INDEX

PRELIMINARY NOTES:

1. THE GOD OF THE COVENANT: ...............................................................x
2. THE UNION OF MAN AND WOMAN: a way to live the covenant: ..............x
3. AS A CONSEQUENCE: one single marriage: .............................................x
4. JESUS IS CELIBATE, NEVERTHELESS HE IS THE SPOUSE OF THE CHURCH:
   x
5. HE WHO IS CELIBATE: a way to live the covenant: ..................................x
6. HAPPY, BECAUSE YOU ARE MARRIED OR NOT MARRIED!: .......................x
7. DEBATES: a question of Faith: .................................................................x
8. MEANING OF CHRIST’S CELIBACY: ..........................................................x
9. FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD: .................................................................x
10. THE CALL TO LEAVE EVERYTHING: .......................................................x
11. ESPOUSALS AND PATERNITY: ...............................................................x

A. THE VALUE OF CHASTITY:

1° As an ideal:
   12. VOLUNTARY EUNUCHS: .................................................................x
   13. ESTEEM: .............................................................................................x
   14. NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD: ............................................................x
   15. GIFT THAT LIBERATES: .......................................................................x
   16. TOKEN OF HEAVENLY RICHES: .........................................................x
   17. CHRIST, UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL SPOUSE: .........................................x
2° As a redemptive offering: (18. 19. 20. 21.).................................................x
3° Growth in chastity: (22. 23.) .....................................................................x

B. THE MEANS TO FIDELITY:

1° An attitude of Faith and Confidence: (24. 25. 26. 27.).................................x
2° Devotion to our work: (28. 29. 30.)...............................................................x
3° Schedule - Rule of Life (31. 32. 33. 34.) ....................................................x
4° Family Life:
   35. FRATERNAL ATMOSPHERE: ...............................................................x
   36. MUTUAL HELP: ....................................................................................x

Consequently:

37. PRUDENCE IN ADMISSION: .................................................................x
38. PROBATION ..............................................................................................x
39. RICHNESS ..............................................................................................x
PRAYER ..................................................................................................................................................

APPENDIX. LETTER TO A YOUNG PRIEST FROM A LAICIZED PRIEST ON CELIBACY

October 22, 1984
CELIBATE - “FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

- PRELIMINARY NOTES -

1. THE GOD OF THE COVENANT:

   Everything concerning priestly celibacy and Christian marriage should be considered in the light of faith and the Gospel. One must not deprecate one state of life to exalt the other. Each person should ask himself the following questions:

   - What is God’s plan for me? “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sm 3, 9). A prudent counselor can help us discover the will of God for each of us.

   - According to the talents that God has given me and the needs of the world in which I live, where and how can I be most useful in the service of my fellow man, and, as an infallible consequence, be happiest?

   - Am I ready to respond to God’s call as the Virgin Mary did? “I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me as you say” (Lk 1, 38).

   - Am I convinced that my weight and measure and my efficiency during this life is my love of God and of others, that is, the essence of Christianity and not my own doing?

   In effect, in Christ Jesus we are all equal:

   “Christ is everything in all of you.” (Col 3, 11)

   “Each one of you is a son of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Him.” (Gal 3, 26-27)

   “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15, 5)

   Concretely, the God who shows Himself to man is the God of the Covenant. Already in the plan of the Old Covenant, with respect to Israel, God wanted to reveal the quality of treating mankind as equals. Christ has applied this title to Himself by showing that He came to accomplish the espousal of God and mankind and each one of us. The Holy Scriptures have taken up the image by representing the Church and each of us, who form the Church, as a spouse.

   “For he who has become your husband is your Maker; his name is the Lord of Hosts...” (Is 54, 5)
“I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.” (Hos 3, 21-22)

In order to appreciate priestly celibacy well, it is necessary to know how to appreciate marriage as well. It is necessary to situate priestly celibacy and marriage in the context of faith in the Covenant of God with man. All during this meditation we will insist upon this fundamental point and we will see that celibacy and marriage are complementary: And, what is more, voluntary celibacy gives added meaning to the indissolubility of marriage.

2. THE UNION OF MAN AND WOMAN:

Let us understand this: it is in His Incarnation that the Son of God espouses himself to humanity. He leaves the Father, takes on human nature, and there He is, God and man in one flesh, that of Jesus of Nazareth, flesh born of the Virgin Mary. St. Augustine repeats time and again that in the Incarnation, in the ‘nuptial chamber’ of the womb of Mary, the wedding of God with humanity took place; that is, in effect, that in the person of the Son of God, divinity and humanity are united.

The mystery of the Incarnation is the mystery of the absolute initiative of the God-love embracing man, until He becomes one with him while remaining perfectly God and while leaving him integrally a man. In Jesus Christ this embrace is consummated.

In effect, in Jesus there is ‘all of God’, since He forms one single God with the Father and the Spirit; in Him, as man, there is ‘all of man’, since he has been able to gather everyone in Himself in one single body.

Thus, the entire life of God passes to us through Jesus Christ. Our whole life, purified, transformed, passes to God through Jesus Christ. Between spouses, everything is held in common. Now God has espoused humanity in Jesus Christ, so everything is shared between God and mankind.

Yes, the marriage par excellence is the one of God and man, through the Incarnation of His Son. This is the Marriage with a capital ‘M’: definitive, and infinitely rich in love.

For His spouse, the Son handed Himself over to death. For her, he gives Himself in Communion: “This is my body. This is my blood.”

