

# Shaping the Future Priesthood



*Anthony T.  
Padovano  
is a  
married priest*

*theologian*

*pastor*

*loving spouse*

*father*

*grandfather*

*Past President of  
CORPUS*

We remember it like it was yesterday.

It was June, 1988. CORPUS, the National Association for a Married Priesthood, had invited its members to gather for the first National Conference in Washington, DC.

Prior to that date, priests who had to choose leaving active canonical ministry in order to follow their hearts and marry, were told to remain silent about their ordination. Some dioceses even required priests to move at least forty miles from their last assignment and never participate in any formal ministries in a parish (lector, Eucharistic Minister, etc.).

Many priests were ostracized by their family members; rejected by former parishioners; and shunned by their fellow priests.

The Church controlled the language using the false term, “ex-priest,” to refer to those who “left”, always leaving the stain of infidelity.

Despite the bitter pain of loss and separation, priests, who followed their conscience and the call of their God to marry, found a new life of insurmountable joy and unfathomable love.

This is the backdrop to our attendance at the first national conference entitled “Mandatory Celibacy is Starving the Catholic Community!” Featured speakers included Terrence (Terry) Dosh on the *Myth and History of Celibacy and Married*

*Priesthood*; Richard Sipe, a noted psychotherapist on *Sexuality and Psyche in Priests*; and Theresa Kane on *Towards the 21 Century: Women and Ministry*.

Dialogue topics included:

1. A Married Priesthood: Benefits for the Catholic Community
2. Women and their Priest-Husbands
3. The Spirituality of a Married Priesthood
4. Strategies for Introducing Married Male

Priests

5. Financing a Married Priesthood
6. Assisting Priests in Transition
7. Strategies for Introducing Female Priests
8. Order, Authority (local ordinary, canon law) and Married Priests
9. Celibate and Married Priesthood Working Together
10. Married Priests, Young People and the Small Christian Community.

In retrospect, the event was profound, prophetic and visionary.

But nothing could have prepared us for a reflection by Anthony T. Padovano. It struck deep into the heart and soul of married priest couples and healed them. It was a resurrection moment which transformed participants and the movement for decades to come.

We offer it to you as a gift and a grace. It is our legacy

*Linda Pinto*

# Broken Promises

Over the last twenty years, from 1968 when the first wave of resignations from canonical priesthood began, until the present, most of the issues inhibiting optional celibacy have been addressed and resolved. Obligatory celibacy has now lost the support of Scripture, Tradition, history, pastoral life and the minds and hearts of God's People. It is not only the breadth of this movement for a married priesthood, in terms of tens of thousands of priests and millions of laity, but the depth of this phenomenon which is impressive.

It seems to me, however, that one issue has not been addressed sufficiently. It is often wielded by the official Church as a weapon to create insecurity in the resigned priests and suspicion of the priest in the larger community of the church as even beyond the church.

This insecurity has led many resigned priests to doubt their worth, to feel a sense of shame about who they are and what they have chosen, to wonder if God still loves them, to hesitate about continuing their ministry with people who are in need. They suppose they have not the right, the credentials, the support of God's favor to be identified as priests for those who require them to be precisely that.

Although many resigned married priests have come to believe they have acted in accord with biblical and pastoral norms, they feel accused and vilified in their consciences and in their convictions, others have been encouraged to have about them.

The issue I am referring to is whether married priests are men of broken promises. Are they people who have abandoned their most sacred commitments, men whose word is no longer trustworthy, Christians who do not deserve to be entrusted with ministry because they have betrayed it, selfish individuals who prefer their own interests to the needs of communities for which they were ordained and consecrated?

The official Church tells the Christian Community at large, Catholic as well as Protestant, that resigned married priests deserve to be punished and marginalized for the sake of God's People, for the well-being of the church, for the protection of Christ's Spirit in our communities. Even when former Episcopal priests are allowed to function as newly ordained married canonical Catholic priests, Rome and the American Bishops refuse this option to resigned priests who married after rather than before ordination. The reason given is that the former Episcopal priests have never broken a promise of celibacy they made to the Latin Rite Catholic Church. The commitments these Episcopal priests and selected other Protestant Pastors made to their own communities, their belief that they were once truly ordained there, is discounted.

