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TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MASS STIPENDS

INTRODUCTION

Financial dimensions related to Mass offerings first emerged in the eighth century as a natural way of participating in both contributing to the good of the Church and in sharing in its concern to support its ministers. This practice has its roots in the medieval understanding and practice of the Eucharist.¹ Over time, the custom evolved and gave rise to a theology of Mass stipends. Understandably, the theology reflected the thinking of the time, including some underlying weaknesses. It was widely established at the Council of Trent, and with certain adjustments made during the Second Vatican Council, became a more common practice in the Church. The challenge that remains is in understanding the fundamental meaning of a Mass offering. In particular, why do the Christian faithful give money when asking for a Mass to be celebrated? This question can be very problematic, especially when we consider its theological and pastoral implications. We may even ask why there is a financial dimension attached to Mass offerings. Likewise, who are the beneficiaries? More importantly, this custom could give rise to a false understanding that a person is ‘paying’ for the celebration of a sacrament. Answers vary from those seeking to find genuine good in the practice, to others simply dismissing it as a concern. This article seeks to identify and respond to such questions and propose a deeper understanding of Mass stipends. In

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¹ E. KILMARTIN, R. DALY, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1998, p. 111.

addition, it will highlight the fundamental difference between a Mass offering and Mass stipends.

1. THE HISTORY OF MASS STIPENDS

The custom of accepting offerings for the celebration of the Eucharist arose in the Western church as a result of a number of key developments. To understand this situation, we must return to the early Church at a time when the Christian faithful brought gifts to the Sunday assembly, especially the bread and wine for celebrating Holy Mass as well as other material gifts. This was done to commemorate the Lord's Supper, which He commanded them to celebrate in His memory until His return (Lk 22, 19; 1Cor 11, 24). The faithful who took part in the Eucharistic celebration provided offerings of bread and wine (Eucharistic offerings), elements to be used for the celebration of the Eucharist, as a visible sign of their participation in the offering of the priests who celebrated the sacrifice of the Mass on their behalf. Consequently, through making Mass offerings, the faithful recognized that they were active participants in the celebration of the Mass, which, in turn, was understood to be one sacrifice offered by the priest with and on behalf of the community. The material gifts presented by the people (non-Eucharistic elements) were not brought forth during the offertory of the Mass.² Rather, afterwards, what remained of the non-Eucharistic gifts was handed over to the priest for his support; some of which was then distributed to the poor (Mt. 10, 10; Lk. 10, 7; 1Cor 9, 13).

Initially, the Mass was not offered for any one particular intention; it was understood that it was offered for the intentions of all those present as well as those who were absent but who had sent their contributions. We can later see the practice of private Masses with a special remembrance or intention at the Mass. This practice was seen in some countries, including England, Gaul and Germania (at the time). The Christian faithful presented offerings to the priest so that he would pray especially for them during Mass. We further see, at the beginning of the sixth century, that the original offertory procession eventually lost its first meaning. The faithful began to make offerings of money which eventually became an activity of the individual members of the community. Participation was not required; it was rather a spontaneous gift.

² C. KENNY, *Mass Stipends: Origin and Relevance; Updating the Practice of Stole Fees*, "Homiletic and Pastoral Review" 64 (1964), no. 6, p. 844.

One reason for this evolution was that private Masses had become quite customary, and money itself became commonplace; further, the Church began to receive gifts of land endowments.³ Making a monetary offering became a sign of regular participation in the Eucharist and a way of supporting both the clergy and the poor.⁴ By the Carolingian period, there was a conviction that those faithful who made an offering to the priest participated fully in the Mass. This gift was understood more as an ecclesiastical custom than law. Offering money to the priest meant to the faithful that he would remember their special intention at the Mass. Since the priest was the one who offered the Mass, he was regarded as having full control over all fruits of the Mass. Additionally, as the number of priests increased, the faithful began to give them money to help them fulfil their pastoral duties.⁵

From the eighth century, the Mass stipend was given more frequently by the donor outside of any participation in the Mass, so that very often, the priest offered the Mass without the donor being present. This became a relatively normal practice when the offering of private Masses became an established feature of the Church's liturgy, that is, with only the priest and server present. We could even say that the very existence of the Mass stipend system hastened the emergence of the so-called "private Mass".⁶ The physical presence of the donor at the Mass was not required and, in practice, they were often not there. This custom soon became widespread in Christendom, and then universally adopted in the twelfth century. The Mass was beginning to be looked upon as a devotional exercise to ensure blessings for the intention of the donor independently of his or her devotion or that of the priest who celebrated the Mass.⁷

