

EVANGELICAL POVERTY AMONG CATHOLIC PRIESTS: INSIGHTS FROM HAGGAI AND *PASTORES DABO VOBIS*

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Abstract

This study aims to offer an alternative perspective on evangelical poverty among Catholic priests amidst worldly luxury. While priests are encouraged to live in poverty as a spiritual virtue, some have been drawn into the allure of material wealth and comfort. Insights are drawn from the Book of Haggai and *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)*. Haggai emphasizes God as the Omnipotent Sovereign, calling humanity to surrender fully to His will. *PDV*, depicting God as the Supreme Good and the True and Definitive Treasure, guides priests in living evangelical poverty by responsibly using material goods and trusting in God's provision. The correlation between Haggai and *PDV* underscores evangelical poverty as a surrender to God as the Abundance, freeing priests from attachment to material goods, making space for God's unexpected and transformative grace. This grace leads to a life of self-giving, generosity, and a commitment to rebuilding the lives of those they serve. Reflections from these sources highlight three practical applications: approaching their mission with trust in God's providence, managing Church resources with integrity and accountability, and offering a prophetic witness of simplicity amidst a consumerist culture.

Keywords:

evangelical poverty • *worldly luxury* • *Catholic priests* • *Haggai* • *Pastores Dabo Vobis* • *surrender* • *abundance*

Introduction

Pope Francis' visit to Indonesia on September 3-6, 2024, was marked by his profound simplicity—a lifestyle consistently evident throughout his papacy.² This simplicity is not just a public display, but reflects Pope Francis' deep convictions, exemplified by his choice of the papal name 'Francis', inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, a saint renowned for poverty and humility.³ This choice aligns with one of the three evangelical counsels, namely poverty, which is central to Christian life. Jesus Himself emphasized evangelical poverty by advising a young man: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

Given the Church's emphasis on poverty, this evangelical counsel holds vital importance for priests, whether diocesan or religious. As shepherds of the faithful, priests are called to embody evangelical poverty, serving as living witnesses and powerful examples for their communities.⁴ However, in today's world—particularly for priests serving in urban areas—living out evangelical poverty presents significant challenges. Urban economies often flourish, and priests in these environments may receive generous material support and conveniences. While such generosity can greatly aid their ministry, it also brings temptations that make it more difficult for priests to remain faithful to the spirit of evangelical poverty.

Moreover, a consumer-driven culture frequently shifts the focus away from simplicity and spiritual poverty toward material comfort and the pursuit of success. Pope Francis himself has highlighted this concern, explicitly stating that it is troubling to see priests using luxury smartphones or driving expensive cars.⁵ In Germany, a bishop was even removed from office by the Pope due to his indulgence in luxury.⁶ The luxurious lifestyle of bishops in the United States has drawn media attention.⁷ In Indonesia, at least two bishops have expressed concern over priests who live extravagantly.⁸ These examples clearly show that some priests have been drawn into worldly luxury.

This study aims to offer an alternative perspective on evangelical poverty among Catholic priests amidst worldly luxury by correlating the Book of Haggai and *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)*, including proposing

several applications based on this correlative reflection. Haggai's call to the post-exilic Israelites to prioritize rebuilding God's Temple over their personal comforts, which carries a message urging the prioritization of spiritual over material concerns, offers a valuable perspective on the role of evangelical poverty among priests. Meanwhile, *PDV*, Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on formation of priests, complements this perspective. Despite being written over three decades ago, it remains a comprehensive exploration of evangelical poverty in the context of the priesthood.

The study begins by exploring the background of the Book of Haggai, establishing a foundation for the exegesis of key passages that highlight the significance of prioritizing the rebuilding of the Temple. It then examines the correlation between the insights from Haggai and the teachings of *PDV*. Finally, the study concludes by presenting relevant applications for priests, offering pathways to align their ministry more closely with this essential value.