Thus the Lord asks, through the Church, that men and women give themselves to each other in love, accepting the honor and the grace that this covenant of Christ and His Church signifies, that of being the ‘Sacrament’, the tangible sign, visible to all. What an honor!

- What a burden! some might protest.

- What a gift! we should hasten to add.
What a man expects from a woman, what a woman expects from a man is, in essence, infinite happiness in life. For life eternal. Nothing less... It is that wild dream that makes a total giving possible on their wedding day.

Now this giving is impossible... unless the spouses encounter, in each other’s lives, the richness of God and, in their hearts, the tender and merciful love of Christ.

3. **AS A CONSEQUENCE:**

- There is only one, single marriage, a single Spouse: Jesus Christ, the Son of God: a marriage truly experienced with a companion or mate for life, or experienced in celibacy.

- The Son of God is full of love for the human family and each of us realizes this single marriage, which is why God is made man and He is given to us:

  “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...”  
  (Jn 3, 16)

- Jesus Christ, to convince us of His love and to pay the price, will die for us:

  “There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”  
  (Jn 15, 13)

  “…you have been bought, not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ’s blood beyond all price.”  
  (cfr. 1 Cor 6, 20 and 1 Pt 1, 18-19)

Thus He fills us with hope: with Him we are resurrected... and because of Him we do not die, because He loves us:

  “I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life.”  
  (Jn 11, 25-26)

4. **JESUS IS CELIBATE; NEVERTHELESS, HE IS THE SPOUSE OF THE CHURCH:**

In a society (the Jewish society) where everyone was married, even the very young, where virginity was considered as a disgrace, Jesus died celibate at 33 years of age.

St. Paul wrote about Him: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. He gave Himself up for Her...”  
(Eph 5, 25)

Jesus is the Spouse of humanity. I will repeat: He left His Father to be Incarnated and to be with His spouse, two in one flesh.

St. Paul adds:

  “Christ cares for the Church - for we are members of His body. ‘For this reason a man
shall leave his father and mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be made into one.’ This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church.”
(Eph 5, 29-32)

5. **HE WHO IS CELIBATE:**

“...for the sake of the reign of God” (Mt 19, 12), is also truly married. Since the beginning of the history of the Church, this same and unique marriage, that of Christ-Church, is present in its totality through these complementary signs: the Sacrament of Marriage and consecrated virginity. This sign is more evident in the mutual love of a man and a woman. Nevertheless, in one who is celibate for the kingdom of God, the ardor of love that goes directly to Christ, without the companionship of a marriage partner, shows better that Christ is the unique Spouse of the world.

It is, however, important to note that these two ‘signs’ of unique marriage, monogamous marriage and consecrated celibacy, are among the new and beautiful things that come from the open heart of Jesus on the Cross: they are charisms, gifts which come from the Holy Spirit. One should not delude oneself: to practice chastity in marriage as much as in celibacy is impossible without the grace of God, who is more present to each of us than we are to ourselves:

“My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection.” (2 Cor 12, 9)

6. **HAPPY, BECAUSE YOU ARE MARRIED OR NOT MARRIED!**

Many times I’ve heard it said: “You, you’re happy! ... Yes, you, who aren’t married! ... Marriage is something else. With a family everything changes... On getting married, one has the impression of losing something, of putting the brakes on his spirit... of reducing his charity.”

It’s true, in the Church this ‘bachelor’ mentality still exists. The notion that one cannot be fully Christian if one doesn’t renounce marriage is still in circulation.

It is a taboo which is difficult to suppress. Many men in the Church, and even more women, have given the impression of believing it, and don’t want to be freed of - their false impression.

Vocations are numerous. Each person has his or her own. Assuredly a vocation to virginity exists, especially in following the example of Jesus. But the vocation to marriage exists nonetheless! It is neither showing weakness, nor looking for an easy way out to respond to it, today above all.

However (and I don’t want to offend anyone by saying this), marriage has been depreciated in the Church, especially in these last centuries. A clerical mentality has spread that has preached and exalted celibacy to such a point that it leaves stuck in the subconscious of Christians the idea that marriage makes Christians second class citizens, incapable of leading a prayer community or unworthy to touch sacred things.
But perhaps the time is arriving when...

Pope Wojtyla, who, in the eyes of many, seems to be a traditionalist, has had the courage to go-against the current. He has affirmed the existence of this ‘bachelor’ mentality in a way that no one until now has expressed with such clarity. While speaking to married couples in St. Peter’s Square, he declared, “Marriage is not inferior to celibacy. Christian perfection is measured by charity, not by continence.”

“No word of Christ,” said the Pope, “provides an argument for proving the inferiority of marriage or the superiority of virginity or celibacy. Marriage and continence are not opposed to each other nor do they divide the human community into two groups: the perfect on one side, those who practice continence, and the ‘imperfect’ or less-than-perfect on the other, those who are married.” He insists, “this supposed opposition between celibates, who form the category of the perfect by reason of their continence, and the married folks, those who form the category of the non-perfect or less-than-perfect ones, has no foundation.”

7. DEBATES:

a. Today, in the Church, the debates centered on the celibacy of priests often bring into light the opposition between two sociological conceptions of the priesthood. The sociological point of view being that of the place of the priest in the Society, that is: the Church.

b. Certain people tend to appreciate this role of the priest according to the laws of any human society, and to try and find out the advantages and the drawbacks of priestly continence in the perspective of universal sociological data.

c. However, the problem of sacerdotal celibacy cannot be considered as a simple sociological one. The society in whose service the priest works is the Church, who holds from Christ himself her original constitution and her essential orientation.

