

WHY "BROTHERS" AND NOT "FATHERS"

Lay Religious for an Ecclesial Mission (4/9)

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f. The "ad intra"/"ad extra" dichotomy: a hidden monopoly?

Evidently certain duties fall within the bailiwick of the Church ("ad intra") and others are carried through outside the Church ("ad extra"). But how are these responsibilities divided up? Time and again it has been stated that what has to do with the clergy is what is within the Church and what concerns the laity is what is outside the Church.

There are three pairs of words which can be considered as meaning the same thing, more or less: "ad intra"/"ad extra", Church/world, sacred/profane. For some people, the clergy should busy themselves with the first member of each pair and seculars with the second. Let's make this a little more concrete. The mission "ad intra" would mean that what is the concern of the clergy is everything within the Church--theology, preaching, prayers, sacraments, sacred power, the maintenance and sustenance of the Faith...; that is, the clergy are the exclusive protagonists in the "intra-ecclesial" sphere. Mission "ad extra" would mean that the obligation of the secular is away from the center, turned to the outside, directed toward the world, the profane, and to people at a distance from the Church ("missio ad gentes"), but always under the guidance and control of the shepherds.

Nevertheless, St Gregory the Great (ob 604), for example, arranged that all functionaries and employees in the service of the pope were clerics or monks; he excluded laymen from a position as "mundane" as the care of the temporal wealth of the Church--also a restriction that holds in our own day!

Later and with good reason, Gregory VII had to stoutly assert that intra-ecclesial matters were the exclusive competency of clerics in order to stop the meddling of princes and other powerful people in the nomination of bishops and popes. But the limitation was extended to provide a monopoly for the clergy.

It must be asked seriously if the dichotomy "ad intra"/"ad extra" is intended, perhaps unconsciously, to buttress monopoly rather than brotherhood and shared responsibility. Let us not forget that at times this pair of words has been understood to mean this, that "ad intra" denotes whatever is important, what is properly "churchy", while "ad extra" means the world, seen as whatever is ambiguous, almost evil,

and whatever has no theological import, the merely profane, sociological. In this division it falls to laypersons to be legal minors within the Church (exile to the extra-ecclesial) and to be agents of the hierarchy, its delegates or whatever, to the community at large.

In almost all religions the identity of the clergy has been dialectically linked to the religious marginalization of the laity. It has been said that the problem of the woman is the problem of the male because in many societies the woman is only what the man says or permits. Likewise it might be said that in the Church there is no problem of the laity but of the clergy, since the laity have been (and still are?) only what the clergy has ordained or permitted.

g. Conclusion

In all that concerns ministries of the Church, at the outset the first consideration was the movement of the Spirit, the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation, and the community itself. After a time the primacy of the sacrament of Orders was asserted. The priesthood of the faithful lost importance.

Under the influence of the Old Testament and of pagan cults the laity were removed from anything having to do with the altar and liturgy and emphasis was put on delegation and transmission of power by the hierarchy.

However, it was forgotten that the real dichotomy was not Church/world but good/evil, an opposition that affects everybody, including the Church itself.

The laity found themselves with no ministry to be performed within the Church. They busied themselves with mundane affairs and had to apply to the secular world the teachings and rules that others elaborated. Within the Church, then, there was no shared responsibility but rather sacralization and the segregation of the clergy; and the marginalization and exclusion of the laity, people who are plebeian and unholy, rough, illiterate, earthy and even carnal, according to some authors. As for women, their situation was even worse. Only in the fourth century was a concession made so that they could be referred to as "lay women".

"The influence of paganism and Judaism has contributed to accenting the cultic dimension of the priesthood at the cost of preaching and evangelization, and to seeing the priest as a mediator between God and the Christian community (as opposed to the unique mediation of Christ and the participation of the faithful in his priesthood). It has favored the isolation of the ministry with respect to the community, the cult of personality and the vision of the ministers as first class Christians. And it has served as the point of departure for the legitimization of structures of domination and dependency within the Church which attack the character of service of all ministry and the fraternal character of the community. All of this has been improperly sacralized and must be desacralized." (7)

Disgracefully, the laity can only be understood in terms of the clergy, in terms of long, sad historical development which still has not come to an end and which comes from many sources (Roman, Jewish, medieval and modern included), all of which lead to the same conclusion: that some of us are commoners within the Church and that others are the nobility. Today we lean more towards democracy. And in the Church we look for fraternity.

It is only from this classist predisposition (and surely not from the Good News) that one can explain, for example, how

there can be parents who say to their children: "Why don't you become a priest instead of becoming a Brother?" Or to give an example of even fuzzier thinking, there are priests and bishops who say that the Brothers are so humble that they forgo even the dignity of the priesthood.

3. THE OTHER ECCLESIOLOGY: THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF COMMUNION. On the New Brotherhood

a. "You are all brothers."

