry.¹⁹ The candidate for such ministry may come from the community, but the ministry does not come from the community, even from a community animated by the Holy Spirit.²⁰

It is not, then, as if Schillebeeckx has developed or completed one of the views at the Council at the expense of the other; he has abandoned both views. What is true of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* is that it inserts the understanding of priestly ministry into ecclesiology, and into a network of relationality, whereby the priest is related at once to other priests (§8), to bishops (§7), and to the baptized faithful in both their pastoral need and their own ministerial competence (§9). The development of these avenues, however, is to be found, not in what amounts to a plea for the abolition of apostolic ministry, but in the even richer development of the relations the priest is the center of and an ever more express realization of the Church, the context of the priest, as mystery, communion, and mission. These things, however, are in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (§12).

Representation and Gender

Perhaps the most contentious of the issues about ministry and orders troubling the postconciliar Church was the question of the ordination of women, where the issue was fought especially on the ground of the priestly representation of Christ.²¹ What is the relation of priestly speaking in the person of the Church and priestly speaking in the person of Christ? *Inter Insigniores*, the 1976 statement of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith on the inability of women to be ordained, appeals to the second and thirteenth paragraphs of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*,²² with its strong emphasis on

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 67; idem, *Church*, 206.

²⁰ See John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §16.

²¹ That is, setting aside such considerations as dominical intention, the alleged cultural conditioning of the mind of Christ and the New Testament hagiographers, subsequent Church history, etc.

²² There is appeal also to *Lumen Gentium*, §§10 and 28; and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §33.

the priestly representation Christ, on acting in his person, especially in the Eucharist, in order to draw the conclusion that only men and not women can in the wholeness of their personal reality, which of course includes bodiliness, successfully carry out this representation of Christ.

In fact, hardly were the decrees of the Council published before the question of representation, and the order and relation of the representations, ecclesial and Christological, raised. In the highly influential Herder commentary on the documents of the Council, F. Wulf wants the priest's priesthood to be a function of the priesthood of the Church.²³ As already noted, he thinks the characterization of the priest in §2, facing the Church as representing Christ the Head, is "one-sided."²⁴ The text forgets that the priesthood of priests represents the priesthood of the Church and is "its organ of fulfillment." Further, while the powers of the priest are "given by Christ," they are "primarily powers of the Church."²⁵

A host of theologians tried their hand at so describing things as to counter the argument of *Inter Insigniores*. Edward Kilmartin has it that the priest represents the faith of the Church, and consequently Christ.²⁶ Similarly, Hervé Legrand holds that the priest's representation of Christ is indirect, through first representing the Church.²⁷ To which it might be replied that, although the priest exercises the faith he shares with the Church and, in the sacraments, with the assembly, for that very reason he need not represent either the Church or its faith as though they were absent things. It is rather Christ, ascended to heaven, who needs palpable representation in the Eucharist. David Power argues that the priest represents both Christ and the Church in the sacrament equally immediately.²⁸ In this reconstruction, however, the assembly ends up as the instrument of consecration,²⁹ and the body signified by the consecrated elements is the body of the assembly.³⁰ In a similar way, Susan Wood has

²³ Wulf, "Commentary on the Decree," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 4, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Lalit Adolphus et al. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

²⁶ Edward Kilmartin, "Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975): 243–64; and repeating Kilmartin's view, see also Mary Schaefer "Forum: Ordaining Women," *Worship* 63 (1989): 469.

²⁷ Hervé Legrand, "*Traditio perpetuo servata?* The Non-Ordination of Women: Tradition or Simply an Historical Fact?" *Worship* 65 (1991): 503–4.

²⁸ David Power, "Representing Christ in Community and Sacrament," in *Being a Priest Today*, ed. Donald J. Goergen, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 97–123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104–10, 116.

it that the priest represents Christ only in that he represents the *totus Christus*, Christ and the Church.³¹ Wood thinks that since to say “head” makes us think also of “body,” the priest in representing Christ the Head must also by that fact represent the body, as if one cannot say “head” without also saying “body.” Indeed, she seems to make headship mean nothing more than representing the *body*.³²

Such liturgical and sacramental convolutions urge a return to the simplicity with which *Inter Insigniores* §5 reads *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §2.³³ By speaking of the priest acting in the person of Christ the *Head*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* means to say that the priest acts in the person or name of the Church only because he first acts in the person of Christ. This would reflect the original deployment of the language of headship in the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians.³⁴ Is this reading of *Inter Insigniores* faithful to the conciliar decree itself?³⁵

Presbyterorum Ordinis certainly seems to incline to the view of *Inter Insigniores* by speaking first and foundationally of the priest as represent-

³¹ Susan Wood, “Priestly Identity: Sacrament of the Ecclesial Community,” *Worship* 69 (1995): 109–27. See the replies of Sara Butler, “Priestly Identity: ‘Sacrament’ of Christ the Head,” *Worship* 70 (1996): 290–306; Lawrence J. Welch, “Priestly Identity Reconsidered,” *Worship* 70 (1996): 307–18 and his “For the Church and within the Church: Priestly Representation,” *The Thomist* 65 (October 2001): 613–37.

