

## PRIESTLY CREDIBILITY IN THE TEACHING OF BENEDICT XVI<sup>1</sup>

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The onset of the third Christian millennium, which gained salience through the wealth of solemn liturgical celebrations, infused many disciples of Jesus Christ with a fresh impulse of faith, filled them with joy and opened their hearts to hope. As a sign of trust in the Master of Nazareth, they generously accepted the evangelical call to “Put out into deep water!” (Luke 5:4) – *Duc in altum!* – which lies at the heart of many works and deeds of new evangelisation adapted to the needs of the modern age.

As the millennial enthusiasm abated, it has become blatantly obvious that Christian hope (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15) still meets with the opposition and challenges posed by the rapid pace of social change and the evisceration of religion, which follows in the wake of consumerism and secularisation. In this context, the anti-vocational and anti-ministerial culture continues, with its ebb and flow, manifesting as indifference or rejection of the sign of ministry. As the need for the services of the ordained is challenged, it seems essential to discuss the priestly credibility, which may be one of the makings for the modern apology of Christianity.

We shall agree with Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, that *people have no need for priests who quarrel for their rights, feeding nobody but themselves. Peo-*

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ple have a need for „the builders of cathedrals”, whose selfless and pure lives establish the credibility of God, thus restoring the credibility of man<sup>2</sup>. This thought shall become the canvas for the theological considerations presented in this paper.

Before all else, let us observe that in the teaching of Benedict XVI, priestly credibility is inextricably linked to the testimony of life. The minister is credible if all his life is a witness to his unity with Jesus Christ, with his bishop, his presbyterate and the body of his lay faithful to whom he has been sent.

### WITNESS TO THE UNITY WITH JESUS CHRIST

For the priest and his ministry to gain credibility, he must bear witness to the unity with Jesus Christ. The idea of witness, dating back to the institution of the Twelve by the Master of Nazareth, derives from the very act of calling upon the chosen few to work together for the accomplishment of the divine plan of salvation. The *Old Testament* tells the story of God who calls upon the great witnesses of faith and designates them to form a nation, to save it, and continually remind it of the covenant (Abraham, Moses, the prophets). Similarly, the *New Testament* tells the story of Jesus, the promised Messiah, who chooses the apostles to be with Him and to share His mission<sup>3</sup>.

Benedict XVI emphasises that the priestly identity has its model in the exceptional relationship of Jesus to the Twelve. In absolute awareness and determination, Jesus forms a group of disciples and gathers them around Himself so that they carry on His mission and give His new family order and shape. The calling of the Twelve is more than a mere assignment of a function. The Pope underscores that it follows from the dialogue between the Son and the Father and there lies its true origin: *You cannot make yourself a disciple – it is an event of election, a free decision of the Lord’s will, which in its turn is anchored in his communion of will with the Father*<sup>4</sup>. Jesus institutes the Twelve upon the act of prayer (Lk. 6:12). He calls those whom He desires (see: Mk. 3:13), although they are also begotten in prayer (see: Matt. 9:38).

The number of the apostles is a direct reference to the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Benedict XVI sees number twelve as a symbol of hope for the nation of Israel, portending the restoration of Israel in its whole. In addition, the number expresses the comprehensiveness of the new people of God<sup>5</sup> and its roots that trace back to the Old Covenant<sup>6</sup>; it is a sign of fulfilled promises to the Fathers regarding the convocation, unification, and unity in the Covenant Communion with God: *In choosing the*

<sup>2</sup> Benedykt XVI – Joseph Ratzinger, *Formalne zasady chrześcijaństwa. Szkice do teologii fundamentalnej*, Poznań 2009, p. 361.

<sup>3</sup> See: Benedict XVI, *Orędzie na XLIV Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, *OsRomPol* 5 (2007), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> J. Ratzinger – Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Vol. I: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, Kraków 2007, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa. Apostołowie i pierwsi uczniowie*, Poznań 2007, pp. 32–33.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ratzinger – Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Vol. I: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, p. 149. For more information, see: J. Ratzinger, *Wielość religii i jedno Przymierze*, Poznań 2004.

