



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
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**Press Conference to present the International Theological Symposium “For a fundamental theology of priesthood”, organised by the Congregation for Bishops (Rome, 17-19 February 2022)**

At 11.30 this morning, the press conference to present the International Theological Symposium “For a fundamental theology of priesthood”, organised by the Congregation for Bishops and to be held in Rome from 17 to 19 February 2022, was streamed live from the Holy See Press Office.

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Marc Ouellet, P.S.S., prefect of the Congregation for Bishops; Professor Vincent Siret, rector of the Pontifical French Seminary in Rome, by remote connection; and Professor Michelina Tenace, professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

The following are their interventions:

**Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Marc Ouellet, P.S.S.**

As Vocations Sunday approaches, and within the framework of the Church's research on synodality, I have the honor and the joy of presenting to the public the project of a Theological Symposium on Vocations. Pope Francis has often repeated what he said in 2015 about synodality: “The path of synodality is the path that God expects from the Church of the third millennium.” This expectation of God and of the Holy Father may seem abstract at first glance, but when we consider it from the point of view of vocations, it takes on a very concrete content. Synodality basically means the active participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church, it describes the united march of the baptized towards the Kingdom which is being built on a daily basis in the realities of family, in the workplace, as well as in social and ecclesial life in all its forms. This requires a life of faith and close collaboration between lay people, priests and men and women religious, for the proclamation of the Gospel to the world through the attractive witness of Christian communities. This expected growth of a Synodal Church certainly corresponds to the orientations of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which are still being implemented with a more profound theological and pastoral comprehension.

The Symposium that we are bringing to the attention of the public today is entitled: "Toward a Fundamental

Theology of the Priesthood". It consists of an intense three-day session, open to all, but intended especially for bishops, and for all those, men and women, who are interested in theology, in order to deepen our understanding of vocations and the importance of communion between the different vocations in the Church. Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, patron saint of the missions and doctor of the Church, reminded us that love is the driving force behind the mission of the Church. She bore witness to this love above all through prayer and penance as part of her life in the Carmel. But this love is poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all the baptized, to be given to the world through what Saint Paul calls the "ligaments and bonds" of the Body of Christ (Col 2, 19), that is to say, by the Church present and operating in the world at the service of suffering humanity today. This priesthood of Love, which is exercised by the entire ecclesial community, is animated and supported by a variety of vocations to love, whose distinct forms and colours complement each other. Between priests and lay people, between men and women religious of different charisms, the Holy Spirit communicates the grace which brings about communion among all, enabling obstacles to be overcome, and through this communion, mysteriously and at least virtually, reaching the whole of humanity. It is clear that such theological and pastoral research does not concern only Europe or America but the whole Church on all continents.

A theological symposium does not claim to offer practical solutions to all the pastoral and missionary problems of the Church, but it can help us deepen the foundation of the Church's mission. Insight from Divine Revelation on the priesthood of Christ and the participation of the Church in this priesthood is a crucial question for our time. This is not a new theme, but a central one, the originality of which will be to establish a fundamental relationship between the priesthood of the baptized, which the Second Vatican Council has enhanced, and the priesthood of ministers, bishops and priests, which the Catholic Church has always affirmed and specified. This rapport is not to be taken for granted in our time, because it entails pastoral readjustments, and it involves ecumenical questions not to be ignored, as well as the cultural movements that question the place of women in the Church. We are also all aware of the scarcity of vocations in many regions, as well as tensions on the ground due to divergent pastoral visions, challenges posed by multiculturalism and migrations, not to mention the ideologies that condition the witness of the baptized and the exercise of the priestly ministry in secularized societies. In this context, how can we live a missionary conversion of all the baptized without a new awareness of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the world through the Risen Christ?

In this search for synodal conversion, there is room for a vast theological endeavour which should offer a renewed vision, a sense of the essential, a way of valuing all vocations while respecting what is specific to each. Such a vision of the communion of vocations is rooted in the communion of divine Persons and seeks to deploy a Trinitarian ecclesiology capable of energizing the synodal and missionary Church that Pope Francis dreams of. It is clear that this research interests the whole Church, especially bishops, but also theologians, consecrated life, married people, and those involved in formation at all levels. My colleagues will offer more on this in a moment.

I might add on my part that this initiative is a big undertaking which has been carefully prepared, but which carries a margin of risk in the current circumstances of the pandemic. It is, therefore, an act of faith that we would not have entered upon without some confirmation from above, plus the urgency of creating a vocational movement following the various synodal experiences of recent years. Indeed, during the synods on the family, on young people, and on the Church in Amazonia, questions regarding the priesthood and synodality were raised in all their magnitude, with an insistence on the reality of baptism, the basis of all vocations. The time has come to prolong the reflection and to promote a vocational movement facilitating the sharing of the various Church experiences all over the planet.