During this time, it came to be acknowledged that the acceptance of a stipend was a legal matter that gave rise to a contract. As a result, it was seen as a payment for a service rendered (stipend in the strict sense). It was in this sense that Jungmann defined the Mass stipend as an offering or honorarium paid in advance to oblige a priest to offer the Mass exclusively for the intention of the donor.⁸

³ E. GILPATRIC, *Mass Stipends and Mass Intentions*, "Worship" 38 (1964), no. 4, p. 194.

⁴ W. COSGRAVE, *Mass Offerings: Theological and Pastoral Rethinking Today*, "The Furrow" 59 (2008), no. 2, p. 78.

⁵ E. GILPATRIC, *Mass Stipends and Mass Intentions*, p. 195.

⁶ S.F. SPAHN, *Mass intentions: Memorials, money and the meaning of the Eucharist*, Boston, College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation 2011, p. 15.

⁷ E. KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West*, p. 110.

⁸ J.A. JUNGSMANN, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, New York: Benziger 1986, p. 23.

We can note that around the beginning of the twelfth century, the practice had further developed whereby a priest would accept a single donation or “stipend” for each Mass in return for remembering one special intention. This practice rapidly spread and gained popularity, and we would see it firmly established during the thirteenth century. The opportunity for the faithful to take a more active role in the liturgy through offering a stipend contributed greatly to this acceptance. From the Middle Ages until the liturgical reforms of the twentieth century, the liturgy was largely a clerical exercise and the laity were silent spectators. Not only that, most people did not understand Latin, the language of the liturgy, and the reception of daily communion was rare. Making an offering to the priest to remember one’s intention at Mass became a very popular way of participating more closely in the action of the priest.⁹ It also allowed the faithful to not only assist the Church in providing financial support to its ministers, but also united them to the priest who offers the Mass on their behalf.

Offerings by the congregation during Mass all but disappeared. What remained were alms which happened to be given to the Church during Mass. It was only on major feasts that the pastor offered Mass for the intention of his people (*pro populo*).¹⁰ This custom evolved and eventually became a binding obligation on the pastor of a parish.

It did not take long for this new custom to spread throughout the entire Roman Church and become a normal part of its daily life.¹¹ This proved to be the forerunner of the two benefits provided by Mass stipends. Firstly, the money which a priest received for offering his daily Mass for a specific intention was essentially his source of income. Secondly, by giving a stipend, the person requesting that a Mass be celebrated made a sacrificial offering of his or her own.

⁹ J. HUELS, *The Offering Given for the Celebration of Mass*, in: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, eds. J.P. Beal, J.A. Coriden, T.J. Green, New York: Paulist Press 2000, p. 1129.

¹⁰ For an extensive consideration of *Missa pro populo*, see T.A. DONNELLAN, *The Obligation of the Missa pro Populo: An Historical Synopsis and Commentary*, The Catholic University of America Press 2014.

¹¹ E. KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West*, p. 38.

2. THE CONCEPT OF STIPEND

The origin of the word “stipend” is found in the Latin *stipendium*, meaning “stipend, tribute or wages”.¹² In the beginning, this term was used in Roman law when, for instance, Emperor Augustus paid an annual stipend to the soldiers as compensation for work agreed upon and dependent on the quality of the services rendered. As time passed, the term found itself used in ecclesiastical terminology to refer to the gift offered for the celebration of Mass (so-called “Mass stipends”). This has been the case for many centuries and continues to this day. The term can be misunderstood or misleading because it can prompt thoughts of simony or the danger of excluding the poor from requesting a Mass intention, or even one seeing the stipend as a “fee for service”; in other words, the priest exchanging money for his activity of offering the Mass. Such confusion results in the Church being accused of “trading the sacraments”. Likewise, the term must have been seen as contrary to the very foundation of the Mass because it suggests a mercantile exchange of goods for services or remuneration of a *do ut facias* contract, reward, or payment in exchange for Mass being celebrated for the intention of the donor.