*Twelve (...) Jesus wants to say that the definitive time has arrived in which to constitute the new People of God, the people of the twelve tribes, which now becomes a universal people, his Church*<sup>7</sup>.

Jesus presents the Twelve with tasks. They are to be with Him and to preach his Word as His messengers (Mk. 3:14). Through the first assignment, they must get to know Him in His oneness with the Father. Benedict XVI underscores that only then will they be able to witness His mystery: *they have to pass from outward to inward communion with Jesus*<sup>8</sup>.

The other task, inextricably linked to the former, is to act as envoys or apostles. The disciples must spread the message of Jesus Christ, first to Israel, and then to *the ends of the earth*<sup>9</sup>. Their apostolic service to the Word is to bear witness and proclaim the Kingdom of God. The Twelve become the heralds of its coming. Benedict XVI emphasises that the proclamation is far more than just instruction. In all its abundance, it involves the task of gathering and uniting people so that they could encounter Jesus. The Kingdom of God is proclaimed through signs – miracles, mainly exorcisms and healings (see: Matt. 10:1). *To „exorcise” the world – to establish it in the light of the ratio (reason) that comes from eternal creative reason and its saving goodness and refers back to it – that is a permanent, central task of the messengers of Jesus Christ*<sup>10</sup>. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they shall spread faith and hope to cure the evil-infested world and the ailing human communities. Furthermore, they shall heal in the medical sense. The Bishop of Rome concludes that healing by the divine power vested in the apostles is a call to believe in God and to use the powers of reason in the service of healing. Nothing but the communion with God may initiate the process of true healing<sup>11</sup>.

The Pope underscores that being with Jesus and being His messenger is not mutually exclusive. The apostles give witness *to Jesus* and *with Jesus*. Being in full communion with their Master is a prerequisite for their dynamic and fruitful ministry. Living in communion with Christ presupposes participation in His mission<sup>12</sup>. Being with Jesus and a mission among the people are two inseparable aspects that contain the essence of the priestly vocation<sup>13</sup>.

By the will of Jesus Christ Himself, the apostolic service is to continue in His Church until the end of time (see: Matt. 28:19 and the following): *The apostolic mandate (...) implies a service that is pastoral (“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”), liturgical (“baptizing them”), and prophetic (“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”), guaranteed by the Lord’s closeness, until*

<sup>7</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> J. Ratzinger – Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Vol. I: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, pp. 149–150.

<sup>9</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa*, pp. 15–17.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger – Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Vol. I: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Ibidem*, pp. 152–153.

<sup>12</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa*, p. 10; J. Ratzinger – Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Vol. I: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> See: Benedict XVI, *Homilia podczas Nieszporów i spotkania z seminarzystami oraz osobami konsekrowanymi* (Altötting, 11.09.2006), *OsRomPol* 11 (2006), p. 22.

*the end of time* (“and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age”)<sup>14</sup>. The Apostles, in obedience to the one who chose and sent them, made sure to institute their successors (see: Acts 13:3 and the following; 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28)<sup>15</sup>. Through apostolic succession, the mission of the Twelve – to reveal the true God and Jesus Christ as the only intercessor of salvation and to form the new family – is continued in the successors of apostles and their helpers: presbyters and deacons<sup>16</sup>. Benedict XVI emphasises that rather than heralds of an idea, they are witnesses to a Person (see: Lk. 24:48 and the following). They may only fervently proclaim their personal experience of entering into the exceptional mystery of communion with Jesus Christ, the communion of love which, *one and totalizing*, purifies and sanctifies all their other relationships while filling them with unwavering hope<sup>17</sup>.

