

WHY "BROTHERS" AND NOT "FATHERS"

Lay Religious for an Ecclesial Mission (2/9)

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f. Two levels and three focal points

In order to maintain a modicum of order, when it comes to outlining the differences between the clergy, laity and religious, two levels should be kept separated: the ecclesial ministry of each group; and its life style. For example, as far as the ministry is concerned, the clergy clearly differ from seculars, but in terms of style of life the clergy are more "worldly" and much closer to seculars than to religious. In fact, clerics used to be able to contract marriage. In the primitive Church even bishops were married, as is clearly stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-5; and today there are married Catholic clergymen. Clerics enjoy great freedom in the disposition of their money and their time, and in the way they order their lives. It should cause no astonishment then that the following question has been posed insistently throughout the ages: Is the ministerial priesthood a state of life, like the lay and religious states, or is it rather a function within the Church? It is true that the clerical ministry requires a suitable life style, in keeping with the demands made on one who represents the Church in a particular way. But every ecclesial ministry requires the following of Jesus and a style of life in agreement with Gospel mandates. At times there can even be special public reverberations, as for example in the case of the Christian teacher.

Furthermore, in treating this theme we should not confuse three distinct focal points: the historical (variable by its very nature); the theological (to which primacy of place must be ceded); and the canonical (also variable and a poor enough subject, at times. For example, St Vincent de Paul preferred that his daughters not be "religious" canonically speaking, so that they could serve the Church with greater flexibility; and centuries had to pass--right up to the Code of 1917--before members of women's religious congregations were considered religious in the full sense of the word.)

g. Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law (1983)

The Council distinguishes three basic groups in the Church: laity (seculars), clergy and religious. For example: "The term "laity" is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church." (LG 31) The Council further states: "Lay religious life, for men and for women, is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself." (PC 10)

Contrarily, the Code sets apart only two groups: clergy and laity. After speaking of the "sacred ministers" or "clergy", it goes on: "The others are called lay people." (Canon 207.1) In each of these two groups there can be religious (Canon 207.2) who can be clerical or lay religious (Canon 588.2 and .3). The same distinction is made in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. (3)

h. Our Plan of Procedure

The lay religious state cannot be understood without first having a clear understanding of the lay state in the Church. However, this state is understandable only as a sad result of the progressive clericalization of the Church. (Part 2) Happily Vatican I has given us a more Christian ecclesiology, the ecclesiology of communion. (Part 3) The foregoing conceded, we can then ask ourselves: "What is more substantive in the lay religious state: the lay character or the religious character?" (Part 4) Some respond that the former is, and some the latter; it depends on their underlying ecclesiology. But from a Lasallian perspective, there is a better answer: give primacy of position to the apostolic mission. (Part 5) Finally, to bring closure, we will consider once more the Christian vocation and the lay vocation. (Part 6)

2. PROGRESSIVE CLERICALIZATION OF THE CHURCH: Nobility and Commoners

a. The first frontier: clergy and laity

In the New Testament equality among the faithful is the predominant idea; neither the word "lay" nor the word "priest" (in the restricted sense we give to it nowadays) is mentioned. The word "priest" was applicable to everyone; all Christians were heirs of the promises, a people chosen and set apart. All were brothers and sisters, the people of God. A common priesthood or a priesthood of the faithful was insisted upon. In short, all were equally Christian, although not everyone carried out the same functions; there were apostles, prophets, teachers, doctors....

But little by little differences arise and distinctions are drawn: first, the division between clergy and non-clergy or laity (towards the end of the second century and the beginnings of the third); and then the appearance of monks (fourth century). (4)

Those who preside at the Eucharist (bishops, presbyters) begin to be called priests (a name which formerly was applied to all Christians, "a priestly people"). In this way the

ancient division of the Old Testament (and of pagan religions) between priests and non-priests reappeared, supplanting the living out to the full the radical newness of the priesthood of Christ.

It has been said that the problem is not in calling priests those who preside (as is the usage in almost all religions). The problem lies in this, that (the priests) may forget that they are servants of an already priestly people. It is in the continuing limitation of the significance and functions of the rest of the Christian people. It is in seeing the celebration of the Eucharist as a personal and not a communal celebration. It is in forgetting that the priesthood of Christ is not a ritual priesthood but an existential one and that, therefore, the primordial priesthood of all Christians is part of life itself (while the ministerial priesthood is at the service of this communal priesthood). (5)

For its part the body of the laity goes on taking its shape from two types of deposit or cultural influence, the Roman and the Jewish, both with negative undertones. For the Romans the laic was a member of the "plebs", which is to say a commoner; for the Jews the lay equated with the profane, the not-consecrated-to-God. The laity are therefore the people who are responsible for nothing, the not-clergy, the not-sacred people, the faceless and voiceless ones.