³² Wood, “Priestly Identity,” 114–15.

³³ For further convolutions, see Dennis Ferrara, for whom the priest says the consecratory words both in the person of Christ and in the person of the Church, in his “Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom *In Persona Christi* in St. Thomas and the Magisterium,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 195–224; and idem, “*In Persona Christi*: Towards a Second Naïveté,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 65–88; and the reply of G. Mansini, “Representation and Agency in the Eucharist,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 499–517.

³⁴ This is so because the life and growth of the body is, for these letters, derived from the head. Heinrich Schlier, commenting on the term “kephale” in Eph 1:22f, 4:14, 5:23; Col 1:18, 2:10, 2:19, observes that Christ is presented as Head of the Church “in the sense that from this Head the body grows up to this Head.” Moreover: “In this unity of Christ and the Church the Headship of Christ is manifested in the fact that he directs the growth of the body to himself. The *kephale* determines not merely the being of the body but also the fulfillment of its life. . . . He is the effective “whence” of the activity of the body whereby it edifies itself though gifts given to its members. As the *kephale* he is thus the concrete principle of the bodily growth of the Church, he is the arche, Col 1:18.” See Heinrich Schlier, s.v. “kephale,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3., ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 680. See also Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 190–91.

³⁵ This is also the reading of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1553.

ing Christ; the priest as representing the Church, acting in her name, is added only at the last, not before the final text, and toward the end of §2, in 2.d. Paragraph 2.a speaks of the mission of the whole church; 2.b, however, speaks on the contrary of ministers, and does so quite consciously as of something distinct from the mission of the Church as such (see the introductory *vero*), in the line of Christ's own being sent and his sending, the line from Father, to incarnate Son, to apostle, to bishop and priest. Priests are therefore ministers of Christ *and not of the Church*. This is expressly the understanding of the text publicly stated at the Council, just prior to the adoption of the final text.³⁶ On this basis, of course, priests act for and in the name of the Church. But as ministers of Christ they are instruments of Christ, not of the Church.³⁷

Again, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* prepares for the position of *Inter Insigniores* by noting in §2 that, since the priestly mission is a mission from Christ (§2.b), it therefore is conferred by a special sacrament, which, of course, like all the sacraments, is the action of Christ, and by construing the mission in 2.c as a mission to the "nations" so that the people of God may be assembled. It must be seen, therefore, as mission *to* the Church, not *from* the Church, which it is rather the function of the mission to constitute. Even apart from the final *relatio*, therefore, the text itself substantially answers the question as to priority of the representations.

In other words, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* simply presupposes the position of Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* but without drawing attention to the position the Church has consistently rejected, as *Mediator Dei*, for its part did not fail to do, appealing to the Council of Trent, the Decree on Orders, chapter 4. So, in §83 of *Mediator Dei*, the idea that the "priest acts in virtue of an office committed to him by the community"—which is only another way of saying that the priest represents first the community and only so Christ—is reproved, and in §84, we read that "the priest acts for the people only because he represents Jesus Christ insofar as [*quatenus*] Christ is Head of all his members and offers himself in their stead."³⁸

³⁶ See the Response to Modus 35, *AS* IV/7, 123–24: to the suggestion that priests be said to act *ut Ecclesiae ministri* in joining the sacrifice of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ in 2.d, the commission replied that the text already has it that priests act in the name of the Church, and that anyway, "presbyters act, not as ministers of the Church, but as ministers of Christ," with reference to *Lumen Gentium*, §§10.b and 28, where priests act (*agunt*) in the person of Christ.

³⁷ As in theory, the prime minister of England is the agent and instrument of the queen, not the people of England. This precision seems to rule out Power's view of things.

³⁸ See also Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, §40: The priesthood of the priest "is not a delegation from the people." And "prior to acting as representative of the community

Presbyterorum Ordinis, in fact, includes the remarkable argument of §93 of *Mediator Dei*, and does so in 2.d, only without explicit reference to *Mediator Dei*, which has it that the people offer the sacrifice of the Mass “by the hands of the priest,” and according to which this is evident “from the fact that the minister at the altar . . . represents Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body.” The people offer, but not because like the priest they perform the rite. Were that true, they would not need the priest to represent them; and, were that true, and they did not need the priest to act for them because able to act on their own here, then the priest could indeed represent the people independently of representing Christ. But no, the people offer because they “unite their hearts in praise, impetration, expiation, and thanksgiving with the prayers or intention of the priest, even of the High Priest himself.” *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, for its part, says exactly the same thing, but without the contrast to the counterposition. So, in §2.d, “the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful,” in union with the sacrifice of Christ, is offered “by their [the priests’] hands” and “in the name of the whole Church” (*per manus eorum, nomine totius Ecclesiae*). And this happens, quite evidently and even though the text does not remark the error of reversing things, because, as the beginning of 2.d says, priests are “ministers of *Jesus Christ*”—that is, not ministers of the people—and ministers of Christ, again and quite evidently, on the ground of the conclusion of 2.c, that priests are in the first place conformed to *Christ* and act in *his* person.