However, it is worth noting that using such terms during this time is understandable in that the whole Christian life and moral message were understood in legal terms. This way of expressing the Christian moral life, however, is now seen as an inappropriate way of presenting the Christian ethic. Indeed, as a consequence, the Pontifical Commission for Revision of the Code of Canon Law accepted that the term ‘stipend’ (Lat. *stipendium*) can no longer be used in association with the Mass to avoid any confusion in relation to an eventual act of simony. It should be considered as a “gift” or “offering” (Lat. *stips*) freely given by the Christian faithful,¹³ rather than as a payment (Lat. *stipendium*) as such. Indeed, priests can no longer rely on their daily Mass stipends to pay for their basic necessities of life. The word “offering” clearly signifies that it is given freely by the faithful primarily out of their concern for the Church and their desire to support its material needs. Mass offerings should be understood as gifts to the Church or its ministers in thanks for

¹² W.H. WOESTMAN, *Canon Law of the Sacraments for Parish Ministry*, Ottawa: Saint Paul University 2011, p. 162.

¹³ For an official report on the canons on the Eucharist see PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE REVISION OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW, *Coetus on the Eucharist, “Communicationes” 4* (1972), p. 57.

a particular intention, much as a donation or petition of prayer made to any charitable institution is made *in the name of* some person, living or deceased.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law¹⁴ no longer refers to *stipendium missae* (Mass stipend), but to *stips* which means an offering or gift given by the faithful. As well, the term “stips” indicates a contribution on behalf of a public charity, an offering in honor of God or to help the needy.¹⁵ In this way, we see a shift from the legal to the more personal and relationship understanding of Mass offerings. In practice, it means, then, that money given to the priest in the context of requesting a Mass to be celebrated must be understood, not as a payment for a service rendered, but as a gift or freewill donation to the Church which expresses the donor’s desire that the Church remember the requested intention in prayer.

Likewise, the Congregation for the Clergy affirmed that Mass offering by its very nature, must be a free act on the part of the one offering, left to one’s conscience and sense of ecclesial responsibility, not a “price to pay” or a “fee to exact”, as if dealing with a sort of “tax on the Sacraments.” In fact, with the offering for Holy Mass, “The Christian faithful [...] contribute to the good of the Church and [...] share its concern to support its ministers and works”. As a result, the Mass offerings contribute to the needs of the Parish, which are “their needs”, for which it is good that they learn spontaneously to take responsibility, especially in those countries where the offerings for Holy Mass remain the only source of income for priests and also the only resource for evangelisation.¹⁶

3. THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF MASS OFFERINGS TODAY

As we have noted, the financial dimensions of Mass offerings are deeply rooted in the tradition of the Church. They were first formally mentioned by Paul VI in his 1974 apostolic letter *Firma in traditione* “There has been

¹⁴ Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), part II, pp. 1–317. English translation: Code of Canon Law. Latin – English edition: Canon Law Society of America 2020.

¹⁵ E. CAPARROS, M. THÉRIAULT, J. THORN, *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur 1993, p. 601.

¹⁶ THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Instruction »The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church«*, (20.07.2020), point 119. Document is available online at: <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html> [accessed: 10.10.2020].

a strong tradition in the Church that the faithful, led on by a religious and ecclesial awareness, should conjoin a kind of sacrifice of themselves, as it were, with the Eucharistic sacrifice in order that they might more actively participate in it. In this way, they, on their part, provide for the needs of the Church, and especially for the support of her ministers".¹⁷ As an aside, the very title of this *motu proprio* reveals how important a place tradition alone has in the life of the Church. Similarly, the Congregation for the Clergy acknowledged in the decree *Mos iugiter*¹⁸ the constant practice of the Church regarding Mass offerings. We can see from these documents, then, that Mass offerings has the following meanings: 1) a type of sacrifice made by the faithful so that they might participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice more actively; 2) a sign of the union of the baptized with Christ and of the donors with the celebrant; 3) providing for the needs of the Church, and especially for the support of its ministers; and 4) supporting the charitable works of the Church.

