NOTE

THE APOSTOLIC ORIGINS OF CLERICAL CONTINENCE: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF A NEW BOOK[1]

During the last twenty years of the fourth century the history of clerical celibacy begins in earnest. In the Synod of Carthage (390) and in papal decretals of that period, bishops remind themselves and their fellow clerics that they all stand under the obligation to abstain faithfully from their wives. The tone and contents of these texts make it clear that the obligation of continence was reaffirmed collegially from above because it was tampered with below, and because the legitimacy of it was being impugned here and there. The obligation was in need of both insistence and legitimation. This explains why the synodal and papal texts bravely undertake the task in which we are still engaged today: they seek to establish for the benefit of all concerned that clerical continence is a mode of life clerics ought to find fit to be meant. In retrospect, these early efforts at sacral legitimation deserve the kind of admiration we are wont to lavish on historic acts of courage. A discipline that in the name of the sacrament of order prescribes the continent life for men bound to their wives in a sacramental marriage has a way of entangling the mind in a net of problems even more intractable than those raised by the discipline that was later to demand a commitment to the single life as a precondition to ordination.

There are, however, no symptoms of theoretical embarrassment in the fourth-century texts just mentioned: the clerical obligation of continent marriage names in their view a discipline the legitimacy of which is said to rest on such unimpeachable founts of legitimacy as the teaching of the apostles and the practice of Christian antiquity. As Bishop Geneclius said at the Synod of Carthage, "it is appropriate (*decet*) that we too should preserve what the apostles taught and antiquity itself has observed" (25).

In a famous debate with Gustav Bickell, the great patristic scholar and historian Franz Xaver Funk remarked that the Fathers of the Church have been known to appeal to apostolic ordinances somewhat too generously, and to credit apostolic origins to institutions which historical research can prove with certainty to have come into the world only at a later time. Christian Cochini is aware of this scholarly skepticism but does not share it, at least as far as the institution of clerical continence is concerned. He takes the position that the synodal and papal claim which affirms the apostolic origins of that institution was taken seriously both historically and theologically when it was made, and that, in consequence,

[1] Christian Cochini, S.J., *Origines apostoliques du célibat sacerdotal* (Paris/Namur: Lethielleux/Culture et Vérité, 1981). Pp. 479.

historians and theologians owe it to themselves and to their disciplines to do the same. Not only is the claim to apostolic origins qualified to disclose for the benefit of historians the travails of a difficult discipline in the fourth century; it is also an invitation to them to bring the historical method to bear upon the verification of that claim itself, and a guide fit to steer their research toward a successful consummation. For theologians, that same claim is an invitation to perceive by what honorable door clerical continence entered the Christian dispensation, and to focus attention once again upon those of its merits that make it fit to remain for good a letigimate part of that dispensation.

DIALOGUE WITH THE LITERATURE

Cochini's book is a very serious and sustained response to both these invitations. The response begins with an informative dialogue with the literature called forth by clerical celibacy across Christian history. The survey is selective: limited to authors who choose to address *ex professo* the apostolic origins of clerical celibacy. Even so, the list is impressive: it goes all the way from Arnold of Constance, a papal theologian who in the eleventh century debated the virtues of celibacy by exchanging letters with a friend, to Alfons M. Stickler, a renowned contemporary canonist and the prefect of the Vatican Library, who has recently discussed celibacy in various publications of the best stamp and finally in the pages of the *L'Osservatore romano* (1979). In between we meet a procession of great names past and present: the Theiner brothers, Henry Charles Lea, Augustine de Roskovány, Gustav Bickell and Franz Xaver Funk, Elphège-Florence Vacandard, Henri Leclercq, Roger Gryson, Georg Denzler.

