

## WHY "BROTHERS" AND NOT "FATHERS"

### Lay Religious for an Ecclesial Mission (5/9)

**Brother Pascual Maymí**

#### c. Clerical Ministers

Today, in the light of Vatican II, it is quite clear that ministers are not super-consecrated persons, super-Christians, first order representatives of the Church; it is clear too that they are not the only depositories of knowledge, of value or sanctity, nor of power or ability to govern. It is clear, for example, that the clergy are not middlemen who stand in for Christ; they are only Christians, the same as all others served by Christ, the some mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). Sacramental efficacy does not depend principally on the minister but on the action of Christ. The flock of the Church "although watched over by human shepherds, is nevertheless at all times led and brought to pasture by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and Prince of shepherds." (LG,6)

The ministry ought not be a career nor an honor nor a privilege nor power--all this is worldly!--but service and brotherhood. The purpose of ministries is to aid the community, not to usurp community. No one can have the sole right to sit in judgment on orthodoxy or orthopraxis. Quite the contrary, here is the importance of the "sensus fidei": communal discernment, shared responsibility (or synodality), the rise of lay ministries. In short: unity, yes; uniformity, no! The New Testament itself does not give us a single ecclesiology, but many. (9)

The clergy do not have a position of personal dignity by any right of their own; they do not have "potestas" but an obligation or "munus". They are at the service of the priestly life of the faithful; they are servants of the servants of God. They are at the service of a community of the faithful who are not profane men in need of a bridge (or the one who guards the bridge) in order to approach God, for the entire community is already priestly. It is made up of consecrated people; it is the temple of the Spirit and has access to God in Christ. Clerics are not functionaries put in charge of ecclesiastical services; they preside over a community and

must celebrate services as members of that community and not as though they alone have the power and right to do so.

#### d. Lay Ministers

Christian salvation is not clerical but ecclesial, the work of a community. Gradually we are putting an end to the clerical domination of ministries. The entire community is ministerial, apostolic, charismatic and prophetic, although not all in the same degree nor with identical obligations. Until a short time ago, only priests were called "ministers", with the connotation, furthermore, of dignity and power (in spite of the fact that, as we have seen, "minister" means "servant"). On the other hand, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 73), for example, speaks of "different kinds of ministries" for the laity itself. And it adds that "the Church recognizes other ministries which, although not related to Holy Orders, are capable of rendering special service to the Church." It goes on to say: "Ministries of this kind..., the ministry, for example, of the catechist, of directors of prayer and chant, of Christians dedicated to preaching the Word of God or to caring for their brethren in need, the ministry of directors of small communities, of the heads of apostolic movements and others of this kind, can be of the greatest value for establishing, vitalizing and extending the church."

Lay ministry has its basis in Baptism and Confirmation, in the importance of the ecclesial community and in the fact that the Spirit can create in the Church charisms and ministries which are accepted by the Church without the necessity of delegation, institution or regulation by the hierarchy. Clearly this is so even though there are regularly established lay ministries (with special liturgical initiation rites); these are the ministries of acolyte and lector (1972) and the extraordinary ministry of the Eucharist (1973). In short, there are three ministries of very low profile and significance. In order to avoid unnecessary clericalization it is preferable that the community itself organize the ministries.

#### e. The layperson's duty is also "ad intra".

The ecclesial duty of the laic (lay ministries) is exercised within the Church and outside it; the external obligations might be called "secular" ministries (which are only a part of the lay ministries).