We have to keep in mind that a Mass offering is not a devotion in itself, but, rather, a sign of the co-offering of the faithful with the priest at Mass. It finds its roots in the New Testament. Indeed, Saint Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, poses a question: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13-14). According to him, giving gifts or offerings is the responsibility of the Christian faithful for the Church and its ministers. Karl Rahner, taking into account this understanding of Mass offerings, notes that it does no more than show the active participation of the person who the offering. It is for this very reason that the donor should make every effort to attend the Mass.¹⁹ In so doing, the Christian faithful actively become involved in the Church's efforts to provide adequate financial support to its ministers, as well as to enable them to unite themselves in the activity of the priest who offers the Mass on their behalf.²⁰ In this regard, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that the Mass offering is a direct contribution toward the fi-

¹⁷ PAULUS PP. VI, *Litterae apostolicae Motu Proprio, Quaedam capita de facultatibus ad Missarum stipendia pertinentibus statuuntur Firma in traditione* (13.06.1974), AAS 66 (1974), p. 308.

¹⁸ CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS, *Decretum quoad stipendia a sacerdotibus pro Missis celebrandis accipienda, regulae quaedam dantur, Mos iugiter* (22.02.1991), AAS (1991), pp. 443-446.

¹⁹ K. RAHNER, A. HAÜSSLING, *The Celebration of the Eucharist*, Montréal, Quebec, Palm Publishers 1968, p. 87.

²⁰ J. HUELS, *Stipends in the New Code of Canon Law*, "Worship" 57 (1983), no. 3, p. 219.

nancial support of the priest and “it is beneficial for those whom it is offered, and through this offering some grace of remission of sin flows.”²¹

Over time, this explanation became accepted throughout the Church. The Christian faithful began to contribute to the support of the Church and its ministers. Making an offering on the occasion of Holy Mass is not paying for grace but a voluntary gift. As previously noted, the offerings were given for Masses requested to be offered by the faithful. At the same time, the priest, parish or monastery cannot charge money for celebrating Holy Mass. This is because the graces flowing from the Eucharist are infinite, and are independent of money. It is clearly stated in can. 947, “Any appearance of tracking or trading is to be excluded entirely from the offering for Masses”. According to can. 1385, those who illegitimately profit from Mass offerings are to be punished with a censure or another just penalty. For this reason, no one is permitted to accept more offerings for Masses to be applied by himself than he can satisfy within a year (can. 953).²² These canons were created to prevent profiteering and any other abuse connected with Mass offerings. Furthermore, it is recommended that priests celebrate Mass for the intention of the Christian faithful, even if they have not received an offering (can. 945 §2). In this context, Pope Pius VI wrote in the motu proprio, *Firma in traditione*, that participation in the Eucharist brings all participants spiritual benefits.

Fundamentally, the Mass offering is a free gift and it is up to the donor to give what he or she decides is appropriate to give. The priest can only accept or refuse it. The Code of Canon Law in can. 945 says that the priest “is permitted” to receive Mass offerings, but, in this canon, without any explanation as to what kind of offering it can be. In turn, can. 945 §2 recommends earnestly to priests that they celebrate Mass for the intention of the Christian faithful, especially the needy, even if they have not received an offering. Money is mentioned only in can. 950, “if a sum of money is offered for the application of Masses [...]”. It is true, however, that neither the Code nor any Vatican documents provide a particular theological explanation on Mass offerings. For this reason, it may be difficult for the faithful to appreciate

²¹ D. POWER, *The Sacrifice We Offer: The Tridentine Dogma and its Reinterpretation*, New York: Crossroad 1987, p. 128.

²² Both can. 953 and art. 5. 1 of the Decree *Mos iugiter* is very explicit: “Priests who receive a great number of offerings for particular intentions for Masses, e.g., on the Feast of the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, or on other special occasions, being unable to satisfy them personally within a year's time, rather than refusing them, and thus frustrating the devout intention of those making the offering and keeping them from realizing their good purpose, should forward them to other priests (cf. can. 955) or to their own ordinary (cf. can. 956).”

that their gift is a contribution to the Church and not only to the priest himself. In so doing, they share in the Church's desire to support its ministers and their ecclesiastical works. It can also be said that Mass offerings are fulfilling the Fifth Precept of the Church: the Faithful are to contribute to the support of their pastors.