The fact that resigned married priests made a far more serious commitment of the priests and to do ministry is not only dismissed by the official Church but, indeed, the Church terminates this most sacred of commitments even though the resigned priest never revokes it and offers himself for service time and again. His crime is the marriage, a marriage indeed, in most cases sacramental, a marriage in which the resigned priest may have demonstrated fidelity and love, sacrifice and courage, virtue and grace.

The promise of celibacy is deemed more serious than priesthood or marriage, parenting and family life. Rome will gladly allow a resigned priest to function canonically and fully once again after a civil divorce or even if he abandons his wife and children provided that they are adequately provided for financially. This forsaking of an entire family is not seen as a broken promise since the marriage itself was viewed as an impediment to ministry even if the marriage happened to be sacramental.

Rome, of course, will think and act as it chooses. The question which concerns me is what this condemnation and rejection does to the heart of a married priest and to his family.

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The purpose of my talk is to address this issue and to ask if Rome is right in its assessment. Or, if Rome is not, why so many married priests feel and act as though Rome was? I have less concern with persuading Rome to reconsider than I have hope that married priests and their families might be brought to a greater measure of peace by these remarks.

I also believe that the fundamental goodness in the Catholic church will prevail and that one day the Church will repent of this action, so unworthy of it, as it now repents of the Inquisition and the Crusade.

I have divided my comments into four general topics:

- I. A Biblical Story
- II. A conclusion (What is Commitment?)
- III. Three Questions
- IV. Commitment as Terror and Commitment at Fidelity

## *The Biblical Story*

The story is from the Book of Judges (11, 29-40).

Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. If you give the Ammonites into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from fighting, shall be the Lord's and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.

Jephthah marched against the Ammonites to attack them and God delivered them into his power. It was a very severe defeat. With great slaughter the Ammonites were humiliated and bruised before the Israelites.

As Jephthah returned to his house, his daughter came out from it to meet him; she was dancing and playing the tambourine. This was his only child. Apart from her, he had neither a son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and exclaimed, "Oh my daughter, my heart is broken! Must it be you? I have made a solemn promise to God and I cannot break it. I cannot unsay what I have said."

She answered him: "My father, you have made a solemn promise to God. Deal with me as you vow demands.

"But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to go to the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."

"You may go," he said. She and her girlfriends went up into the mountains and grieved because she was going to die and because she was compelled to be unmarried and childless.

After two months she came back to her father and he killed her since he had made a solemn promise to the Lord. She died unmarried and childless. He treated her as if a vow he had uttered bound him.



This is why there is now a tradition in Israel. Every year the women of Israel gather to commemorate and to lament the slaughter of Jephthah's only daughter. They leave their homes and grieve for her for four days each year.

Allow me to make a few observations about his story.

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There is a connection, I believe, between violence and rigid interpretation of promises and vows. We agree, of course, that promises and vows must be considered serious events and experiences in our lives. One's words should not be discounted as a trivial or frivolous commitment, as an obligation one might readily reject whenever something more to one's advantage or liking comes along.

Nonetheless, the maintenance of a vow at all costs, with no adaptation or possibility of reversal, is a militant and belligerent action. The connection in the story of Jephthah between armed conflict, human sacrifice and literal interpretation of the vow ought not be lost on us.

We might ask ourselves what kind of God does Jephthah's action imply? If Jephthah is right, God holds us to our word even if life is sacrificed to it. This is the essence of legalism in its worst possible connotation. Jephthah is so intent on keeping his word that all claims of human decent and compassion, all rights of others and alternative moral options are rejected. The law has literally killed the spirit. It is not only the life of Jephthah's daughter that is destroyed but the life of Jephthah himself who must forever live out in his remaining years the memory of the life he denied for the sake of consistency with his own word.