At the basis of sacerdotal celibacy, there is Christ’s celibacy. This is to say that the problem, above all, is a theological one. When one tackles the question of whether it is preferable to dissociate the priesthood from continence and to leave those who are going to be ordained priests the possibility to get married, arguments on the advantages and drawbacks of celibacy in a social service situation cannot hold first place. They are certainly not useless, but they must be placed in the light of Christ’s primordial intention.

What has Christ wanted for his Church? And since what he wanted was founded on his very being, what has he been for his Church?

8. MEANING OF CHRIST’S CELIBACY:

a. This is why we must first consider the meaning of Christ’s celibacy - the value it represents.

We must recognize the fact that many of those who have expressed an opinion on sacerdotal celibacy have not taken into account the undeniable, surprising and suggestive fact that is
Christ’s celibacy. It is this fact that it import to analyze, and we must scrutinize its deep motivations if we want to receive the necessary divine light over a problem in which powerful human inclinations are concerned.

b. Obviously, it is not enough to consider Christ’s celibacy to solve the question of the priest’s celibacy. But since Christ is the unique priest, model of all others, and since there is no other true priesthood than that deriving from him and participating in his sacerdotal mission, the state of life of Jesus on earth takes on an importance that is capital in the determination of the priest’s state of life.

c. We know the full influence of the principle given by Jesus concerning the indissolubility of marriage. The holiness of Christian marriage received from Christ is a decisive development, with the call to a fidelity that overrides the human motivations for dissolution. It is not surprising that the priesthood should also have received from Christ, not only a rule that goes beyond merely human considerations, but also the illumination of a living model who invites the priest to live on a higher level - that of the broader life placed by God in the human heart.

9. FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

   Through its origin, celibacy is placed on the supernatural plane. It comes from above. It is so placed through its aim that it is well “In view of the kingdom of God.” The justification that Jesus gives it goes beyond all merely human considerations. Celibacy is not seen here under the simple aspect of a better service to society. Christ’s way of speaking confirms that the problem of celibacy such as he recommends, is not placed only, not even specially, in sociological terms. It is ‘the kingdom of heaven’ that gives a base to its value.

10. THE CALL TO LEAVE EVERYTHING:

   As we have already pointed out, Christ’s celibacy denotes a universal openness that manifests itself in other domains. It is not an isolated compartment. It is part of a general attitude. When he asks his disciples to give up a family, Jesus asks at the same time a more complete abandonment of all things: “We have left everything and followed you,” says Peter to him (Mt 19, 27; Mk 10, 28).

   To follow Christ is to leave everything, as he himself had given the example. The Master underlines it:

   “I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not be given repayment many times over in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life!” (Lk 18, 29-30)

   We quote the text from St. Luke where the renouncement to woman is expressly mentioned. In the text from St. Mark (10, 29) and in that of St. Matthew (19, 29), we find the formulation, just as forceful, of the renouncement to the home in the invitation to leave “the children;” but, moreover, there is a special mention of abandoning “the fields.” In this way, Jesus asks for the
renouncement, not only to material goods, but also to the trade or the occupation one has, one’s own way of life, and the various calls we are told about in ‘the Gospel are an illustration of ‘this total renouncement willed “because of the kingdom of God.”

No sacerdotal function strictly requires celibacy for its exercise. However, the conduct adopted by Christ imposes on the Church the necessity to aim towards a kind of priesthood in which the total renouncement claimed by the Gospel may be effectively put into action. Such is the tendency that can be observed in the history of the Church, be it in the Latin Church, where through the centuries, in spite of acute crisis and at times of lamentable situations, the discipline of celibacy has never stopped being strengthened, or in the Oriental Church, where the ideal of un-married priesthood has gained more and more ground.

11. ESPOUSALS AND PATERNITY:

a. The meaning of celibacy for the kingdom of God is high-lighted through other words from Jesus: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son’s wedding...” (Mt 22, 2). In the kingdom, Jesus has the part of the Spouse, and it is by this name that he defines himself (cf. Mt 9, 15; Mk 2, 39; Lk 5, 34). In this way, he means that he is coming to realize the nuptials of God and his people, such as they were announced by the prophets. He brings divine love to humanity, in view of the deepest intimacy, and he offers to the Father, in the name of men, a perfect answer of love. It is truly in him that the union is consummated.

b. In the light of this quality of Spouse, one understands better the full meaning of Christ’s celibacy. It is the refusal of a particular marriage, but not the refusal of all marriage - as Spouse, Christ realizes the supreme marriage, that uniting God and men. It is this unique and universal marriage which is the foundation of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

For Jesus, to be celibate is to be married to the whole of humanity and it is to live a superior love, which must feed and sustain the love of all marriages.

c. Following this way in participating in Christ’s celibacy, the priest enters deeply into the mystery of the espousals of God and humanity. He shares the quality of Spouse that is that of Jesus, and unites himself to men by a bond of love.

Celibacy, therefore, must be seen as a superior form of matrimony, animated by a more spiritual and more universal love. On the part of the priest, as on the part of Christ, it is meant to bring all marriages to blossom out in holiness.

d. Espousals entail fertility. Renouncing his family, Jesus came to form another family, one that was greater, that of the Father’s children. He has become the principle of a new spiritual generation.