Reflective readers of this survey are likely to collect considerable dismay as a reward for their pains. They will have undertaken a journey back to the origins under the guidance of scholars who claim to know the way. That journey will then mirror itself in their consciousness as an ebb and flow of position and counterposition, challenge and response. The titles of the four fighting articles issued from the Bickell-Funk debate in 1878–80 will say it all best: "Clerical celibacy: an apostolic ordinance; . . . no apostolic ordinance; . . . yes, it is an apostolic ordinance; . . . no, it is still far from being an apostolic ordinance." (57) Beyond dismay, there is an important lesson to be learned: when clerical celibacy is at issue, historical objectivity turns out to be an elusive commodity. A bountiful measure of it seems to be available to everyone to feast upon at the level of intention, advocacy, and self-congratulation *post factum*; at the level of execution and achievement no such bounty is the case. When the desire to know brings itself to bear upon the question how clerical celibacy came to make its debut in the Church, the march from question to answer seems to be interfered with and deflected by other desires which are

commendable no doubt, or at least understandable, yet lack the purity of the desire to know just what happens to be the case. The desires to show that the obligation of clerical celibacy so long in place deserves to stay much longer, or that it has overstayed its welcome and should be quietly invited out, are the most prominent of these intrusive desires.

METHODOLOGICAL PRECISIONS

The survey of pertinent literature is followed by a display of "methodological precisions." Under this label the author undertakes to show the color of his own money. In his view, our ability to trace to a positive will on the part of the apostles the obligation of clerical continence that surfaces in fourth-century documents is not contingent on the existence of scriptural texts that would let us witness from a distance, as it were, the moment in which that will originally affirmed itself. This affirmation may have been at first the content of spoken communications; it may have traveled across centuries of time as oral teaching and become embodied in the institution of clerical continence. When in due time and under the pressure of circumstances that institution bears witness to its own existence in the synodal and papal utterances, historians are called upon to see in these utterances the permanent memory of the oral tradition that gave rise to the institution, and ultimately of the teaching of the apostles which that tradition preserved.

Cochini also unveils the principle the application of which will allow historians to exploit methodically the possibility of an unrecorded teaching and evoke out of later, nonapostolic utterances the historical certainty that clerical continence is in effect entitled to claim apostolic origins. He stipulates that to the extent to which we can ascertain that a doctrine or a discipline is effectively observed "by the whole Church" and "has always been observed," we have the right to think that the point of departure of that doctrine or discipline is located in the age of the apostles (78). For the sake of convenience, this stipulation is made into a principle, and the principle is named "principle of spatial-temporal universality" (85), where "spatial" points to the fact that the whole Church subscribes to a given doctrine or discipline, and "temporal" refers to the fact that the whole Church has done so always.

What response is this principle likely to elicit from historians concerned with the integrity and credibility of their discipline? Can they agree in principle that the spatial-temporal universality of a discipline that first bears witness to its own institutional existence in the fourth century was in fact willed into existence by the apostles, even if these bequeathed to posterity no public evidence of any such act of their will? Only a special kind of historian, I believe, can afford to answer this question in the affirmative. This is the historian who at that critical moment when the

act of knowing is about to come to fruition in judgment can in good conscience call upon a conviction to which historians qua historians have no access. This is the believer's conviction that the Christian Church is indefectibly faithful to the normativeness of her own origins, and cannot therefore subscribe universally and always to an institution unless the authority of an apostolic enactment stand at the origins of it. It is only on the strength of such a privileged conviction that the universality of an institutional discipline can be construed as evidence of the apostolic origins of the same. But since this conviction is available only to believers, an assertion made on the strength of it does not constitute an act of historical knowing, and public validity is not, in consequence, one of the qualities that assertion is entitled to claim for itself.

A further consequence is that the inquiry conducted on the basis of the universality principle is caught in an identity crisis. It is undertaken for the explicit purpose of answering a historical question historically, but moves from question to answer without the correct estimate of what constitutes a historical fact, what lends the reconstruction of historical facts the quality of historical knowledge, and what is required if that reconstruction is to claim historical certainty or the nearest approximation to it. This is why, in the end, the answer achieved does not qualify as the recovery of a historical fact but as an act of faith resting ultimately on the believer's inability to entertain the mere possibility that a married-yet-continent priesthood might have been ushered into history by latecomers bearing witness not to the teaching of the apostles but to their own. It is this inability that enables the believer's imagination to transform late advocacies of the institution into a witness to the apostolic origins of it.

