

Celibate Chastity in the Life of the Priest  
in the Light of the Teaching of Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II

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Priestly celibacy is a rich tradition and source of grace in the life of the Church. Since apostolic times men have answered the call to “leave everything,” including the great goods of marriage and children, in order to follow Christ and share in his mission. By embracing a life of continence and celibacy they make themselves “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 19:12).

Karol Wojtyła observed: “Chastity can only be thought of in association with the virtue of love. Its function is to free love from the utilitarian attitude.” He appreciated the Second Vatican Council’s teaching that Christ fully reveals man to himself, and that man can truly find himself only through a sincere gift of himself (GS 22, 24).

This study examines John Paul’s teaching on the chaste celibacy of the priest in three contexts: 1) the history and practice of continence-celibacy in the Church up to Karol Wojtyła’s election as pope; 2) Wojtyła’s pre-papal writings; 3) John Paul’s pontificate.

Chapter One considers the New Testament teachings on apostolic continence, examines of the priestly continence in the ancient Church. It investigates the development of the tradition, and the meaning and motivation for priestly celibacy in the Church up to the Second Vatican Council.

Chapter Two explores Karol Wojtyła's writings before he became pope.

Wojtyła's dramatic and philosophical works illustrate his respect for the dignity of the person and human freedom. After his years as a pastor, teacher and writer of philosophy, Wojtyła wrote *Love and Responsibility*. This reflection on human love and sexuality identifies love as a complete and sincere donation of self, in marriage or in the consecrated life. Wojtyła's contributions at Vatican II echo these themes.

Chapter Three examines Pope John Paul's teachings on priestly celibacy as found in encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, letters, addresses and his "Theology of the Body." His thought and his teachings represent an important development in the Church's understanding of the celibate chastity of the priest.

John Paul understands that celibacy is a gift from God and a way to make a sincere and complete gift-of-self to God and others. The celibate priest is not a bachelor. His ordination consecrates him and configures him to the person of Christ as Head and Bridegroom. Priestly celibacy *makes visible the interior reality* of the priest's spousal love for the Bride of Christ, the Church.