

WHY "BROTHERS" AND NOT "FATHERS"

Lay Religious for an Ecclesial Mission (7/9)

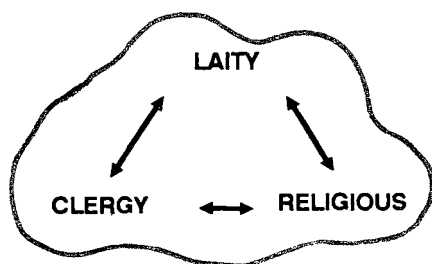
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e. Supremacy of the Religious Component

From the viewpoint which we have just examined and commented upon, primacy of place is given to the lay component. On the other hand, in this second opinion, what is most basic or substantive in the lay religious is the religious dimension; the lay dimension is second (but not secondary).

In this vision, the question introduces us, not into two basic areas (clergy/laity) but three: clergy, religious and laity (or seculars) equally distinct and complementary, in a context of fraternity or community. And that is the most important consideration. Among the followers of Jesus there were apostles, disciples who left everything, and disciples who continued their daily activities as usual. The earliest monks didn't want to be priests or bishops; nor did they want to live as "seculars".

**FRATERNITY
or
COMMUNITY
of
CHRISTIANS**



The lay religious and the secular walk hand in hand insofar as they are not clergy, but they differ as to life style and mission, or ecclesial ministry. In effect:

1. In terms of the secular's style of life (marriage, finances, personal decision making, political and professional commitment, etc.) every religious, lay or ordained, stresses a dimension of contrast, the counter-cultural, as should be the case for the entire Church(16); and within the Church, it is a particularly suitable role for religious, ordained or not. In this context, ordination is not an important consideration.

2. In terms of the ecclesial mission of the layman, the lay religious can have great similarities (for example, in the ecclesial ministry of the Christian school) and, at the same time, tremendous differences (as in the already mentioned case of contemplative nuns, who are also laywomen, quite evidently). Each case must be taken separately.

If we accept this vision, we must consider the principal consequences of giving primacy of place to the religious aspect.

– Expansion of our understanding of the religious dimension: To discover our real identity, we must enter more deeply into our character as religious, understood to be distinct yet complementary to that of clergy and laity.

– Fundamental characteristics: to be a religious, lay or not, requires some basic orientations, such as:

* to be one who lives in anticipation (by the radical and total nature of our consecration) of the utopia of the Kingdom;

* to be part of the counter-culture;

* to incarnate in a special way the celibacy of Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom, his option for the poor, his total dependence on the will of his Father, his style of life within community...;

* to carry out a prophetic duty: to be a man of God and to transmit to others the same attitude, to be a man of the present (signs of the times) and of the future, an agent of salvation and liberation; to be attentive to peoples' joys and hopes, their happiness and anguish (GS,1); to leave everything for the sake of the Kingdom and to become a living parable of God, for whom there are no proofs but only witnesses. The vows of religion are the prophetic renunciation of the excesses of greed, egocentric love, and self-sufficient pride.

* it is often said also that in temporal duties the religious should give more importance to symbol than to efficiency; in other words, to show that the kingdom of brotherhood already exists and that celibacy disposes one to love God and neighbor fully. Further, if we accept the notion that Christian education is much more than a temporal obligation, it is clear that its effectiveness is of the utmost importance. De La Salle was very concerned with the effectiveness or success of the schools, although his motive was nothing personal, evidently.(17)

f. The shadow cast by clericalism is always very long.

In theological terms it is clear: in the religious life, pride of place goes to brotherhood; the ideal is to be brothers with no importance given to clerical or lay status. Consequently in any community the person best suited to the task should have the authority to preside, with no need to ask for anyone's permission, should that person be a layman. Otherwise, the laity remains sideline. But that is not an easy change at all, as history demonstrates. On the other hand, the weight of canonical considerations further complicates the whole matter.(18)

(12) **Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Rome, 1982,24.**

(13) Meditation 201 is one of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat (which includes #'s 193 to 208). In these meditations De La Salle speaks of "masters" and his orientation is clearly biblical. In this sense, the meditations speak to all Catholic Christian teachers, who can apply them to their own concrete situations (state of life, etc.). As for the specific application proposed by De La Salle in these texts:

1) He speaks of the "Christian schools in which teaching is gratuitous and solely for the glory of God." (Med 194,1) He also says: "Thank God every day, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He has been pleased to establish this benefit and to give this support to the Church. Pray to Him fervently, too, that He will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day..." (Med 207,3)

2) He repeats what is clearly a very radical interpretation of the vocation, something perhaps more applicable to the religious life than to that of lay masters: "Accept with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer and be willing to be dishonored and mistreated by men, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry." (Med 201,1) "For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education..." (Med 201,3)

(14) Cf. *Rule*, 1987 edition, articles 2, 3, 12, 13, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 40, 42, 51, 87, 141. For example: "In response to the call of the Holy Spirit, each Brother freely, and without any thought of turning back, bases his whole existence on the Gospel.... He consecrates himself entirely to the Holy Trinity to procure the glory of God in the ministry of Christian education." (art 22)

(15) We have seen the text of Matthew (23:8-12): call no one Rabbi, or father, or teacher, but God alone; the greatest among you is the servant of all; "you are all brothers."

