



**FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM:**

**A SULPICIAN APPROACH FOR FORMATION**

**IN PRIESTLY CELIBACY**

**Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice  
2006**

O Mary,  
Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of priests,  
accept this title which we bestow on you  
to celebrate your motherhood  
and to contemplate with you the priesthood  
of, your Son and of your sons,  
O holy Mother of God.

O Mother of Christ,  
to the Messiah - priest you gave a body of flesh  
through the anointing of the Holy Spirit  
for the salvation of the poor and the contrite of heart;  
guard priests in your heart and in the Church,  
O Mother of the Savior.

O Mother of Faith,  
you accompanied to the Temple the Son of Man,  
the fulfillment of the promises given to the fathers;  
give to the Father for his glory  
the priests of your Son,  
O Ark of the Covenant.

O Mother of the Church,  
in the midst of the disciples in the upper room  
you prayed to the Spirit  
for the new people and their shepherds;  
obtain for the Order of Presbyters  
a full measure of gifts,  
O Queen of the Apostles.

O Mother of Jesus Christ,  
you were with him at the beginning  
of his life and mission,  
you sought the Master among the crowd,  
you stood beside him when he was lifted  
up from the earth  
consumed as the one eternal sacrifice,  
and you had John, your son, near at hand;  
accept from the beginning those  
who have been called,  
protect their growth,  
in their life ministry accompany  
your sons,  
O Mother of Priests.  
Amen.

John Paul II, Concluding Prayer of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

**FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM:  
A SULPICIAN APPROACH TO FORMATION IN PRIESTLY CELIBACY**

In the Gospel of Matthew (19:10-12), Jesus speaks with his disciples about the indissolubility of marriage. His new teaching provokes a reaction among the disciples. They say that if this is what is required perhaps it is better not to marry at all. Jesus responds that there are some people who from birth are incapable of marriage, and others who have been made incapable by human intervention. However, he cites a third case: those who are rendered unmarriageable because of their commitment to the Kingdom of God. Jesus is also saying something about his own choice in life and he invites those who can accept this teaching and who are called to such a life to do the same.

In a similar way, Saint Paul recommends to the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:25-28) that those among them who are not yet married might choose celibacy in light of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God. Neither Jesus nor Paul insists on the point as a general practice for the Lord's disciples, but both clearly consider it a positive choice, when it is made in view of a personal commitment to serve the reign of God in the world.

The law of celibacy has been in effect for all clergy in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church from the time of the First Lateran Council in 1123.<sup>1</sup> The practice of this discipline is much older in the life of the Church. Its roots can be traced to explicit references in the fourth century. In recent years some have tried to establish its origins in the apostolic period. There is no need for us to enter that debate, since our concern is essentially a question of formation. Regardless of what conclusions one may draw in that controversy, the practice is clearly ancient. However, the basis for understanding the law has varied considerably over the centuries, and documents dating from the time of the Second Vatican Council no longer cite certain arguments for its "suitability"<sup>2</sup> for priestly ministry (e.g., ritual purity for those who serve at the altar or the argument that one can only come to perfection by means of the celibate state).<sup>3</sup> Recent documents stress other elements of the tradition. The Church has seen much debate over the question in the years since the last Council. Some argue that celibacy is no longer a reasonable demand for those who are ordained to the presbyteral order. Some go so far as to blame celibacy for the recent crisis in priestly vocations and for the scandals of sexual abuse in a number of countries in North America and Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Some exceptions have been granted in the last fifty years, particularly for Anglican and Lutheran pastors who have been received into the Latin Church and have been ordained to the priesthood.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16 on the notion of the "suitability" of celibacy for the priesthood.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Maurice Vidal, "Le célibat des prêtres est-il apostolique?" in *Requalifier le ministère presbyteral*, no. 109 of *Jeunes et Vocations* (May 2003), pp. 63-71 for a very insightful analysis of this evolution in arguments for celibacy as well as an examination of what foundations we may find in the New Testament. The document he cites is the *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (1974), par. 13. Cf. also Charles Bonnet, "Image vivante de Jésus-Christ, époux de l'Église," in *Pour une vie donnée : Jeunes et Vocations*, no. 20 (Feb. 2006), pp. 73-81.

In this context the General Assembly of the Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice of 2002 asked the General Council and the three Provinces of the Society to study the question of formation for celibacy within the framework of the four dimensions of priestly formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral). It was and remains the intention of the General Council of the Society to promote continuing reflection on this question in our seminaries. With this goal in mind, the General Council and the three Provincial Councils gathered in Montreal in July of 2005 for an extended time of prayerful discernment on the question of celibacy. How can we critically assess and improve our methods of formation for celibate chastity? The following document is the fruit of this meeting and is intended for use in all the Society's houses of formation as well as for the initial and ongoing formation of members of the Society.

We recognize that there are different practices in the Oriental Churches and we do not wish to imply that these practices are inferior to those of the Latin rite.<sup>4</sup> It is also to be noted that there is no explicit treatment of the question of homosexuality in this document. The meeting in Montreal took place before the appearance of the recent document on the question published by the Congregation for Catholic Education. Obviously, we expect all our houses of formation to implement the Church's directives on the topic.

The charism of celibate chastity presupposes a life-long commitment to continence and chastity. This commitment, when chosen freely and generously, is a response to a generous gift of God who is the source of life for the priest. Priestly celibacy is thus lived out in an ongoing dialogue between God and the individual. Throughout his life he will grow in the knowledge that the other is not a stranger, nor even just a neighbor, but a friend, a brother or a sister. Celibacy cannot be separated from the whole of a Christian and priestly life whose objective is at one and the same time to affirm with Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me;" (Gal 2:20)<sup>5</sup> and to allow himself to be configured to Christ the Good Shepherd who "gives his life for his sheep" (John 10:11).

In this context his freedom will find expression in a personal maturity oriented towards others and available for service of God through service of His people. Even in the crosses that come with this state in life, the priest who embraces celibacy finds therein the treasure of "carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10). Thus will he learn to give his life for the people entrusted to his care, and this gift of himself will push him to proclaim the Gospel "whether it is convenient or inconvenient" (2 Tim 4:2). As he becomes more deeply a disciple and a pastor, he will no longer belong to himself but to the people to whom he is sent.

While these factors alone render a constant, meditative reconsideration of the virtue and charism of celibate chastity necessary and fruitful, it is in the living of a life marked by this sign of the kingdom that celibate chastity finds its true value and meaning. Thus, to understand both what celibate chastity means and how to engage in a life-long formation for it, we must consider the concrete circumstances within which the gift of self is expressed.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16 on the differing practices of the Latin and Oriental rites.

<sup>5</sup> Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

## Situating Programs of formation for Celibate Chastity Today

### The Current Social and Cultural Context

Formation for celibate chastity today takes place in an ambiguous social and cultural context. There are both positive and negative features in the present environment. **We can begin with some positive elements.**

In regions that suffered in other times from strong anti-clericalism and a casual dismissal of the message of the Gospel, particularly in the west, there is a greater openness to the possibility of faith, of belief, and a greater tolerance for opinions and behavior that are spiritual in nature. Moreover, there is a concern for individual freedom and responsibility, which opens the door to questions concerning the meaning of life. Thus there are young people who come to the decision to enter a program of formation without cutting all ties with their social and professional milieu. Even if they do not receive much encouragement, they are not likely to be rejected. Even if they are not understood, they are respected in their quest and sometimes secretly admired.

In spite of forces to the contrary, our societies continue to manifest a concern for the poor and the disadvantaged that is shared by the Church. This allows greater room for the expression of a genuine gift of self within which the commitment to celibacy motivated by a desire to serve others can be better understood and accepted.

Young people today have a high regard for the virtues of authenticity, sincerity, generosity and trust. These virtues are clearly favorable to the idea of a gift of self. The same may be said of their hunger for truth and their capacity to denounce hypocrisy, for their desire to encounter the other, as well as for their interest in cultural diversity and in expressions of fraternal concern.

Many have traveled extensively beyond the borders of their own countries. They appreciate the value of community life. They enjoy large gatherings of their peers, such as the very popular World Youth Days and gatherings of young people at Taizé.

Even if contemporary society is marked by strong tendencies to exercise total control of one's own life rather than receive from another, reluctance for self-denial, and a nascent egocentrism, nonetheless, there are signs in our present culture and among the younger generation of an openness to others, a hunger for values, a desire to give of one's self for a meaningful purpose, and a distaste for the excesses of a world marked by consumerism and the rule of money.