4. WHO IS THE BENEFICIARY OF MASS OFFERINGS

The answer to the question of who is the beneficiary of a Mass offering is contained in *moto proprio*, *Firma in traditione*, and in the Code of Canon Law. In accordance with can. 946, "The Christian faithful who give an offering to apply the Mass for their intention contribute to the good of the Church and by that offering share its concern." The ecclesial dimension stands out, inseparable from the purely religious one. A Mass offering is not a kind of tribute or financial payment for a service rendered. Rather, it is contribution to the good of the Church. As Pope Paul VI noted, "This practice the faithful unite themselves more closely with Christ offering himself as victim, thus deriving more abundant fruit from the sacrifice has not merely been approved but has been encouraged by the Church" (FT 308).

At the same time, it may be difficult to understand that Mass offerings contribute to the good of the Church since the Code of Canon Law clearly speaks that Mass offerings are received by the celebrant (can. 945). The current legislation also specifies that every celebrant is permitted to keep the offering for only one Mass each day.²³ Any other Mass offerings applied on the same day must be forwarded to his ordinary.²⁴ This is because Mass offerings are not his own but belong to the Church and through them, the Church can support its works. Likewise, we use the tradition of the Gregorian Masses (30 days) and the month's mind Mass. So, if it was left an undetermined sum, celebrant takes the total amount for 30 Masses, and it is the remainder that is applied both to the institution (parish, diocese, convent). This is one specific way whereby the faithful can fulfill their duty to assist in the work

²³ Except for Christmas Day, when the priest is permitted to retain the offering up to three Masses (can. 951 § 1)

²⁴ In accordance with decree of Archbishop of Ottawa, Policy N°26 (Revised January 1, 2013), the other Mass offerings (for binated or trinated Masses) are to be divided equally between the parish and the Diocesan Compensation Fund. Document is available online at <https://catholicottawa.ca/documents/administration/121120%20POLICY%20NO.%2026%20%20Revised.pdf> [accessed: 15.10.2020].

of the Church.²⁵ This understanding was also affirmed in the latest decree of the Congregation for the Clergy on collective Mass offerings, *Mos iugiter*.

Nonetheless, a much bigger problem can arise in one's understanding of Mass offerings. Many Christian faithful incorrectly believe that they are "buying Masses" or that they will get something more if they 'pay' for it (e.g. spiritual favors or benefits). In fact, the liturgy itself expressly states that the Eucharist is offered for many intentions. In accordance with the Eucharistic prayer all faithful say: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church." The faithful's intention is joined by the celebrant to the sacrifice of the entire Church. Alternatively, we could say that the donor's intention is remembered in the prayers of the Church. It doesn't mean, however, that other participants of the Mass will not gain any spiritual benefit. No papal document nor the Magisterium of the Church say that the priest should remember only this special, additional intention.²⁶ The faithful's offerings on the occasion of holy Mass allow the donors to participate in the work of the Church, and, in so doing, support their ministers. A process of education on the basic meaning of Mass offerings would be beneficial, therefore, for both the ordained and the faithful. All participants should be aware that when they give an offering on the occasion of Mass, they contribute to the good of the Church.

5. EVOLVING FORMS OF MASS OFFERINGS

Accepting financial offerings for particular remembrance at Mass may provide a negative connotation to the Mass offering system. It may be interpreted as buying sacraments. The Vatican documents mentioned previously provide many references related to Mass offerings, which state clearly that they are not to be associated with trading, but are strictly freewill donations. These include, among others: 1) collective Mass offerings, 2) parochial account, 3) will for celebration of Masses, and 4) Mass Cards.

The decree of the Congregation for the Clergy (February 22, 1991) approved the celebrating of collective intentions in a single Mass. In this doc-

²⁵ J. CALVO-ÁLVAREZ, *The Offering Made for the Celebration of Mass*, [in:] *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, vol. 3/1, eds. Á. Marzoa, J. Miras, R. Rodríguez-Ocaña, Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2004, p. 670.

²⁶ J. HUELS, *Stipends in the New Code of Canon Law*, p. 220.

ument, it points out that the Christian faithful can collect particular intentions (e.g. in a receptacle in the Church) and present them to the priest celebrating holy Mass. The priest is not required to accept money for celebrating the Mass. This form of requesting a Mass is very distinct from the notion of “buying a Mass” and the celebrant “does not make money” from the Mass offerings as he is permitted to keep the amount for just one Mass offering. The amount is determined by diocesan norms concerning Mass stipends²⁷ and any excess is to be set aside for the purpose(s) prescribed by the ordinary.²⁸ Indeed, the amount received as a gift would not be sufficient for a priest’s needs for one day.