So, in the divine Plan, the renouncing <of> carnal generation is linked to a paternity of supernatural order. Associated in the espousals of Christ with humanity, the priest is also,
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

through his celibacy, associated in a universal paternity, achieved by the power of grace.

- A. THE VALUE OF CHASTITY -

1° As an ideal:

12. VOLUNTARY EUNUCHS:

a. Our chastity is in view of the kingdom of heaven. The Decree “Renewal and Adaptation of Religious Life”, defines it in the terms of the Gospel, recalling the declaration in which Jesus had praised “those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven...” (Mt 19, 12).

It is a voluntary chastity and not only one imposed by circumstances. It is a chastity aiming towards a more complete entry of the whole human personality into the kingdom of God - aiming as well towards the use of all human forces in the service of this kingdom.

b. One must not lose sight of the fact that, when proposing this ideal, the Master was presenting it as already realized: “those who are such...” Indeed, he was the first to lead this kind of life and he shows here to his disciples that, if he remains celibate, it is by virtue of a sacrifice voluntarily offered for the establishment of his kingdom. This is why this chastity consists in following ‘the virgin Christ’, according to the words of the Decree in the Prologue.

13. ESTEEM:

This chastity professed by the priest must be “esteemed as a surpassing gift of grace.” Christ already had insisted on the divine gift. When his disciples had reflected: “If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is not advisable to marry,” he replied:

“It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted.” (Mt 19, 10-11)

Here is a gift that is not granted to all, “surpassing gift of grace,” says the Decree; the Latin word (eximum) which has been translated <by?, as> ‘surpassing’, suggests a gift of a superior nature, based on divine choice.

14. NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD:

It is, therefore, not surprising that the ideal of virginal chastity cannot be understood by a great number of men, even of Christians; and it is normal that lack of understanding should lead to criticisms. In our days, a depreciation of this ideal has at times followed the exaltation of the virtues of marriage. These values, certainly, must be held in high esteem, but - as the Decree recalls - consecrated chastity must also be esteemed in proportion to the divine gift it means.
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

While inviting us to appreciate a gratuitous gift from God, the Council, moreover, excludes from that esteem all pretension of pride or vanity.

15. GIFT THAT LIBERATES:

a. More precisely, in what does the value of chastity consist? “It liberates the human heart in a unique way” says the Decree, while referring us to considerations of St. Paul. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle explains how there is in virginity a liberation from the cares of the world: while the married man “has to bother about the world’s affairs and devote himself to pleasing his wife, he is torn two ways;” “he who is unmarried devotes himself to the Lord’s affairs, all he needs worry about is pleasing the Lord” (1 Cor 7, 32, 33).

b. One still might, egotistically, want to liberate oneself from certain worries. But here, liberation only makes sense with total openness to the Spirit and heart of the Lord. It takes place, the Council says, in order that the heart “burns with greater love for God and all mankind.” And so appears the theocentrical and universal character of chastity: one renounces to attach oneself to a human being in order to attach oneself directly to God, and, through Him, to all men. Love becomes at once, more elevated and broader.

c. This love allows the priest “to spend himself readily in God’s service and in work for the apostolate.” Liberation opens out on a service - service of God and of humanity. But this service, even as strenuous as it may be, remains a joyful offering. Chastity makes the heart lighter, more ardent in its self-giving; it goes along with a deep joy which animates and carries devotion. It contributes notably to the energy and to the efficiency of apostolic activity.

16. TOKEN OF HEAVENLY RICHES:

a. When affirming that chastity is “an outstanding token of heavenly riches,” the Council draws our attention to its eschatological value. The heavenly riches, of which it is a token, are summed up in the happiness of possessing God face to face, in communion with all the elect. Consecrated chastity gives a foretaste of this immediate possession of God, and of this broadening out of the heart in the measure of the whole human community.

b. The Council describes, still in another way, this anticipation of the thereafter found in chastity. Through it, the priest “gives witness to all God’s faithful of that wondrous marriage between the Church and Christ her only spouse: a union which has been established by God, and will only be fully manifested in the world to come.”

17. CHRIST, UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL SPOUSE:

a. A passage from St. Paul’s Epistles brings itself to mind here. That where the Apostle declares to the Christians of Corinth that he has allianced them to a unique spouse. They are like a pure virgin to be presented to Christ (2 Cor 11, 2). This reference, which figured in the promulgation of the Decree, was not, however, maintained, because the passage applies to all
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

Christians, and not only to those who live in virginity.

Although these are illuminating words for those who make <the> profession of chastity, in virginal life, the image of ‘pure virgin’ to be presented to Christ becomes reality, and the betrothal to the unique Spouse takes <over?, on> its full meaning.

b. In this way, one comes to realize a little better, how consecrated chastity is really a marriage - the ideal marriage to Christ himself. In the Sacrament of Marriage, the human spouse is the image of Christ-Spouse.; in virginity, there is no other Spouse than Christ in person.

c. Marriage of the whole Church: In the virginal consecration, it is not only a human individual who binds himself to the Lord, but the whole Church who realizes her destiny as Spouse of Christ. The profession of chastity comports essentially an ecclesial dimension, and must be understood in this perspective.

d. The full manifestation of this union will only take place in the life to come. Here on earth, this marriage remains veiled, secret, on a divine level. But it is a real anticipation of eternal nuptials, for it already has for its characteristics the renouncing of the mediation of a human spouse, and so, by effacing all intermediaries between human being and God, it makes one adhere to Christ as unique, exclusive Spouse of the soul.