Moreover, Christian communities are becoming more and more sensitive to the universality of the Church and to an international vision of things. Multiculturalism has become an ordinary experience in the western Churches. Even if this phenomenon has sometimes favored the development of sectarian forms of community life, it has much more often enriched the practice of the faith and given new dynamism to the life of local communities. It makes the majority cultures more conscious of their responsibilities toward their brothers and sisters in other lands, forces them to re-examine their values, to seek new grounds of understanding and to find new ways of relating to one another. In terms of formation for celibacy, cultural exchanges encourage members of formation teams to be sensitive to different expressions of celibacy in the wide range of cultures and to the variety of means for helping candidates for the priesthood to

integrate the value of this commitment.

The information “super-highway” of the Internet reinforces the sense of global consciousness. It encourages openness to the stranger, a willingness to engage new ideas and new ways of acting. It has also proven to be a force for freedom, allowing the voice of those silenced by oppressive regimes to be heard, and permitting them to know more objectively what is happening in the larger world. It helps to break down boundaries and develop a greater sense of our common humanity.

When all these new factors are experienced not simply as an object of curiosity in facile and superficial ways, they can make us more sensitive to the problems of entire populations suffering from hunger, injustice and oppression. When we let our hearts be touched by this information and by these exchanges, they can give birth to lasting commitments, such as the commitment to celibacy, that are motivated by love.

Current philosophical trends and the painful experiences of the twentieth century have forced us to recognize the limits of human knowing as well as the failings of social policies rooted in the idea of indefinite progress, the utopia of past generations. This, in turn, engenders a foundation for intellectual modesty and perhaps can open a door to seeing the need for salvation as well as a sense of mystery much larger than the material world.

Finally, we should note that in western cultures, there is a pursuit for a lifestyle that includes attention to bodily health. Whether this is pursued through the practice of sports or through forms of treatment, there is a concerted effort to discipline the body. This context can be favorable for a life of chaste celibacy, which requires self-mastery and a strong dimension of physical self-discipline.

**If there is much to encourage us in the present situation, there are also factors that present a great challenge to a solid formation for celibate chastity.** It is certain, for example, that the media contribute extensively to a sexually “charged” atmosphere, an element of contemporary experience that tends to trivialize the meaning of love, human sexuality and permanent commitment. Extensive sexual experimentation and changing social mores in relationship have had devastating effects on such institutions as marriage. The internet, with its easy access to pornographic sites, has certainly contributed extensively to this evolution of customs, which affects the sense of love and which can often lead to addictive behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

Multiculturalism brings great richness to the lived experience of Catholicity, but this phenomenon can also favor an intellectual and moral relativism as we discover beliefs and practices very different from our own. It can favor the development of a personal identity that flounders between laxism and rigidity, between paternalism and genuine respect for the other, between xenophobia and a defenseless naiveté.

Consumerism is an ever-growing menace to the quality of human desire. In face of the constant solicitations placed before them by the consumer society, individuals can find themselves wandering in all directions. Sexual desire naturally suffers from this profound disorder and people sometimes find it difficult to resist all the temptations placed before them. Falling into easy experimentation, they can have great difficulties in coming back to a sense of true love and the gift of self. Combined with a desire to dominate, their desire can degenerate

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the benefits and liabilities of the Internet, see the documents of the Pontifical Council on Communications: “Ethics in Communication” (June 2, 2002) and “The Church and the Internet” (Feb. 28, 2002).

into violence.

The concentration on personal freedom and responsibility and the growing emphasis on the individual compromise the role that institutions play in society. Obviously marriage is a victim of this movement, but also the Church which proposes an ethical teaching which is not always well received. The call to celibacy is often perceived more as an obligation imposed by an unfeeling institution than as an invitation to exercise human freedom in a generous gift of oneself.

As for the cultivation of the body, celibate chastity can appear as a denial of expressions of a being that is innately sexual. In this context, celibacy can seem to be a sort of “bodily mutilation.”

As a conclusion to this brief presentation of the social and cultural context in which the formation of seminarians for celibacy takes place, we should underline a particular challenge that faces us: not to make of consecrated celibacy a counter-cultural statement (even though it obviously contains an element of the counter-cultural); to believe and to proclaim that it is possible in our world and to present it as a witness to the truth of human love inscribed in the human heart by God.

## **The Ecclesial Context**

Along with great evolutions in the social and cultural context in recent years we can note significant changes in the ecclesial climate as well, often occasioned by those taking place in society.

First, there are important differences in the kind of seminarians we have been receiving in the last few decades. Many have already had professional careers or other work experience. Some have been extensively engaged in parish activities and recognized lay ministries. Some come to us from complicated personal and family histories. They often hear the call to priesthood after a personal conversion experience or an experience of recovering the faith. The international character of the communities in the countries of the north and the west is very evident. Some are children of recent immigrants; others come directly from other countries to offer their service to dioceses now poor in vocations.

**As with the social and cultural context, there are elements that are positive for the task of formation for celibacy.** Seminarians generally arrive with a great esteem for the value of chaste celibacy and a genuine desire to commit themselves to it.

Greater personal maturity and the experience of bearing responsibilities in work and social life can reinforce the sense of commitment to this new project of formation. Conversion experiences feed apostolic zeal and enthusiasm. Seminary communities find themselves enriched by the experience of international candidates who often bear witness to great courage in the face of hardship and sometimes persecution. These seminarians also help us live an ecclesiology of communion in the largest sense of the term.

**On the other hand, there are considerable challenges as well.** Some of the seminarians have little serious formation in the faith and try to make up for the lack of intellectual foundations by reliance on feelings. Many bear scars that are difficult to heal, stemming from family difficulties or from sad personal experiences. These bad experiences complicate interpersonal relationships and can make a commitment to celibacy problematic. They accentuate the difficulties of a generation: lack of maturity, prolonged adolescence, slow patterns of personal growth. Difficulties in establishing personal identity can breed inconsistency in patterns

of desire. There is sometimes a gap between intellectual and emotional maturity. International students need to learn appropriate standards of conduct in a culture that is new to them. Their formators need to be aware of the differences and patient with the misunderstandings that arise because of cultural diversity. However, they must also be clear about the expectations in the local culture in which these future priests will minister. Finally, they must also be attentive to help the students make the transition between professional work or studies and the life of the seminary and to encourage the genuine integration of past experience. This last point is very important for a generation in search of identity.

All these factors make it clear that no one size fits all. Programs for formation in celibate chastity must be personalized and tailored to the needs of the individual. Each candidate must be accepted for the person that he is and engaged in the process of formation for celibacy in an initiatory manner. We must also recognize that seminarians have many structures of support while in the seminary. The transition to full-time ministry at ordination is often accompanied by the disappearance of these structures. While we can encourage dioceses to offer and new priests to seek new structures of support, we must also be realistic about the possibilities and strive to avoid creating dependencies on our structures and on ourselves. The departure from ministry of young priests in various parts of the world challenges us to reflect on the question of the passage from seminary to the early years of priesthood and to cooperate with bishops in offering help for this important step. How can we better prepare young men for the permanence of this commitment to celibate chastity?

In several of the countries where we are working, sexual scandals have had a devastating impact on the morale of priests, and are probably responsible to some extent for lower numbers of those willing to present themselves as candidates for priesthood. Fortunately, those who do come to the seminary see these scandals as a call to greater holiness. We must do all in our power to avoid future occurrences of these sad stories. Other factors, particularly declining practice of the faith in many countries, also play an important role in the diminishing number of seminarians and priests. We must not, of course, yield to pressures, internal and external, to lower standards of admission in order to increase numbers.

Communion of priests with their bishops, with brother priests in the presbyterate, in Christian communities and among these communities is especially important. It constitutes an essential element of ecclesial life. Promoting communion in all its dimensions is for priests a task that is both necessary and delicate. Priestly formation will insist on the need to get beyond ideological differences and crises of confidence between bishops and priests as well as between different generations of priests. We should help seminarians to get beyond the spirit of competition and confrontation to a true sense of collaboration. Formation will also strive to help them become men of peace and of reconciliation in order to foster communion in the communities that will be entrusted to their care. In addition, we should help them to be open to the life of the larger diocesan Church as well as that of the Universal Church.