Another way of ensuring proper respect and understanding with regard to Mass offerings and its infinite value is the creation of the parochial account. If the intention of the person making the offering is not clear, then that money would be placed in distinct account of the parish.²⁹ In this case, the celebrant is not accepting Mass offerings directly. As such, he would receive the ordinary offering amount in effect in the diocese, and the remainder would belong to the parish or institution that was the beneficiary.³⁰

In this case, there is no question of exchanging money for Mass intentions. Such a policy would have to be issued before making any offerings and those making the offerings made aware at the time of requesting Masses. As a result the priest’s only income is his salary. We have to keep in mind that each offering must be freewill, and each priest is free to retain the Mass offerings.³¹

Another form of Mass offerings are money left to parish in a will for celebration of Masses. In order to provide for respect of the intentions of the donors, yet at the same time take into account that in some dioceses bishops have established a policy to the effect that if the number of Masses is not specified in the will, and if the amount available for the celebration of Masses

²⁷ Under the decree of Archbishop of Ottawa, Policy N°26 (Revised January 1, 2013), for such “collective” intention Masses, the priest may accept only the offering equivalent to a single Mass intention (\$15). The remainder of the offerings is to be divided equally between the parish and the Diocesan Administration Fund. Available on the website: <https://catholicottawa.ca/documents/administration>. T. PRENDERGAST, *Decree of Archbishop of Ottawa*, Policy N°26 point 2 [accessed: 20.10.2020].

²⁸ W. COSGRAVE, *Mass Offerings*, p. 79.

²⁹ PRENDERGAST, *Policy N°26*, 2.

³⁰ J. PROVOST, *Offerings to a Parish Director*, in: *CLSA Advisory opinions 1994–2000*, ed. A.J. ESPELAGE, Washington 2002, p. 147.

³¹ J. HUELS, *The Offering Given for the Celebration of Mass*, p. 1130.

is more than thirty times the diocesan offering, then the sum is to be divided by thirty (in line with the former ‘month’s mind Masses’). The celebrant receives the ordinary offering in the diocese, and rest goes to the parish or institution that was the beneficiary.³² Such policy would have to be issued before a will is received and the executors notified accordingly when they present the request for Masses.³³ If the number of Masses is indicated in the will and the bequest is accepted, then, the intention has to be honored.³⁴

Another yet form of the Mass offering is the Mass Card or Memorial Card. The custom of sending Mass Cards emerged in Ireland. People who could not take part in a funeral Mass would request that a Mass be said for the deceased as an option to sending flowers, for example. The Mass Card would be given to an individual to let them know that they, or a deceased loved-one, would be remembered in the intention at Mass. The card giver would obtain a Mass Card from the parish office. They would visit the parish office, obtain a card, give his or her offering (a donation), and a Mass would be offered for his or her intention at a future date. He or she would then give the card to the recipient, which acknowledges that he or she or a deceased family member, or some other intention, would be prayed for at Mass.³⁵ This is another occasion for offering a Mass. The priest is not involved in monetary donation but the parish office and depends on a good will of the card giver.

³² It is also possible a suggestion (the ‘50%-50%’): the priest celebrant will receive the normal local stipend for each of the 30 Masses. With the remaining money, 50% could go to the institution that received the donation from the will (i.e., parish, diocese, convent, monastery), and 50% to the Diocesan Priests Compensation Fund or Pension Plan.

³³ J. Renken notes however, that Morrisey’s proposal seems to suggest that donor’s intention would be different if the diocesan bishop had promulgated a policy, which explains that a pre-determined number of Masses (e.g. thirty) will be offered when the number of Masses is not specified in a will. Inasmuch as the provincial bishops establish Mass offerings (can. 1264), perhaps it would be “canonically more prudent” for the provincial bishops, rather than an individual bishop to establish such policy. Obvious concerns with such policy, whether issued by the provincial bishops or a diocesan bishop, are that one cannot presume with certainty that donor and been aware of the policy, and that the ordinary must assure fulfillment of donor’s intentions. John RENKEN, *Church Property: A Commentary on Canon Law Governing Temporal Goods in the United States and Canada*, Ottawa: St. Paul 2009, p. 117.

³⁴ F.G. MORRISEY, *De bonis temporalibus eorumque administratione*, [in:] *Comentario Exe-gético al Código de Derecho Canónico*, vol. II/2, eds. Á. Marzoa, J. Miras, R. Rodríguez-Ocaña, Pamplona 2002, p. 1595.