And so, the Decree notes within a brief evocation, the christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological aspects of virginal chastity.

2° As a redemptive offering:

18. The Priest commits himself to celibacy because he desires to follow the way opened by Christ “in which the human creature adheres wholly and directly to the Lord, and is concerned only with Him and His affairs; thus, he manifests, in a clearer and more complete way, the profound transforming reality of the New Testament” (Sacerdotalis caelibatus, 20).

19. In answer to a special call from the Holy Spirit, the Missionary enters on this new way which leads him to renounce marriage as that form of love which is orientated to marriage.

20. When he makes this renunciation, the priest in no way fails to recognize the value of human love or the meaning and nobility of marriage. On the other hand he relies on the help of the Lord to remain faithful to his commitment, notwithstanding difficulties he will encounter and which he cannot entirely foresee (Ibid. 50, 55, 56). Thus the offering he makes of himself rings true (Gaudium et Spes, 49).

21. But in order to announce more effectively man’s salvation won by the Redemption, the priest wants to give his share of sacrifice towards the work of redemption which pertains to the whole Christ. For this reason he unhesitatingly faces the ‘daily dying to himself’, which may be demanded of him by fidelity to celibacy.
3° Growth in charity:

22. This spirit of renunciation does not prevent us from fostering and developing the affective side of his nature, so that it remains healthy and develops normally (S. Cae., 55). The interchange of ideas and sentiments with others - a thing which is desirable and often beneficial - comes easily to him. His relations with his family and friends help him to be a man of ready sympathy to others. Friendship, if rightly understood, brings its own enrichment.

The priest is also a member of a spiritual family. It is good and even necessary that this family “have its roots in what is human. It is not only a question of loving one another in God, a kind of spiritual and disembodied love, but of true affection, as between human beings, in true fellow feeling and friendship.” For in the heart of the priest (and Missionary) love is by no means extinct. His Charity is drawn from the purest source, practiced in the imitation of God and Christ, and, no less than any other genuine love, is demanding and real (cf. 1 Jn 4, 8-16). “It gives the priest a limitless horizon, deepens and gives breath to his sense of responsibility - a sign of mature personality - and inculcates in him as a sign of a higher and wider fatherhood, a generosity and refinement of heart which offer a superlative enrichment” (S. Cae., 55).

23. Thus, love of this kind frees the priest’s heart from all ties, making it possible for him to be always joyfully at the service of all and deliver his Message “without any restraint and in all freedom,” so that he always gains a hearing.

True charity will inspire him with a deep respect towards all whom he encounters in the course of his apostolate, knowing as he does that Christ wishes to live ever more fully in them. To bring them to Christ is the one and only purpose of his life, consecrated to the work of The Mission.

- B. THE MEANS TO FIDELITY -

1° An attitude of Faith and Confidence:

24. The will to remain faithful to the engagement of chastity first of all implies an attitude of faith and of trust, to “lodge one’s faith in the words of the Lord”, and in “trusting in God’s help.” When he offers the gift of chastity and when he calls to follow this road, God commits himself to supplying the necessary help. One must believe in this commitment, welcome the word of Christ, who has praised the chastity which is practiced “on behalf of the heavenly Kingdom”, have confidence in the protection of divine grace, and in the struggles and temptations of daily life. It is on the strength of God himself that is founded the perseverance of the virginal heart.

25. On the other hand, to this sovereign action of grace must respond, with faith, a free and active collaboration, ready to use all available means. Among supernatural means, the Decree indicates “mortification and custody of the senses,” the priest must avoid “presuming on his own resources,” and practice an asceticism which allows him to master his body. The expression
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

taken from St. Paul, “treat my body hard and make it obey me” (1 Cor 9, 27), which had been placed in an anterior redaction, has been cut out in the final text; it might have been interpreted in a pessimistic way, considering the body as an obstacle to spiritual life. While the “custody of the senses” is but the expression of a chastity which seeks to be integral, it is akin to the will, through a certain spiritual instinct, to “spurn everything likely to imperil chastity.” The Decree only reaffirms a traditional rule, dictated by humble prudence.

26. It also recommends “to take advantage of those natural helps which favor mental and bodily health.”

Instead of weakening the body, one should rather give it all its vigor, especially through physical training, which develops at once strength of the limbs and bodily self-control. A good corporal equilibrium, can only favor the effective equilibrium required by chastity. This care taken of bodily health as well as of that of the mind will help the priest not to see his state as down-grading, or frustrating.

27. The Council does not fail to warn against “those erroneous claims which present complete continence as impossible or as harmful to human development.” The best demonstration of the falsehood of these claims resides in the example of Christ and of all those who, after him, have been witnesses of a powerful personality while finding in virginal chastity the possibility to fully develop their love for God and their devotion to their fellow men.

The positive value of chastity, as it has been shown by the Decree, verifies itself by experience. It is thanks to virginal consecration that religious and priestly life can assure the unfolding of all personal forces in the service of God, and in apostolic activity. Indeed, the blossoming out takes place first of all in the hidden depths of the being, but it manifests itself exteriorly, and one may appreciate its reality through the testimony of many religious and priestly lives.

2° Devotion to our work:

28. He who gives himself unreservedly “to the interests of the Lord” has his feet on the path of fidelity. For the priest, “the interests of the Lord” are the pastoral tasks confided to him and the various work for which he is responsible, with all the cares and worries that go with it. Having been sent among men to preach to them the Kingdom of God, he is aware of being in intimate communion with Christ, the Savior Who is ever at work in this world through the Holy Spirit.