As C. Bermejo, speaking of the Franciscans, writes: "The one-on-one contact with ordinary people falls to the gate-keeper and the one who distributes alms, positions usually reserved for the lay brothers. And these men write page upon page resplendent with the true Franciscan spirit. Gospel brotherhood was transformed into a 'Mendicant Order'. The lay religious were 'the brothers' par excellence; the other religious were 'the Fathers'. Because of their work they have always been closer to the ordinary folk than the clerics." It must be added that "every Franciscan reform was begun by or counted among its promoters a lay brother." ("*El hermano laico en Institutos clericales. La experiencia franciscana*" in *Vida Religiosa* 74, 1993, 204)

J. Moral expresses this opinion: "It is a provable fact that the 'title' or the very behavior of the Brother or Sister, lay religious, eases the contact with others in many settings. It makes us less defensive, less closed, more open to communication and exchange, for it causes us to be less possessive, less dominating, less attached to privileged status, less self-centered, more generous in giving. It causes us to be warmer in our relationships, more attentive to the needs of others and freer in the manifestation of our own needs." (*Laicos, consagrados y educadores*, in *Vida Religiosa* 74, 1993, 210.)

(16) G. Lohfink, *La Iglesia que Jesús quería*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 1986.

(17) Cf. *Sauvage, op. cit.*, vol II, p. 45-47. It is evident today that the daily occupation, the school... cannot be reduced to a means or an instrument (as though it were only the needle that introduces the golden thread of catechesis into the tapestry of life, as has been suggested). On the other hand, if it is applied to the Lasallian concept of vocation as ministry, statements such as the following become quite ambiguous: "The consecrated life does not require that effectiveness go by the board; but its effectiveness is symbolic." J.C.R. García Paredes, "*Misión del religioso apóstol en la Iglesia y en el mundo de hoy: Institutos religiosos laicales masculinos*," Bulletin of the Institute FSC, No. 239, p. 36, ARLEP, No. 163,

1993, No. 34) "The Brothers of the Christian Schools have not been raised up to solve educational problems, but much more. They have not come into being as an effective tool for such problems, but as a symbol, a sign, that inspires and leads society and the Church to resolve its educational problems in light of the Kingdom of God. The vocabulary which describes the mission of the 'christifideles consecrati' (or religious) is not so much the vocabulary of agency (to cause, to educate, to heal) as the vocabulary of symbol (to signify, to inspire, to refer to, to manifest, to stimulate, to go beyond)." (Idem, *ibid.*, n. 39) Our foundational texts go far beyond that: "The end of this Institute is to give Christian education..."

(18) For example, among the Friars Minor or Franciscans, at the very origins of their community; or even today when Rome requires them to be a clerical order, against their own declared desire. Cf. C. Bermejo (*loc. cit.*). For example: The brothers "suffered their inequality as regards the ordained membership... since it was well known that their manual work was considered as less..." (p. 199). "The current 'clerical' status of the Franciscan family runs directly counter to the original intention of the Poverello." (*ibid.*) The fundamental mission of the Franciscan is to be a "friar minor", to live brotherhood." As long as, from a juridical point of view, there continue to exist in the Franciscan world two 'classes' of brother, we will not live the brotherhood that the Lord revealed to Francis." (p. 201) At first everybody, both cleric and lay religious, used to preach; then Francis introduced the condition that preachers were to be approved by their ministers (i.e., their superiors). (*ibid.*) "The ensuing drama of Franciscanism was not that some were allowed to preach and others had to do the menial tasks but that some were marked and chosen for apostolic ministry (the clerics) and the rest were relegated to manual labor (the lay religious)." (*ibid.*) In his Testament, Francis restates his conviction of the value of manual work for all. It is a known fact that he was not a priest. He died in 1226. Until 1239 all the Ministers General were lay brothers. From that point on the Order became more clerical in nature due to the lack of solid formation of the lay religious (in spite of the fact that for many years they were the majority; in the event, their number decreased notably). Such clericalization resulted also from the influence of the lettered (educated) clergy, university professors (who, intimidated by the example of the Dominicans, wanted a powerful Order, linked to university chairs, the pulpit and the confessional). "The hunch of Francis in regard to lettered ordained membership was realized. Paris put Assisi to the sword." (p. 203) As a result, "the lay religious, inadequately trained, were not eligible to be chosen as superiors, and at the same time they were denied the possibility of a suitable formation. We have therefore two parallel vocations in Franciscanism. The Franciscan charism has been stricken at its very heart: brotherhood." (p. 203) Some have voice and others don't." St. Bonaventure speaks of 'ants' (the lay brothers) and 'bees' (the clerics). The former work so that the latter can devote themselves to duties 'more worthy of their attentions'. This might work for another order; but not for the Franciscans." (*ibid.*) The importance of sacramental administration, choral recitation of the Office and study continued to increase. Happily, since Vatican II things have considerably changed in the Franciscan family (Friars Minor, Capuchins, Conventuals); with proper authorization some lay brothers have been named guardians (local superiors) and even provincials. In their respective Constitutions, there is no expressed distinction between clerics and lay religious; the sole objective is to be a fraternity in which all have the same rights and obligations. Unfortunately the Code of Canon Law doesn't allow for anything between the two poles of clerical Institutes and lay Institutes. The Sacred Congregation has fortified that position by adding to the Constitutions: "The Church numbers the Order among the clerical Institutes." However, "for the Friars Minor this is not a merely theoretical or juridical question, but goes to the very heart of the matter. It poses for us the question of remaining faithful or not to the charism given by God to Francis." (p. 205)

Let us recall too that for reasons of orderliness St. John Baptist de La Salle had to establish two classifications: the "school Brothers" and the "serving Brothers", with different habits and vows. That difference lasted until the French Revolution. Some years after the death of the Founder some serving Brothers complained to the Archbishop of Rouen that they were treated as second class religious. (Cf. *Sauvage, op. cit.*, vol II, p. 85)