³⁵ P.O’SULLIVAN, *The Wonders of the Mass*, Saint Benedict Press, LLC 2012, p. 37.

CONCLUSION

Mass offerings given by the Christian faithful are rooted in the long-standing and venerable tradition of the Church. It is an approved custom, however, and neither law nor a legal requirement. The Faithful wish to pray for their needs at Mass which is living the *sensus fidelium*. As well, the custom of giving money when requesting a Mass for a particular intention must be respected. It should not be expected, therefore, that this venerable practice will disappear any time soon, or that it will be revised, in spite of defects and weaknesses in the Mass offering system that have been discussed here.

The main issue with Mass offerings is not theological but pastoral. It arises when the Christian faithful give an offering, there can be the perception of “buying Masses”. They think they are getting something for their money; some spiritual favor or grace which benefits their intention. Whereas it is the contribution to the good of the Church and a participation in its concern to support its ministers.

Vatican documents, though, speak little about a Mass offering theology. Indeed, they have made significant progress in removing references of Mass stipends in favor of Mass offerings. This points to the very nature of the Mass offering as a freewill gift of Christian faithful on the occasion of Mass to be celebrated.

The celebrant should not be involved in accepting Mass offerings to avoid any association with financial benefits or that “he is doing it for the money”. Instead, he should utilize other forms of accepting Mass offerings like the parish account or Mass cards. We must keep in mind, though, the fundamental understanding of the system of Mass offerings because the added revenue for clergy is a major factor in the continuation of the practice. Any consideration on Mass offerings must be faithful to the Eucharistic theology of sacramental sacrifice, of the close connection between celebrant and people in their common act of worship, and of the gratuity of this great gift of the Lord to his people.³⁶

³⁶ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II, *Litterae Encyclicae Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17.04.2003), AAS 95 (2003), p. 433.

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TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MASS STIPENDS

S u m m a r y

The term of “Mass stipends” have been preserved in the longstanding and venerable tradition of the Church. Their justification can be found in the Apostolic letter *Firma in traditione* and in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Even so, understanding their meaning is not clear and often confused with buying sacraments or a type of financial payment for a service rendered. From a historical viewpoint, the Mass stipend seems to trace its origin to the offertory of the Mass. It was during the Offertory that the faithful, who were participating in the Eucharistic celebration, offered their gifts. This study explores the concept of the so-called Mass stipend and their evolving form in the practice of Church. For a proper understating of Mass offerings, it is important to point out that they must be coherent with the Eucharistic theology of sacramental sacrifice, of the close connection between the celebrant and the people in their common act of worship, and of the gratuity of this great gift of the Lord to his people. Ultimately, Mass offerings contribute to the good of the Church and share its concern to support its ministers and works.

Keywords: Mass stipends; Mass offerings; Canon law; the Sacrament of the Eucharist

KU NOWEMU ROZUMIENIU STYPENDIÓW MSZALNYCH

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Pojęcie „stypendiów mszalnych” zostało utrwalone w długoletniej tradycji Kościoła. Ich uzasadnienie można znaleźć w liście apostolskim *Firma in traditione* oraz w Kodeksie Prawa Kanonicznego z 1983 r. Mimo to zrozumienie ich znaczenia nie jest jasne i często bywa mylone z kupowaniem sakramentów lub rodzajem opłaty za wykonaną usługę. Z historycznego punktu widzenia stypendium Mszy św. wywodzi się z procesji z darami podczas sprawowania Mszy św.

To właśnie podczas *offertorium* uczestniczący w celebracji Eucharystii składali swoje dary. Niniejsze opracowanie analizuje koncepcję tzw. stypendiów mszalnych i ich ewoluującą formę w praktyce Kościoła. Autor zwraca uwagę na fakt, że ofiary składane z racji Mszy św. muszą być spójne z teologią sakramentu Eucharystii i jego ścisłego związku między celebransem a ludem wiernych. Ostatecznie ofiary te przyczyniają się do dobra Kościoła oraz uczestniczą w jego trosce o utrzymanie szafarzy i dzieł.

Słowa kluczowe: Stypendia mszalne; ofiary z racji Mszy św.; prawo kanoniczne; sakrament Eucharystii