THE HISTORICAL INQUIRY

In spite of these methodological ambiguities, the bulk of Cochini's inquiry presents itself to its readers as an exercise in competent and painstaking historical scholarship. Having disclosed his methodological commitments, the author turns to the apostles and inquires about their marital situation, with special emphasis on the question whether those among them who might have been married left their wives and children at home and devoted themselves to the practice of continence away from home. He then turns from the apostles to bishops, priests, and deacons, and compiles a chronological inventory of 210 clerics from both the East and the West who during the first seven centuries of Church history are referred to in written sources as married men with sons and daughters to their credit. Finally, he traces his steps back to the beginnings once more and undertakes to assemble one by one the pieces of a large patristic file (*dossier*) on the celibacy-continence of the clerics. Again, the *terminus*

ad quem is the end of the seventh century.

It has been difficult to grasp with some precision the contribution which this large piece of historical research in the middle of the book is intended to make to the economy of the book as a whole. Considering that the book professes the intention of ascertaining historically whether clerical continence be apostolic in origin, and that the universality principle is adopted as the operative methodological instrument, it seems fair to assume that the historical inquiry into the marital situation of the apostles and clerics is intended to ascertain whether prior to the fourth century there existed an oral teaching requiring that married clerics be continent and whether this teaching enjoyed spatial and temporal universality. According to the methodology at work, the existence of such a teaching would then engender the conclusion that clerical continence was indeed an apostolic institution.

Read in the light of this assumption, the inquiry into the marital situation of the apostles is disappointing. We learn from it that our ignorance concerning that situation is well-nigh total. About the continence of those apostles who might have been married, we are told that we know more than we know about whether they were or were not married: in response to Jesus' call, they brought their married lives to a swift end and spent the rest of their lives in continence. In the absence of scriptural evidence, this position is made to rest on patristic evidence, namely, on the "common sentiment" (107) of the Fathers, functioning in a twofold capacity: as historical clue leading to the recovery of the fact in question, and as hermeneutical clue toward the interpretation of Synoptic texts relative to the complete detachment to which the disciples of Christ are called (especially Mt 19:27 and Lk 18:28–30).

Upon reflection, the phrase "unanimous sentiment" gives an overgenerous ring as an assessment of the patristic evidence to which it refers. At least, so it seems to me. Readers might want to decide for themselves whether three comments by Tertullian, Jerome, and Isidore of Pelusium occasioned by the "believing woman" of 1 Cor 9:5, and three remarks by Eusebius of Caesarea, Ambrosiaster, and Jerome constitute a unanimous patristic consensus, or even that more elusive unanimous consensus the unanimity of which is referred to as "moral." Nor is it obvious that the alleged patristic consensus constitutes a consensus on the part of the Church spatially and temporally universal. But even more disturbing is the fact that we lack evidence, scriptural or patristic, that would lead us to maintain that, if the apostles did in fact desert their wives and children, they did so because they had resolved to practice continence, and that they had resolved to practice continence impelled by the conviction that the nature of their priesthood made continence imperative. When all is said and done, the evidence of this conviction is indispensable if we are

to speak of the apostles "teaching" clerical continence or giving an "example" of it. Taken by itself, the fact of their departing from home, permanently or intermittently, does not constitute that kind of teaching. If they intended to live by the commitment they had made to the Lord Jesus and to the proclamation of his gospel to the nations, leaving home was a necessity.

I shall not comment on the remaining sections of the historical inquiry: the biographical inventory of married clerics and the patristic dossier. I am unable to perceive what contribution this wealth of historical lore might make to the question the book professes to answer. As a consequence, I have no criteria by the application of which I might manage to assess the size of its merits. My surmise is that we have here a substantial portion of the author's doctoral dissertation (mentioned on pp. 9 and 68 n. 30) and that the task of integrating this material into the book's economy has proved intractable.