The Pope explains that the communion with Jesus should pervade a priest’s life in its entirety, including the spheres of intellect, emotions, will and action. A priest truly renders his service *in persona Christi* only when his external activity flows from the inner unity with Christ. *Being a priest means becoming an ever-closer friend of Jesus Christ with the whole of our existence* – concludes the Bishop of Rome<sup>18</sup>. Invoking the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* of John Paul II (No. 16), the Holy Father reminds us that the relation of the priest to Jesus Christ and His Church rests upon the very being of the priest by virtue of his sacramental consecration, because the priest minister is the servant of Christ present in the Church as mystery, communion, and mission<sup>19</sup>. By bearing witness to this personal bond of unity in love with Jesus Christ, preachers of the Gospel confirm their credibility.

How should the priests bear witness to their unity with Jesus Christ? The answer to this question seems to be of paramount importance for the preservation of priestly identity. Benedict XVI approaches the topic by drawing our focus to two fundamental matters: that a priest should maintain a certain order in his life and uphold a dialogue with God (be a man of prayer). *Serva ordinem et ordo servabit te* (*Preserve order and order will preserve you*) – exhorts the Pope<sup>20</sup>. The two general principles witnessed above turn into more tangible recommendations for everyday routine: the Holy Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, reading of the Sacred Scripture and Eucharistic adoration.

The Holy Father underscores that the crucial matter for a presbyter is to say the Holy Mass with profound spiritual commitment so that it unites his words and works

<sup>14</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliższej Chrystusa*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>15</sup> See: Ibidem, pp. 28–30.

<sup>16</sup> See: Ibidem, pp. 35–43; Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLVI Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, *OsRomPol* 5 (2009), pp. 4–6.

<sup>17</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święcen kapłańskich* (Rome, 27.04.2008), *OsRomPol* 6 (2008), p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. Krzyżma w Wielki Czwartek* (Rome, 13.04.2006), *OsRomPol* 5 (2006), p. 12. See: Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie podczas spotkania z kapłanami i diakonami stałymi* (Freising, 14.09.2006), *OsRomPol* 11 (2006), pp. 33–34.

<sup>19</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLIII Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, *OsRomPol* 5 (2006), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Odpowiedzi na pytania podczas spotkania z alumnami Rzymskiego Seminarium Duchownego* (Rome, 17.02.2007), *OsRomPol* 5 (2007), p. 42.

with the words and works of Christ Himself. The Eucharist is the fullest expression of the communion between a priest and God. The Pope preaches that a day without the Eucharist is incomplete. Yet, a priest should be wary of treating the Holy Mass as a *professional obligation* rather than an *interiorly-felt duty*<sup>21</sup>. The Daily Eucharist teaches the priest how to be a good Shepherd in the likeness of the Supreme Shepherd Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the sheep in his care. The Holy Mass illuminates the Mystery of the Cross and introduces it to the minister, showing him how to sacrifice his life as a gift. The Mass teaches him to live for others, not for himself<sup>22</sup>.

Alongside the Eucharist, another fundamental way of conversing with God is the Liturgy of the Hours. Celebrated daily, at a fixed time, even among the flurry of arduous and absorbing ministerial duties, it brings order to priestly life, opens a priest to close contact with Christ, and gives him an inner freedom. By saying the Liturgy of the Hours, the priest includes all people in the practice and the fruits of prayer. Furthermore, saying the Liturgy of the Hours expresses the oneness of the whole presbyterate and helps the priest to maintain the bonds of friendship with his brothers in vocation<sup>23</sup>.

Benedict XVI observes that to say a meaningful liturgy that will bear its fruits, a presbyter must engage in the personal, spiritual reading of the Holy Scripture. In other words, to meditation. The issue at hand is to ensure not only the lecture of the Word of God but also its actuation. For the Word of God is still living and effective. The Lord speaks to us to strengthen us and show us the ways for solving our troubles. A priest must always remain in personal touch with the Word of God<sup>24</sup>.