Acquiring an affective balance, open and generous, will be a precious help for attaining these objectives. That is not, however, enough in itself. We must also inculcate the sense of evangelical forgiveness and of unity in charity with a view to our hope for the gathering of all humanity in Christ.

### **Articulating a Sure Starting Point: Reflections from our Tradition**

## Theological Foundations

*Presbyterorum Ordinis* appeals to a variety of aspects of the mystery of Christ and of the Church that serve as theological foundations for the “suitability” of celibacy for priesthood.<sup>7</sup> A number of dimensions taken from the theological rationale for celibacy help the priest to discover and deepen his identity as a chaste celibate and a priest. These include:

***Christological Dimensions.*** To understand himself as a chaste celibate and to appreciate the richness of this style of life, the priest looks first and foremost to the Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh, the High Priest in whose priesthood the ordained priest participates. In meditating on the mystery of the Incarnation, the priest recognizes that Jesus Himself lives relationally. He is the perfect Son of the Father and the universal Brother of the whole human race. Jesus’ relations with those around him are marked by truth and the desire to help the other to come to full realization of their humanity that happens precisely in relation to God. Jesus is himself the perfect model of this realized humanity.

Jesus’ relations with women show that he recognized a dignity that his culture was not willing to grant; and here the priest finds the key to his own relationships with women. From the Lord’s relationship with his mother the priest learns what it means to cherish and love the one who brought him into the world and yet take leave from her. The priest realizes that his identity calls him to “leave mother and family behind” in order to achieve his identity as an adult. He continues to honor and respect his family, yet he is his own man.

In contemplating the life of Jesus, the priest also sees him in relation to the community of his disciples. He also discovers that he does not just have relations with individuals alongside each other, but that he is responsible for building up in love a community, a Church, the sign of the possibility for humanity to be gathered together in Christ.

However, in announcing the unconditional love of the Father, source of the love that we should bear for every human person, including the enemy, Jesus confronts humanity’s refusal to renounce violence, distrust, the spirit of domination, the will to power. This refusal on his part

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<sup>7</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16. “Indeed, celibacy has a many-faceted suitability for the priesthood. For the whole priestly mission is dedicated to the service of a new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, has aroused through his Spirit in the world and which has its origin ‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God’ (Jn 1:13). Through virginity then, or celibacy observed for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12), priests are consecrated to Christ by a new and exceptional reason. They adhere to him more easily with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34), they dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men, and they more expeditiously minister to his kingdom and the work of heavenly regeneration, and thus they are apt to accept, in a broad sense, paternity in Christ. In this way they profess themselves before men as willing to be dedicated to the office committed to them--namely, to commit the faithful to one man and to present them as a chaste virgin to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2) and thus to evoke the mysterious marriage established by Christ and fully to be manifested in the future, in which the Church has Christ as her only spouse. They give, moreover, a living sign of the world to come, by a faith and charity already made present, in which the children of the resurrection neither marry nor take wives.”

leads him to the cross and death from which the Father saves him once he has passed through it. Thus is he established in his risen existence where he becomes by the Spirit the source of communion among people and with God.

In this contemplation of Christ's existence in his mysteries of the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection, priests are called to enter into the same dynamic. They are so called first by their baptism, and they enter into this mystery in a different way by their ordination and configuration to Christ the Good Shepherd. They are called in Christ to live a relational existence where the chastity of their relations permits them to help others attain their full humanity and to build up a community based on the gift of self within the love that comes from the Father. They are also called in Christ to take up their cross and to pass through their own trials when their faithfulness to the Kingdom of God exposes them to contradiction, to derision and even to hatred. Thus they live in the hope that the Resurrection of Christ, whose spiritual energy is already at work in their lives, will bring to completion in them the eternal life that is already manifested in the purity of their lives.

It is clear that the Eucharist they celebrate with their communities is at the heart of their existence, precisely because it represents communion with Christ in the mysteries of his Incarnation, his Passion, his Death, and his Resurrection.

Thus they can joyfully and freely receive their celibacy as a gift from Christ to whom they are willingly configured not only in their ministry but also in the way he lived his life, including his celibacy, which was always directed toward his Father and toward the people he encountered. Accordingly, they do not fear the misunderstanding and the rejection of the world around them; rather they hope that the gap between their choice and the behavior of their contemporaries may pose challenging questions for society.

***Eschatological Dimensions.*** As a "eunuch for the sake of the kingdom" (Matt 19:12), the chaste celibate realizes that he is called to live a life filled with hope and to proclaim that hope to a world often on the verge of despair. He celebrates the "not yet" of the kingdom in his style of relating, recognizing that it provides an alternative image to the Incarnational manner of relating that characterizes marriage. In fact, married people and celibates serve mutually as signs to one another of the building up of the Kingdom. Those who live a celibate life remind others by their renouncement of marriage that in life all is "for the Lord." Married people, on the other hand, help others see that this gift to the Lord is offered in the concrete realities of life. Both states in life seek to live in "freedom of the children of God," (Gal 5:13ff.) each in its own way.

The priest's vision of the kingdom of God also calls the chaste celibate to live his life in an unencumbered manner. He is called to be available for service to his bishop and to the people of God, living a life of simplicity. Always centered on Christ, and awaiting his coming, he does not seek power or esteem in this passing age.

***The Nuptial Dimension.*** Pope John Paul speaks of a nuptial dimension in the sense that the priest is called to be a sacramental representative of Christ not only as Head and Shepherd but also as Spouse of the Church. The two images of the Head and the Spouse are closely linked in the bible. The commitment to celibacy takes on meaning in the context of this nuptial dimension of priestly ministry. The gift of himself that the priest offers to the Church in celibacy is a privileged expression of this nuptial dimension and it is a clear sign of what the Second Vatican Council says concerning the "suitability" of celibacy for priestly ministry. His celibate commitment is thus seen as a reflection of the love of Christ for the Church, the jealous,

consuming and self-giving love described in the Letter to the Ephesians.<sup>8</sup>

***The Pneumatological Dimension.*** Configured to Christ by the sacrament of Orders, the priest is called to abandon himself to the Spirit of Christ who is at work in him. This self-surrender to the Spirit finds in celibacy a sort of fruitfulness. It helps him to discover and live in a particular way two aspects of his ministry. First, it is not his own word he preaches but the Word of God. Secondly, he is not the one who directs his own life, but he gives himself over to the initiatives and to the will of the Spirit. Here we can see the vital link between celibate chastity and the evangelical counsels of poverty and obedience. Part of the priest's very identity is the refusal to put himself in the limelight, but always to point towards Christ. Thus he becomes the friend of the bridegroom as John the Baptist describes himself in John's gospel. He joyfully steps aside when he hears the voice of the bridegroom. Consequently, through the surrender of his life which belongs no longer to himself but to the Church, he discovers a fruitfulness that comes not from himself but from the Spirit. He carries on the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Spirit and finds in himself the wherewithal to accomplish "even greater works than these."<sup>9</sup> Humbled by the ways in which Divine Providence acts through him, he realizes that at the heart of his ministry he "must be like the star that led the Magi to Bethlehem. As soon as it brought them to the brighter light of the Messiah, it vanished."<sup>10</sup>

***Apostolic Dimensions.*** *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Second Vatican Council's document on priestly ministry and life speaks of the foundation of the gift of celibacy for the clergy in the following terms: "Indeed, celibacy has a many-faceted suitability for the priesthood. For the whole priestly mission is dedicated to the service of a new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, has aroused through his Spirit in the world..."<sup>11</sup> Celibacy is a particular expression of this new humanity that priestly ministry is trying to call forth in the life of the world. This is one dimension of what it means to say that celibacy is "suitable" for priestly ministry. It has been suggested that two further points in contemporary Catholic life can be seen as providing an apostolic dimension to the suitability of celibacy for priesthood.<sup>12</sup> The first is the close tie between the office of bishop and that of the priest. Especially with the recent decline in the number of priests, many pastors today have larger responsibilities than many bishops once had.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Eph 5:21-33; also *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, par. 22 "Hence Christ stands "before" the Church and "nourishes and cherishes her" (Eph. 5 :29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church. Of course, he will always remain a member of the community as a believer alongside his other brothers and sisters who have been called by the Spirit, but in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community." At the same time, it is probably prudent to balance this image with that of John the Baptist, who claims to be not the bridegroom but the "friend of the bridegroom." Cf. John 3:29; also Charles Bonnet, op. cit., pp.73-81.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:12

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, *The Spiritual Director*, 87-88.