29. In serving Christ, the priest must be ever vigilant and “know how to guard against sentimental tendencies, which imperil an affectivity not sufficiently enlightened or guided by the spirit” (S. Cae., 77). “He should beware of looking for spiritual or apostolic pretexts for what are in fact dangerous inclinations of the heart.”

30. With the help of grace and in peace of heart, the priest,

“will face with generosity the manifold tasks of his life and ministry. If he performs these
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

with faith and zeal, he will find in them new occasions to show that he belongs entirely to Christ and His Mystical Body, for his own sanctification and the sanctification of others. The charity of Christ which urges him on will help him not to renounce his higher feeling but to elevate and deepen them in a spirit of consecration... in order to bring the light and power of the Gospel of God’s grace to shine in the world (2Cor 5, 14).” (S. Cae., 76)

3° Schedule - Rule of Life:

31. Sacred Scripture is very clear and explicit about the use of time, a precious gift of God: “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens...” (Eccl 3, 1ff).

32. The Second Vatican Council (Optatum Totius, 11) points out that we must appreciate personal discipline, not just as a help to fraternal life, but as an important element of our on-going formation:

- so as to acquire dominion over one’s self, since an easy education, even sensual, produces only slaves, and whim leads to passion and this to lack of self-control;

- to obtain a solid maturity as a person, which implies a decided will, an assimilated responsibility, continuous overcoming of temptation, and profound reflection;

- to form those dispositions of soul which decidedly help toward an efficient and well-ordered labor, in a world of rigid structures and fixed schedules, where we missionaries cannot behave like lazy people, incapable of following the rhythm currently in effect;

- to assimilate our attitude of service in an apostolate which implies giving of ourselves constantly to our brothers and sisters, who want to see in us their friends and servants.

33. Rules and regulations are indispensable for our continuing formation and our apostolic effectiveness. However, though they do not constitute the most important part of consecrated life, to carry them out in a formalistic and servile way is to belittle and nullify their authentic sense; they are means, not ends; they are paths, not obstacles; they are helps, not hindrances... Thus they should be functional, simplified, subordinate to the highest values, and flexible, according to the interpretation of Superiors.

34. There are too many people who, because they pay no attention to rules and regulations, find themselves in chaos. Efficiency cannot exist where there is disorder; charity cannot exist where there is selfishness; virtue cannot exist where whim rules.

4° Family Life:

A person is born into a family, grows up in a family, and dies in a family. This is God’s plan and if we don’t follow this plan the consequences are always disastrous and selfishness takes over our lives.
35. **FRATERNAL ATMOSPHERE:**

Life in the company of one’s brothers and inspired by loyalty and trust, is a guarantee and protection for chastity. Having simple, but agreeable living conditions - a pleasant house and proper food - is in itself a help in the practice of this virtue (*S. Cae.*, 79). This is still more true of an atmosphere of joy and charity, which promotes a type of friendship that is open and virile. An atmosphere of this kind helps to ensure man’s equilibrium and meets a natural need deeply embedded in his heart. Wherever fraternal love is lacking, the members of the family are more easily tempted to look elsewhere for companionship and consolation.

36. **MUTUAL HELP:**

Moreover, as members of the same community, we are responsible for one another and must help each other. However good his intentions, no one can wholly trust his own judgment regarding the way he ought to behave in the interests of the apostolate in the country where he is working. He needs to know the local customs, so as to adjust his behavior accordingly. All must see that each one acts in such a way as to command the respect due to his ministry.

Consequently:

37. **PRUDENCE IN ADMISSION:**

“The observance of total continence,” says the Decree, “intimately involves the deeper inclinations of human nature.” It may happen that, in certain individuals, nature seems incapable of reaching this mastery ‘of the deepest inclinations and that they be unfaithful to virginal chastity. The Council declares that the profession of chastity can only take place “after a truly adequate testing period”, and, only if one has reached “the needed degree of psychological and emotional maturity.”

38. **PROBATION:**

a. Hence, probation itself must aim at making those who present themselves for sacerdotal life acquire psychological and emotional maturity. A probation that would provoke regression towards a certain childish state and that would prevent the development of personality, by taking away practically all responsibility, for instance, or, by imposing an excessive dependency, would go against the aim it must ensure.

b. The engagement of chastity can only truly be taken and lived by an adult personality. The choice of Christ as a Spouse for a whole human existence, must be the expression of a self-conscious freedom, and of a fully enlightened gift.

39. **RICHNESS:**

a. The Decree specifies, at the end, that the formation to chastity must not be achieved
Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”

according to a purely negative way, by “warning of the dangers confronting chastity,” but that one must give a “training to make a celibate life consecrated to God part of the richness of the whole personality.” This personal enrichment through a broader and more elevated love, has already been mentioned: chastity should always be presented according to this essential point of view.

b. Virginal life, therefore, cannot be conceived merely as a treasure to be preserved; it is a construction, an edification. In the intimate gift to Christ and the universal gift to the neighbor, it is the human person which takes shape, which is fashioned in depth; it is also the Mystical Body that is being built up.
- PRAYER -

Lord Jesus,

on you alone do I want to risk my life.

We pray to You, Lord Jesus, for all these:
priests, religious, lay people, who have consecrated their life to You and who, conscious of
the demands of their baptismal vows, want to live the radicalism of the Gospel.

Since You call them to the total giving of themselves, inspire them with the generosity of
carrying this through.