The Bishop of Rome recommends that priests participate in the Eucharistic adoration as a privileged form of being with Jesus. Incessant presence of the Lord in His sacrament is the greatest gift of God and the true treasure of the Church. The Pope declares: *In the sacred Host, He is present, the true treasure, always waiting for us. Only by adoring this presence do we learn how to receive Him properly – we learn the reality of communion, we learn the Eucharistic celebration from the inside*<sup>25</sup>. Benedict XVI encourages priests to love the adoration. When they are with the Eucharistic Christ and say this unique prayer in the silence of their hearts, they can offer Him their joys, troubles, and concerns, their gratitude and hope, and ask Him – who chose them and sent them – to be good labourers in God's vineyard<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 7.05.2006), *OsRomPol* 8 (2006) p. 31; Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Nieszporów i spotkania z seminarzystami oraz osobami konsekrowanymi*, p. 22; Benedykt XVI, *Homilia w uroczystość Zesłania Ducha Świętego i święceń kapłańskich* (Rome, 15.05.2005), *OsRomPol* 7–8 (2005), p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Nieszporów i spotkania z seminarzystami oraz osobami konsekrowanymi*, p. 22; Benedykt XVI, *Odpowiedzi na pytania podczas spotkania z alumnami Rzymskiego Seminarium Duchownego*, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Nieszporów i spotkania z seminarzystami oraz osobami konsekrowanymi*, p. 22; Benedykt XVI, *Odpowiedzi na pytania podczas spotkania z alumnami Rzymskiego Seminarium Duchownego*, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Nieszporów i spotkania z seminarzystami oraz osobami konsekrowanymi*, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> See: Ibidem; Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie podczas spotkania z duchownymi w archikatedrze św. Jana* (Warszawa), 25.05.2006), *OsRomPol* 6–7 (2006), p. 16.

A presbyter who abides by the recommendations provided above may rest assured that he bears witness to the unity with Jesus Christ. In communion with his Master, he may faithfully perform his ministerial duties: listen to the voice of the living Church and always remain at the service of the people in his care, thus confirming his credibility towards the community.

#### WITNESS TO UNITY WITH THE BISHOP AND THE PRESBYTERATE

An important yardstick of priestly credibility is his witness to the unity with his bishop and the presbyterate which he joined upon his ordination.

As already discussed, the Twelve chose their helpers and institute their successors in an effort to render their service in all faithfulness and to ensure its permanent continuation. The deeds of the apostles and the power of the Holy Spirit led to the appointment and the sending of bishops (Greek: *epískopoi*). Thus, the apostolic ministry continues in the Church of Jesus Christ through the episcopal ministry (Greek: *episkopé*). Benedict XVI highlights that this function gradually evolved until it reached the form of the threefold office of Bishop, Priest and Deacon. Evidence of this division is found even at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the writings of Saint Ignatius of Antioch. The Pope explains that: *This development was guided by God's Spirit who helps the Church in the discernment of the authentic forms of apostolic succession, ever more clearly defined among the plurality of experiences and charismatic and ministerial forms present in the earliest communities*<sup>27</sup>.

To the Holy Father, the episcopal succession guarantees the faithful transmission of the apostolic witness, assuring a historical and spiritual bond between Christ and the Church. In this understanding, the succession is a tool of the Holy Spirit who acts through the people, ordained by the laying on of hands and prayer of the bishops. Benedict XVI emphatically declares that through the apostolic succession, Christ reaches us and constantly remains in our presence: *in the words of the Apostles and of their successors, it is he who speaks to us; through their hands it is he who acts in the sacraments*<sup>28</sup>.

In the light of the above, the link between a pastor's (a presbyter's) credibility and his unity with the bishop and the presbyterate appears self-evident. As successors of the Apostles, the bishops represent Jesus Christ in their dioceses and fulfil His mission by instructing and sanctifying the people of God. For the effective accomplishment of their tasks, they are in need of assistance. Through the sacrament of the Holy Orders, the bishops insert their assistants in the episcopal ministry, giving them a share in the mission of Christ Himself<sup>29</sup>. The Holy Father explains this truth in his address to the newly ordained presbyters: *With priestly ordination you are inserted into the Apostolic mission. (...) Through this ministry, you are inserted in the multi-*

<sup>27</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa*, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 29.04.2007), *OsRomPol* 6 (2007), p. 37.