<sup>11</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Maurice Vidal, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

Moreover, they exercise their ministry in close collaboration with their bishops, not only as vicars but also as brothers and collaborators in priestly ministry. The closer the ties between these two ministries, the more it makes sense that those who exercise the priesthood of Christ at a second level share the qualities that mark the lifestyle of those who share in the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders. This goes well with the concept of the priesthood developed at the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized the close bonds between the bishop and the priests and which promoted a strongly apostolic vision of priesthood. A second apostolic dimension accompanies the present situation of the “older churches.” We live in a time when the truth of the Gospel is called into question and when there is a need for a “new evangelization,” a conversion of mentalities and behavior in the areas of politics, economy, consumerism, solidarity and human relations. Called, together with all Christians to be “salt for the earth,” priests can bear living witness by their commitment to celibacy to the radical call to conversion.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reflections from the Tradition of the Church and from the Sulpician Heritage**

Every era is called to express its faith and the practices of the Church in its own cultural context. But that can only be done to the extent that we are solidly rooted in the tradition within which we live and define ourselves. Concerning celibacy in particular, we wish to develop our programs of formation this solid based. Indeed, the solid teaching of the Church provides us with a necessary base from which to reflect and incarnate our response to the Lord’s gift of celibacy and to teach those whom we have been given the privilege to serve in the process of priestly formation. So too, our Sulpician tradition and methods of formation provide us with a compass point from which to orient the development, implementation, and evaluation of our programs of formation for celibate chastity. In particular, the following themes from those foundations provide us a good perspective from which to articulate and evaluate our programs for formation in celibate chastity. They start from our profound conviction that that celibacy lived in chastity is relational in nature. It strengthens the identity of the priest as a man defined by relations, orients his life as a servant leader of the Christian community, reinforces his bonds with his bishop and the presbyterate, calls him to understand its resonance and connections with other states of life, and insists that his life be characterized by a full range of relationships, including close friendships.

1. *Celibate chastity is a way of loving, working with and relating with others.* This is clearly presented in recent documents of the Church, especially in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. The chaste celibate embraces a life that is other-centered, that respects the personal dignity of all he meets, that bears witness to the kingdom and to the call of all Christians to holiness.
2. *Celibate chastity entails an ongoing and lifelong commitment.* While permanent in nature, the promise to live a life of celibate chastity is rooted in the deepest part of the priest’s self-expression as a human being. As such, it must be constantly renewed, re-affirmed and re-integrated throughout the life of the priest.
3. *Celibate chastity is properly understood only in relationship to the other promises, explicit and implicit, made at the time of ordination.* The life of the chaste celibate is marked with simplicity, and oriented toward a discipline of prayer, because it is a gift

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ministerial Priesthood*, Synod of Bishops (1971), part II, no. 4, C, on the value of this sign in contemporary society.

which must be continually received. It implies as well whole-hearted obedience, a constant striving to allow himself to be configured to Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church, and an ever deepening identification with the mysteries he celebrates.

4. *Celibate chastity includes an ascetical dimension.* While this aspect of celibacy is less emphasized in recent documents, it remains an important part of any appropriate understanding of this commitment. Prudence, vigilance, renunciation of self, sacrifice, accepting the crosses that accompany one's state in life are all aspects of a life of celibacy and must be discussed in any program of formation for celibate chastity.<sup>14</sup>
5. *A life of celibate chastity in the priesthood is marked by fecundity and generativity.*<sup>15</sup> The celibate priest should have a healthy understanding of what it means to be called "Father." His life must be marked by an outpouring of love for his brothers and sisters that helps them progress in faith, hope and charity.
6. *A sound program of formation in celibate chastity reflects on the biblical roots of this way of life.* The Scriptures provide resources for prayer and reflection on the meaning of celibate chastity. It is important to grasp the roots of this practice in the gospels. The discipline of the Roman Church is on this point is not simply by attachment to a long tradition; the tradition itself is not foreign to the texts of the Scriptures. Even if the New Testament does not present it as obligatory for those who continue the ministry of Jesus, there are direct invitations to consecrated celibacy. For this reason it should not be presented only as a counter-cultural value, since its dynamism and fecundity come ultimately from the gospel. Further study, reflection and publication on the biblical roots of celibacy should be done.<sup>16</sup>
7. *A sound program of formation in celibate chastity is grounded in theological reflection.* Programs of formation for celibate chastity enable seminarians and priests to understand clearly and appropriate fully the Christological, ecclesiological, pneumatological and nuptial meanings of this state of life from its beginnings to its accomplishment. Moreover, every effort should be made to deepen the sense of the "suitability" for ordained ministry that is developed in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.
8. *Formation for celibate chastity recognizes the importance of the "formation community" (communauté éducatrice) as a key element in the early stages of formation in this commitment.* Thanks to the discernment that it permits, the times of exchange and of solitude that it makes available, and the sharing that the seminary community fosters among the seminarians and between the seminarians and the formation personnel, seminary community plays an important role in the initiation into and the sustaining of the celibate life. At the same time we acknowledge that other communities contribute to that formation (e.g., the seminarian's family of origin and the parish communities where he has served as an intern and those that will be his home during his priestly ministry).

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Formation in Seminaries*, Congregation for Catholic Education (1980), Part II, no. 3: "the Word of the Cross, Spiritual Sacrifices." Cf. also, Jean-Jacques Olier "The Way of Perfection is the Way of the Cross."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Philemon and Corinthians on Paul's begetting of others into the Christian life.

<sup>16</sup> One such study that has already appeared; see Ronald D. Witherup, P.S.S., "A Biblical Spirituality of Celibacy," *Seminary Journal* 9:2 (2003) 43-49.

9. *Sulpician tradition insists on the importance of spiritual freedom in accepting a call to priestly ministry and to celibacy.* It is very important to underline this point at the present time. Celibacy is not to be accepted as a burden “imposed from outside, but rather as a manifestation of his self-giving, which is accepted and ratified by the Church through the bishop. In this way the law becomes a protection and safeguard of the freedom wherewith the priest gives himself to Christ, and it becomes ‘an easy yoke.’”<sup>17</sup>
10. A sound program of formation for celibacy addresses clearly and firmly issues of failure and their consequences. Teaching concerning sexual misconduct of any sort (inappropriate breach of boundaries, abuse of children, sexual harassment, danger signs of behavior leading to failure in this area) is an important aspect of formation in celibate chastity. Seminary programs insist on proper behavior and formators are quick to enforce the consequences of misbehavior in questions of sexuality.
11. *Those charged with the work of priestly formation make efforts to be well informed in the domain of formation for celibate chastity.* Not only do they seek to understand what is involved in the meaning of celibacy and its various components (human, psychological, theological, and spiritual), but they are also committed to growing in their own commitment and deepening their own appreciation of this aspect of their priesthood.

**Foundational Aspects of Formation for Celibate Chastity  
within the Context of the Four Principal Elements of Formation**

At the heart of the Sulpician method of formation is an approach that conceives of the formation process as a gradual initiation into a life-long pursuit of holiness. Consequently, all aspects of the seminary program must be seen as interlocking pieces of a larger whole. To speak of the fundamental aspects of formation for celibate chastity in relation to the four “pillars” of formation articulated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral), is, therefore, not a matter of seeing distinct elements that operate independently of one another. Rather, each of the four pillars provides a distinct point of view from which to examine the others. These viewpoints provide access to an organic whole. Thus, even if we articulate various aspects of this formation from the point of view of one of the elements of formation, no single element can be considered in isolation from the other three. Not only need all four be present; they also need to be seen as intertwined, each informing and interacting with the others.

Moreover, because the process of formation consists of an organic whole, formation for celibate chastity must be seen in the context of the much larger picture of formation for priesthood. Formation for celibate chastity, then, while distinct, cannot be separated into a series of steps that, if taken, will articulate a separate element that stands alone. Rather, each aspect of formation is a treasure whose beauty can be appreciated only in relation to the whole in much the same way that the individual brush strokes of a painting take on their full significance only when seen in light of all the other strokes.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ministerial Priesthood*, Synod of Bishops (1971), Part II, no. 4, C. Cf. also *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, Congregation for the Clergy (1994), par. 58. Cf. also *Priestly Celibacy*, encyclical of Pope Paul VI (1967), par. 69 and par. 72 on the importance of a conscious and free choice.