There is more to the story. The worst of crimes and sins in Israel is idolatry. Although the Book of Judges does not label it as such, Jephthah has made an idol of his word and sacrificed his daughter to it.

It is significant that the passage ends with the community's grief. A vulnerable woman, a woman without a name or rights of her own, is sacrificed to the belligerent rigidity of a vow made by a man. The story is told poignantly. Jephthah's daughter is the only child he has. How much this story contrast with the ministry of Jesus who calls back to life the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official. "My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her to make her better and

save her life" (Mark 5, 23). Luke tells us this was the only daughter Jairus had.

Or consider the contrast with the widow of Naim who is burying her own son when Jesus rescues them. In both stories, Jesus violates the law for the sake of life; in both stories he heals rather than destroys a woman. On the way to Jairus' daughter, he is touched by a woman with a hemorrhage of blood; in the Naim story, he puts his hand on the bier of the dead man. Each of these instances entailed a legal impurity.

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And, so, when we hold rigidly to our vows and promises, when we sacrifice life to legalism or even personal consistency, do we worship thereby the god of Jesus or the God of Jephthah?

When we worship the God of Jephthah, the community suffers. This story, almost a Greek tragedy in miniature, ends as the community mourns and laments for years the loss caused by a rigid interpretation of a promise. Have we learned anything from this?

## *II. And a Conclusion (What is Commitment?)*

In the Jephthah story, the vow has become everything and life has become incidental to it. We might, of course, observe that the solution of this dilemma is not an approach to vows and one's word which trivializes them. Is there, we might ask, a middle ground, somewhere between rigidity and capriciousness?

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There are three values which, I believe, justify a change from one's earlier word, indeed compel the change so that, if it is not made, one remains consistent with one's word, it is true, but not faithful to God or to the inner life of the church.

The first of these values is *life itself*. It is exemplified in our story of Jephthah. We are obliged to reflect on whether consistency with an earlier promise enriches or diminishes our life and the lives of others. This is not always easy to determine but we know, at least, that the context for the right answer is not a promise we once made but the effect the continuance of the promise has on our own lives. To allow life to wither as promises are stalwartly maintained is an aberration.

The second of these values is *a sense of integrity*. If I remain consistent with my earlier promise, will I be true to what is deepest and most authentic in me? Has the church or the institution or the other person who has received my promise been authentic in turn? If, for example, the official Church refuses to allow any discussion of the issue of obligatory celibacy, if it silences all honest and respectful dialogue, can one say the Church has acted with integrity and authenticity?

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We might use another story to exemplify this point. After he wrote *Catch 22*, Joseph Heller wrote a novel, *Something Happened about Bobby Slocum*. Slocum sacrifices his integrity by giving up his dreams and his freedom for the sake of a conventional life and corporate promotion. He becomes an utterly predictable person, willing to do whatever he is asked to do by the institution. Both he and the corporation realize that he is thoroughly dependable because he has absolutely no personal integrity. Slocum succeeds but at the price of his happiness and authenticity. His life vocation has been surrounded to the institution.

Integrity might be defined as consistency with our deepest longings and hopes. It is fidelity to the vocation we have been given to be ourselves. We must, of course, also be faithful to others' we shall consider that aspect of commitment is our third point.

Bobby Slocum needs institutional approval for all else. He cannot say "no" to an institution because he cannot say "yes" to himself.

If the Catholic Church one day allows priests to marry, certainly an option which is possible and even probable, will it then be honorable to marry and become inconsistent with one's former promise of celibacy? Is honor and integrity so totally in the control of an institution that the individual has no access to this on his or her own initiative?

The third of these values is *intimacy*. If I remain consistent with my earlier promise, must I keep others at a distance and significantly close off my emotional life? We might utilize a third story to make this point.

The main protagonist of Eliz Kazan's *The Arrangements* is Eddie Anderson. He married a woman he does not love and becomes sexually active with a number of other women. He loses his capacity to feel anything with anyone and keeps his emotional life under strict control.