Let the whole Church benefit from their consecration and stimulate them to devote themselves,
without expecting any return, for the sake of Your Kingdom.

Help them to become conscious, as was Mary, of their mission of intercession in You and for
You, Jesus, on behalf of the People of God, and sustain their perseverance in prayer.

Protect and strengthen their chastity, so that the purity of Your Church, united to You as its
Spouse, may shine through it.

Develop their charity, by which they may worthily represent You in Your great love for all
mankind and for each one in particular, so that each may understand the God who says to him
or her: My heart beats only for you; you are the one I prefer, “because you are precious in my
eyes and glorious, and because I love you” (Is 43, 4).

Make them live their lives in You in such way that they may radiate Your presence to awaken in
all whom they meet an appreciation for God, and to irradiate the faith and joy of living united
to You.

May they be teachers of the road to sanctity and may the testimony of their cheerfulness show
more clearly to all Christians the authenticity of the Beatitudes.

AVE MARIA

Your brother priest,
Eusèbe-H. Ménard
My dear friend,

As you have been expecting an answer from me on the question of celibacy, I am writing on that subject today.

I wrote about the priesthood being a sign of transcendence, a sign of a world of meaning. The promise to forego marriage is another sign, perhaps the most powerful one which the priesthood gives. It determines a form of life; it expresses the fact that a man has staked his whole life on God. It bears witness to the meaning of life, to a fervent faith, to a deep personal relationship with God. It gives immense force and cogency to the proclaimed word. No wonder that the Pope calls it “the pearl of great price.”

Why, then, has celibacy become a controversial issue in recent times? There is no simple answer to that question. I can only tell you what happened to my fellow priests and myself. Our theological path has been described in an earlier letter. Many of us were oppressed by the thought that in our Church there seemed to be a hatred of the body, a Manichaeism. We felt that, because of this, our contemporaries were no longer able to believe simply and happily, that they regarded God as a rival to their lives and bodies. These ideas sank in, since we were set on finding a Gospel language intelligible to modern man.

We had no defense against self-criticism of this kind. Perhaps there were contrary arguments; if so, we did not understand them or, as time passed, we simply paid no heed to them. We saw that the faith of the Bible had overcome this hatred of the body, that it proclaimed the Resurrection of the Body, in other words, of the whole man. This was a joyful discovery for us, and we regarded it as our task to do away with the Church’s understanding of the role of the body; then a new start could be made in inviting people to share the Good News.

Obviously, in this context, little thought was given to the sign-value of celibacy. It was criticized from many angles; we began to hope that the Council would alter this particular sign and we listened eagerly to those who seemed to prophesy just that. Looking back now, I wonder did those who thus raised our hopes act responsibly? In any case we felt sure that the Council, having allowed the Eucharistic words of Consecration to be in the vernacular, would soon be in a position to abrogate priestly celibacy and would actually do so.

The Council made no decision, and we proceeded to the priesthood, some of us in spite of the lack of a favorable decision from Rome. It was a time of agonized wrestling with the problem. Our vocation to the ministry of the Gospel was so clear that no other possibility presented itself. We accepted celibacy as a sign of the Cross of Jesus, but, unfortunately, we had not filled out that sign with sufficient meaning; we had not fully identified ourselves with it. Perhaps it is in this respect that we were different from other generations of priests. And all the time we clung to
the tiny hope that the Church would come to a favorable decision - a decision coinciding with our hopes - in the near future.

So it was that for many of us celibacy was like a ‘foreign body’ in our lives. We had not totally accepted it, and that soon had consequences, for we did not see its positive function. We heard it spoken of as an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel; we heard the priesthood described as an unfulfilled life, a life incapable of manifesting the Good News. So we looked for human fulfillment, considering that we had a ‘right’ to it. The next step was to take back the promise we had given, to surrender the sign. After all, we told ourselves, we had been called to the proclamation of the Gospel; surely the Church would not ‘drop’ us.

I will not burden you with the intense inner crises and torments of soul we endured. I only want to give you some idea of the consequences of false assumptions and expectations, and to keep you from making similar mistakes. There were, of course, many reasons why we failed to fully integrate the sign of celibacy into our lives and ministry. Among these were the confusing pressures and exploitation of modern advertising, the exaggerated value placed on human sexuality, the new cult of the body, the commercialization of sex, the constant betrayal of what is deepest in man, and so on.

As I have said, it was late in the day before we saw through all this, and some of us did not see even then. Fundamentally unsettled as we were, it was nevertheless our genuine desire to eliminate the traces of Manichaeism we saw in the Church. And we were not always aware of the issues being fought out around us, or of how we ourselves were being used as pawns in that struggle. One must regard the modern, more relaxed attitude towards the body and sexuality as a considerable gain; but the price paid for this was high and we can only hope that what has been lost in the process will yet be recovered. The Church’s depreciation of the body has practically gone. A firm stand against the new cult of the body and of sex is now a more urgent need.

At present - and you may be surprised to hear this from me - the sign of celibacy which you bear is not only valid but positively essential and vital. One reason for this arises from the Gospel form of life, another stems from the world of our time and modern life. If I had realized this earlier, I would probably have taken a different path. It is true that Christ did not oblige those who were to be ministers of his word to accept celibacy, but he did commend it. Today, celibacy is unquestionably the sign of a life lived according to the Gospel; it is a sign of one who builds his life completely on God, peaceful, trusting, without the need to possess.