Haggai and Post-exilic Era

Haggai is one of the twelve minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible, whose role, though less prominent than some other figures,⁹ was pivotal during a critical time in Israel's history. His name, derived from the Hebrew word *hag* (feast), is fitting for his mission to inspire the rebuilding of the Temple, the central site for religious worship and festivals.¹⁰ Based on the chronological details found in Haggai 1:1, 1:15, 2:1, 2:10, and 2:20, his ministry is estimated to have taken place around 520 BC.¹¹ This positions him among the prophets who worked after the Babylonian Exile, alongside figures like Zechariah, Trito-Isaiah, Malachi, and Joel.¹²

Haggai cannot be separated from the context of the Babylonian Exile, which stands out as one of the most significant and transformative periods in Israel's history.¹³ In 587 BC, the Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar,¹⁴ who had already deported many Jews in 597 BC.¹⁵ This period reshaped Jewish identity, as Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and many Israelites were forced into exile. Nebuchadnezzar's reign was followed by a series of successors,¹⁶

culminating in the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia¹⁷ in 538 BC. Rather than ruling with an 'iron fist', Cyrus adopted a policy of diplomacy and tolerance, freeing the Jewish captives and permitting their return to Judah,¹⁸ as narrated in 2Chronicles 36:22-23. In the bible, the story of Babylonian Exile can be found in 2Kings 24-25 and 2Chronicles 36:5-23.

Upon their return, however, the Jewish community faced numerous challenges. The physical and religious fabric of their nation had been fractured. Without a Temple, worship had shifted from communal rituals to more private, home-centered practices. This crisis of faith, identity, and national unity is reflected in the efforts to rebuild the altar and Temple, as recounted in Ezra 3. Although initial attempts were made to lay the foundation of the Temple, opposition from local adversaries—likely the Samaritans¹⁹—halted progress (Ezra 4). These adversaries, who offered help but were rejected, retaliated by bribing officials and intimidating the Israelites, delaying construction until the second year of King Darius's reign (Ezra 4:24).²⁰

It was in this context that Haggai emerged as a prophet, reigniting the people's commitment to God and the Temple. His central message was a call to rebuild not only the physical structure of the Temple but also the spiritual life of the nation. Haggai's prophetic leadership played a crucial role in restoring the religious and communal identity of post-exilic Israel.²¹

God as the Omnipotent Sovereign in Haggai

The Book of Haggai consists of two chapters. The passages discussed below highlight key elements of Haggai's prophecy regarding the importance of rebuilding the Temple, a theme that is relevant to the study.

Haggai 1:1-4

"In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house. Then the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"²²

The opening of the Book of Haggai introduces Haggai as the messenger of God's word, addressing Zerubbabel and Joshua, two key leaders of the post-exilic Jewish community (Haggai 1:1). As noted in Ezra 3:2, Zerubbabel and Joshua were instrumental in leading the efforts to rebuild the nation after the Babylonian Exile. Thus, the divine message delivered to them was not merely for their personal guidance but for the entire people of Israel.²³

Haggai 1:2 reveals that the Israelites felt no urgency to rebuild the Temple, as indicated by the phrase "the time has not yet come". Yet, 16 years had already passed since their return from exile.²⁴ Ezra recounts that, while the Temple's foundation had been laid with great enthusiasm, external opposition soon discouraged the people, halting the project.

Over time, the Israelites shifted their focus from communal concerns to personal interests, neglecting the national priority of rebuilding the Temple.²⁵ As a result, Jerusalem began to flourish again as a city, yet the Temple, the center of religious life, remained in ruins. Haggai 1:4 highlights this disconnect by questioning whether it is right for the Israelites to live in 'paneled houses' while the Lord's Temple lies desolate. These 'paneled houses' represent comfort and luxury, and Haggai's critique is not of the comfort itself but the contrast between the well-maintained homes and the neglected Temple.²⁶

Haggai's criticism goes beyond the physical state of the buildings. The people's indifference to the Temple symbolized a deeper spiritual issue: their hearts had turned away from God. By prioritizing their personal concerns over the restoration of the Temple, the Israelites deprioritized their relationship with God. The problem was not merely the neglect of the Temple but the neglect of God Himself.²⁷

Haggai 1:5-6

"Now therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes."

This passage addresses the consequences of the Israelites' actions, introduced with the command, "Consider how you have fared". The NIV translates this as "give careful thought to your ways", a common phrase in Haggai's message.²⁸ The Hebrew phrase 'šimú lēbabkem 'al'²⁹ literally means 'set your heart on'³⁰ implying an invitation for reflection and self-awareness. The plural term 'ways' (from the Hebrew 'darkēkem') refers to the various paths of life they pursued or neglected.³¹ Thus, this command is a call for the Israelites to examine their lives and the directions they have taken.³²

The following verses present five contrasts: they sow much but harvest little; they eat but are never satisfied; they drink but are never filled; they wear clothes but are not warm; they earn wages but place them in a bag with holes. These contrasts highlight the disparity between their efforts and the lack of results³³, reflecting a fundamental issue of scarcity.³⁴ In an agrarian society, where food, drink, and clothing are essential, these unmet needs underscore the severity of their situation.³⁵ The term 'šokerā' in the context of drinking suggests that even the act of drinking does not lead to the satisfaction associated with abundance.³⁶ This further emphasizes their condition of lack and frustration.