Be that as it may, taken as a self-contained exercise in historical scholarship, the research in question is impressive, especially because of its determination not to leave any stone unturned. Whether the research is always on the mark in matters of textual criticism, authenticity, and the interpretation of disputed texts, I gladly defer to the judgment of experts.

REASON FOR CONTINENCE

Cochini's study of the patristic texts does include yet another aspect significant enough to call for separate consideration. The author takes the position that the Fathers do more than lend to the apostolic origins of clerical continence the logical status of the historical fact. They also disclose the reason why that continence happened first to the apostles themselves, then through their example to those who succeeded them in their ministry. That reason is an exigency unfolding itself from within the very constitution of the Christian priesthood; for this is a priesthood whose most original and defining function is the prayer of intercession (278). The priest is poised permanently, like Moses, between God and God's people. He attends the "audiences" to which God summons him, dialogues with God, then reports to the people God's will in prophetic speech. These prophetic mediations are constitutive of what has been called the priest's "service to the altar"; for, when man approaches the "divine mysteries," it is above all in order to engage in a supremely efficacious dialogue with the Lord of history (469). And precisely because the priest's partner in dialogue is the Lord of history, the priest's participation in this dialogue, his intercessions and mediations, are a highly important and demanding responsibility; for God's audiences are "salvific," (470) the dialogue with God is "supremely efficacious," and the

speech of prophecy that makes report upon it all is "a supremely effective instrument of political-religious education" (278). The future of the Church depends on that dialogue (278), as well as "the spiritual interests of the community" (469) and indeed the very "march of history" (279). It is because the priest's intercession is politically so decisive that the Christian priesthood is not conceivable as a part-time occupation. "Those invisible Amalekites, the demons" would surely gain the upper hand, should Moses grow weary under the strain (270).

When patristic theology reaches such a dramatic conception of the priesthood, the stage is set for continence to come in as a necessity riding on a necessity: "the necessity of perpetual prayer" creates "the necessity of uninterrupted continence" (279). Permanently in attendance before God, the priest of the New Covenant is left without "leisure" (*loisir*) for conjugal life; for this is a mode of life the grammar of which entails moods, inflections, and conjugations that would surely "alienate" his "spiritual energies" (279). It thus comes to pass that the priest falls into the arms of a "'total' anthropology" (279) which injects contradiction into his own very self and inscribes "a sign of ambiguity" upon the values he cherishes because he is a man. "The conjugal bed," ennobled though it be by the power of a sacrament, is one of the values that perish in this wholesale transvaluation of values. Which explains why the very same Fathers who raise indignant voices against the eccentricities of encratics do not hesitate to brand "the sexual commerce" as "defilement" (*souillure*: 278 and 280).

Defilement strikes us latecomers on the scene as offensive and derogatory language, but we should not be so naive, Cochini remarks, as to impute to the Church Fathers a regressive penchant for the Levitical dialectics of clean and unclean, or a subliminal addiction to one of mankind's most ancient taboos. The explanation is linguistic: the Fathers struggle under the same limitations we all come up against when we try to put to language things which resist a linguistic translation of themselves (280). They speak of "defilement" but they mean incompatibility. They are making report upon their own conviction that "the theater of the divine liturgy resists any compromise with activities whose value remains confined to the sphere of this world" (280). It is this envisagement of reality that the word "defilement" seeks unsuccessfully to express. At any rate, the conjugal act retains all its truth and nobility before their eyes, but so does the fact that it has no place in the "chamber of the sanctuary" (280). This incompatibility, already clearly inscribed in the Levitical code, was imported into the New Dispensation in the early days of the Church by converts from Judaism bent on a "politics of integration" (468). Through the example of the apostles it made its way into the patristic theology and spirituality of the priesthood, into synodal and

canonical discipline, and into that long string of insistences made indispensable by the "vicissitudes of history" (460).