I believe that now this sign of celibacy can become deeply rooted again. In recent times, the Church has decided conclusively on the matter and that decision, however painful for many of us, seems to express the very essence of the matter. In this situation we need to learn to put the good of the Church before our own desires. With all my heart I wish that you may succeed in developing an untroubled relationship with the sign of celibacy, integrating it completely into your life. To achieve that, you will need to evaluate all things in life correctly and to develop a calm attitude towards Eros and sexuality - not depreciation, but a right proportion between body, soul and spirit.
**Celibate - “For the Sake of the Kingdom of God”**

Your freely chosen celibacy would not be an intelligible sign if seen in isolation. It needs to be manifested in its connection with other Gospel signs. This entails a detached attitude towards possessions; the renunciation of success and achievement; actual service, love and assistance; and occasionally, the giving up of one’s rights, of one’s own wishes. All these support and help to interpret the celibacy-sign and point to the reality of God.

You are aware that you are holding on through a difficult time in the Church; you also need to remind yourself that you are helping to establish a new expression for a sign which many have come to regard with suspicion. It is not by words that you will convince them, but by your life. By combining a life-affirming and body-affirming attitude with a full commitment to the sign of celibacy, you will render that sign most clearly intelligible. You will probably encounter spiritual problems on the way, but these can be solved by an ever deepening relationship with God.

In the working out of this priestly sign, many mistakes have been made, there have been many failures in charity. The arguments, because of the nature of the case, could not be other than highly emotional. But now verbal argument seems to have died down. What we need now is the argument of life, giving reality to the Church’s decision. Those who recommended abandoning celibacy have forgotten that, if such a powerful sign were given up, it would need to be replaced by an equally powerful one. They have thus laid themselves open to the charge of wanting an easy, merely worldly life, of turning away from the Cross of Jesus. The discussion can proceed no further until they produce, and attempt to live, other signs of transcendence. Personally, I doubt whether there is any equivalent sign. If our time were rich in transcendence one might find such a sign, but that is not the case, so the sign of celibacy is now more relevant than ever. We cannot choose the time in which our life-span is set, the time in which we live and are ministers of the Gospel. The very time we live in may be for us a cross.

So you should not have any reservations about your celibacy. Give it life and shape. Those around you who find it hard to talk about God will take notice of the sign. It may make them stop and reflect on their own lives; it may help them to see that there is more to life than what is empirical. You will probably never know in this life for whose sake you bear that sign. Sometimes you will be a sign of contradiction but on the whole you will be a sign revealing God, a pointer drawing attention to him. It will involve you in suffering, bringing you closer to Christ, and enabling you to share in the transforming power of his Cross.

The modern cult of Eros and its subtle forms of exploitation can be foiled by exhibiting an alternative way of life and by preserving a sense of humor. But if you wish to be understood, avoid fanaticism. You will need the calmness which comes from a faith that says: “I do not need to have everything men think valuable and important. I must serve my fellow men and this can only be done by self-denial and the free acceptance of the cross. God will give me the strength to do what he requires of me.” Such an attitude would liberate many people today.

Clerical clothes were also the sign of a life-form; they still can be this sign. We often imagine that people do not understand, and hence become unsure of ourselves. I remember, when we were preparing for ordination, many of us regarded the priest’s attire as a cramping constraint; we had quite an inferiority complex about it. Rules and custom have been relaxed
since then, which is a good thing. But it would be a pity if a priest’s clothes bore no sign of his priesthood; his dress is part of the language of his life-form, a non-verbal sign of service and of the Gospel. Try and retain this sign in some form.

Regarding my own situation, I have sought and found human fulfillment. In doing so, I have forfeited my service as a priest and, to a large extent, my ministry of the Gospel. I have little opportunity now to preach the Gospel. At the same time my vocation to the Gospel has not diminished; rather, it has matured and I have gained a new awareness of it. You can imagine how hard my position is: I cannot and will not stifle that inner call, and yet I can no longer follow it. St. Paul says: “I am constrained; woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.” Everyone who has a vocation knows this feeling. It is a cross, and like all crosses, has the power to transform.

Those of us who have taken this decision have lost our standing in the Church. We are accused of breaking a promise, of running away from the Cross of Jesus, of failing in faith, of injuring the Church. We cannot attempt a defense in words, but only by a form of life. Even if our decision were subjectively correct, it remains true that, in the context of the Church, it was the gravest error possible. And it was a transgression against love of the community, against our brother priests, against you who were to come after us. But even in a situation of disobedience there remains the hope of the pardoned sinner; it is possible to be borne up and carried by the grace of God. Such is his unfathomable way.

So I ask you to understand our position, even if you must condemn us. Do not utterly break off communication with us. For we share your vocation and would like to follow it; we keep hoping that the Church may yet find another way for us. Today this is difficult, as the dispute over celibacy has not yet completely subsided. So our life goes on and our vocation will not have been in vain. Help to find and prepare a way for us that we, too, may follow our call. That was one of my reasons for beginning this correspondence with you; the other was to warn you of the pitfalls all around us today, and into which I fell.

I would say to you, adapting the words of Bertolt Brecht: “But you, my brethren, when Christians have succeeded in understanding one another better, think of us kindly, remembering that we emerged from dark days.” Our time in the Church began bright and promising, and raised towering hopes; it became overcast and gloomy with insecurity and the loss of communication. We passed through that darkness but we did not emerge unscathed. Time has moved on. Many of us have learned in the darkness, and would like to communicate that knowledge. Think of us and do not refuse the outstretched hand!

Ave Maria!