Intimacy is our vulnerability and sensitivity to others. It is the source of our compassion and of our communion with others. This intimacy must not be so irresponsibly shared that one loses all capacity for one's integrity. But it must not be so thoroughly discounted that one is encouraged to be unaffected by the needs and the love of others for us. Clerical systems sometimes favor ideology over people, abstract ideals over relationships, promises of celibacy over commitment to others.



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If we are to avoid the rigidity of Jephthah on the one hand and the self-indulgence of taking none of our promises seriously on the other, we need to measure the changes we make from our earlier promises by the effect this has on life, integrity, and intimacy.

If the vows we have made are actually commitments to God, they remain stable as well as fluid. Thus, all I was as a priest in a canonical celibate system, I still am as a married priest but under a different formality. If, however, the vows I have made have been made, not to God but to an institution, then they are rigid and legalistic. In such an instance, I can only be faithful in a canonical system and I lose all I was by going forth from it.

The official Church senses this dilemma as it seeks to define a resigned married priest. It denies him the title of priests or clerical but knows he is not really a lay person because he has been ordained. It knows that something has gone on between God, between the church and us, in ordination, which cannot be annulled. And, so, it defines us as laity in reference to its canonical system but as priests in terms of its sacramental system and in terms of the commitments and promises we once made to ministry and never revoked.

The commitment we made to God and people remains intact and complicates the canonical system of the church which is incapable of dealing with us adequately. Indeed, the permission we were given or sought to marry sacramentally is the only impediment the church cites to our continuing sacerdotal ministry.

One of the signs that I am not a committed person is the fact that I am constantly aware of how committed I am and of those who are not. When one is healthy, one does not speak endlessly of health. When one is happy, one does not feel a need to convince all others of how happy one is.

Commitment, then, is a life force, a consistency with the self at its deepest levels, an encounter with God and grace in all their compelling passion. It is interwoven with integrity and unfearful of intimacy.

Commitment is, therefore, more demanding and enriching than life-long concurrence with an earlier word one may have pledged. This word may not have been profound enough when it was first spoken. Or, if it were indeed at that time, it may have to be put aside now because even more is asked of us. Jephthah's words were deep and serious when he formulated his vow but his daughter's life introduced a more substantive reality into his life, one he refused to be faithful to because he was blinded by fidelity to his earlier word.

Everyone knows a committed person when one sees him or her. No institution needs to point out such a person. Life knows life and remains life even though some institutions choose to define it differently.

## *III. Three Questions*

Implicit in this question of vows and solemn promises are issues of over-riding significance. My attitude to my former word and commitment is influenced by my evaluation of other realities in my life. I would like to isolate three of the most salient concerns.

Who is God and how does God deal with us?

Is God, we might ask ourselves, someone who is revealed only in someone else's life? Or is God Someone who is revealed in my own life? God, I believe tells me who God is, not only in the community of the Church and of the world but also in the context of my own life. When, therefore, I make decisions and choices from the deepest levels of my being, when I elect, for example, to marry, with all the passion and conviction, with all the suffering and ecstasy that election presupposed, especially for a priest, is God part of that in no way.

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When I choose to dispose of my life in such a radical manner, could God truly be a stranger to me? Is God part of that decision in my way, a decision in which my whole future and my very identity are at stake? If not, what kind of a God do I believe in and worship? If I feel that God has not blessed me in my marriage as well as in my priesthood, if I feel that God was with me in celibacy but not in sexual commitment, then what kind of a God do I profess to love?

As far as I can understand God's plan for the human family, marriage is at the core and center of it. It is the first blessings God gives to human life. It is also the first instance in the chronology of Jesus whose life begins with the marital commitment of Mary and Joseph.

In the plan of God, marriage is first. Priesthood comes about much later in the history of revelation. Celibacy is the last of these gifts. All these developments are good but marriage is the first blessing, the only blessing of the three (marriage, priesthood, celibacy) which is essential for the survival of the human family and, of course, the Church.