The passage underscores a direct relationship between Israel's obedience and their living conditions. Their disobedience has led to a lack of sufficiency. This is not merely a result of God's anger but reflects the divine order, where true sufficiency is found only in living according to God's will.³⁷

Haggai 1:9-11

"You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors."

Meyers and Meyers note that the Hebrew term 'bayit' (home) refers not only to a physical structure but to the household in its social and economic

dimensions.³⁸ The Israelites' preoccupation with their own homes can be interpreted as an obsession with personal economic and social concerns.

The word "drought" in Haggai 1:11 derives from the Hebrew word *'hōreb'*, which shares consonants with *'hārēb'*, meaning 'ruins', the term used to describe the condition of the Temple.³⁹ This wordplay signifies a profound connection: the 'ruins' (*'hārēb'*) of God's house have led to a 'drought' (*'hōreb'*) on the land. The drought is comprehensive, affecting all crops, animals, and people.⁴⁰ This devastation disrupts the entire ecosystem, reflecting the gravity of the situation caused by the people's neglect of the Temple.

Haggai 2:4-9

"Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts."

In Haggai 2:4-5, God offers encouragement to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people of Israel. The repeated command to "take courage" emphasizes both physical and spiritual fortitude. The thrice-repeated phrase "says the LORD" underscores the importance of focusing on God's voice alone.⁴¹ The message is clear: God is present with them, and they must find strength to complete their task.

McComiskey interprets the 'shaking' in Haggai 2:6 as a metaphor for God's arrival, representing creation's response to the Creator. The contrasting elements (heaven and earth, sea and dry land) signify totality,⁴² highlighting *God's omnipotence*. Furthermore, Haggai 2:8 affirms God's sovereignty over all wealth, as He declares that the silver and gold are His.⁴³ This reflects the ancient tribute system, where wealth flowed from outlying territories to the central seat of power⁴⁴—in this case, the

Temple, as God's dwelling place. The passage assures that if the Israelites remain faithful in their task, God will provide for their needs through His sovereign control of all resources.

Haggai 2:15-19

“But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord's temple, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you.”

In Haggai 2:15, God calls Israel to reflect on their future and compare it to their present condition. The specific mention of the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month likely marks the day the Temple's rebuilding resumed.⁴⁵ The reference to “setting stones” symbolically connects the physical act of building the Temple with the spiritual act of setting one's heart toward God.⁴⁶

Verses 16-17 recount the scarcity Israel faced before this day, with grain yields halved and wine vats producing far less than expected. However, Haggai 2:19 closes with a promise: from this day forward, God will bless them. This is the first explicit indication in the text that God intends to bless His people, signaling a shift from hardship to divine favor.⁴⁷

Up to this point, the exegetical study of Haggai reveals several key lessons. God is *the Omnipotent Sovereign* over all creation, with all wealth and the world belonging to Him (Haggai 2:4-9). Humanity faces a fundamental choice: to prioritize personal desires or to fully surrender to God, placing His will above all. Pursuing self-interest over God leads to dissatisfaction and lack, even amidst material abundance (Haggai 1:5-6, 1:9-11). In contrast, surrendering to God brings His presence, sufficiency, peace, and blessings, ensuring a future better than the past, as true fulfillment is found only by living according to His will (Haggai 2:15-19). These lessons will be reflected upon in correlation with *PDV*'s teachings on evangelical poverty.

God as the Supreme Good and the True, Definitive Treasure in *PDV*

In traditional christian teaching, the three virtues known as the evangelical counsels—poverty, chastity, and obedience—are recommended for those striving for greater perfection in their spiritual lives. Unlike the imperatives of the Decalogue, these counsels encourage spiritual growth.⁴⁸ The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines poverty as the spirit of sacrificing all that one has for God’s sake and the Gospel.⁴⁹ This teaching is inspired by Christ’s words: “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Luke 14:33). By detaching from material goods, disciples are expected to direct their hearts toward the greatest love, unimpeded by worldly attachments.⁵⁰

The call to live out poverty also applies to the life of priests. One of the Church’s key documents addressing poverty in the context of the priesthood is *PDV*, a post-synodal apostolic exhortation from Pope John Paul II, issued on March 25, 1992. This document remains a comprehensive exploration of evangelical poverty in the priesthood, including practical applications relevant today.