In this light, we can take *Pastores Dabo Vobis* as the authentic development of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §2 on the question of representation.³⁹ In *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §12.d, John Paul II notes that the priest’s relation to Christ is “primary,” and in §§13–15 he treats of the priest’s relation to Christ as Head and Shepherd as “fundamental.” Paragraph 13 deals with Christ the Priest, who makes a priestly people; §14 notes that the ordained priest exists for the sake of this priestly people; and §15 tells us that the service he brings to it is precisely the representation of Christ the Priest. Then in §16.a, the priest’s “sacramental representation” of Christ “serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church.” Again, §16.d speaks of “the relation of the priest to Jesus Christ and in him to his Church.” That is, once again, the relation to the Church is a function of the first, foundational relation to Christ. This ordering of things, moreover, is a sign of the priority of the grace of the Christ to the Church (§16.f):

before the throne of God, the priest is the ambassador of the divine Redeemer.” And note that the priest is an ambassador of Christ as Head.

³⁹ See also the explanation of the priest’s acting in the person of Christ in the Eucharist in John Paul II’s letter of 1980, *Dominicae Cenae*, which speaks in §8 of the priest’s “sacramental identification” with Christ the High Priest.

And so the priest, on account of his very nature and sacramental mission, appears in the structure of the Church as a sign of the absolute priority and gratuity of that grace which is conferred by the risen Christ on the Church. And through the ministerial priesthood, the Church acquires an awareness of herself in faith, that she has her origin not from herself but from the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit. The apostles and their successors—since they exercise an authority which is not their own—but one which has been received from Christ the head and shepherd, through their ministry occupy a position facing the Church. And this ministry is nothing but the sign, as well as the sacramental and visible continuation, of Christ himself, who faces the Church and world as the one author and source of an abiding and always new salvation, since he alone is himself the savior of the body.⁴⁰

This perception of the order of the relations, first to Christ, then to the Church, perfectly reflects theological tradition. So, for instance, for St. Thomas, the priesthood of Christ is treated before Christ's mediation in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa*. For St. Thomas follows an explanatory order, where causes and principles are treated before effects and things derived from principles. Therefore, although both priesthood and mediation suggest a double relation, God to man and man to God, Thomas treats first of the consequence of the hypostatic union for his relation to the Father, and second of the consequence for his relation to us, for the very good reason that his relation (as a man) to the Father is the *foundation* of his relation to us. The relationality of the ordained priesthood mirrors this structure, for the relation to Christ is first and the foundation of the priest's relation to the Church.

⁴⁰ We have reworked the official English translation of this passage because it does not accurately convey the meaning of the Latin original. For example, the official translation renders "Apostoli autem eorumque successores, cum potestatem non suam sed a Christo Capite et Pastore receptam habeant, locum coram Ecclesia occupant" into "The apostles and their successors, inasmuch as they exercise an authority which comes to them from Christ, the head and shepherd, are placed with their ministry—in the forefront of the Church . . ." (emphasis added). "In the forefront" does not capture the sense of the Latin original (*locum coram Ecclesia occupant*), which tries to express the nature of Christ's headship in distinction from the Church, and hence the ministry of the apostles and their successors as involving an authority that addresses or faces toward the Church. Elsewhere, at §§16.b and 22.c the text has *erga Ecclesiam* as equivalent to *coram Ecclesia*, and *erga* is "toward" or "in relation to." "In the forefront" suggests not an addressing or facing toward the Church but a position of facing with the Church and addressing something else. For the Latin original of this passage see *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84 (August 3, 1992): 682. For the official English translation see *Origins* 21 (April 16, 1992): 718–59. The official French translation available on the Vatican website has "face à l'Église."

We see here also the strength of Benoît de La Soujeole's observation, comparing the conciliar texts to previous magisterial anathema, that positive statements of the Council provide for less theological freedom than the negative, condemnatory ones typical of past conciliar canons.

[P]ositive language is much more restrictive for the theologian. When the magisterium undertakes to formulate Catholic doctrine for itself and on such or such a point, it deploys a certain number of affirmations bound together with one another, and that become the obligatory framework of theological reflection.⁴¹

Had the Council been content to note the difference ordination makes in terms of incapacity to be reduced to the lay state or, for a bishop, to that of simple priest, there would have been no strong assertion of the priestly and episcopal action in the person of Christ. But, in fact, the Council Fathers chose to state the difference orders make in terms of an episcopal and presbyteral capacity to act comprehensively and across the board, in all ministerial functions, in the person of Christ. This plain and positive statement of the Council is not well interpreted by the convolutions of relations and representations envisaged by those who wish to obscure the simple meaning, that the priest represents—immediately—Christ the Priest to the Church, and does so insofar as Christ is distinct from the Church, as is a head from a body, a bridegroom from a bride.