Is it not possible that God called us to marriage after priesthood because God had confidence in us? Are our marriages to be prophetic statements, challenging the Church to reconsider its order of priorities? At this moment of history, the marriages we entered into would demand of us far more courage and sacrifice than those marriages will in the future. These marriages required in us a profound poverty, the poverty of setting aside clerical privileges and conveniences, indeed key aspects of our identity and meaning. Such marriages make substantive contributions, I believe, to the reform of the Church and the renewal of people's lives.

And, so, we have been called. It was always that way with us, was it not? We must give God back in gratitude more than guilt and insecurity, more than resentment and anger at the Church whose life we are serving in a special fashion, more than indifference and apathy in the vocation for which God has elected us in an altogether unique manner.

If a vow or promise of celibacy had been held too rigidly, all of this would have been lost.

What is the Church and how are we part of it?

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If the truth be told, many of us were more committed to clerical culture than we imagined. Obligatory celibacy reinforced this attachment. We grieve, at times, over our loss of clerical identity more than we do over our priesthood (which is enduring) or over our place in the Church (which is indelibly ours).

Indeed, it may well be that we valued the laity as such and women in particular less than we do now. We once assumed, did we not, that ordination was a more important sacrament than baptism, that it was more vital for the Church's life. This assumption is, of course, unbiblical, untraditional, untheological, non-pastoral in its implications.

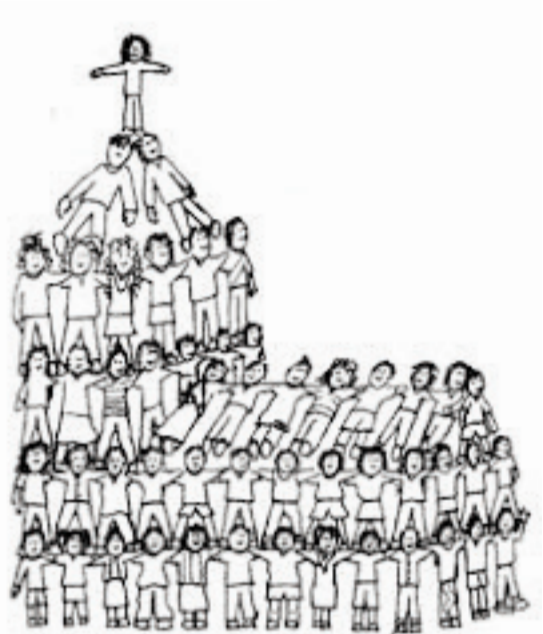
# Broken Promises

In a survey done for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, fifty-six percent of resigned priest still consider themselves priests' almost eight out of ten (78%) consider themselves Catholic. What has been lost, then, is clerical identity and some aspects of ministry, many of which may be continued if we choose. In a further study about resigned priests (1982), canonical priests have overwhelming positive ratings to the ministry once exercised by their married priest brothers.

By every standard of measurement, it is clear that the hour for a married priesthood has come. Scripture calls for it as does the tradition of the church. Indeed, we are not asking for an innovation but for a restoration, the restoration of a married priesthood which has been an option for most of church history. Pastoral life requires such a priesthood and the signs of the time denote its urgency and its inevitability. Collegiality, women's rights, and ecumenism will not make significant progress which obligatory celibacy is maintained. Liberation theology and the base community movement seek a married priesthood. The desire for a married priesthood has been expressed in overwhelming majorities by women as well as men, by clergy as well as laity, by religious as well as diocesan priests, by old as well as young, by the entire world, in every country, on every level of economic and socially life. The time has come.

What kind of Church insists on obligatory celibacy in the face of all this? A Church which has no future. The Church of Jephthah is dying; the Church of God's Spirit is here, in all this evidence, with all this witness, in the power and grace we feel in this first national conference on married priesthood. It is the Church of Jephthah which hides in fear, refusing to allow this issue to be discussed by the pastoral leaders of the Church, punishing those who declare publicly what is present in the hearts of God's People, refusing to promote priests or bishops who pled for a Church which recognizes fully all the ministries to which women and married Catholics are called by God.