The historical component of this presentation may be addressed first, namely, the claim that the incompatibility between sexual relations and the exercise of the priesthood was integrated into the priesthood of the New Dispensation by converts from the Old. The available sources are adequate to establish the existence of Christian converts from Judaism in the early years of the Church, and of nostalgic, integrative, and restorative propensities on their part, but there is no evidence to show that their "Levitical Christianity" (468) impressed its mark on the structure of the Christian priesthood then in the making. Specifically, there is no evidence whatever that Jewish converts, who may very well have had the Levitical priesthood under their skin, as has been said, managed to transpose into the new priesthood the obligation of sexual abstinence, revised from intermittent to permanent. Since the missing evidence is the only source from which anyone could come to know that such a transposition occurred, one wonders how anyone can claim to know that it did occur. If this affirmation be a claim to knowledge as distinct from thinking, the knowledge so claimed is not fit to be shared.

Note also that the indications that are available tend to make the happening of that transposition most implausible. If the available sources can be trusted, Jesus consistently recoiled from claiming any priesthood for himself, and for those of his disciples destined to become his apostles, and the founders and leaders of the Christian communities to come. Whenever he disclosed his understanding of their identity present and to come, he did so apart from any reference to the priesthood. If so, why would these men be entitled, or feel called upon, to have any priesthood, Levitical or otherwise, play such a decisive role in their own effort at appropriating through understanding the identity Jesus had meant for them?

When that identity did in fact acquire definition in their own minds and in the collective imagination of their communities, it was referred to by means of terms that betray a nonsacral understanding of it. These terms denote ministries and functions whose direct reference is not to the sacred as such but to the community. If it is true that we speak the way we think, the use of nonsacral terminology and the avoidance of a sacral one establish the fact that the earliest Christian communities were far from thinking of their leaders and shepherds as of a sacral caste, the structural and historical prolongation of the Levitical priesthood.

Cochini adverts to the fact that such Greek terms as *apostolos*, *episkopos*, *presbyteros*, and *didaskalos* "have exact equivalents in Hebrew and refer to Israelitic institutions with which early Christians were well acquainted" (468). He then goes on to argue that the transmigration of

these terms betrays the transmigration of the functions to which they refer. The argument may or may not be sound, but if it is sound it adds insult to injury. The functions denoted by these terms were not thought of in Judaism as constitutively priestly functions; they were pastoral functions, distinct and separate from the functions the Levitical priests were empowered and called upon to perform precisely because of their priesthood. When these terms reappear then as designations of the leaders of Christian communities, they alert us to the fact that what has occurred in the meantime is not a Christian reincarnation of the Levitical priesthood but a new conception of leadership whose constitutive functions cannot be named without reference to the community, whereas they can be named without reference to the sacred. In short, if the linguistic argument be legitimate, it does not show that early Christianity had adopted the model of the Levitical priesthood; it shows that it had not.

But the argument may also be illegitimate after all. Since the terms in question were all available in current secular speech, they need not be borrowed from "the Jewish tradition" (468), and so we cannot trust ourselves to assert that they were.

In addition to the historical claim just discussed, there is the quasi-doctrinal attempt to ground clerical continence on the incompatibility between the exercise of the sexual persuasion and the exercise of the priesthood defined in advance as uninterrupted intercession.

No need to delay over the question whether justice is done to the Christian priesthood by insisting that it is first and last a ministry of intercession. In the light of the discussion to which the nature of the priesthood gives rise today, and given the diversity of views with which this discussion has to cope, a blank insistence on intercession will not fail to give the ring of the glorious oversimplification—an act of indulgence on the Gordian knot syndrome.

Be that as it may, for the sake of testing the validity of the incompatibility argument, it may still be assumed that intercession does pertain to the essence of the Christian priesthood. There arises then the question why priestly intercession allows priests to indulge without reproach in interruptions of many sorts but precludes the one interruption entailed in the communing of husband and wife. The reason why the many interruptions are admitted is obvious: they are indispensable; the maintenance of life under the regime of finitude makes them so. Or they afford participation in what is known to make for quality in life. If so, why should marital relations be the inadmissible interruption? That they contribute to the maintenance of life is not in doubt, since they prolong it by sharing it. That they contribute their share to the quality of life is a fact widely attested by people in the know. It is also a truth, if we can

trust the Creator God who took a second look and quietly acknowledged to Himself that aloneness is not good for man.

