



North Thompson Catholic Parishes

Roman Catholic Diocese of Kamloops

Congregation for the Clergy
Priesthood
a greater love

International Symposium on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the
Promulgation of the Conciliar Decree
Presbyterorum Ordinis

GENERAL INTRODUCTION ¹

Cardinal Jose Sanchez
Most Reverend Crescenzo Sepe ²

By means of the international symposium we want to celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the proclamation of the Conciliar Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. We want to do this not with a purely celebratory approach to an event that is over and gone, but in an ecclesial way i.e. in a dynamic, missionary, and forward looking way that is faithful to the substance of the decree.

With the passing of time a magisterial document should not lose its validity, but take on an expanded meaning in the light of new questions and challenges which the Church has to take up in a serious study.

Such has been the case in the past thirty years, in which strong winds have blown, social contexts have changed, and dramatic challenges have suddenly appeared, to which the Magisterium has responded carefully and coherently under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

The Magisterium has produced a coherent body of teaching that began with *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, moved forward with the Synods of 1971 and 1990, and the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and has developed with the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* published by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1994. In our symposium six Cardinal experts have delivered the six principal papers that dealt with the principal themes of the life and ministry of priests. There were also the communications given by theologians, pastoral experts and lay persons that were rich, relevant and timely, but limitations of space force us to offer the briefest summaries.

1 Translated from the original Italian by Msgr. Richard Malone.

2 Cardinal Jose Sanchez was then Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy; Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe is Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy.

In these years, the Congregation for the Clergy has been guided by an awareness of the indispensable nature of the priesthood, by an awareness of the totality of the priest's pastoral ministry, as well as by the fact that evangelization cannot prescind from the clarity of priestly identity nor from the sanctity of priests. We have to admit that the attacks on the Church that try to reduce her to the purely horizontal dimension have been aimed at her priesthood. The Congregation has not spared any energy either in its publications (e.g. the English volume, *Magisterium and Celibacy, the Catecheses of the Pope on Priests and Permanent Deacons*, and the semiannual review *Sacrum Ministerium*), nor in setting up an institute for the permanent formation of priests nor by organizing symposia on crucial dimensions of priestly life. We intend to act in a positive way. The attentive and sapiential re-reading of the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and of the successive body of teaching up to the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* took place from the 23rd to the 27th of October 1995, and was the occasion for finding a way of summing up the teaching, planning and organizing it for the further education of priests and those who form them. We have to guide and shape priestly will and action in the spirit of communion. The effort demands courage, determination, good will and strong interior motivation.

From the daily experience of our work in the Congregation, we have reached the firm realization that the Church can count on a great corps of faithful priests who bear the daily burden and fatigue with tenacity, with internal peace and joy even in the midst of difficulty. They are engaged in many areas in their daily zealous ministry overcoming every obstacle at the precious outposts of evangelization. Unfortunately, the mass media ignore these generous, quiet and hard working priests, devoted to their duty, true witnesses of the greater love, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the four hundred thousand and more priests in the world. Instead the media pay a great deal of attention to a few cases of priests in difficulty, on whom they concentrate their attention with the unfortunate result of showing only a negative image of the priesthood. The result is a certain amount of bitterness, discouragement and a sense of loneliness among great numbers of faithful and clergy. It can lead the weak astray.

In the last thirty years the Congregation has noticed a certain amount of change in the area of priestly life and ministry. Years ago the main issues were the many desertions of the priesthood, conflicts between bishops and priests, and the critical impact of secularization on the Church. Today, despite various persistent difficulties, there is a positive quantitative and qualitative recovery which makes one hope for a priestly second spring.

Today we find other causes for problems of priestly identity, for example, the cultural pressures on the priest to move from a sacral to a social role, in accord with the democratic mechanisms that characterize our society as secular, democratic, functional and pluralist. There is an effort to transform the hierarchical Church that Christ established into the equivalent of a purely humanist organization, transforming the saving mystery into a vague order of philanthropy and solidarity, and priests into a band of social workers and sentimental communicators.

In the last ten years another problem has attracted the attention of the Congregation: the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the pastoral ministry of priests. In this area we discover splendid examples of generous, intelligent and constructive collaboration. In such a situation we can only confirm and encourage. There are also serious cases in which the priestly role is lost in the attempt to clericalize the laity and laicize the clergy.

Clearly, doctrinal errors contribute to the rise of the abuses. They can also arise from not putting into practice the established disciplinary norms which express and respect in practice the distinction and complementarity of functions that are vital for ecclesial communion.

In sum, one understands very well that concern for priestly identity and ministry is concern for the foundational elements of the life of the Church. Interest in priests, concern for their ongoing formation and their sanctification, promoting their missionary motivation, fraternity and interior joy all amount to giving the greatest imaginable impetus to the evangelization of the world. The cause of the priest is the cause of Christ, the cause of souls and the cause of the fruitfulness of the Redemption in our time. The Congregation for the Clergy has organized the present symposium and publishes the papers in the hope that it will contribute to the ongoing reflection of bishops, priests and will inform the faithful who feel an active responsibility for living their baptism and confirmation.

We want to promote a frank and fraternal dialogue in the bond of ecclesial communion, looking to the good of priests, in order to promote in a form of concrete docility to the Spirit the golden resources of evangelization. As part of the symposium that we held in the Paul VI Audience Hall, the Successor of Peter along with the Cardinals and bishops listened to the witness of priests, laity and even of non Catholics on the priesthood and together we lived an afternoon that became a feast of the priesthood. It was not just a spectacle even if there was entertainment, but it was an attempt to create the complete, even emotional, involvement of our confreres in the world to show them our respect and gratitude. We did this with the assistance of television which transmitted the event in world vision.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to whom we consecrate this work and everything we do for the good of priests, make this enterprise fruitful.

ADDRESS GIVEN BY POPE JOHN PAUL II DURING
THE COURSE OF THE SYMPOSIUM ¹

"The greatest love" is the title of this interesting *Recital*, during which we have had the opportunity to hear various testimonies on the priesthood, 30 years after the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* on the ministry and life of priests.

I thank those who prepared it with care and competence. In particular, I thank the Cardinal Prefect, Jose T. Sanchez and the Secretary, Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe of the Congregation for the Clergy, who in promoting the International Symposium of these days have also wished to organize this significant artistic event, which is rich in priestly spirituality. I also thank the artists, the technicians of the live television broadcast as well as those who have taken part both here in the Paul VI Auditorium and directly linked it with Jerusalem, Fatima, Ars and Wadowice. I thank RAI which, collaborating with the Vatican Television Center and Telepace, have made broadcasts possible to many nations of the world.

I then address a deferential greeting to our brothers and sisters of the other Christian denominations who have wished to take part in our meeting.

I would like to thank my successor, Cardinal Macharski, the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Church of Krakow, and all those who had a part in my priestly journey. At this point I would also like to offer my testimony as a priest for almost 50 years. However, I first want to greet you all affectionately, dear Brothers in the priesthood. I embrace each with cordial gratitude: the diocesan and religious priests, especially those who are elderly, sick or weary. Thank you for your witness which is often silent and not easy; thank you for your fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church. I know the joys and worries of your daily apostolic work. I am close to you with my prayers and affection. A sign of my spiritual closeness, dear priests, is also the *Letter* which I write and send to you every Holy Thursday. It is lovely today to think again together about the gift of the priesthood, which links us all in the bond of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

¹ English text of the address given on Friday, October 27, 1995 taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition.