

Apologia of the Married Clergy

(a real letter from the XI century)

by Ulrich, bishop of Imola

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE LETTER

We know very few things concerning the author of this letter-apology. Ulrich was bishop of Imola (near Ravenna, Italy) from 1053 to 1074, year of his death. In AD 1059 the bishop wrote this letter to Pope Nicholas II, in order to defend his married clergy from the new pro-celibate reforms in the breast of the Roman Church. The epistle's style is redundant and rethoric, typical of some Patristics. In the letter many public people are called to remembrance but without their name, perhaps to not scandalize the Pope, or maybe for they were already well known to the corrispondent.

This epistle remains as a little witness of the "other side" of the gregorian reforms in the period immediatly following the Great Schism.

The letter was translated in italian by Francesco Quaranta in his book, *Preti Sposati nel medioevo* (Married clergy in the Middle Age), 2000, Claudiana ed. The present work is a translation of the most parts of the letter as presented in Francesco Quaranta's book.

ULRICH - BY GOD'S GRACE BISHOP OF IMOLA
TO HIS HOLINESS NICHOLAS THE SECOND, POPE OF OLD ROME

Me, Ulrich, bishop by name, son in love but servant in fear, to the guardian of the
Roman See.

As I had made no sense of the measure, O Father and Lord, in your decrees on the continence of clerics, which had recently come to me, fear and sadness troubled me in a single feeling. Fear, since it is written: "the opinion of those who command, both right and wrong, must be respected" (St. Gregory the Great, Homily in Evang., II 26,6). In fact, I was worried for those who find it difficult to stick to the Scriptures, because they, who barely obey a just prescription, once they have transgressed the

unjust - an oppressive, indeed intolerable disposition of their pastor - would no longer feel bound to the commandments. I was sad and in pain as I thought how much the members needed their head, invalidated by such a large body.

What is more serious, what is more worthy of the compassion of the whole Church than you-- bishop of the highest See, which is called to herd everyone-- having lost the sense of discretion? And not just from this you have deviated, when you wanted to force the clerics to abandon the marriage with a certain violence, while you should have only exhorted them. Is it not, in the judgment of all the masters of the Faith, violence that compels us to obey arbitrary decisions, taken against the rule of the gospel and the teaching of the Holy Spirit? Since there are plenty of examples of the Old and New Testaments in favor of moderation, you know, after all, and I beg your paternity of not bothering to have anyone mentioned in these pages.

The Lord has certainly instituted the marriage of priests in Jewish law; and that he later forbade it is not written anywhere; indeed, he says the same thing in the Gospel: "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven: not all are capable of this: whoever is capable of these things is capable of it." (Mt 19,11-12). For this, the Apostle (Paul) says: "I do not give the Lord a command of the Lord, but a council." (ICor 7.25).

He was aware, in accordance with the aforementioned word of the Lord, that not everyone would live up to that ideal and foretold that many of his zealots, eager to please not to God but to men with a false image of continence, would have committed more serious things: they would have violated the wives of the others and would not have escaped from the intercourse with the males or the beasts. To prevent the contagion of this disease from becoming a devastating pestilence of the whole Church, (St. Paul) said: "to avoid debauchery every man has a wife." (ICor 7.2) that this concerns exclusively the laity is a lie of the hypocrites present in every degree of the priesthood (2) who instead do not hesitate to abuse the wives of others and fully, we say crying, degrade in the aforementioned wickedness.

They certainly did not rightly interpret the Scripture, whose breast, pressed too hard, drank blood instead of milk. In fact, that apostolic saying, "everyone has a wife", does not allow exception, except for those who make a vow of continence and those who decide in the Lord to remain in virginity. (...)

In order that you know with certainty that it should not be absolutely forced who did not make this vow, listen to what the Apostle says to Timothy: "the Bishop must be irreprehensible, the husband of only one wife" (I Tim.). And, so that someone did not refer this sentence only to the Church (3), he added: "But if someone does not know how to govern his own family, how will he take care of the Church of God?" (I Tim 3,2).

Besides, I know that the decrees of Pope Sylvester (4) have taught you enough that the wife must be blessed by the Church. Finally, the author of the canon law, agreeing with the decrees of the Holy Scriptures, rightly says: "The cleric is chaste or bound with certainty to a single marriage" (Apostolic canon VI).

It is clear from all these texts that the bishop and the deacon are condemnable if they share among many women. If instead they cast out only the legitimate ones with the pretext of religion, without any difference in rank, they are thus condemned by canon law (canon V):

"No one, bishop or priest, in any case drive his own wife under the pretext of faith, if he then goes away, he is excommunicated, and if he perseveres, he is deposed."