The force of these uncomplicated observations is so obvious that one is reduced to coping with the incompatibility argument by resorting in relation to it to a hermeneutics of benevolent suspicion. Since it is plain to everyone in sight that many relations, occupations, and transactions do break in upon the stream of priestly intercession without thus becoming incompatible with the priesthood, those who would single out conjugal transactions and insist that they are incompatible interruptions of that same stream, and that this is the reason why continence is imperative, might be visiting honest deception upon their own minds. No doubt they do believe that these transactions are incompatible because they intrude, but they would not let this intrusion be an argument for clerical continence unless they were convinced in advance that conjugal relations intrude because they are incompatible, and that they are incompatible precisely because they are sexual and to that extent. Ultimately, then, if the incompatibility argument has what it takes to ride all the way from premise to conclusion, it is not because intrusion makes sexual relations incompatible; it is because incompatibility makes them intrusive. By this path one comes to the further conclusion that the incompatibility argument is not today's alternative to the old cultic-purity argument over the demise of which many rejoiced so short a time ago; it is a sanitized reincarnation of it. The former incompatibility between the sacred-as-the-pure and the sexual-as-the-impure-and-defiling has been replaced by the more sanitary incompatibility between unbroken intercession and transactions that interrupt that unbrokenness. This is the difference. Unchanged beneath this difference is the conviction that the sexual and the sacred do not mix. It is the built-in quality of this incompatibility that calls for conjugal relations precisely as sexual to be singled out from among the many relations that are compatible with the priesthood and to be declared incompatible with it.

This hermeneutics of the incompatibility argument gains strength as one probes into various other persuasions that sprout here and there in close proximity to, or in a more or less loose connection with, that argument.

Cochini agrees that the time has come to let the cultic-purity legitimation of clerical continence be gone. It is "charged with pagan or philosophical (especially Stoic) resonances which are not always homogeneous with the spirit of Christianity" (280, n. 41). The place vacated by "irrational taboos" (ibid.) should now be taken by a specifically Christian motivation. He then goes on to advocate a "central motivation" which is still cultic: it is connected with " 'the service to the altar'" and " 'the priestly ministry,'" that is, with the liturgical function of the priest, and

specifically with the celebration of the Eucharist "where Christ himself comes to presence and associates his ministers to his own person and sacrifice" (ibid.). These catechetical commonplaces are to rescue clerical continence from the obscure intimidations that made themselves pass for a legitimation of it in the past, and usher in an enlightened legitimation that is to sustain the validity of continence in the present and future.

Any effort at purging the premises from archaic terrors is more than welcome; still, the purge ought to be convincing. Here convincingness is in doubt because the effort announces itself, then promptly runs out of breath. It is no use announcing to the world that continence is an obligation for ministers because they preside at the Eucharist of the community in the person of Christ unless this announcement be followed by a quiet discourse fit to show for the benefit of these ministers and the community at large that the exercise of the sexual empowerment within a sacramental marriage would surely visit upon the ministers not the old discredited defilement no one can believe in any more but a new disablement which the ministers can and ought to believe in along with all the rest. If this disablement is to serve as motivation for continence, the ministers must be told not only that it would descend upon them but from where and why, why upon them only, what it is made of, and how it differs from the all-so-discredited defilement of old. This is one place where it is well to remember that motivations are for people; they are expected to motivate people, not theological views. And the stakes are high: on the strength of this motivation people of flesh and blood and with minds of their own are supposed to make good sense not of the theological-liturgical persuasions of others but of their own commitment to the continent life.