We therefore want to bring together national and diocesan delegations from all continents to the Paul VI audience hall for three days, from February 17 to 19, 2022, with an intense program of conferences, crowned by a message from Pope Francis. The conference program is available to journalists and to the public from today. A website, opened a few days ago, will provide further information to interested parties, facilitating registration for participants as well as to solicit financial contributions in support of the organisation of this great event.

Given the scope of this symposium, we hope it will mark a stage in the research of the Church and encourage new initiatives and publications. I cannot extend this invitation as Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops without appealing for prayers from the people of God, and in particular, from contemplative communities. Since this is

the question of the priesthood, whose baptismal and ministerial awareness we must re-energise, as well as the consciousness of the fruitfulness of consecrated life, this can only be obtained by a grace from above to be implored with insistence and perseverance. I therefore invite especially bishops to welcome this call and to re-launch this concern for vocations within the framework of their particular Church, in communion with Pope Francis and his collaborators of the Roman Curia. I thank the Communications Department of the Holy See for being available to collaborate today and in the months to come for this event. Thank you very much.

### Intervention by Professor Vincent Siret

The Symposium of 17-19 February 2022 "For a Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood" concerns the formators of future priests in the Church, and I have no doubt that they will take it to heart. Indeed, how can we form those whom the Lord calls in his Church to receive the ministry of the priesthood if they are not enlightened in a more specific manner than ever before, not only on what they are about to receive through the sacrament of Holy Orders, but also and above all on how they are situated in the communion of the whole Church? This issue is certainly not new, but it must be studied again and again, in a renewed way. It is not enough to repeat. The extension to the Trinitarian dimension, the source of all communion, is essential so that the field is not limited to collaboration and a more thoughtful distribution of tasks or even to co-responsibility, but so that the Trinitarian source itself is the primary focus. Baptismal life is the fundamental human vocation and all must exercise the priesthood received at baptism. The ministry is in the service of this. We can hope, for example, to avoid a disappointing and counter-productive priest-secular face-off and to articulate this duo in relation to the presence and life of men and women religious, who are on both sides.

Reflecting on the fundamental theology of the priesthood will also make it possible to return to the justifications for priestly celibacy and the way it is lived. It is a service owed to those who are preparing to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders to show them the reasons that justify such a request and such a commitment to life, and to propose to them accordingly and coherently the most suitable ways of living in fidelity to this gift. After this, it is possible for them to make an informed commitment. The consecration of one's entire life takes in the whole person and can only be justified in an oblation perspective following Christ in a Trinitarian dynamic. Love is at the root of self-giving. The human balance that is required to envisage a particular vocation is certainly necessary, indispensable, but ultimately, the commitment can only be based on a theology that is itself just, making room for all vocations and situating that of the ministry within the whole. The struggle against all forms of clerical abuse, the source of which Pope Francis identifies in clericalism, can only be carried out with theological clarity. This struggle requires both a horizontal perspective of the correct relationship between the baptised, which itself can only come from a vertical perspective of the correct relationship to God and the Holy Trinity.

The Symposium is part of the path of synodality, as the Cardinal has just recalled. This path is in fact the only way to escape ecclesial clericalism. I say ecclesial and not ecclesiastical because the clerics within the Church are not the only ones tempted by this truncated and deceptive vision. The vocation of all to enter the Kingdom by grace is explicit and unique, and it prevents any withdrawal into ecclesial structures. The ministry of priests is not primarily structural or organisational, but essentially mystical, that is, inscribed in the Mystery. Only this ultimate depth of the Mystery, in which the journey can only be a journey with and in the footsteps of Christ towards the Father in the Spirit, can allow a way out from above of the many difficulties and risks encountered in being trapped in a worldly dimension, that of a power struggle or of communication based on publicity.

The theology of the priesthood, revisited in its depths and lived out, can restore not only a missionary impulse but, even more profoundly, a missionary unity far from any uniformity. The whole life of the Church is missionary, or else it is neither life nor ecclesial. Pope Francis writes in no. 273 of *Evangelii gaudium*: "I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world". Such an affirmation is linked with the offering of the world to the Father and the acceptance of the Father's gift in his Son through the Spirit, Love for the world. The mission also finds its own dynamic if it is seen in its link with the communion of Love which is the vocation of all. The ordained minister can then situate himself in this eternal plan of the Father.

This Symposium, as we all know, requires complex and important organisation. An association, the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations, has been created to support the project financially and to ensure its smooth running. You can log on to the website [www.communio-vocation.com](http://www.communio-vocation.com) where it is possible to donate to support this conference and the research work carried out by the Centre; this will allow, among other things, the funding to enable as many people as possible to participate. This is where you can find the content and the planned stages of the Symposium. On the website you can enrol and obtain all the necessary information. Simultaneous translation into French, English, Spanish, Italian and German will be provided.

The days of the Symposium are divided in such a way as to address the different themes. Each half-day is chaired by a cardinal. The 17th February is entitled: Tradition and New Horizons. This day will be chaired in the morning by Cardinal Ouellet and in the afternoon by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy. The papers on 18 February are grouped around the trio: Trinity, mission, sacramentality. The gatherings will be chaired by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the morning and by the Congregation for Catholic Education in the afternoon. On Saturday 19, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, will preside at Mass in the morning in Saint Peter's Basilica. The work will then be carried out in relation to the trio of *celibacy*, *charisma* and *spirituality*, with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints presiding in the morning and the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life in the afternoon. Pope Francis will send the participants on their mission at the end of the afternoon.

### **Intervention by Professor Michelina Tenace**

#### **A crucial question for our time**

A symposium on the priesthood entitled "For a Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood" is not intended to provide solutions to problems but to bring to light the roots of the priesthood so that the tree may be reinvigorated with fruit.

Cardinal Ouellet says: "The priesthood of Christ and the participation of the Church in this priesthood is a crucial question for our time".

This is certainly not a new theme.

What, then, is the urgency of reflecting on this theme?

The fact that today we must think about the foundation that links the ministerial priesthood with the common priesthood of the baptised.

This relationship must be reviewed in every age, since every age expresses a different understanding of the relationship between the various members of the same body, and every age develops an updated ecclesiology on the demands of witness in history.

Today we see that in many parts of the world, bishops and priests struggle to identify the changes necessary for a priest truly to be a sentinel of the Kingdom of God, a man called by God to sanctify the world through the gift of the sacraments of the Kingdom.

Changes cannot be dictated by cultural pressures, but neither should they exclude the fact that in the issues that prompt change, there is a call to free the faith from encrustations of the past.

#### **Some theological issues to be addressed**

One of the aims of the Symposium is to reflect on the relationship between ministerial priesthood and common priesthood.

In an introduction to a book on ministries, Pope Francis wrote that "The Holy People of God, anointed by the Spirit, are all priestly insofar as they participate in the one priesthood of Christ. There is only one priest, Christ".

So the question that naturally follows is how to understand the one priesthood of Christ, the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptised.

So it is important to understand why a symposium on the priesthood will lead to talk about baptism.

Let us recall that with the descent of the Holy Spirit the church is born.

With baptism, where the Holy Spirit descends, one becomes a Christian, one participates in the divine life as a child in the Son.

Ordained ministers are indispensable because they preserve the divine life through the sacraments of the Eucharist and the forgiveness of sins; the people of God preserve the divine life through the building up of the church in the witness of charity and the growth of charisms. It is not possible to consider one without the other.

When we say that the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful refer to the one priesthood of Christ, we are saying a very challenging truth: we are saying that there is a mutual responsibility between the community of the baptised and the priests. The lack of priestly vocations means that the Christian community has become impoverished: it neither gives nor receives priests.

#### **Another important theme is the theology of vocation.**

To each his vocation. Indeed, it is the exchange of gifts and attention to the vocation of each person that builds up the church of Christ.

This is the guiding idea of the Symposium: to deepen the theology of the priesthood, to reaffirm the essential features of the Catholic tradition on the identity of the priest, perhaps freeing it from a certain clericalisation.

Clericalisation is a danger both for priests and for the faithful: it identifies the priesthood with power and not with service, being an *alter Christus* at the altar as a privilege and not as a responsibility that concerns all the faithful.

Clericalism is derived from a view of the priest as isolated, above everyone else. Pope Francis often draws attention to this danger.

In this mistaken approach there is also the risk of priests being damaged by the idealisation of omnipotence or by the demands of the faithful.

#### **The question of celibacy must be addressed from the perspective of vocation.**

When one speaks of the question of celibacy, one must understand that the real question concerns vocation and formation: if one is called by God one also receives the gift of living out this call, and formation makes these gifts conscious and manifest. But formation in seminaries has often proved to be very poor precisely in the discernment of vocation and formation in the life of communion.

The issue raised is that the priestly function does not require celibacy, but in the Latin tradition it is required because of the prophetic witness of Christ's priesthood to the eschatological character of the church. Celibacy is a prophetic sign that makes the priest a free witness to a newness that will be manifested in the eschaton.

The church needs prophets and not only 'officials' of the sacraments. (cf. Jacques Servais)

**Another issue that will be addressed is the relationship to the sacred.**

The sacred and the profane in Christianity are outdated categories because with Christ, God's presence among us, the sacral religious model of the ancient religions is outdated. But the mystery remains. So the priest of Christ must evoke the mystery and transcendence of the liturgical act, for example, without trivialising the sacred, without sacralising the profane. The theology of the sacraments and the liturgy is an area that must be re-proposed together with the theology of the priesthood.

Thus the symposium will help to understand that the crisis of the identity of the priest or of vocations is not only a crisis affecting particular individuals but the ongoing transformation of the whole church as a body animated by the lymph of the Spirit, a living organism on the basis of faith that creates a profound harmony between the members, the head, the joints, a communion that from age to age must reaffirm an adequate physiognomy of the Kingdom.

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