Regarding evangelical poverty in the context of priesthood, *PDV* states the following:

“On the subject of evangelical poverty, the synod fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as ‘the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his kingdom’. In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can understand and practice poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom - that is, with reference to God and his plan.”⁵¹

The text presents two images of God that serve as the foundation for priests to live evangelical poverty: God as the Supreme Good and God as the True and Definitive Treasure. The first image, God as the Supreme Good, carries some implications. First, everything finds its true goodness only when it is aligned with God. Second, because God is the Supreme Good, everything He creates is inherently created for good

purposes. Therefore, material goods are not something to be avoided, as they are ultimately created with good intentions. Third, since material goods are created for good purposes, priests are called to use these goods responsibly. To use them responsibly means to align their use with the will of the Supreme Good, as stated in the first implication. In this way, the good purposes intended by God when creating these material goods are fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the image of God as the True and Definitive Treasure carries one significant implication. Since God is the True and Definitive Treasure, priests are invited to use material goods with great interior freedom. They do not need to fear if the material goods they 'own' are 'taken away' from them, because God, as the True and Definitive Treasure, will always provide them with 'true goods' sufficient for them to fulfill their mission as priests. In this sense, the freedom to detach from material possessions allows priests to live without anxiety, knowing that their true treasure lies in God alone.

Evangelical Poverty as A Surrender to the Abundance

When correlating the teachings about evangelical poverty among priests from *PDV* with Haggai's prophetic message, it is found that the two sources mutually enrich each other. *First*, Haggai emphasizes God as the Omnipotent Sovereign over the world and human life. Meanwhile, *PDV* depicts God as the Supreme Good, and therefore, everything He creates is good, and everything must be aligned with Him to be truly good. When contextualized within the life of priests, these two images emphasize that God must be the center and priority, as He is sovereign over all, and He alone is the true and ultimate good. Everything in the priest's life should thus be aligned, directed, and centered on Him. In short, priests are called to *surrender*.

Second, the image of God as the Omnipotent Sovereign connects with the image of God as the True and Definitive Treasure, as expressed in *PDV*. According to Haggai, God, in His sovereign power, can bring about conditions of 'lack' for those who fail to align with His will, while blessing those who prioritize Him above their own desires. When this image is seen

through the lens of God as the True and Definitive Treasure, it becomes clear that God is the sole source of true abundance. He has the power to bestow genuine and abundant grace, making Him the ultimate source of all that is truly fulfilling. In essence, God is *the Abundance*. From the two paragraphs above, an insight emerges: evangelical poverty is *a surrender to the Abundance*.

Third, in the Book of Haggai, the Israelites never anticipated the lack that came upon them after prioritizing their own interests. Conversely, they were equally surprised by the blessings that God promised once they prioritized the rebuilding of the Temple. Similarly, for priests living out evangelical poverty, they may experience *unexpected* grace in ways they never anticipated.

Fourth, surrender, from another perspective, is an act of trust in God to shape and transform the life of the one who surrenders. It is a willingness to create '*space*' for God to work flexibly and powerfully in one's life. Consequently, priests who embrace evangelical poverty undergo a continuous process of *transformation*, growing both in their personal lives and in their ministry to the people they serve. This transformation nurtures not only their own quality of life but also the depth and authenticity of their pastoral mission.

Fifth, recognizing the abundance of grace received through surrender fills the heart with deep *gratitude*. Priests who live evangelical poverty and are attuned to the overflowing grace bestowed upon them will always be filled with thanksgiving. This gratitude fuels a spirit of enthusiasm and dedication in their service, resulting in a ministry of the highest quality. Ultimately, the grace they experience touches not only their own lives but also the lives of the people they serve, spreading God's abundance throughout the community.

Relevant Applications

Evangelical poverty, as a surrender to the Abundance, can be applied practically in three key areas of priestly life: mission, administration of goods, and prophetic witness in a consumerist society.

Application 1: Mission

One of the clearest expressions of evangelical poverty is found in the priest's mission. Every priest is sent on a mission by his bishop or superior, which is central to his identity. Priests are not 'freelancers' but serve in communion with the Church and under obedience to authority. However, not every mission aligns with their personal desires or sense of purpose.