(...) Here the Bishop Ulrich remembers the episode of the martyr Pafmutius who rose up at the Council of Nicaea (325) defending the uxoria from the bishops who wanted to impose celibacy. The episode is reported by Cassiodorus in the Tripartite Ecclesiastical History in chapter XIV.

(...)

There are indeed supporters of celibacy, whose recklessness makes me laugh and their ignorance [makes me] cry, which invoke the authority of St. Gregory (the Great) in their favor. In fact, they ignore the fact that the dangerous decree containing this heresy promulgated by Saint Gregory was then retracted by himself with adequate fruit of penance.

One day, in fact, having commanded that fishes be brought from his nursery, he perceived himself delivering more than six thousand heads of children. He groaned then, struck by intimate repentance and confessing that the cause of so much slaughter had been his decree on abstinence, and, as I said, he made adequate penance, adding to the apostolic saying "better to marry than to burn" (I Cor.7 , 9) its own maxim: "it is better to marry than to offer the occasion of death". (5)

So cease, Your Holiness, to oblige those who you should only persuade, so that you may not be found, God forbid, an enemy of both the Old and the New Testament, because of a law invented by you.

Says St. Augustine to Donatus: "We fear only that your justice believes that it should punish by not considering the Christian meekness but the enormity of the sins, we beg you not to do it in the name of Christ, for sins must be repressed so that those who have repented of to have sinned. "(6) (...)

Jerome says: "this can also concern those virgins who boast of modesty and who with impertinent face show off chastity, having other in mind, they do not know the definition given by the Apostle" saint of body and spirit ". in fact, the continence of the body to a corrupt soul, which does not possess the other virtues described by the prophet? " (7)

(...) And indeed, what can be more foolishly in favor of men and more subject to the divine curse on the fact that some bishops and archdeacons, so deeply plunged in lust, to appreciate adultery, incest ... and shame! the very strange intercourse with the males, they say that the chaste marriages of clerics are repugnant and moved not by the desire for true justice but by the disdain of the false one, to command them as servants and force them to abstain, instead of praying them as companions and urge them to contain themselves.

In fact, they accompany this advice to this turpine: "it is better to associate with many women in secret, rather than just one before everyone." This certainly would not say if they came from or were on the side of Him who said: "Woe to you, Pharisees, who do all these things to be looked upon by men" (Mt 23, 5.13). Reverse men, who would have us prefer to be blushing sinners before the One to whom all things are clear and manifest, rather than being men before men.

Therefore, although for their wickedness they do not deserve to be treated according to clemency, nevertheless we, mindful of the divine philanthropy and driven by intimate charity, we offer him the norm of the law that never divorces itself from the benevolence. We have been told by some people that some of these are going to tear and scourge the flock of the Lord without reason, to the point of arrogance they have come. I would not hesitate to define them as the Apostle said to Timothy: "in the end times some will apostatize by faith, paying attention to lame spirits and diabolical doctrines, men who will propose falsehoods for hypocrisy, cauterized by their conscience, and forbid to marry." (I Tim 4,1-3).

This is, if you look carefully, the host of the diffusers of a bad fruit, of this whole party of madness, which causes clerics, forced by the fury of the Pharisees to abandon, God forbid, their own legitimate wives, they are made fornicators and adulterers and accomplices very turbulent of other perversities of these same who blind, lead other blind, and plot this heresy inside the Church of God.

Since none of those who know you, our Apostolic Lord, ignore that if I had valued with clarity of your habitual discernment as a great pestilence would be derived from your decision, that you would never succumb to suggestions so perverse, and we ask you with loyalty of due submission to act to the removal of such a great scandal from the Church of God and to eradicate the Pharisaic doctrine from the Godfold, so that not only in the flower of virginity, but also in the conjunction of marriage, each will see with purity Our Lord, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit unto ages of ages. Amen.

NOTES

- 1) Moderation. *Discretio* in latin.
- 2) Ulrich of Imola writes about well known people, for he gives no names. Probably, the reflection of bestiality and homosexuality is a reference to cardinal Peter Damian, well known for these sins.
- 3) It was common to celibacy's defenders to claim that St. Paul's writings were allegorical.
- 4) *Acts of the Synod of Pope Sylvester*, Canon VII, collected by St. Isidore of Seville states: "be the priest married to a single woman with the blessing of the Church".
- 5) This story is not present in the official catholic biographies of st. Gregory Dialogist. Seems he promulgated a decree against the marriage of priests, and he saw like a vision of the babies dead for the abortions of the priests' wives. Seeing that, st. Gregory decided to break his own law and to restablish the married priesthood.
- 6) St. Augustine of Hippo, *letter to Donatus*, I, 10.
- 7) St. Jerome, *Comm. in Ier.* 1,II, cap. 32