*tude of those who, beginning with Pentecost, have received the apostolic mission. You are inserted into the communion of priests, into communion with the Bishop (...)*<sup>30</sup>.

Priestly ministry draws upon episcopal ministry, whence it takes its apostolic source and roots to bear all fruits for the sake of the faithful. To underscore the exceptional bond between the bishop and his priests, Benedict XVI invokes the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, which in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* No. 41 quotes the Ignatius of Antioch to say that presbyters form *the spiritual crown of the bishops*<sup>31</sup>.

After the sacrament of the Holy Orders, a priest is never alone. He is always in the company of Christ. Furthermore, as it is emphasised by the Holy Father, he joins the presbyterate, i.e. the communion of priests with the bishop<sup>32</sup>. Only in union with the Bishop and the whole presbyterate may he be the servant of the ecclesial communion and establish the harmony with all other vocations and forms of ecclesiastical services<sup>33</sup>. The fellowship between presbyters traces back to the communion of the apostles and their successors. Therefore, priestly credibility is also contingent upon his unity with his fellow brothers.

#### WITNESS TO THE UNITY WITH THE LAY FAITHFUL

In the teaching of Benedict XVI, priestly credibility relies heavily on the priest's witness of unity with the lay faithful to whom he was sent. His acceptance of the Holy Orders implies his absolute dedication to the mission of the Saviour Himself in the service of God and the people.

A priest gives himself to God the Father for the sake of others, in the likeness of Christ. While celebrating the holy rituals, he does not represent himself nor speaks on his own behalf; he acts and speaks *in persona Christi*. By putting himself at the disposal of Christ, he allows Christ to insert him in *truly being for all* (see 2 Cor. 5:15)<sup>34</sup>. In line with his vocation, he must stand among people as *alter Christus*<sup>35</sup>.

The priestly vocation is a call to serve the ecclesial community. The Pope underscores that the priest may authentically proclaim Christ only when he remains in communion with His body. The priest believes together with the ecclesial community, thinks and speaks in oneness with the people of God, and serves hand-in-hand-

<sup>30</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia w Uroczystość Zesłania Ducha Świętego i święceń kapłańskich*, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie podczas spotkania z Konferencją Episkopatu Francji* (Lourdes, 14.09.2008), *OsRomPol* 10–11 (2008), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie podczas spotkania z kapłanami i diakonami stałymi*, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLIV Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. Krzyżma w Wielki Czwartek* (Rome, 5.04.2007), *OsRomPol* 5 (2007), p. 21; Benedykt VI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. Krzyżma w Wielki Czwartek* (Rome, 13.04.2006), pp. 11–12.

<sup>35</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie papieskie podczas spotkania z seminarzystami* (Cologne, 19.08.2005), *OsRomPol* 10 (2005), pp. 19–20.

with the people of God<sup>36</sup>. By invoking the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council contained in the Decree on Ministry and the Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis* (No. 6) and the teaching of the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (No. 16) that followed the Council, Benedict XVI emphasises that a priest is a servant of *the Church as communion*. Through his service, in collaboration with people of various callings and charisms, he builds up the unity of the Church community and cares for its preservation<sup>37</sup>. By the same token, amongst the people of God, he exercises a fatherly role, the source of which is within the very fatherhood of God. The mission of the priest in the Church – the administration of sacred mysteries, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the ministry – is indispensable and irreplaceable<sup>38</sup>.