## **Human Formation**

Celibacy for the Kingdom is lived by human beings who must, like every other human person, integrate their personal history, their limits and their gifts, their capacities for loving and ways for dealing with obstacles that may hinder their growth in this area. Discernment takes into account all these human realities and seeks to harmonize them into a man who is open and capable of healthy relationships. However, chaste celibacy finds its ultimate meaning in his relationship with God. Like the other states of Christian life, provides a sort of sacramental perspective through which the love that defines the Trinity manifests itself in human experience.

Consequently, many of the human qualities and virtues that determine human maturity in the state of celibate chastity for the Kingdom are the same as those for all Christians, no matter what their state in life. At its best, the state of celibate chastity allows the same melody to be sung in a different key.

The chastity of a celibate is expressed in all that goes to make up the ordinary human life of a Christian. It is expressed in the entirety of the priest's life, in his prayer, in his friendships, in his leadership style, in his manner of exercising authority, and the like. When it comes to articulating what is specific to the priest's celibacy, it can be expressed in his way of serving as an image of the Good Shepherd. Living celibacy as a priest requires that he manifest the human qualities of Christ the Shepherd that reveal the love of God for his people, i.e., an aptitude to guide the Christian community: a welcoming presence, gentleness, openness to all, availability, simplicity and clarity in relating to others, firmness without rigidity, the ability to foster communion in truth, the ability to open a community to the larger diocesan Church and to the universal Church as well as to the problems of society and to maintain in the local community an apostolic spirit.<sup>18</sup>

## **Principal Human Qualities and Virtues of the Chaste Celibate**

While it is impossible to make an exhaustive list of all the human qualities and virtues that describe the chaste celibate, we will note here several elements.

*The chaste celibate is relational and identifies himself as a relational being.* We have already said that chaste celibacy is not just a renouncement but a capacity of opening oneself to others. This is true for every consecrated celibate, and all the more so for the priest who has an enormous variety of relationships: the community to which he is sent, the bishop and the presbyterate of the diocese, the universal Church, the non-Christians who come to him either as a friend or as a public person. In the midst of all of this, he must be a witness to the love that gives

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. also *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, par. 43 on the human qualities to be cultivated: "Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a 'man of communion.' This demands that the priest not be arrogant or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console."

him life, a love essentially Trinitarian.<sup>19</sup>

He relates with others in a way that puts them first. In working with them, he makes himself available in a way that seeks to deal first with their concerns and not his own. Rather, his manner of relating expresses a deep reverence for the other and he allows the other to be the person that he or she is, marked with the freedom of the children of God. He tries always to communicate personal warmth that expresses the “good news” of the gospel he has been sent to preach, an attitude of welcome that seeks to include and not exclude, to free and not to possess.

As such, his manner of relating always celebrates in a particular way the “not yet” of the kingdom for which all Christians long in the midst of a world where relations are often characterized by self-interest, judgment and domination. He is self-effacing, striving always to help others come to an encounter with Christ, not just with himself. get in the way of his pastoral relationships which cross generations and various states in life. He refuses all exclusivity in relationships and chooses instead to seek communion with the other in a manner that is profoundly respectful of the dignity of the person. He has a broad spectrum of relationships, including healthy friendships and is able to relate to people of all generations and vocations. He has a special concern for those who are marginalized by society and sees in them the presence of Christ in a particular way.

*The life of the chaste celibate priest is marked by a concern for justice.* The detachment implied by celibacy should render him particularly attentive to the dignity of all, especially the poor and marginalized and foster in him the concern that every individual receive what is his or her due. He will manifest this concern first of all by responsibly managing what belongs to him personally, recognizing the importance of generosity and knowing that “this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). As for institutional resources for which he is responsible, he will surround himself with competent lay people to assure that the Church’s goods are used wisely and always with a priority to help those who are most in need.

These qualities, which every Christian should cultivate, are especially important for a priest who has a direct responsibility for guiding a Christian community. He should be genuinely collaborative, an attentive listener and a courageous herald of the good news of salvation. He is collaborative, an attentive listener and a courageous herald of the good news of salvation. As he celebrates Christ’s Eucharistic sacrifice, he unites the offering of his own life to that of Christ so that he may also become bread that is broken and blood that is poured out so that others may find nourishment for their life in Christ.

*The chaste celibate priest lives a life of spiritual generativity.* This fruitfulness is above all Christ’s. It is the fruit of the work that the Spirit of Christ is accomplishing in him by the grace of ordination. It is manifest first in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments that give birth to a new life in the Spirit. It is also revealed in the pastoral charity he extends to the individuals and groups he is guiding along the way toward the Lord. Servant and guide of the people of God, he is ready to help each individual find his or her proper place in the Church; he tries to adapt his counsel to each individual in order to help the person live a fully Christian life under the will of God. Open to all, he also makes his own the concern to help the community grow in charity and in unity with the life of the local Church; always respectful and obedient to his bishop, he is also open to look for creative ways to bear fruit for the mission of the Church.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, par. 12. “The priest’s identity,’ as the synod fathers wrote, ‘like every Christian identity, has its source in the Blessed Trinity.’”

This pastoral work presupposes accepting the crosses that life inevitably brings to every individual. Uniting oneself with the mystery of the cross of Christ gives these trials find their meaning and their genuine fruitfulness. But pastoral work also requires research and constant deepening in both the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of life. Without such deepening, personal resources for ministry are quickly exhausted. Understanding society and discerning the work of the Spirit in the world are essential for the proclamation of the Gospel and for pastoral ministry and they require of the priest serious study and reflection. Working with other priests in continuing education is very valuable.

Finally, it is worth noting that generativity in the life of a priest also concerns his role in the Church as an example. This witness will be all the more effective when he leads a balanced life, when he is not ruled by his passions and when it is clear that his entire life (including his relaxation and his cultural pursuits) finds its unity in the exercise of pastoral charity

*The life of the chaste celibate is marked by self-knowledge.* This is just as important as human relationships for the spiritual fruitfulness of the priest's ministry.

This self-knowledge comes with a priest's acceptance of his limits before God, an integration of his personal history, a humble sense of his talents, and a joyful acceptance of the graces he has received. It supposes a capacity for self-reflection, a willingness to examine the motives of his actions without being self-centered.

To the extent that the chaste celibate manifests this virtue, his life is marked by an honesty of self-expression that allows the other to know his core values and to see that he lives those values to the best of his ability. A sincere desire for purity of heart will lead him to think more of others than of himself. He will examine his life in light of the Gospel and seeks the kind of authentic conversion that will lead him to a deeper configuration to the Lord Jesus who is the source and model of his life.

Self-knowledge also leads to inner peace so that he is happy to be who he is and happy to have been chosen by God for this ministry. Thus he is energized by virtues that provide a solid foundation for pastoral ministry: strength and prudence that support self-control, temperance that helps him to avoid seeking compensations for loneliness. Solitude can be a trial, but it is also a choice; and the celibate priest finds in solitude an opportunity for a deeper communion with the Lord who often spent the night in prayer.

When solitude is difficult to bear, there is always a danger of flight into an activism that can engender stress as well as other unhealthy behaviors, such as dependence on alcohol, overeating and the Internet. If he opens himself to the encounter with God, if he strives to bring those he receives in pastoral situations before the Lord in prayer, he will discover that solitude is also a privileged space to experience and to bear witness to God's love for the whole human family. Solitude constitutes an essential part of the life of a priest, a privilege way of being united to Christ the Shepherd who accepted solitude as a place to encounter the Father.

It should be clear, therefore, that obedience, poverty and chastity are closely linked; they are in the life of the priest the sign and the realization of a "detached" life, that belongs not to himself but in the end only to Christ who has called him.

## **Spiritual Formation**

What we have said about human formation makes it clear that it cannot be separated from spiritual formation. In fact human formation is already profoundly marked by the spiritual. Since we are striving to cultivate in priests the human qualities that marked the life and ministry of

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, it is clear that these traits are already more than simply human, but already in some way the work of the Spirit and qualities that are more than simply natural.

However, spiritual formation seeks to invite the Holy spirit to dwell more profoundly in the reality of this human life of a pastor, in pointing out, for example, the constant interaction between mysticism and mission. The priest's worship of the Father, his communion with the Son, his cooperation with the Spirit,<sup>20</sup> all permit the priest who is living a chaste celibate life to see his communion with the Trinity at the heart of the human relations that he enters into, all the while maintaining a certain distance. He renounces marriage in order to be "anxious about the things of the Lord and how he may please Him" (1 Cor 7:32). He also realizes that without a disciplined cultivation of that relationship with the Trinity, his celibacy risks losing its meaning and its motivation.