The call for the married priesthood challenges the idolatry and absoluteness of the Church, the authoritarianism and vengeful spirit which are unworthy of it. The happier we are as married priests, the more public we are about our vocation, the less bitter and angry we are, the less we become victims of guilt or insecurity, the more able we are to see our role as prophetic and charismatic, then the more thoroughly we become a sign of the future Church God's People yearn for with an intensity which is painful in its ardor and in its need.



Obligatory celibacy was once a policy the Church endorsed many centuries ago against the worldliness of the Church, its involvement in money and property, power, and privilege. It has now become a sign of the worldly Church, one which closes its heart and its ears and chooses instead an arsenal of weapons against its own people, censorship and threat, punishment and sacramental deprivation, dismissals, and condemnations.



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All this will not work, because the Church is more than that. It did not work because we, our families, and our friends, are not worthy of such treatment and the Church at large knows. This. All the indecency of this aspect of the Church's life will come to naught through the quiet love with which we embrace our wives and children and, yes, the church itself. In contemplative tranquility we shall go on trusting that God will not abandon God's our People and that Church will be present as he always is when love is authentic, sacrificial, and faithful. John XXIII once observed that the Church has no enemies even though some may hate it. The Church of Christ must not consider as enemies those ordained Christians who come to it in love and offer their lives in service.

Thomas Merton said it well:

What is a church, after all, but a community in which truth is shared, not a monopoly that dispenses it from the top down? (*Hidden Ground of Love*)

Who am I and what is human life all about?

We need to ask ourselves whether we believe that our lives are greater than our commitments. If our life serves our commitments, then we are closer once again to the God of Jephthah. Commitment is not the source of our identity but only a product of it.

Who am I? I am a human being, made by God for relationship and love first of all, and for service and happiness. Any commitments I make along the way need to be affirmed within this context. Commitment must create love or lose it dishonors this context. Commitment must create love or else it dishonors God and misrepresents God's commitment to us in making us. Commitment is to be maintained with relative ease, not harshly and brutally, so that all our energy goes into the commitment and little is left for service and life.

We have been made for joy and ecstasy. Is this not what we teach our children? We have been made for passion and celebration, for beauty and peace. Have we taught our children they were made only for discipline and sacrifice? Of course, we have not. Then why have we not understood this better ourselves?

When I remember my parents, the most precious memories I have of them from my childhood were the times they played with me. Why? Because play and leisure are what is deepest about us. Our God is God of the dance, a poet who made in the beginning, a paradise, and a special relationship between the first man and the first woman.

The Christian community is most enchanted by the Jesus of Christmas and Easter, events when Jesus was not constrained but somehow sovereignly free. The cross and the darkness are real moments in the life of Jesus but they are interludes. Jesus dies no more; he is forever Easter; and we are his People.

*The Church can dispense as it chooses from obligatory celibacy because it knows such celibacy has not come from God directly but has always been an institutional policy.*

My evaluation of the promise I once made to be celibate tells me a great deal about who God is for me and what I believe of the Church. It is a statement about how I value my own life and what I think of the place of love in it. My attitude toward my earlier words lets me know how much I value freedom and love, and the price I will pay for them.

# Broken Promises

## *Commitment as Terror and Commitment as Fidelity.*

Loyalty, it seems to me, is a two-way street. We must be loyal to the Church but the church must be faithful to us. Some policies in the church deserve no fidelity. To serve them is to dishonor the church and to deny the vocation we have been given.

If the church cannot find an adequate place for married priests, it becomes, at least to this extent, an anti-life Church. What can be a more compelling sign of life than marriage and children?

A Church which forbids such life to its priests, a Church which rejects the call of God's People for a married priesthood, is a church which acts against life and justice, indeed, against its own interests and its own people. Any policy which must be maintained with terror and dishonesty creates a heart of darkness in the Body of the Church, a spirit which Christ resists with all his love.