Consider the case of a priest who has always dreamed of working in youth ministry but is instead assigned to a parish where most of the community is elderly. This might initially feel disappointing or challenging. He could be tempted to approach the assignment half-heartedly, believing his gifts and passion are underutilized.

Regarding this, *PDV* explains:

"Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to 'go forth', without traveling bag or personalities, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk. 9:57-62; Mk. 10:17-22)."⁵²

In this spirit of evangelical poverty, priests are called to surrender their ambitions, comforts, and desires for the sake of a greater purpose—the mission of God as communicated through their bishops or superiors. Here, evangelical poverty is not merely about detachment from material possessions but involves a profound interior release from the need to control one's own destiny.

This is where evangelical poverty, as a surrender to the Abundance, intersects with mission: priests, through their surrender, believe that the missions entrusted to them by their bishops or superiors are God's will, even more profoundly, God's grace, regardless of whether the mission aligns with their personal interests or not. Their obedience to these missions becomes an act of surrender to the Abundance.

When a priest accepts a mission that is outside his 'comfort zone', he may encounter difficulties, challenges, or even suffering, much like the Israelites in Haggai, who would experience similar discomfort when

sacrificing their personal interests to prioritize the rebuilding of the Temple.⁵³ Yet, it is precisely these challenging assignments that have the potential to broaden his skills, deepen his compassion, and expand his spiritual horizon. This is the unexpected grace that lies behind the spirit of evangelical poverty. In embracing these challenges, he allows himself to be ‘rebuilt’ by the mission entrusted to him, growing in grace and effectiveness in his ministry.

For instance, being sent to a remote parish may initially seem like a burden for those who feel more comfortable living in urban areas. However, in this place outside his ‘comfort zone’, the priest might discover ‘hidden gems’, uncover unknown talents, acquire new skills, deepen spiritual life, overcome certain weaknesses, or meet people whose faith inspires him in unexpected ways. These encounters are not accidental but are manifestations of the abundant grace from the Abundance that comes through surrender. Just as in Haggai’s time, when those who prioritized rebuilding the temple were blessed, so too will a priest who places God’s will above his own find his ministry unexpectedly fruitful.

This surrender also enriches the priest’s relationship with the community. His willingness to embrace difficult missions fosters a unique pastoral approach that resonates deeply with the needs of the people. Parishioners, sensing the priest’s authenticity, may find his presence ‘rebuilding’, as it reflects a life lived in harmony with God’s will. Additionally, recognizing the unexpected grace behind every challenge cultivates a spirit of gratitude within the priest. This gratitude, in turn, motivates him to serve with even greater dedication.

Thus, the concept of evangelical poverty as a surrender to the Abundance offers a profound perspective on the priest’s mission. It is not about simply accepting assignments out of duty or fear of authority, but about trusting that God’s plan, revealed through the directives of bishops or superiors, leads to unexpected grace, rapid growth, and deep fulfillment. This surrender becomes an act of faith, where the priest believes that by letting go of his own desires, he makes room for God’s abundant blessings to flow through him and into the community he serves. In short, this application also connects evangelical poverty with another evangelical virtue, namely obedience.

Application 2: Administration of Goods

Evangelical poverty is not only about personal detachment from material possessions but also extends to a priest's role as a steward of the Church's resources. *PDV* emphasizes the importance of transparency and integrity in this area:

“Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total ‘honesty’ in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor.”⁵⁴

In practical terms, this means that a priest's management of resources must reflect his total surrender to God. He is not to build monuments for himself but to ensure that the Church's assets are utilized to meet the pastoral needs of the people, especially the poor. This requires discernment in financial decisions, ensuring that resources serve the mission of the Church rather than personal comfort or prestige.

For example, consider a parish priest overseeing a building renovation. It may be tempting to prioritize aesthetic enhancements that reflect his personal taste or that might elevate the parish's profile. However, a priest living in the spirit of evangelical poverty will first ask: How does this serve the mission of God? How can the resources be used to address the most pressing needs of the community, particularly the poor?

Henricus Pidyarto, the Bishop of Malang, once wrote that the primary concern for every priest should not be the construction of magnificent places of worship or the establishment of parish organizations modeled on modern management principles, but rather addressing the decline in the life of faith.⁵⁵ This mindset encourages priests to prioritize the spiritual growth and well-being of their communities over material grandeur.