Spiritual formation also invites the priest to have an ever-growing love for God and for his people. It is not just a question of living a balanced human life that is loving and open but a willingness to love to the end in taking on the love of the Church itself for the whole human family. The priest is called, as Jean-Jacques Olier puts it, "to have a heart as large as the Church." The pastoral charity that is at the heart of the priest's life and ministry transcends him; it is the charity that the Church itself has for the world.

### **Qualities and Virtues that Strengthen the Identity of the Chaste Celibate in the Spiritual Life**

In addition to deepening the virtues and qualities mentioned above, four additional virtues help the chaste celibate priest develop his identity in Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* no. 12 on the Trinitarian focus of the priest's entire identity: "It is within the Church's mystery, as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension, that every Christian identity is revealed, and likewise the specific identity of the priest and his ministry. Indeed, the priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the sacrament of orders, is sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured in a special way as head and shepherd of his people, in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world. In this way the fundamentally 'relational' dimension of priestly identity can be understood. Through the priesthood which arises from the depths of the ineffable mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's gift of unity, the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and with other priests in order to serve the People of God who are the Church and to draw all mankind to Christ in accordance with the Lord's prayer: 'Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (Jn. 17:11, 21). Consequently, the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships which arise from the Blessed Trinity and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as a sign and instrument of Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity."

*The Theological Virtues.* The chaste celibate realizes that it is by faith that he sustains the discipline of chaste celibacy. His radical adherence to God alone makes sense out of this commitment. In the contemporary context, it is in some ways “foolish” to make a definitive choice to live a celibate life. Only faith in God and in the kingdom can make sense of it. The commitment is grounded in hope, a longing for what has yet to appear in its fullness, the kingdom of God. Faith that, together with hope is expressed in pastoral charity, the gift of his life poured out in service to God’s people.

*Humility.* Realizing that humility is the “foundation for all the virtues,”<sup>21</sup> the chaste celibate cultivates that virtue through a growing sense of his profound dependence on God. In a spirit of detachment and of total dependence upon God that lead him to exclude any other defining relationship, he strives to know his strengths and limitations, to cooperate with the grace upon which he relies, and to bring the honesty this virtue implies to prayer and to spiritual direction.

### **Structures and Spiritual Disciplines that Support Fidelity to Celibate Chastity**

A number of structures and disciplines assist the chaste celibate to remain faithful to his commitment. These include the following.

*Spiritual direction* is of great importance. We note that many priests do not have a spiritual director once they leave the seminary. Some say that they have trouble finding one. But do they really make an effort? We acknowledge that spiritual direction is at the heart of our ministry as Sulpicians,<sup>22</sup> and we reaffirm our commitment to be available to priests who seek to continue this supportive relationship that served them throughout the time of their initial formation for the priesthood. We know from experience how useful it is to reflect on our lives as pastoral ministers and especially to review with another person our personal relationships and affective life.

*Regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation* is also essential in supporting fidelity to celibate chastity. Beneath its sacred seal, the chaste celibate confesses the faults and failings that hinder his ability to live his state of life fully. From its healing grace, he draws courage and strength to enter more deeply into that life. Moreover, the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings conversion into the mystery of Christ who died and rose from the dead. It also adds a theological dimension to the self-knowledge of which we have already spoken.

*Particular prayer disciplines* are another source of support for a healthy celibate life. In *lectio divina* the seminarian and the priest submits themselves to the living Word of God in order to let his life be conformed to the one who is that Word, the One through whom and for whom all things are created (Col 1:16). Through meditation or mental prayer in its various forms (including the Rosary) he enters more deeply into the central mysteries of the life of Christ. Through the regular practice of the *Examen* (either in its Sulpician form as particular examen or in its Jesuit form as examination of consciousness) he can reinforce his commitment to the honesty and integrity that underlie the very possibility of his promise of celibacy. In maintaining a regular rhythm of *days of recollection* and *retreats* he enters a sacred space where, after the example of the Lord Jesus, he communes with the Father through the power of the Spirit for the

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, *Introduction to the Christian Life and Virtues*, chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice*, articles 17 and 18.

whole of his life. It is certainly true that there is a close link between a faithful life of celibate chastity and personal prayer in the sense that celibacy is a gift that we must ask for and receive unceasingly. Prayer also helps us to become more detached and open to God and to our brothers and sisters, thus helping us to make the gift of ourselves that is at the heart of a commitment to celibacy.

*Support groups and healthy friendships* are an important source of the kind of human warmth and appropriate intimacy that are needed to sustain a life of celibate chastity. In the honest and simple interaction of relationships with priest peers, with devout families and with those in consecrated religious life, the priest finds that he is challenged to express his celibacy more clearly and at the same time he is supported and encouraged to do so.

*The Liturgy.* Faithfully celebrating the Eucharist, the source and summit of the life of the Church, plunges the priest more deeply into the paschal mystery. Here he finds meaning for his life, with its joys and its sorrows, and here he draws the strength to live up to the commitments he has made.<sup>23</sup> If the year is sanctified by the rhythm of the liturgical seasons, the day finds its transformation into God's time by the faithful celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. Fidelity to this obligation accepted at ordination will certainly reinforce fidelity to other obligations as well.

## **Intellectual Formation**

There is a profound link between chastity and truth. To be open to the truth for itself, not to impose one's own point of view, respecting others' convictions, not trying to support one's own positions with specious arguments, all this presupposes a kind of spiritual chastity expressed in a humble acceptance of the truth. Intellectual formation in a seminary should give seminarians these virtues which are intimately related to chastity: love of the truth, respect for the other person's expression of the truth and his or her personal freedom, and the refusal to use one's intelligence in an attempt to dominate the other. While the project of articulating the meaning of celibate chastity is a life-long project since it is a lived experience, the consideration of that meaning takes place in an intense way during the time of initial formation. The seminary ensures that seminarians are well aware of at least the following elements that contribute to the understanding of this commitment: the Trinitarian love revealed by Jesus as the foundation for understanding the meaning of celibacy; the congruence between celibacy and ordained ministry; the history of celibacy and its spiritual significance; the magisterial documents on celibacy; the biblical and theological foundations for the practice, including the Christological, Incarnational, ecclesiological, Pneumatological and eschatological perspectives.

The teaching of the meaning of celibate chastity should be distributed throughout the curriculum. Courses in other disciplines such as psychology, the Christian meaning of sexuality, and philosophical anthropology can also serve this goal. In the course of the theological curriculum, courses dealing with Christian anthropology, theology of orders, theology of marriage and family, ecclesiology and spiritual theology are all domains within the program of intellectual where the meaning of celibate chastity can and should be explored.

The seminary ensures that the teaching of the Church concerning celibate chastity has been appropriated by the seminarian through such elements of the formation program as: spiritual direction, work in small formation groups, self-evaluations (especially that which is included in the petition for diaconate), *scrutinia* and comprehensive examinations. Assuring the

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<sup>23</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis* no. 14.

appropriation of a sound understanding of celibate chastity and the seriousness of the commitment made to this discipline by the seminarian is the responsibility of the entire formation team and it takes place in both internal and external *fora*. For this reason, the formation team periodically discusses its own understanding and appropriation of the meaning of celibate chastity as an element of the continuing formation of its members.

## **Pastoral Formation**

“The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character.”<sup>24</sup> Pastoral charity, the driving force of the spiritual life of the priest,<sup>25</sup> is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who inhabits the ordained minister and invites him to cooperate in the ongoing ministry of Jesus in the world today. In his whole-hearted dedication to preach the good news, to celebrate the sacraments, to hear the cry of the distressed, to alleviate the miseries of the poor, the priest continues to render visible Christ who remains the one Good Shepherd of the flock of his disciples.<sup>26</sup> In doing so, he heralds the coming of the kingdom for which all Christians long, a longing which chaste celibates hope to manifest precisely by virtue of their celibacy.

During his years of formation the seminarian is gradually introduced into this “work of God” through a program of pastoral placements that includes supervision, theological reflection and evaluation. Through this process, he hones his ability to practice the art of being a pastor. Some of the qualities to be developed in this process include the following.