The Church is only true to itself when it says that it needs no weapons and it fears none of its children. The Church is most itself when it is a faithful lover, when it calls us to discipline but not as its first order of preference, when it speaks to us of life, sometimes painfully, but not when it silences all the alternative voices of its own sons and daughters.

A study done for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops states that the main problem in the church cited by resigned priests is the abuse of authority. Those in canonical priesthood list the way authority is exercised as the most serious of some fifteen personal problems they encounter in their priesthood.

The abuse of authority creates a docile clergy but one which becomes so oblique to people's lives, so marginal to the Church's real needs that few young people want to follow was calling. And so, our seminaries become bare, ruined choirs of priests who once dreamed, at their ordination of a renewed world and a reformed church and a spirit-filled priesthood settle into complacency, into the terror which resides at the heart of an

institution which has come to mistrust everything it does not approve and allow.

At the core of the church's life there is an awareness that its present abuse of authority is wrong. And, so, married priests' function in the Eastern Catholic Churches and no, in the Latin Rite, provided that no promise of celibacy has been made at any point in a person's life.

This promise, once made, achieves an autonomy of its own, one which is seen as central, on which makes peripheral all previous and all subsequent decisions and choices. The only reason why a married priest is punished and forbidden to function fully is because of a promise of celibacy, one which means more than marriage or priesthood, children or faith, pastoral needs for truth, grace, or love. Celibacy has become, at this point, neither lifestyle nor gift but taboo.

There is a tendency for some in the church to equate the promise of celibacy with the vow of marriage and to compare optional celibacy with divorce. Even the official Church does not go this far. It grants no divorces, at least not divorces it is willing to call such. It does grant dispensations from celibacy, a dispensation which says, in effect, that both parties declare the promise or vow non-existent. If both parties who make the agreement agree it is no longer binding, why are two punished?

Is it not legitimating to conclude that such a promise is not even a broken promise, merely a non-existent one? Why, then, are we punished? If the promise is broken, then the Church has been a party in breaking it. When then are we punished are we punished and God's People with us? Would any of us release a child from a promise and then punish the child?

The Church can dispense as it chooses from obligatory celibacy because it knows such celibacy has not come from God directly but has always been an institutional policy. Why then does the institution punish itself by seeking to terminate the ministry and priesthood of some 100,000 married priests? Why must the laity be burdened with the lack of adequate pastoral leadership? We

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ask again and again but there are no answers. Only, the response: “It is the law. It is our will.” Where is Christ’s spirit in all this?

The demise of celibacy in the Catholic community has not come about because people are less able to maintain celibacy or less generous in their love for God and for people. The demise of celibacy has come about because people no longer believe in it as institutional policy.

They have found other ways to be faithful and sacrificial, sometimes far better ways to be creative and committed. Many currently celibate priests know they will be better priests if they are married. They remain celibate not because they believe Church wishes this or the priesthood required it but because one man, the Pope, has decided they must live this way.

The Pope’s decision is oppressive when it can only be maintained by threat and power. The Pope is more than that, is he not? We hope in him to settle this issue and bring peace to the Church. For a quarter of a century, this issue has been before the Church. Every effort, except optional celibacy, has been used to resolve the crisis. None has worked. None will work. The answer to the crisis in pastoral leadership is essentially bound up with the restoration of a married priesthood.

It is time to bring these reflections to a close.

My brothers, when you and I offered ourselves for ordination, it was with the priesthood in mind as our central commitment. Had there been only a married priesthood allowable, we would have sought priesthood after marriage. There was, instead, only obligatory celibacy and so we sought priesthood in that context.

Let us, however, be honest about this. We did accept celibacy, as a commitment and in freedom. This celibacy was, for many of us, a creative experience. Indeed, the growth we were gifted with, from celibacy, may explain the extraordinary happiness the vast majority of married priests find in marriage. In this

sense, we have brought our celibacy and our priesthood into our marriages.

Let us be honest also in saying that we had no intention then or now that celibacy should control our priesthood and become essential to its exercise. How did a condition for ordination become the very substance of our commitment? Would any of us, were we to make the decision, ordain a candidate for whom priestly ministry was incidental to celibacy?