Celibacy

The priestly representation of Christ is at the same time a representation of Christ precisely as bridegroom relative to the Church. This, too, has been resisted in the postconciliar age for the sake of the ordination of women. This, too, is present if not prominent, in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, but in connection with another issue involving gender: celibacy. For all that it recognizes the perfect legitimacy of the practice of the Eastern Church, §16 indicates the suitability of celibacy for priests in very strong terms. Celibacy “is at once a sign of and a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world” (§16.a). But these reasons are not foundational. The suitabilities of celibacy for priesthood are indeed both personal and pastoral, but the foundational one is the relation that celibacy gives the priest to Christ. Celibacy consecrates priests to Christ “in a new and exceptional manner,” so that they may

⁴¹ B. de La Soujeole, 452: “le langage positif est beaucoup plus exigeant pour le théologien. Quand le magistère entreprend d'énoncer la doctrine catholique pour ell-même sur tel ou tel point, il déploie un certain nombre d'affirmations liées entre elles et qui deviennent le cadre obligé de la réflexion théologique.”

“more easily [*facilius*] cling to him in with singleness of heart” (§16.b), just as St. Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:34). Celibacy, a consecration to Christ, is thus suitable for a minister who is to be consecrated to Christ also by ordination; it links the priest in another way to the consecration for mission that is constitutive of priesthood.⁴²

The Council was most express about this foundational aspect of celibacy, which entered the text only before its final version. The Commission observed that it is not sufficient to say that celibacy is a sign, or testifies to the kingdom, and so on; rather, its value is first of all to unite the celibate to Christ, whence the sign value follows.⁴³

Everything else is built on the foundation of consecration, beginning with pastoral effectiveness. The consecration of celibacy as of orders, in other words, is for mission, and being undividedly devoted to the Lord is at the same time being devoted to the things of the Lord, taking care of the Lord's people in his name. This is spelled out in the clauses following the fact of consecration, which detail as it were its intended result. Consecration is said in the first place to be for union with Christ, but immediately following we read also that celibate priests more freely (*liberius*) dedicate themselves to God *and* men, that they serve the kingdom and the work of human regeneration with greater ease (*expeditius*), and that they are better fitted (*aptiores*) for paternity in Christ (see 1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thes 2:11), a paternity they accept more openly (*latius*).

Last, “by this state” (*hoc modo*), that is by enacting their ministry in the aforesaid ways and so fulfilling the pastoral purpose of celibacy, priests are also a sign. First, they “make an open profession before men” of their undivided dedication (see again 1 Cor 7:34) to the task of betrothing Christians to Christ. The *first* meaning or sign value of celibacy the Council mentions is therefore that it shows a will to consecrate oneself wholly to the task of betrothing Christians to Christ the Spouse (2 Cor 11:2), and in this way it is a sign of the eschatological wedding of the Lamb.⁴⁴ Also (*insuper*), in a *second* way, celibacy is a sign of the eschaton

⁴² For a brief history of the work leading up to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §16, see Jean Frisque, “Le Décret ‘Presbyterorum Ordinis.’ Histoire et commentaire,” 172–76.

⁴³ Response to Modus 21, AS IV/7, 212: “[T]he theological justification of celibacy cannot be adequately drawn uniquely or principally from its sign or witnessing value. The more profound reason for celibacy, rather, consists in a more intimate consecration to Christ, from which its value as a sign flows as a consequence.” The Commission directs us to *Lumen Gentium* §44.

⁴⁴ The text refers us to *Lumen Gentium* §42, where continence for the sake of the kingdom is a spur to and a source of spiritual fruitfulness, to §44, where observance of all the evangelical counsels bear witness to the eschaton and is an imitation of Christ, and to *Perfectae Caritatis* §12, where the chastity of religious leads to greater

where there is no marriage or giving in marriage, as the Lord says in the Gospel (Lk 20:35–36).⁴⁵

In insisting that celibacy must in the first place and foundationally conduce to holiness, the Council makes the structure of celibacy the structure of the priesthood itself: first Christ, conformity to Christ and union with Christ and on that basis, ministry and sign value. Priestly celibacy has, as it were, the same structure as priestly identity. Just as the priest is consecrated to Christ for mission, and just as he represents Christ and on that basis represents the Church, so celibacy is also, in another way, consecration to Christ, and on that basis there is erected pastoral zeal and the further service of eschatological witness. Moreover, it is to be noted that the “better” way that celibacy is as compared to marriage is not simply a matter of being a clearer sign of eschatological blessing, but enters into the objective good of the person, holiness itself. It enters, doubtless, as a more efficacious means to holiness of the kingdom of God; it is not that non-celibates are not called to perfection⁴⁶ or do not cling to Christ; it is that the celibate “more easily clings to him.”⁴⁷

love of God and man, readies one for apostolic work, and is a sign of the wedding of the Lamb.