A living witness to this principle is Pope Francis, who has repeatedly called for simplicity in the Church's administration. By choosing modest living quarters and advocating for a “Church that is poor and for the poor”,⁵⁶ he embodies the belief that the Church's wealth is not for self-glorification but for serving those in need.

In the context of evangelical poverty as a surrender to the Abundance, when a priest lets go of financial ambitions and personal preferences, trusting fully in God's provision, he opens himself to God's grace working through him. He does not concern himself with personal gain. Instead, he ensures that the Church's resources are genuinely used to nurture the faith of the people. As the faithful recognize this genuine intention, it often inspires them to contribute in various ways. Thus, God's grace flows abundantly and even unexpectedly, enriching the pastoral mission of the priest alongside the community he shepherds.

Just as in the early Church described in Acts 2:42-47, where the believers shared all things in common, a priest living out evangelical poverty promotes equity in the distribution of resources, especially for the poor. This spirit of surrender enables him to be sensitive and empathetic to the needs of those in poverty. Conversely, if a priest prioritizes his own interests, as Haggai warns, neither he nor the community he serves will be truly 'fulfilled' or 'rebuilt'. The priest may find himself caught in an endless pursuit of satisfaction, while the congregation will miss out on the grace that comes from dedicating resources to God's purposes.

Application 3: Prophetic Witness in a Consumerist Society

One of the most challenging aspects of evangelical poverty is its prophetic witness in an affluent and consumerist world. In modern society, success and happiness are often measured by material wealth and financial security. Regarding consumerism, Pope Francis highlights its dangers in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG).

“The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.”
(EG 2)

According to data from the United Nations Association (UNA) Indonesia, consumerism in Indonesia is reflected in high levels of consumption and a prevalent 'buy-and-dispose' culture. This is especially evident in areas such as food, beverages, transportation, communication, and clothing. The issue is exacerbated by many individuals, particularly young people, being trapped in consumerist behaviors, leading to debt and uncontrolled spending.⁵⁷

A priest who embraces poverty, living simply and detached from possessions, becomes a powerful counterpoint to these values. *PDV* highlights this prophetic dimension:

“A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non - submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security.” (*PDV* 30)

In a world that prioritizes comfort, wealth, and consumption, a priest's life of simplicity speaks volumes. His decision to renounce luxury is not just a personal discipline but a public witness that challenges society's obsession with consumerism. It invites parishioners to reflect on their own attachments to material goods.

The challenge for priests today is to courageously embody this witness despite societal pressures. A priest who embraces evangelical poverty as a surrender to the Abundance entrusts himself entirely to God, caring less about discomfort or criticism that may arise from his countercultural stance. This total surrender, as described in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, manifests in a life that resists conforming to worldly values, even while living among its people.⁵⁸ This surrender fosters a profound sense of gratitude and joy, which, in turn, becomes a prophetic message to others.

The prophetic aspect of this lifestyle is not just a personal choice but a communal invitation. It encourages the community to reconsider their own attachments to material possessions. By witnessing a priest's detachment from worldly wealth, parishioners are challenged to re-evaluate their own priorities and to place their trust in God rather than material security. This can lead to a transformation in how they live and approach the world.

Again, a notable example is Pope Francis, whose simple lifestyle has inspired many. By choosing modest living spaces and rejecting traditional symbols of papal opulence, he demonstrates a powerful rejection of materialistic values. His example underscores that a priest grounded in evangelical poverty serves God's will, trusting that faithfulness will bear spiritual fruit in the community.

In this sense, evangelical poverty is not merely a personal discipline but a communal gift, inviting others into the freedom and abundance that come from surrendering to God. When a priest lives in harmony with

God's will, his faithfulness becomes a source of spiritual nourishment for the community. His simplicity serves as a reminder that God's grace is more than sufficient and that true fulfillment is found in a life of total trust and reliance on Him.

Conclusion

In the perspective of this study, Haggai reveals that God, as *the Omnipotent Sovereign*, reigns over all creation and calls humanity to surrender fully to His will. Pursuing self-interest leads to dissatisfaction, while aligning with God brings His presence, peace, and blessings, promising true fulfillment and a future greater than the past. Meanwhile, *PDV* presents God as *the Supreme Good* and *the True and Definitive Treasure*. As the Supreme Good, God ensures that all things find value when aligned with Him, calling priests to use material goods responsibly. As the True and Definitive Treasure, God invites priests to detach from possessions with freedom and trust in His provision.