According to Benedict XVI, this truth finds a pithy reflection in the biblical image of the good shepherd. The *Old Testament* provides examples of the great shepherds of Israel (such as Moses, David, the prophets). However, let us not forget that the true and faithful Shepherd of His people is God (see: Ezek. 34:12). In His public activity, Jesus sees Himself as the Good Shepherd, through whom the Father takes care of His creation, with a particular focus on man whom He leads to salvation (see: John 10:1–18; 1 Pet. 5:4). Jesus is the gate for the sheep and their shepherd, for He gathers them, leads them to the Father, feeds them with His word, and even sacrifices His life for their sake<sup>39</sup>. This image is a perfect illustration of the teachings on the Church and its faithful. The sacrifice of life is the pinnacle of love which unites Jesus with His disciples and should unite His followers, the shepherds of the Church, with the believers entrusted to them. The Pope emphasises that the relationship between Jesus and the Father, just like that between Jesus and the Apostles, is archetypal for all relationships of the ministers. To be a true shepherd, the priest should be one with his Master, and through Him with the Father, and then he shall become one with the people of God. Through this union, He will accompany people, seek them, open himself to their needs, solve their troubles, and answer their questions and concerns<sup>40</sup>.

The Bishop of Rome confirms that the priest is entrusted with the care for the entire flock, the mission to unite all the children of God, not only those who believe and practice: *We generally have to „translate” this great task in our respective missions. Obviously, a priest, a pastor of souls, must first and foremost be concerned with those who believe and live with the Church, who seek in her their way of life and on their part, like living stones, build the Church, hence, also build and support the priest. However, we must also – as the Lord says – go out ever anew „to the highways and hedges” (Lk 14:23), to deliver God’s invitation to his banquet also to*

<sup>36</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. Krzyżma w Wielki Czwartek* (Rome, 20.03.2008), *OsRomPol* 5 (2008), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLIV Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLIII Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Blisko, najbliżej Chrystusa*, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 7.05.2006), pp. 31–32; Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 29.04.2007), pp. 37–38; See: Benedykt XVI, *Encyklika Deus caritas est*, Watykan 2005, No. 19–39.

*those who have so far heard nothing or have not been stirred within. This universal service has many forms. One of them is also the commitment to the inner unity of the Church, so that over and above differences and limitations she may be a sign of God's presence in the world, which alone can create this unity*<sup>41</sup>.

The Holy Father asserts that the priestly service mainly involves the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, which shall be the true *ars celebrandi*, an expression of the communion with God and the people<sup>42</sup>. The privileged *place* where the members of the community of faith form *one body and one spirit* in Christ is the Holy Mass. During its celebration under the leadership of right-believing shepherds, the people of God experience the mystery of oneness and become the organically shaped communion of love. The Eucharist is the source of oneness and love of the people of God<sup>43</sup>.

A fruitful celebration occurs when the presbyter lives in closeness and affinity with his Master, in docile compliance with His commands. The true servant follows the words of Jesus: *not my will, but yours be done!* (Lk. 22:42). The pastor cannot follow his own will. He accepts and fulfils the will of God. He gives up his wish for self-fulfilment and respect so that Christ could use him freely<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, he cannot treat his autonomy as absolute, because he has not been called by his own making, he does not proclaim himself but, as the servant and a preacher of the Word, he should share his freedom with others, thus bearing witness to the brotherly union<sup>45</sup>.

In conclusion, we may say that the priest bears witness to his unity with the lay faithful through his fulfilment of the mission of Jesus Christ, i.e. through service to all people as *alter Christus* and *in persona Christi*. In this manner, the priest confirms his identity, becoming an authentic and credible witness to the Master of Nazareth.

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During his announcement of the Year for Priests, Benedict XVI declared that his aim is to inspire all priests to an interior renewal *for the sake of a stronger and more*

<sup>41</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 7.05.2006), p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Przemówienie podczas spotkania z kapłanami i diakonami stałymi*, p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, Encyklika *Deus caritas est*, No. 17; Benedykt XVI, Adhortacja apostołska *Sacramentum caritatis*, Watykan 2007, No. 14–15, 23–26; Benedykt XVI, *Orędzie na XLIV Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. i święceń kapłańskich w Światowy Dzień Modlitw o Powołania* (Rome, 7.05.2006), p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> See: Benedykt XVI, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. Krzyżma w Wielki Czwartek* (Rome, 20.03.2008), p. 7.

*incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world*<sup>46</sup>. By the same token, he emphasised the importance and topicality of the issue of priestly credibility.