⁴⁵ The council’s theology of celibacy is nicely reprised by Max Thurian in his “The Theological Basis for Priestly Celibacy,” in *For Love Alone: Reflections on Priestly Celibacy* (Middlegreen: St. Paul’s, 1993), 53–65. This article is also available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_theol_en.html.

⁴⁶ See *Lumen Gentium* §40: “Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”

⁴⁷ *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §16. The straightforward sense of 1 Corinthians 7 and of the tenth canon of the twenty-fourth session of the Council of Trent is therefore upheld. It would not be sufficient to say that celibacy or virginity is always better relative to marriage only insofar as it is a sign, as does, e.g., Karl Rahner, “On the Evangelical Counsels,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life II*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 147 and 163. The greater sign value of celibacy or virginity in comparison to marriage is of course to be recognized, as does for instance John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 273–75 (general audience of April 7, 1982). But also, celibacy and virginity are to be affirmed as more expeditious as means to holiness as compared with marriage. For this traditional affirmation, beyond St. Augustine’s reproof of Jovinian, see St. Thomas, *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*, cc. 6, 8. As to the traditional nature of the council’s teaching here, see Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., “Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality,” *America* 188 (2003): 10. See too John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 274, where he speaks of a greater human fulfillment through continence, and 277, which denies that continence in itself constitutes a state of perfection, since of the counsels it is rather affirmed that they

Notwithstanding the careful avoidance of an appeal to ritual purity in expressing the value of celibacy, however, the postconciliar charge was that celibacy, like the restriction of orders to men, is a function of some kind of anti-body fear of sexuality, driving it underground, where it spoils and leads to perversion and immorality and abuse. So Nadine Foley, writing also after *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967) and the *Letter to Priests* of John Paul II (1979) says that “if a non-celibate state is inappropriate to sacred priesthood, despite the tradition of the eastern Church, then something definitive is being said about women and about marital relations with women. Women are unfit to approach the realm of the sacred.”⁴⁸ At the same time, the very fear and repression of sexuality is said to be an ecclesiastical instrument of political power.⁴⁹

We think that it can be readily acknowledged that both the distinction of the sexes as well as marriage and the renunciation of marriage enter inextricably and powerfully into both the structure of Revelation and the polity—the Church—that Revelation calls into being. The disagreements in evaluating this fact have to do more with whether one enters into its intelligibility with faith or not, with confidence in the Catholic tradition or not; and we cannot deal here with the enormous differences of hermeneutical, anthropological, and theological principle involved. Of course, while maleness is a necessity for the sacramental representation of Christ, celibacy is not. Nonetheless, it can be understood as furthering the likeness to Christ, and in this way linked to the capacity of the priest to act *in persona Christi*. This implication in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* is not in fact hard to unfold, if indeed it can be said to be merely implicit at all. Furthermore, as we shall see, the postconciliar reception of the Council’s reaffirmation of celibacy makes of it ever more clearly a form of the affirmation and salvation of sexuality, and in its male form, not its denial or repression.

We take for granted, first, that sexual differentiation is ordered to the nuptial gift of embodied persons; second, that this mutual gift is itself

(only!) “*help* us to achieve a fuller charity” (emphasis added). At the same time the pope therefore affirms that it is possible for someone who has not taken a vow or promise of perfect continence to reach a superior degree of perfection—whose measure is charity “in comparison to the person who lives in the state of perfection with a lesser degree of charity.”

⁴⁸ Nadine Foley, “Celibacy in the Men’s Church,” in *Women in a Men’s Church* (*Concilium* 134), ed. Virgil Elizondo and Norbert Greinacher (New York: Seabury, 1980), 35.

⁴⁹ See Ferdinand Menne, “Catholic Sexual Ethics and Gender Roles in the Church,” in Elizondo and Greinacher, *Women in a Men’s Church*, 20, for whom celibacy is a constituent of the Church’s political power. Menne relies in part on the work of Michel Foucault.

further ordered to fruitfulness; and third, that the ways in which men and women compass both these things are distinct. Adding the issue of likeness to Christ, there are therefore four themes to watch for in the Decree and its reception in subsequent magisterial statements and theology: likeness to Christ, the gift of the person, fruitfulness, maleness. Likeness to Christ is, ideally, to be verified in all the other three things, not just in maleness.

If we return to the text of the Decree, we can note that insofar as it is a sign of the eschaton, priestly celibacy is not proper to priests, but something shared with religious. But the Decree says also that the priest's celibacy enables and shows him to be dedicated wholly to the service of betrothing Christians to Christ (2 Cor 11:2). This meaning of celibacy is something proper to priests. In this way, as a celibate, a man's fecundity is as it were turned over to that of Christ and the Church; one's bodily fecundity is suspended at the straightforward bodily level and directed to spiritual fruitfulness, the spiritual fruitfulness to which priestly ministry is already dedicated.