Nor will it do to shift from the commonplaces of liturgical catechesis to theology and submit that "theology discloses to man his proper nature and marks for his benefit the boundaries that separate man from the inaccessible" (279). The boundaries of the inaccessible are inscribed in that inaccessibility itself, and religious experience, not theology, is needed to disclose them. If theology be needed, it is in another capacity. Instead of making statements about what theology does, theology ought to do something, and let that be specifically relevant to the advent of that all-important motivation. That is, it ought to make explicit the reason why the exercise of sexuality within marriage makes the sacred inaccessible as it comes to presence in the ecclesial celebration of the Lord's Supper, and this for the ministers who preside at the celebration, not the faithful who engage in it.

Finally, it helps little to shift once more from theology to anthropology and postulate a "'total'" anthropology the totality of which consists in the fact that it visits "a sign of ambiguity" (279) on human values and

disqualifies any compromise between "the theater of the liturgy" and "activities whose value remains confined to the sphere of this world" (280).

Why this anthropology should be named "total" in quotation marks must remain a puzzle. There is no one in sight to whom the label could be credited, unless of course the author might be intent on quoting himself.

Besides, the ambiguity of human values is the stock in trade of any anthropology that would retain a connection with the experience of value, or at least not forget that all of us live within the necessity to die, and that hand in hand with that necessity there goes a quiet despair.

But there is one valuable service anthropology, total or otherwise, should render to the constitution of the motivation here at issue: it should write a paragraph that would disclose the reason why, if all human values have ambiguity visited upon them, many of these values can be pursued by priests to the enhancement of their priesthood, whereas the values that are known to emerge from the exercise of conjugal sexuality may not be pursued without precluding the exercise of the priesthood itself. This is an excellent and most intriguing question for any anthropology to answer, and a question it is, considering that it will no longer do to answer it by noting that sexuality precludes because it intrudes.

In the absence of the paragraph that would answer this question, and of the other paragraphs whose absence has already been lamented, the liturgical-theological-anthropological motivation for clerical continence as suggested is reduced to claiming for itself no more than the logical status of the biographical self-expression to which a full measure of respect is due and no measure of assent is yet possible.

Finally, it stands to reason that the "central motivation" that is to replace the discredited one will hardly carry the day until some plausible explanation be offered of the fact that the liturgical disablement to which it refers is, so to speak, selective: it affects the priests who preside at the liturgy but not the faithful who celebrate the same, and the priests of the Latin rite but not their confreres from the Orthodox communion.

It is because the incompatibility argument creates these empty spaces along the way and leaves them all unattended to that the hermeneutics of suspicion turns out to be the inevitable mode of interacting with it. Note that the suspicion is benevolent: it does not bring itself to bear upon the intention that presides over the task of constructing the argument and making it work, but on the source from which the argument draws its capacity to work. In desperation, if you will, one is compelled to conclude that, if the argument proves convincing in spite of the holes in its fabric, it must be because those who have woven the cloth need no convincing in the first place. If I am right, the reason why no convincing

is needed is because there has been no genuine parting of the ways with the misty persuasion that senses in the dark that sexuality and the sacred do not bemingle. When all is said and done, the argument that underlies the liturgical, theological, and anthropological animadversions and persuasions, and takes them all so shakily toward their destination, still begins in the way Pope Damasus (or Siricius) had it begin: "*Si commixtio pollutio est. . . .*"

CONCLUSION

The preceding considerations incline one to the conclusion that the legitimation of clerical continence is still an unfinished task. One of the many merits of Cochini's book is precisely to show how difficult it is to make a genuine contribution to the completion of that task. He himself seeks to contribute to that legitimation historically by contending that clerical continence is traceable to the teaching of the apostles. In my view, he does not manage to prove that it does. The commitment to a hybrid theological-historical methodology is in part responsible for this failure. The other part is the absence of appropriate evidence. The lack of evidence and the presence of adverse evidence defeat the attempt at tracing the introduction of clerical continence into Christianity to the Levitical propensities of Jewish converts.

Cochini's second contribution is more theological than historical. Having dismissed the cultic-purity legitimation, he seeks to instate a liturgical-theological-anthropological motivation where there had been subservience to an irrational taboo. As has been shown, this most welcome effort too is short of total success. The motivation that emerges from that effort is still too embryonic and programmatic to make the difference motivations are expected to make.

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