

Step By Step Toward a Married Priesthood



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As is known, Pope Francis was completely silent on the ordination of married priests when he drew the conclusions of the synod of the Amazon. But he certainly did not silence the proponents of the innovation.

Who on the contrary are becoming ever more impatient and talkative. Proof of this comes from one of their leading theologians, a consultant at the synod to a good number of Brazilian bishops, who in an interview with Mauro Castagnaro in the latest issue of the magazine *Il Regno* lists in minute detail all the steps to be taken to achieve the goal, giving it out as a sure thing that the pope will consent to it.

The theologian is Antonio José De Almeida, priest of the diocese of Apucarana in southern Brazil and a teacher at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, known for having developed the hypotheses first put forward by the German Fritz Lobinger, bishop in South Africa from 1987 to 2004, read and appreciated by Pope Francis as well.

Lobinger longed for parishes led by "teams of the elderly" made up of men or women, unmarried or married, ordained priests and therefore with the power to celebrate Mass.

To begin with, De Almeida says that Francis's silence "does not mean that he has closed the door." So much so, he explains, that *Querida Amazonia*, the pope's post-synodal apostolic exhortation, in its initial paragraphs cites with emphasis none other

than the final document of the synod that approved the ordination of married priests, gives it out as "valid," and urges the pastors and the Christian people of the region to "strive to apply it."

So how to proceed? The "first step" - De Almeida says - will consist in "lining up the reasons why a diocese intends to propose the ordination of married men."

This first step could be taken by one diocese alone, but "it would be better to decide it with the neighboring dioceses, perhaps at the level of the ecclesiastical province or regional episcopal conference." And this "would be the second step."

The "third step" comes once the "plan" has been developed and consists in "presenting the request to the Holy See."

And will the Holy See accept it? "Of course the Holy See could do so," De Almeida replies. "In the Amazonian context and considering the synodal process set in motion after the announcement of the special synod for the Amazon, I have no doubt."

But how will the ordination of married men be authorized? De Almeida says that "for now the solution is in the code of canon law," which in canons 1042 and 1047 admits that in special cases the Holy See can exempt candidates for the priesthood from the "impediment" of marriage, "taking into account 'the good of the faithful,' the presence of a 'just and reasonable cause'

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(access of the faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist) and ‘the circumstances of the case’ (in the Amazon, the almost complete absence of celibate clergy).”

But there is more. De Almeida quotes number 93 of *Querida Amazonia*, where Pope Francis writes that “it is not simply a question of facilitating a greater presence of ordained ministers who can celebrate the Eucharist,” but also of “awakening new life in communities.”



For De Almeida, this prompts one to think of a new model of priest, the “community priest,” who in the wake of Lobinger could also be “a team of these priests,” not itinerant but stationary, with their respective families, practicing a civilian profession or not.

So once the request has been made in Rome - De Almeida continues - the Holy See will be able to grant to the dioceses of the Amazon “permanently or for a certain period the right to dispense from the impediment of marriage so that a married man can access priestly ordination.”

But that is not all. It could also happen - De Almeida hypothesizes - that in the meantime an “Amazonian rite” might be established in the region along the lines of the “sui iuris” Churches, such as the Greek-Catholic, in which the married priesthood is present.

In which case “everything would change,” because the married priesthood would also be part of this new autonomous rite. So much so - De Almeida concludes - that “footnote 120 of *Querida Amazonia*,’ which speaks of it, is already interpreted by some from the perspective of footnote 336 of ‘*Amoris Laetitia*,’ which opened the door to communion for the divorced and remarried.”

Footnote 120 of *Querida Amazonia* simply says: During the Synod, there was a proposal to develop an “Amazonian rite.”

Footnotes 336 and 351 of *Amoris Laetitia* are also allusive: “In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments... The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak... Discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists...”

But just as in *Amoris Laetitia* these allusions acted as leverage for an extensive - and for many abusive - application of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, authorized by Pope Francis himself, so also there are those who would like this to happen with that little footnote from *Querida Amazonia*.

This in a perspective of ritual autonomy that still appears far away. Meanwhile, however, many are prepared even now to take those other steps that De Almeida has indicated.

Not only in the Amazon. Because there is another synod, in Germany, that has already started down the same path. With a particular predilection for autonomy from Rome, pushed right to the edge of schism.