In his publications and speeches on the priestly service, the Pope delves into the biblical sources of priestly identity and the abundant tradition of the Church. He successfully actuates the old magisterial instruction and adapts it to the mentality of modern people. The Holy Father is aware of the contemporary failings of the priestly service and the new challenges faced by the preachers of the Gospel. The Pope, instituted by Jesus Christ as a symbol of oneness and love in Church to strengthen brothers in their faith and watch over the entire community of the Lord's disciples, cares for the authenticity of priests in their life and service. In other words, he cares for their credibility, understood chiefly as the dedication of their whole life to giving witness to their unity with Jesus Christ, their bishops and their presbyterate, and the lay faithful to whom they are sent.

It seems that the key to comprehending priestly credibility in the teaching of Benedict XVI is the assertion that in Jesus Christ, the person and the mission are one, and a priest should wish and strive to attain an equal oneness in his own person. To attain this goal, he must keep the faith of the Church and in the power of Christ's ministry, which lies at the heart of the priestly vocation.

## PRIESTLY CREDIBILITY IN THE TEACHING OF BENEDICT XVI

### SUMMARY

In the context of the modern culture, with its manifest anti-vocational and anti-priestly tendencies, priestly credibility is an important and topical issue. Benedict XVI is among the theologians who take an interest in the apology of the Holy Orders. In his publications and appearances, he delves into the biblical sources of priestly identity and the abundant tradition of the Church. The Pope underscores the need for authenticity in the life and service of the presbyters. In other words, he calls for their credibility, understood chiefly as the dedication of their whole life to giving witness to their unity with Jesus Christ, their bishops and their presbyterate, and the lay faithful to whom they are sent.

<sup>46</sup> Benedykt XVI, *List na rozpoczęcie Roku Kapłańskiego z okazji 150. rocznicy „dies natalis” Świętego Proboszcza z Ars, OsRomPol* 7–8 (2009), p. 3.

## WIARYGODNOŚĆ KAPŁANA W ŚWIETLE NAUCZANIA BENEDYKTA XVI

### STRESZCZENIE

Problematyka wiarygodności kapłana (prezbitera) jest ważna i aktualna w kontekście współczesnej kultury, w której widoczne są trendy antypowołaniowe i antykapłańskie. Benedykt XVI należy do teologów, którzy swoimi zainteresowaniami obejmują apologię sakramentu święceń. W swych publikacjach i wystąpieniach sięga do biblijnych źródeł kapłańskiej tożsamości oraz czerpie z bogatej tradycji Kościoła. Papież podkreśla konieczność autentyczności w życiu i posłudze prezbiterów, czyli ich wiarygodności. Rozumie ją przede wszystkim jako świadectwo życia dawane na trzech podstawowych płaszczyznach: jedności z Jezusem Chrystusem, jedności ze swym biskupem i z prezbiterium oraz jedności z wiernymi świeckimi, do których został posłany.

## DIE GLAUBWÜRDIGKEIT DES PRIESTERS IM HINBLICK AUF DIE LEHRE VON BENEDIKT XVI

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Frage der Glaubwürdigkeit des Priesters (Presbyters) ist wichtig und aktuell im Kontext der zeitgenössischen Kultur, in der kirchlichkritische und priesterfeindliche Tendenzen sichtbar sind. Benedikt XVI. gehört zu den Theologen, die sich für die Apologie des Wehesakramentes interessieren. In seinen Publikationen und Reden greift er auf die biblischen Quellen priesterlicher Identität zurück und schöpft aus der reichen Tradition der Kirche. Der Papst betont die Notwendigkeit der Authentizität im Leben und Dienst der Presbyter, d.h. ihrer Glaubwürdigkeit. Er versteht sie vor allem als Lebenszeugnis, das auf drei grundlegenden Ebenen gegeben wird: Einheit mit Jesus Christus, Einheit mit seinem Bischof und dem Presbyterium und Einheit mit den Gläubigen, zu denen er gesandt wurde.

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