The pursuit of spiritual fruitfulness is predicated, however, on the prior gift of self to the service of God and man, the devotion of self "with greater freedom" that *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §16 says celibacy enables; indeed, it is predicated on the prior consecration to Christ that is the first moment of priestly celibacy according to the Council.

In the priestly pursuit of spiritual fruitfulness, moreover, in priestly celibate service to God and man, the celibacy in question is that of a man, a male, and this is clear from the text the Council adduces. For in presenting himself as betrothing the Corinthians to Christ, the Apostle, Paul, puts himself in the place of the paterfamilias, the father of the bride whose office it is to betroth his daughter to her husband.

Celibacy for the sake of this spiritual fruitfulness therefore likens one at least to Paul, the apostolic minister par excellence. More than that, however, it likens the priest to Christ. For if the apostolic minister is in the place of the father of the bride, who would the mother be? It would be the Church herself, as we read in Galatians of the Jerusalem above, our mother, whose spouse, quickening the womb that is the laver of baptism, is Christ. So, Paul is here, in a sort of transitive symbolic way, in the role of Christ, the spouse of the Church (Ephesians). That is, the apostolic minister functions in the place of Christ the Bridegroom, and this joins up with the idea of paternity in Christ, also evoked by the Council (1 Thes 2:11; 1 Cor 4:15).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ignace de la Potterie, "The Biblical Foundation of Priestly Celibacy," in *For Love Alone*, 13–30, esp. 21–25, finds another connection of 2 Cor 11:2 to the priestly celibate representation of Christ. The phrase, "one husband," referring to the Christ

Of course, it might be argued that to say that the priest acts in the person of Christ the Head, as the Decree does in §2, is already to say that he acts in the person of Christ the Bridegroom. In Ephesians, after all, Christ the Head is both and inclusively head relative to the body, and head relative to the Church his bride.⁵¹ In any case, both Paul VI and John Paul II complete the inference the Decree suggests. Paul VI teaches:

“Laid hold of by Christ” (Ph 3:12) unto the complete abandonment of one’s entire self to him, the priest takes on a closer likeness to Christ, even in the love with which the eternal Priest has loved the Church his Body and offered himself entirely for her sake, in order to make her a glorious, holy, and immaculate Spouse (cf. Eph 5:25–27). The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh” (Jn 1:13).⁵²

And this text of *Caelibatus Sacerdotalis* sends us to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §16.⁵³ And here is John Paul II:

The will of the Church [legislating celibacy for priests] finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self

to whom Paul says he betroths the Corinthians as a pure virgin, is recalled in the pastorals by the requirement that apostolic ministers be “a husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). The requirement follows from the symbolic character of the minister, as representing Christ the Bridegroom, a character recognized by both St. Augustine and St. Thomas. The representation is more perfect, however, according as the minister practices continence, for the marital love of Christ and the Church is virginal. As de la Potterie puts it, “the representational role of the monogamous priesthood also entails the call to continence for the married minister, and consequently, for the unmarried ones, the call to celibacy” (24). De la Potterie’s article can also be found at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_01011993_bfoun_en.html.

⁵¹ It can be argued that it is the nuptial relation of Christ to the Church that makes the Church his body; see John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 312–18, the catecheses given in the general audiences of August 18 and 25, 1982; and Sara Butler, “The Priest as the Sacrament of Christ the Bridegroom,” *Worship* 66 (1992): 510, who appeals to these catecheses.

⁵² Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, §26.

⁵³ As it does also to *Lumen Gentium* §42.

in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.⁵⁴

It is the celibacy of a man that the priest brings to the priesthood and the representation of Christ, and this is very important for the psychological and spiritual integrity of priestly life that the Decree addresses in §14.⁵⁵ If it is precisely as a man that the priest's celibacy is important, then he can say not that he is leaving his sexuality and his masculinity behind but bringing them forward and offering them for the service of a higher fruitfulness.⁵⁶ Given the symbolic register that their own virginity or celibacy sounds, women can say, "it is precisely because we are women that our virginity and celibacy is religiously important; it is our celibacy, womanly celibacy, that we bring to the representation of redeemed humanity, of the Church, of the bride." So also for men, celibacy is the redemption and consecration of their own distinct sexuality. This is especially manifest, moreover, in the priest's presidency of the Eucharist.⁵⁷

John Paul II sounds this note both magisterially and more privately as a theologian. Magisterially, again from *Pastores Dabo Vobis*:

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."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §29; see also the Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (January 31, 1994), §§13 and 58, for the same connection.

⁵⁵ On *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §14, see Ratzinger, "Life and Ministry of Priests."

⁵⁶ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §29: "For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of a positive, specific, and characteristic approach to being a priest."