The dichotomy "ad intra"/"ad extra", used to separate clergy and laity is a useless division. Actually all Christians share in the triple mission of Christ. This participation is based, not on any concession or delegation of the hierarchy, but on the layperson's own right which originates in Baptism and Confirmation, sacraments much more basic than the sacrament of Orders. As *Lumen Gentium* says (n.33): "Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to the apostolate by the Lord himself." (See also *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3 and 18; and *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 11.) In other words, there is a divine and Christian "missio" anterior to and more important than possible canonical missions. The ministry of the Word, for example, is not the exclusive domain of the clergy, as we see in the New Testament and in Church history, notwithstanding numerous monopolies and misunderstandings. The priesthood of the Faithful (more radical and fundamental than ordained ministry) is not only "ad extra"; it is a lay priesthood, like that of Jesus, not ritual but existential (Hebrews 10:6f). It is a priesthood which is exer-

cised on the altar of daily life and in the rite of the gift of life itself. The intraecclesial "koinonia" and "diakonia" (community and service) are the obligation of all, not only of the clergy. As for government, little by little the way is being cleared (eg, Canon 517.2). The Christian family (the "domestic Church") is absolutely essential for the internal life of the Church. (Parents and not the clergy are the ones who pass on the Faith, as we are being shown each day in very impressive ways.) Preferential service of the poor is not something "ad extra", but something very much in the heart of Christ and of the Church, which many laypersons and religious engage in anyway. As for "missio ad gentes", the clergy would have to be much more missionary, even in their own parishes, instead of limiting their activities to the hoary pastoral plan of maintaining the status quo. Seculars too would have to do more, but only rarely have seculars been in the van in mission countries (due to a whole series of difficulties--the family, the clerically cornered market of many ministries, etc.).

Lay religious also are described in much of what has been said, with the addition for them of institutionalized ministries, ie, those ministries confided by the Church to their Institutes. (10)

#### **f. Secularity "ad extra"**

The entire Church is in and of the world; in this sense the entire Church is "secular".

On the other hand, the word pair sacred/profane is quite blurred in a truly Christian vision of the Kingdom of God, understood as something wider and deeper than the Church we can see (creation has a theological value and no need whatever of clericalization). What is really profane is sin, oppression of people and forgetting about God.

Nevertheless, it is true that among the obligations of laypersons or seculars is whatever is secular, not in an exclusive way but as something that is more properly their concern. "This secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity.... By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.... They contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties." (LG,31)

Secularity means to move from clerical monopoly or from the unnecessary guardianship of the clergy to human autonomy (science, culture, economy, art, society). Consequently, declericalization, desacralization, deconfessionalization--these are good movements; not done in any way whatsoever,

but carried out by Christians, that is, by people open to the transcendent.

The laity do not lead worldly lives. There is no need to deny the Christian value of the activity of the world. Christianity secularized Jewish worship and religion, but at the same time it "sacralized" the profane life. In the humdrum of daily life, God is adored. To be a Christian is not to neglect temporal obligations but to have better motives for their fulfillment. (GS 43)

#### **g. Too much talk**

For some time now, a great deal has been said about the importance of the laity and their having reached majority of age. But in reality the picture is not so pretty. "There is a tendency to maintain a clerical throttle hold on important Church affairs. In questions of doctrine, discipline, government and leadership the importance of the sacrament of Holy Orders as the source of rights, competencies and obligations is stressed. In this context there is a tendency to minimize Baptism and Confirmation as the essential consecration of the Christian which permits the definition of spheres and limits of jurisdiction of the laity in the Church." (11) Nevertheless, the lack of priests and the growing awareness of the laity force the sharing of ministries, but "always with the fear that the proliferation of laymen's services and ministries will ultimately cast shadows on the theory and practice of the ordained ministry." (ibid.) Such discrimination is particularly serious in the case of women.

The fundamental problem is that we are navigating between two ecclesiologies, the pyramidal and the conciliar. We clergy and laity must grow beyond our old clericalizing education. Also the corresponding supports of the new ecclesiology are lacking.

Fortunately the very life of the Church encourages and forces theological and canonical reflection.

(9) Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, Paulist Press, 1984.

(10) "Institutionalized" ministries are not to be confused with "instituted" or established ministries, those that, since 1972 and 1973, a bishop can give through a liturgical missioning, which can be found in the book of rituals. These are ministries with little transcendental value: those of lector and acolyte (1972) and the extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. (1973)

(11) Estrada, *La Identidad...*, p. 304.