Haggai and *PDV* weave together a profound and harmonious message. The correlation between God as the Omnipotent Sovereign and the Supreme Good underscores the truth that God must be the central focus of life, as He is not only sovereign over all creation but also the true and ultimate good. Priests, in response, are called to *surrender*. Furthermore, the image of God as the Omnipotent Sovereign aligns with the image of God as the True and Definitive Treasure. God alone has the power to grant grace and fulfillment, making Him the ultimate wellspring of all that is truly satisfying. In essence, God is *the Abundance*. Therefore, evangelical poverty is *a surrender to the Abundance*. Such surrender liberates priests from attachment to material goods, creating *space* for God's *unexpected* and *transformative* work within them. Rebuilt by this grace, their hearts overflow with *gratitude*, shifting their focus from self-fulfillment to self-giving. Through this, priests demonstrate generosity and a commitment to rebuilding the lives of those they serve, ensuring that the blessings they receive flow abundantly to their communities.

Evangelical poverty has profound relevant applications in the daily lives of priests. *First*, in their mission, priests are called to set aside

personal preferences and wholeheartedly embrace the tasks entrusted to them by their bishops or superiors. This surrender reflects trust that these assignments are part of God's will, carrying a divine purpose, and that God will work through them in unexpected ways. As Paul assures, "... the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion ..." (Philippians 1:6).⁵⁹ *Second*, in managing resources, priests are called to act with transparency and responsibility, ensuring that the Church's wealth serves the community—especially the poor—while prioritizing spiritual growth over certain personal desires. *Finally*, through their prophetic witness in a consumer-driven society, priests challenge dominant values by living simply and detaching themselves from material possessions. This countercultural example inspires the congregations to reflect on their own priorities and deepen their reliance on God's providence.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Email: marthensa.revie@gmail.com.
- 2 Robertus Andrianto, “Deret Kesederhanaan Paus Fransiskus: Arloji Ratusan Ribu - Naik Innova”, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/research/20240904080226-128-568922/deret-kesederhanaan-paus-fransiskus-arloji-ratusan-ribu--naik-innova> (access 10.09.2024). News outlets highlighted his choice of commercial flights over private jets, modest vehicles for local transportation, and his decision to stay at the Vatican Embassy rather than in a luxurious hotel. His modest watch and casual seating arrangements further underscored his deep commitment to simplicity.
- 3 See Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi: a New Spring in the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014) 1.

- 4 See *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)* 30.
- 5 See Suryawijayanti, “Paus: Pastor Gunakan HP Canggih dan Mobil Mewah Itu Menyakitkan”, <https://kbr.id/berita/intermezzo/paus-pastor-gunakan-hp-canggih-dan-mobil-mewah-itu-menyakitkan> (access 06.11.2024). It is nearly impossible for the Pope to make such a statement without being grounded in the reality that there are indeed priests who live luxurious lifestyles.
- 6 See Bayu Probo, “Paus Memecat Uskup Mewah Jerman”, <https://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/paus-memecat-uskup-mewah-jerman> (access 06.11.2024).
- 7 See UCA News, “Rumah Mewah Para Uskup Agung AS Berada di Bawah Pengawasan”, <https://indonesia.ucanews.com/2014/08/05/rumah-mewah-para-uskup-agung-as-berada-di-bawah-pengawasan/> (access 06.11.2024).
- 8 The two bishops are Bishop Inno Ngutra (Diocese of Amboina) and Archbishop Petrus Canisius Mandagi (Archdiocese of Merauke). See Mgr. Inno Ngutra, “Menjelang Misa Pembaharuan Janji Imam Para Imam Gereja Katolik”, <https://keuskupanamboina.org/news/index.php/2024/03/27/menjelang-misa-pembaharuan-janji-imamat-para-imam-gereja-katolik/> (access 10.12.2024). See Archbishop Mandagi’s speech during the 150th-anniversary celebration of the Diocese of Manado, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSEWBJvZNaA&t=472s> (access 10.12.2024).
- 9 See Richard Coggins & Jin H. Han, *Six Minor Prophets through the Centuries* (West Sussex: Willey-Blackwell, 2011) 135.
- 10 Mark J. Boda, *The NIV Application Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 32-33.
- 11 Willie J. Wessels, “The Tip of the Iceberg: Leadership and Leader Interaction in the Book of Haggai in a Time of Resettling and Reconstruction,” *Old Testament Essays* 16, Nr. 2 (2003): 503-504.
- 12 See St. Darmawijaya, *Warta Nabi Masa Pembuangan dan Sesudahnya* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990), 91-134.
- 13 Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001) 1.
- 14 Darmawijaya, *op. cit.*, 15.
- 15 Samuel Willard Crompton, *Cyrus the Great* (New York City: Infobase Publishing, 2008) 38.
- 16 Mark J. Boda, *The NIV Application Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah*, 25. Nebuchadnezzar’s reign continued until 562 BC, and he was succeeded by several rulers, including his son Amel-Marduk, his son-in-law Neriglissar, and eventually, Nabonidus.
- 17 Pierre Bryant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 40. At that time, Babylon was Persia’s strongest rival.
- 18 Crompton, *op. cit.*, 81. One piece of evidence that illustrates Cyrus’ respect and liberation of captives is the Cyrus Cylinder. The Cyrus Cylinder is an ancient text that describes the state of Babylon after its conquest by Persia. This text contains Cyrus’ own statements from a first-person perspective. It was written by priests and scribes shortly after Cyrus entered Babylon following his victory. Its central theme is Cyrus’ efforts to honor the local population and the gods they worshiped, including the deities venerated by the captives.