Vatican II has given us an ecclesiology of communion (family of God, people of God). What is of primary importance is not the clergy/laity dichotomy but the community, which is the protagonist par excellence. Therefore, the different ministries and charisms arise within the community. Nobody must be teacher nor father nor law-giver but God alone. "Avoid the title 'Rabbi' One among you is your teacher, you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father. Only one is your father, the One in heaven. The greatest among you will be the one who serves the rest." (Matthew 23:8ff)

Many things must be "declericalized". But it is no easy thing, due to the Messiah complex, jealousy and defence mechanisms, among other things. First of all, the father/son model must give way to the fraternity model. Priests and bishops should call themselves and should be "brothers" and not "fathers" (much less "Excellency", "Eminence"...). Children need fathers and mothers they can see, who nourish and guide them, forgive them and support them. Adults, no! Adults are looking rather for companions and brothers. (8)

Let us take up once more the dream spoken of in the introduction: the suppression of the word "laity", (a word that has suffered defects from its very birth) and the drawing of a new map, the construction of a new nation like that of ancient times, a nation of Christians or brothers with "a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the body of Christ," (LG 32) and peacefully organized into three equally valued provinces: seculars, clergy and religious. Would this be so difficult? There are important documents and many authors who say this or something very similar to it, but in the moment of truth a soupy fog envelopes all. All are equal and we enjoy equal dignity, but some are more equal than others and enjoy the same dignity, only more of it. (Word games? Square pegs in round holes?)

Today we are rediscovering that our baptismal consecration makes us all equally Christian and that this is the most wonderful thing possible. Every Christian is a consecrated person (and was even called a "vicar of Christ", both clerics and laypersons; only much later was this expression co-opted as a papal title.) However, there are different but complementary ways of living out our baptismal consecration. Lumen Gentium speaks first of what we all have in common (Chapter II, The People of God) and only afterwards about the differences (Chapter III, The Church Is Hierarchical; Chapter IV, The Laity [or interchangeably "seculars"]; Chapter VI, Religious). It is important not to confuse the people of God (Chapter II) with the laity or

seculars (Chapter IV). Actually "Everything that has been said of the People of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy." (LG,30) No other ecumenical council has spoken so much and so well about the laity.

b. A Priestly People

All Christians form a priestly people; all share in the unique priesthood of Christ; all participate in the common priesthood, either ordained or lay, which is the foundation of everything (and it is precisely in the service of this common priesthood that some are ordained priests). According to tradition, the institution of the Eucharist is the foundation stone of Christian priesthood, not only of the ministerial priesthood but of the priesthood of all Christians. We are all really priests and we all really celebrate the Eucharist. We are not merely spectators nor are we passive recipients. We must overcome the clericalization of sacramental celebrations. Further, the sacramental presence of Jesus is not the only way he is present among us. "Where there are two or three gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." (Matthew 18:20) What is more, by this lay priesthood the entire existence of the Christian has been made priestly. The Christian united to Christ (who remains a lay person throughout life) offers his/her very person to God as a pleasing sacrifice, a consecrated and responsible life, which leads all people, cultures and institutions to God. The rituals are not enough! We must reach into the existential!

In a living break with pagan and Jewish religiosity, Jesus Christ by his death opens access to God to every person with no need to go through human intermediaries all the time. Now the presence of the Spirit is experienced in the community with no necessity of special places or rites of mediation. "Are you not aware that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16) "Anyone who loves me...we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him." (John 14:23)

The first Christians totally relativized temples, cultic objects, sacred ceremonies and sacrifices. A lawyer of the late second century, Minutius Felix by name, says that Christians have no need of statues or images because humankind itself is the image of God, nor do they need temples, for the world itself is the work of his hands. He goes on to say that the offerings and sacrifices that are pleasing to God are a good soul, a pure mind, a sincere word, the doing of justice. Especially meaningful is the step from worship in the temple of Jerusalem to looking upon Christians themselves as the temple of the Spirit. Christians, then, had a way, neither pagan nor Jewish but much more spiritual, of adoring a God who wants to be adored in spirit and in truth, neither in the temple nor on Mt. Gerizim. (John 4:21-23) But they were not understood and were branded as atheists or at least as irreligious.

(7) Estrada, *La identidad...*, p. 107.

(8) The possible ambiguity and the immaturity of such expressions as "Holy Mother Church" have to be avoided as well. Actually, we, all of us, are the Church; only Christ is the mediator. (1 Timothy 2:5) God, who is neither man nor woman, loves us with the tenderness of a father and of a mother: "As one whom his mother consoles, so I shall console you..." (Isaiah 66:13. Cf P Maymí, *Un Compendio de doctrina, más que una aproximación al hombre actual*, Sinite 34, 1993, 454-456).