The capture of two words ("brother" and "priest") and a radical change in the meaning of a third ("ministry") are the consequences of all this. In effect, the word "brother", the common property of all Christians, becomes reserved for clerics for use among themselves, and for monks in their monasteries. The laity are called "sons". The Church therefore is spoken of less and less as a brotherhood; instead of a fraternal bond, a father/child relationship takes root. The word "priest", common to all Christians, becomes the property of the clergy. It is they who have the Lord as their inheritance. It is they who are the portion chosen for the Lord and set apart, as once was the tribe of Levi. In short, the word "minister" ("ministry"), which etymologically means servant and in the Gospel includes making oneself a slave and the last of all is changed brazenly from a sign to a rank, at once elevated above the laity, socially superior, and far more dignified.

b. A pyramidal, juridical, hierarchical Church: A society of unequals

The Church gradually assumes the shape of a pyramid with some on top and some on the bottom.

The Gregorian Reform (Gregory VII, ob. 1085) brings the developments a step further. The disagreement over the right of investiture forces the Church to extricate itself from the intrigues of laypersons (emperors, princes, potentates); it proves necessary to remove ecclesiastical nominations from the political arena and to reform the Church in many ways. Hand in hand with this development, the existence of benefices and prebends fosters a growth in the ranks of the

clergy and a consequent diminution in the importance of the laity. The monopoly of the clergy in "intra-ecclesial" matters ("ad intra"), then, becomes more pronounced. The mission of the laity is only outside the Church ("ad extra"). In this way arise the monarchical centrality of the papacy and even papal intervention in temporal affairs. Thus the Church identifies itself with the clergy, as we shall see in more detail. Ecclesiology became "hierarcology" and the laity found themselves reduced to passivity, to obedience and to the status of followers. Trent confirmed and completed the Gregorian Reform. The Church was understood to be a "perfect society" in which some gave the orders and others obeyed. Closer to our time, various documents of the nineteenth century insist upon this lack of equality. And in our own century this text of St Pius X ("*Vehementer Nos*", 1906) has sadly become famous: "The Church is, by its very nature, an unequal society, that is to say, a society which embraces two classes of people: the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different grades of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. ... In what concerns the multitude, it has no other rights than to allow itself to be led and, like sheep loyal to their master, to follow its shepherds."

(3) In this respect, it says, for example: "In #873, the Catechism, following the Code, recognizes the objective existence of only two states, the clerical and the lay. Religious life do not incarnate any definitively ecclesial reality; they are simply a canonical grouping, who, if they enjoy any particular juridical personality, do so for the simple reason that the Code concedes it to them. Religious life as such do not have any ecclesial existence; in ecclesial terminology, they are either clerics, if they receive the sacrament of Orders; or, the only other possibility, they are laics. Women religious are all part of this latter group." (A. Bandera, *Catecismo de la Iglesia católica*, Ciencia Tomista 120, 1993, p. 266.) Also: "Canon 207 and the Catechism, which accepts it, reduce the religious life to an historical phenomenon, which just as it had a beginning 'in the first centuries of Christianity' (#925), can also have an end in the future; it is not an essential of the Church, nor is it necessary for the life of the Church." (ibid, p. 264)

(4) In a much deeper sense, it must be said that the religious life is much more than an historical phenomenon put into motion by the founders. It comes from the way Jesus himself practiced the evangelical counsels during his public ministry. The religious life "is of divine origin, because only in it is found and perpetuated the revelatory and redemptive value of the way in which Christ practiced the counsels (...). The way in which religious consecrate themselves to the practice of the counsels did not originate 'in the Middle East in the first centuries of Christianity'; it finds its origin in the very person of Jesus and in the way in which he put them into practice. That manner of living contains public revelation and public redemption." (A. Bandera, loc. cit., p. 251) The Catechism itself recognizes that "The entire life of Christ was a continuous teaching: his silence, his miracles, his deeds (...) his predilection for children (...) are his word put into action and the fulfilling of revelation." (n. 561) The evangelical counsels are founded upon "the teaching and example of Christ." (LG, 43) "From the very beginning of the Church there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels. They led lives dedicated to God, each in his own way." (PC, 1)

(5) Cf. Estrada, *La identidad...*, p. 59.