⁵⁷ See Roman Cholij, "Priesthood and Celibacy According to Recent Church Teaching," paper given at the Congregation for the Clergy's symposium on the priesthood, "Priesthood: A Greater Love" (October 23–28, 1995), who has it that, at the Eucharistic sacrifice, the priest "lends his chaste flesh to Christ, his continence now becoming an integral constituent of his iconic relationship with Christ who offers the sacrifice of a total self-oblation to the Father on our behalf."

⁵⁸ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §29, quoting his *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), §16.

There is too much material in the “theology of the body” to canvass in this essay, but at least we can recall the catecheses on the resurrection and on virginity. In the first, sexuality is seen to be fulfilled in the resurrected body, which is to say that the nuptial meaning of the sexually determined bodiliness of human persons is fulfilled in heaven, where deification makes the gift of self perfect.⁵⁹ From the catecheses on virginity, we have this:

if continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven undoubtedly signifies a renunciation, this renunciation is at the same time an affirmation. It is an affirmation that arises from the discovery of the gift, that is, at the same time from the discovery of a new perspective of the personal realization of oneself “through a sincere gift of oneself” (*Gaudium et Spes* §24).⁶⁰

Celibacy integrates male sexuality into priesthood. First it is self-gift, and precisely as involving (by way of renunciation, to be sure) sexually characterized bodiliness. Second, it keeps the specific finality of sexuality, fecundity, but orients it to a higher, spiritual fecundity. We should notice that here as for marriage, there is an inseparability between the union effected by self-gift and fruitfulness.⁶¹ As the exclusion of one or the other destroys the integrity of the marital act, so the exclusion of one or the other in priestly celibacy would destroy its way of affirming and redeeming sexuality.⁶²

Also, the very way of being sexual as a male is affirmed and redeemed in priestly celibacy, though this is hard to put into words that will not be misunderstood. Sara Butler, relying on John Paul’s Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, says that the feminine mode of loving is characterized “by active receptivity, a welcoming love which meets, accepts, and responds to the husband’s gift with its own gift of self,” and is careful to point out that “active receptivity” is not passivity.⁶³ By contrast, we can say that if the feminine welcomes, the masculine knocks; if the feminine meets, the masculine seeks; if the feminine accepts and responds, the masculine initiates and begins. These harmonics, too, are sounded in the

⁵⁹ Catecheses on the resurrection, John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 233–261, esp. 238–40 (December 2, 1981), 240–43 (December 9, 1981).

⁶⁰ Catecheses on virginity, *Theology of the Body*, 286 (May 5, 1982).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 277–278 (April 14, 1982); see also Cholij, “Priesthood and Celibacy,” for whom the priest’s “conjugal debt is now not toward his wife, but toward the Church through frequent celebration of the Eucharist. His paternal responsibilities are first and foremost toward his spiritual progeny.”

⁶² See here Michele M. Schumacher, “An Inseparable Connection: The Fruitfulness of Conjugal Love and the Divine Norm,” *Nova et Vetera* 1 (2003): 381–402.

⁶³ Butler, “Priest as Sacrament,” 511; see John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, §25.

priestly initiative in gathering the Church by the initiative of evangelization and preaching, by the offering of word and sacrament to the welcoming, active receptivity of the faithful.

The orientation of sexuality to a higher goal occurs, *mutatis mutandis*, in both Christian marriage and also in another way with a married clergy, as in the Eastern practice. If one sticks with the Council, it cannot be said that celibacy flows from the nature of the priesthood, else a married clergy impedes the working out of nature of the sacrament.⁶⁴ Nor can it be said on the basis of the above argumentation that married priests unworthily celebrate Mass, or that they do not give themselves fully to the fulfillment of their charge.⁶⁵ But it can be said that with a married clergy, the integration of sexuality into priesthood does not happen as unambiguously as with celibacy, for sexuality finds its ordinary finality in procreation; it is not *exclusively* integrated into the symbolic register of priesthood, of the priestly representation of Christ, and indeed, the earthly Christ, nor is it *uniquely* integrated into the spiritual finality of the priesthood. Still, a married clergy does not of itself militate against either the symbolic harmonics or finality of priesthood. Were it so, of course, the practice of the Eastern Church could not find the praise and approbation the Council rightly gives it.⁶⁶

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article we asked where the legacy of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* is to be found. This depends very much on whether its view of the nature of priesthood is coherent, a true synthesis of the two dominant views with which the Council started, or whether it is a juxtaposition of pieces that cannot go together. In the latter case, the legacy is a choice between two unsynthesizable pieces. As one popular hermeneutic of the Council would have it, we could pursue a reconstituted post-

⁶⁴ Response to Modus 16, *AS IV/7*, 209.

⁶⁵ Responses to Modus 18 and to Modus 20, *AS IV/7*, 211.