Let us be honest once again about the fact that it was the priesthood and the unique ministry which went with it which captured our hearts and our spirits. Our memories do not cluster around documents we signed about celibate commitments but around ordination day and the Eucharist. We remember the blessings we gave and received, the anointing of our hands and hearts, the love we had for a God, who could bring us, in all unworthiness, to such a commitment, to such a grace.

In any case we are here, my brothers. And we are here, in many cases with our wives and children. We have given ourselves to a new fidelity, one which assumes and absorbs all our priesthood and the substance of our life in the arms of our wives and in the hearts of our children. We are still faithful but to a different Church, a new Church, one which all God’s People need us to help them build. We are the bridge between the old and the new since we have lived in both Churches, between clerical and lay life since we have known both profoundly, between celibacy and marriage since we have been given both gifts.

We must not cease our efforts or even doubt that words and ideas are powerful realities in our lives. Lenin once said: “Ideas are much more fatal than fund. “ Ideas are decisive. The ideas and words of a new Church are alive in every man, woman, and child here. Every word we speak, all the words of this meeting change the world in some way. Didn’t Jesus teach us about the value of the world? Even Lenin knew that. We must renew our confidence in our words and ideas. We are wedded to the new Church by the witness of God’s Spirit and by the words of fidelity we speak at this meeting.

# Broken Promises

We shall prevail if we can only believe it is God's Word and God's Work which is being done in us. We must believe with all our hearts that God has called us to make the church holy. We once thought God's holiness was in us when we were ordained and anointed, uplifted for God's People, and blessed by, ordained, and anointed, uplifted for God's People and blessed by their love. So, we think this is all over? When God has sworn, God does not repent. Remember those words. Do we suppose we are sainted no longer? Who told us we were not? Why did we believe them?

## *What kind of a God would that be?*

Where was our sanctity lost? Did we lose sanctity in the arms of our wives? We found grace there and we were blessed by our wives. Did we lose sanctity in the children we conceived and held in our arms, willing to die for them if need be? We found God in our children, in their hearts, and they blessed us.

Did we lose sanctity because we asked God to be with us as we took our word of celibacy and made it a vow of marriage? We were given two sacraments at that moment and summoned to be doubly committed to marriage and to priesthood until death. Mysteriously, both sacraments became one lived reality in us to that all the commitments of marriage and priesthood became one life. In our wives and children, Christ was formed for us as he became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. What God put together in us, let no mortal power put asunder.

Jesus once said: "If you love me, I will come to you and you will be my disciples". Words of such heart-breaking tenderness can never cease to echo in our lives. We must hear them as we age and die, as we love and prevail.

My brothers and my sisters, your marriages brought love in the world, a love which would have withered and died has you turned away from it and not been faithful to each other. You brought children into the church and taught them of Christ. You brought peace and joy and freedom into this sometimes bleak and broken century. Nothing was ever broken in you, certainly not the promise of your life.

Would God ever take God's own Word out of us because we loved and gave life? What kind of God would that be? Where is the shape of the future priesthood and the life of the new Church? It is here. It is in every choice we ever make for Love over the Law. It is in every memory we nurture of that new commandment of Love which broke the rigidity of Jephthah's God and the heartlessness of Jephthah's vow. Our God takes not one away from love.

Where is the shape of the future priesthood? It is here. It is us, all unworthy though we be. For, you see, it was God who made us priests. God has sworn. It was God who called us to marriage. God does not repent.

Let us make no mistake in this regard. The stakes are too high, the price too costly. Marriage for us was priesthood on another level, consecration in a new form, commitment in its most concrete and incalculable expression.

We, all of us, have served God less well than God deserved but we have loved God more ardently than we imagined.

"If you love me, I will come to you and you will be my disciples." Do we not remember? How could we forget? Would God ever take away our priesthood because we loved our wives. What kind of a God would that be?

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which  
He looks Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which  
He walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which  
He blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he  
looks compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

— St. Teresa of Ávila (attributed)