*The Apostolic Spirit.* Father Olier desired the *esprit apostolique* above all other gifts of the Spirit and asked others to pray that he be granted this gift and that he strive always to cultivate it in himself. In Father Olier’s words,

The Seminary of Saint Sulpice will be considered by all who enter it as an apostolic college where all are assembled under the protection of the holy apostles, to study their maxims, to invoke their spirit, to imitate their habits, and to live in conformity with the Gospel they proclaimed. Consequently, all who live here will consider themselves students and disciples of these great masters. They will come to benefit from the apostles’ school and to cultivate in themselves, in the greatest purity, a living knowledge of the Spirit and of the evangelical virtues.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the formation team seeks to form in those who are sent to them a holy zeal

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<sup>24</sup> With these words *Pastores Dabo Vobis* begins its treatment of pastoral formation in par. 57.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 21. “By virtue of this consecration brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the sacrament of holy orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.”

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, par 15: “Therefore priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one high priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care.”

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, *Divers Écrits*, 1, 281.

and an ardent pastoral charity, a complete availability for the work of the Holy Spirit expressed in parochial service, a deep desire to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The formation faculty recognizes that while there is a great congruence between celibate chastity and availability for service,<sup>28</sup> the simple fact of remaining celibate does not guarantee such availability; nor is the cultivation of the apostolic spirit a guarantee of success in the commitment to celibacy. It is in itself a virtue that needs to be cultivated. Therefore the formation team pays attention to the seminarian's commitment to pastoral ministry, evaluating his eagerness to serve, his zeal for the proclamation of the kingdom and his competence for this kind of service. They will try to determine if the apostolic spirit is genuinely enlivened and driven by a gift of self to the Lord, body and soul and if this gift of self serves to strengthen the apostolic spirit.

*Pastoral Charity.* The relational identity of the chaste celibate addressed in the section on human formation bears fruit in pastoral ministry. The yield includes the following: a capacity to love a community in particular and people in general, an ability to show warmth and care in his encounters with others and to be just in relating to all, without distinction and in an inclusive rather than exclusive manner. Since the great majority of those who give of their time and talents in promoting the mission of the Church are women, he needs to be able to relate to them in a positive fashion that is neither manipulative, nor patronizing nor condescending. Balance in this domain is not always easy to achieve. Respect should not deteriorate into a fearful distancing; and simplicity in relationships should not lead to excessive familiarity.

*Prudence.* This virtue is of special importance in the pastoral context. The chaste celibate expresses this virtue in a variety of ways, including his ability to navigate difficult situations in a manner that puts the other first, his ability to manage conflict in a way that respects the truth of the situation and with an effort to bring opposing parties to reconciliation, his capacity to handle stress, his respect for appropriate boundaries in relationships, his aptitude for organizing and maintaining balance in the face of multiple demands and his skill for handling transitions.

Prudence also governs his style of communication. His conversations should be marked by a clear commitment to the whole Christian message, his skill for reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, his determination to avoid ideology and adapt his teaching so that the good news of salvation may be heard. Double entendres, sexual innuendoes and flirtatious language are counter signs to his commitment to perfect chastity in the celibate state.

*Love for Pastoral Life.* It is in service to others that the chaste celibate finds the best expression of chaste loving. Ordained for service in a particular diocese, the diocesan priest shows a genuine desire for parochial ministry over specialized service, unless requested for such service by his bishop. He realizes that in this service he finds a principal source and expression of his spiritual life,<sup>29</sup> and he orients his discipline of prayer from and towards it.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 7:32.

<sup>29</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, par. 12: "Hence, those who exercise the ministry of the spirit and of justice (cf. 2 Cor 3:8-9) will be confirmed in the life of the spirit, so long as they are open to the Spirit of Christ, who gives them life and direction. By the sacred actions which are theirs daily as well as by their entire ministry, which they share with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are directed to perfection in their lives."

*Leadership Qualities.* The good pastor is a servant-leader. His mission includes guiding those who are confided to his care along the path of faith and of the life of the Church. At the same time he helps them discern their vocation and strives to call forth their gifts for the service of the community. In the end he has a responsibility to discern the right path, but he must also get his parishioners involved in the discernment process and invite them into a genuine collaboration. He represents Christ the Head and Shepherd but that charge includes the promotion of the priesthood of the baptized. In order to guide the community, he must be firm in important matters, respectful of the truth, kind and capable of listening. He serves the unity of the community, gathering them and leading them in the same direction, but remains respectful of the vocation of each individual.

*Power and Authority.* The servant-leader exercises power and authority in a manner that is particular to the very nature of the Church. His authority flows from his faithful submission to the good news of salvation, to the teaching of the Church and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. He is not authoritarian. Rather, he uses his power to include others, not to exclude them.<sup>30</sup> As a man of power he is especially attentive to maintaining appropriate boundaries in relationships with others. The sexual abuse of another person is not only the greatest violation of the promise of celibate chastity, but an expression of the most corrupt form of power. It brings great harm to the other, especially the victim, but also to the Church and to his brother priests. All forms of abuse of power have an affective dimension, because they introduce a spirit of domination into situations where sincere brotherly love and genuine service should be most evident.

### **Structural Elements of a Program of Formation for Celibate Chastity: An Overview**

Given the diversity of cultures in which we Sulpicians are working, we cannot and will not attempt to describe a single approach to formation for celibate chastity that can be found in all Sulpician seminaries. It is rather our desire to articulate common elements that our varied experience has found helpful in the process of formation for celibacy.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, par. 21: "The authority of Jesus Christ as head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church. All this he did in perfect obedience to the Father; he is the one true Suffering Servant of God, both priest and victim. The spiritual existence of every priest receives its life and inspiration from exactly this type of authority, from service to the Church, precisely inasmuch as it is required by the priest's configuration to Jesus Christ Head and Servant of the Church. As St. Augustine once reminded a bishop on the day of his ordination: 'He who is head of the people must in the first place realize that he is to be the servant of many. And he should not disdain being such; I say it once again, he should not disdain being the servant of many, because the Lord of Lords did not disdain to make himself our servant.' The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should therefore be marked by this fundamental attitude of service to the People of God (cf. Mt. 20:24ff.; Mk. 10:43-44), freed from all presumption of desire of 'lording over' those in their charge (cf. 1 Pet 5:2-3)."

## **Admission to the Seminary**

Admission to a seminary program occurs only after a period of discernment between the candidate and his diocese. As part of this process, he should demonstrate that he already has a capacity for celibate living, based on information in the following areas. He should obviously have an extended history of celibate living before entering the seminary. If there has been a history of turmoil in his family of origin, it should be clear that he has dealt with this difficulty and that it has not distorted his capacity to trust others, to relate to them in an open and healthy way. He should have good self-knowledge and self-acceptance. There should be no indications of dependency or addiction of any sort. He should make use of the media (including the internet) in a sound and appropriate way. He should be able to speak about others in a positive, healthy and good moral manner. He should manifest a sense of self-mastery and personal autonomy. With regard to the spiritual life, he should show signs of integrating the values of the cardinal virtues. He should be balanced in his approach to the spiritual life and free from authoritarian and rigid mannerisms. He should have openness toward and respect for the intellectual life.

## **The Years of Philosophy (Pre-Theology or First Cycle)**

When a candidate for the priesthood enters the seminary, he gives himself over to a process of formation in a way that will gradually initiate him into a priestly identity. During the first years of the program of priestly formation, he must learn the following in order to ensure an appropriate growth in the virtue of celibate chastity.

He must first learn to have confidence in the process of formation itself as a gift of the Spirit and in the work of qualified formators who have been entrusted with this ministry by the Church. He must begin to be comfortable with his new identity as a seminarian. This facet of formation includes behavior that is appropriate to a celibate lifestyle, the acceptance of a public identity and the boundaries that this requires in the areas of speech and action, a capacity for service, and evidence of collaborative leadership. He should manifest a growing level of comfort in relating to a wide variety of people from different cultures and socio-economic levels, with a special concern for the poor and the stranger. He must begin to show a commitment to a disciplined prayer-life, including not only the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, but mental prayer with the Word of God. He should be introduced to the various styles of mental prayer, and that both *Lectio Divina* and the Sulpician method should be included. He should also be getting used to an appropriate sense of the continuing presence of God and the value of finding that presence in silence and in solitude. He should not surround himself with noise and distractions all the time. The practice of the *examen* should be introduced at this time as well.