- 19 A.H. Sayce, *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1889) 21.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 23. Ezra 4:6-23 initially appears to continue from Ezra 4:1-5. However, from a historical perspective, this seems less plausible because Ezra 4:6-23 mentions King Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes, who were the son and grandson of King Darius. Both ascended the throne only after Darius' reign, while the construction of the Temple began during the time of King Darius. One solution proposed to address this is to consider that Ezra 4:6-23 relates to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, rather than the Temple. The wall construction indeed took place during the reigns of these two kings. Therefore, the part of Ezra 4 that pertains to the Temple's construction is Ezra 4:1-5 and 4:24.
- 21 See Darmawijaya, *op. cit.*, 99.
- 22 All the following Bible passages are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition* (NRSV-CE).
- 23 Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 48.
- 24 Micah Fries et al., *Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 47.
- 25 John Calvin, *Commentary on Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999) 313.
- 26 Fries et al., *op. cit.*, 49.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 28 John L. Mackay, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi God's Restored People* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2010) 12. A similar phrase appears three times, specifically in Haggai 1:7, 2:15, and 2:18.
- 29 Anthony R. Petterson, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015) 52.
- 30 Carol L. Meyers & Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987) 24.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 32 Verhoef, *op. cit.*, 60.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 34 J. Alec Motyer, "Haggai," *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary Volume 3 (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1998) 976.
- 35 Meyers & Meyers, *op. cit.*, 24.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 37 Fries et al., *op. cit.*, 51.
- 38 Meyers & Meyers, *op. cit.*, 30.
- 39 Verhoef, *op. cit.*, 64-65.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 41 Motyer, *op. cit.*, 988.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 990.
- 43 Meyers & Meyers, *op. cit.*, 54. The mention of 'silver' before 'gold' is tied to the trade

market during the early stages of Jerusalem's restoration. At that time, silver was considered more valuable than gold.

- 44 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 45 Petterson, *op. cit.*, 78.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 Boda, *op. cit.*, 150.
- 48 Joseph Xavier, "Call of Evangelical Counsels," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 79, Nr. 4 (April 2015): 7.
- 49 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2544.
- 50 See *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 42.
- 51 *PDV* 30.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 See Haggai 1:2. The Israelites say that "the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house" because they believe that rebuilding the Temple would make their lives more 'difficult'.
- 54 *PDV* 30.
- 55 See Henricus Pidyarto, "Menjadi Imam Sejati: Bercermin pada Paulus Rasul Para Bangsa", *Imam Jantung Hati Yesus*, ed. Yon Leseq (Jakarta: Obor, 2009) 185.
- 56 *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) 198.
- 57 See Nya' Jeumpa Madani et al., "'Confessions of a Shopaholic': Membedah Budaya Konsumerisme", <https://www.unaindonesia.org/2023/11/07/confessions-of-a-shopaholic-membedah-budaya-konsumerisme/> (access 13.12.2024).
- 58 *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO) 3.
- 59 This verse provides the basis for the bishop's response when candidates for priesthood or diaconate pledge their obedience to him (or their superiors) during the ordination.