⁶⁶ On the other hand, those who want a female priesthood make of sexuality something indifferent to priesthood, irrelevant to priesthood, something that cannot, as such, be integrated into priesthood. Whether someone is male or not is wholly accidental to priesthood. Likewise, those who want homosexual "marriage," at the same time as they destroy the nature of marriage, also make of sexuality something indifferent to priesthood because incapable of speaking a relation to the finality of priesthood in (spiritual) fruitfulness. Here, sexuality is denatured because stripped of its ordination to procreation; it cannot therefore bear any special relation to spiritual fruitfulness, which could no longer justly be called spiritual "paternity."

Tridentinism, a sort of resupernaturalizing and resacerdotalization of ecclesial ministry (bad things), as some claim to see in the 1971 Synod and the Letters to Priests of John Paul II. On the other hand, still according to this hermeneutic, the course is forward, to the democratic and clericalized, egalitarian, charismatic, and collaborative style of ministry toward which the Council took but a few hesitant and indecisive steps.

A seemingly more moderate hermeneutic, and one critical of the foregoing, would see the Decree, as it sees the production of the Council generally, as a juxtaposition of views, but a not incoherent one. Rather, according to this view: "Fidelity to the Council requires that both juxtaposed theses be taken seriously and that an attempt be made through a more penetrating theological reflection and a renewed ecclesial praxis to reconcile them in a synthesis that will allow further advances."⁶⁷ So, the Council bequeathed to the Church and theology the task of working for a synthesis that the Council itself could not or did not effect.

We believe that neither of these approaches is helpful for interpreting *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. The textual history of the Decree and the speeches and discussions that are part of that history show that it was certainly not the intention of the Council Fathers to do nothing more than juxtapose two theses or viewpoints.⁶⁸ The October 16, 1965, *relatio* of Archbishop Marty gave voice to that intention, accepted by the fathers. Further, we think it is no great feat of interpretation to see the fulfillment of this intention in §2 of the Decree. Interpreting *Presbyterorum Ordinis* therefore cannot be a matter of weighing or balancing two masses of material, the theses of a progressive Council majority on one side and of a conservative Council minority on the other. We are to see, rather, that consecration is for the purpose of extending the mission of Christ, whose own end is the glory of the Father in a redeemed humanity. The priest-priester is sent forth as one consecrated *in persona Christi capitis* authoritatively to proclaim the Gospel to the world, to extend the offer of salvation in the sacraments, and to build up the Church.

Determining the legacy of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* depends also on whether the Decree is read against the background of prior Catholic tradition, the great democracy of the diachronic voices from Scripture, itself read as *Dei Verbum* §12 teaches us to read it, to the Fathers, from the Fathers to the theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and

⁶⁷ Pottmeyer, "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council," in Alberigo, Jossua, and Komonchak, *The Reception of Vatican II*, 39.

⁶⁸ We try to show this in detail in the commentary cited in note 3 above.

very much including past conciliar and papal teaching. This way of interpretation was urged by the Synod of Bishops on the twentieth anniversary of the Council.⁶⁹

We think that, if read in that way, the synthesis of the views, and the adequacy of the one view arrived at, become manifest. If the priesthood was framed in the theology of mission, it remained the ministry which culminated in the Eucharistic sacrifice, where the Christian's sacrifice of life passes over sacramentally into the eternal sacrifice of the Lamb. Precisely because it was framed in the theology of mission, both its historical institution by Christ, as well as its sacramental enablement, now, by Christ through the Spirit, were affirmed. If the priest was not hailed as an *alter Christus*, he was described as acting *in persona Christi capitis* no longer merely at the Eucharist, but across the length and breadth of his ministry. The Decree put it that the priest was to find holiness within the very exercise of his ministry—teaching, sanctifying, ruling. Still, that is what he was to find—holiness. The relation of the priest as minister to bishop, to fellow priests, to the laity, and including to the laity in their own apostolic labor—in other words, the concrete ecclesial context into which the priest is inserted was affirmed expressly and in detail. Still, he remained a “man apart,” both by reason of his consecration and in order to have something to bring to the people in whose midst he lived and worked.

If read in this way, furthermore, where the truly synthetic character of the Decree becomes manifest, then it is possible to answer the question of its legacy, which would appear to be the 1992 apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. This is true for the ecclesiological presuppositions of the priesthood, spelled out by the Holy Father as the mystery, the communion, and the mission of the Church; it is true for the centrality of the priest as representing Christ the Head; it is true for the priority of this representation relative to priestly representation of the Church; and it is true for the clarity with which celibacy is also linked to this representative character of the priest. All these things, some more or less developed by the Council, are brought fully to expression by Pope John Paul II, especially in relation to the human and ecclesial situation, the signs of the times, at the beginning of the third millennium. In this way, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* shows us a privileged way forward in the task of receiving the synthesis of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. N V

⁶⁹ See “The Final Report,” §5, “A Deeper Reception of the Council,” *Origins* 15 (December 19, 1985): 445–46.