The seminarian should be introduced during these years to a proper Christian understanding of the meaning of human sexuality from moral, physiological and psychological and moral perspectives. Any psychological courses treating this material should present the understanding of the affect and human drives and should be cognizant of and congruent with the teachings of the Church on the theology of the body, so extensively treated in the writings of Pope John Paul II. Finally, there should be some initial experience of apostolic outreach, including contact with and service to the poor.

## **The First Years of Theology**

Entrance into the first year of theology presumes that the seminarian has a firm intention of proceeding to ordination and that his formators believe he manifests sufficient psychological and spiritual maturity to be an acceptable candidate for priesthood. In particular, he should have a positive appreciation for the Church's teaching concerning celibate chastity. He should develop a sound and positive appreciation for the Church's teaching on celibate chastity and see it as something that is not imposed on him as a law but rather something that he chooses freely and confidently. It should not be seen merely as abstinence but as a way of living out pastoral charity. This includes a growing comfort in relating respectfully and appropriately with others, a pastoral concern for and an unattached love for both individuals and communities.

He should be discussing the meaning of this celibate commitment in an open and frank manner with his spiritual director and he should be able to speak in the public forum as well about its meaning, the challenges it poses, and his willingness to commit himself to it. This last element happens most appropriately as he approaches important transition steps in his vocational journey: formal admission to candidacy, the ministries and especially diaconate ordination. At this stage of formation, teaching concerning celibacy will focus primarily on the theological and biblical dimensions of celibate chastity, on the suitability of celibacy for ordained ministers and on its relations to other states of life in the Church, especially consecrated life. Pastoral assignments will help judge his ability to maintain appropriate boundaries in relating to others. Opportunities for theological reflection on the basis of pastoral assignments will offer further evidence of internalization of his intellectual formation.

### **The Last Years of Theology: Immediate Preparation for Ordination**

In this last stage of initial formation, the formation process continues to along the same lines, seeking to deepen the candidate's personal integration of the value of celibacy. A more intensive pastoral placement will help to verify that the candidate has internalized the qualities that are needed for a fruitful and chaste life as a celibate pastor.

Readiness for orders occurs only after years of discernment on the part of the individual seminarian, the formation team and the local Church. In relationship to the commitment to celibate chastity, the candidate for ordination can demonstrate at least the following elements. He has personally integrated the various facets of formation. He has an existential subjective readiness and enthusiasm for ordained ministry. In addition, he has a peaceful and joyful acceptance and appropriation of his identity as a chaste celibate. This is made clear in his patterns of relating with others. He is a man of honesty and integrity and is clearly serious in making a promise of permanent commitment to the celibate state. He understands that there are crosses that come with this commitment, just as there are crosses that come with any state in life and he is willing to take up those crosses as part of his ongoing entrance into the paschal mystery. He has developed a solid life of personal prayer. He manifests an ability to pray for and with others and can lead others in prayer. He has made a personal appropriation of all the promises that he will make at the time of his ordination and recognizes that prayer, obedience and celibate chastity (as well as the evangelical counsel of poverty) are not isolated from one another but are interconnected and support one another. He has demonstrated qualities of pastoral charity and sees himself as a servant-leader of the people of God.

### **Continuing Formation**

As he lives out his permanent commitment to celibate chastity, the priest is continually re-appropriating the promise and re-integrating it into the meaning of his life. Some structures that assist him in this project include spiritual direction, periodic evaluations (especially for young priests structures of accountability can be a great support), priest support groups, regular days of recollection and annual retreats, days of study and programs of renewal. In some cases, psychological counseling may be called for, since the lived experience of chastity in the celibate life may well be more complicated than anticipated. However, as in the seminary, spiritual direction will remain the privileged place where he can speak openly about his difficulties and his joys. Seminary formation personnel will make a special effort to inculcate in the seminarians a perception of the importance of spiritual direction after ordination.

A priest must certainly be aware of the warning signs of danger in the area of living out the celibate commitment, signs that he may recognize in himself or in brother priests. These include lack of discipline in the life of prayer; patterns of self-imposed isolation and refusal to participate in events for clergy and diocesan celebrations; frequent meetings with a single individual, at the expense of other personal encounters; listlessness in the performance of pastoral duties or over-involvement in them; lack of respect for or from his fellow priests; inappropriate consumption of food and/or alcohol; activism; patterns of conspicuous consumerism (the collection, for example, of equipment that one neither needs nor uses); rigidity; sleeplessness; frequent extended absences from the parish; use of pornography from the internet or other sources; habits of conversation that demean or objectify the other, including sexual innuendo and double entendre.

### **Continuing Formation of Sulpicians**

As diocesan clergy the priests of Saint Sulpice are committed to the same consistent reappropriation of the place of celibate chastity in the process of living out their priestly identity. We are subject to the same risks and temptations as our brother priests in their ministry. The quality of our chastity often has to do with our ways of relating to seminarians. We can make them dependent on us or become dependent on them if our relations with them are exclusive or possessive. We may be tempted to cultivate a little circle of disciples; we may fall into patterns of favoritism with regard to certain students we particularly admire. To avoid some of these difficulties, a seminary superior should be careful that one spiritual director does not have a larger percentage of directees than the other members of the formation team.

There are also other risks inherent in our ministry in priestly formation. These include a lack of interest in the larger community of the Society and its mission, just as a religious might lose interest in the mission of his congregation or a diocesan priest might lose interest in his diocesan Church—this would indicate that our heart is not really where it should be. The same goes for a refusal to participate regularly in the prayer life of the community, frequent absence from the prayer life of the community, and difficulties in submitting to the wisdom of the local council.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators, Congregation for Catholic Education (1993), par. 35 for a description of the kind of affective maturity one should see in formation personnel: “As an integral part and essential consequence of the above-mentioned overall maturity, it is important that educators have a good, mature affectivity. This term is

At the recent Synod of Bishops on the theme of the Eucharist, the Bishops reaffirmed strongly the desire to continue drawing the Church's clergy from among those who are also called to a celibate state of life. It is our desire in the Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice to assure that we are doing the best we can do in the discernment of this call and in preparing men to live out this promise they make at ordination in the healthiest and holiest way possible. May the Lord strengthen and sustain us in our own commitment and help us lead others to deepen theirs, and may He always keep us mindful that this commitment is for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding these reflections, we would like to underline the role that devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary plays in the formation of priests for a life of chaste celibacy. In the Sulpician tradition, Marian devotion holds a very prominent place. Mary, who raised the child Jesus and guided him along the road to human maturity, must surely play an important part in the formation of priests, and in a particular way for their appropriation of the gift of celibacy.

By her virginity and her chastity, she was consecrated to the Lord in a unique way. Her consecration is not to be separated from the unique mission that she received in the history of salvation: to give her Son to the world. The Virgin Mary orients us toward an understanding of celibacy as a gift of self to open the world to the coming of Christ. Consecration and mission are inseparable in every Christian life; and this certainly must be so in the life of the priest. By ordination he is consecrated to Christ in order to be sent to announce the Gospel to the world. The choice of celibacy extends this configuration to Christ to the point of following him in his very way of living and relating to others. For this reason, although celibacy is not bound to priesthood in an absolute way, it most assuredly manifests a profound "suitability" and coherence with priestly ministry.

As a model of virginity and chastity, the Virgin Mary is for priests and seminarians a precious help on the way, leading them to follow in the footsteps of her Son, a path along which she preceded all of us. We conclude with the beloved prayer of Sulpician founder, Father Jean-Jacques Olier:

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understood as the free and stable possession of one's own affective world: the capacity to love and to allow one's self to do so in a right and purified way. He who possesses this capacity is normally inclined to a self-giving attention to the other person, to an intimate understanding of his problems, and to a clear perception of his real good. Such a person also appreciates the gratitude, respect, and affection of others, even while not exacting these and never making them the condition of his own willingness to serve. He who is affectively mature will never bind others to himself; instead, he will be able to form in them an equally self-giving affectivity, concentrated and founded on the love received from God in Jesus Christ and, in the end, always referred to Him." This whole chapter (par. 23-47) is dedicated to qualities that should be present in seminary formators. It should be studied carefully by Provincial Councils and those who are responsible for formation in the Society of Saint Sulpice.

O Jesus, living in Mary,  
Come and live in your servants,  
In the spirit of your holiness,  
In the fullness of your power,  
In the perfection of your ways,  
In the truth of your virtues,  
In the communion of your mysteries:  
Overcome every oppressing force  
In your Spirit,  
For the glory of the Father. Amen.