

The two following articles are on the ordained priesthood. The first, available in its entirety from *New Catholic Times: sensus fidelium*, suggests a sinister motivation for the declaration of "The Year of the Priest."

The second article examines the role of priest as liturgical presider.

The Year of the Priest 2009 – 2010

The official Year of the Priest is a blatant attempt by the high powers of the curia to restore a fallen dynasty.

A special indulgence has been granted by the Apostolic Penitentiary for those who attend Mass and offer prayers to Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, for the priests of the Church during this year. (Plenary and partial indulgences are still available until June 19, 2010)

"...the ordained priesthood is essential to the encounter with Christ through word and sacrament that the Church exists to foster." (Tablet editorial, March 11, 2010)

"O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...". St. Jean Marie Vianney as quoted by Benedict XVI in letter to priests.

Pope Benedict XVI declared that on June 19, 2009, the celebration of the death of the Cure d'Ars, St Jean Vianney, some 150 years ago would mark the beginning of a "Year of the Priest". This would be a special year for the entire Church to reflect on the "priesthood" and its role in the life of the church. Unfortunately this could be just an ideological exercise to reinforce and defend the current paradigm of "priesthood".

... The priesthood as we know it did not originate with Jesus. ... There is no indication that Jesus ever thought of designating a special group of his followers as "priests". Any extrapolation of the "Last Supper" story to the institution of the priesthood is myth building by a group that eventually saw itself as a select and privileged group within the community. No-one really knows who was present during the "Last Supper" but surely the Jesus who was all about inclusivity was not about to "exclude" the majority or to set up a clique of privileged disciples with the "powers" of institution that went with the words "Do this in my memory".

There seems no doubt that there was an inner circle of "apostles" and that one, Simon, was later designated as Kephaz (the rock) (Matt16) or Peter. This group of apostles, whatever its original constituents, was not replaced after its members died or were martyred. Claims that today's bishops are linear successors of these apostles is again myth that is used to legitimate their authority and privilege in a system which has divided the church into two groups - the clergy and the laity. That is the beginning of the problem.

... The formal priesthood has hijacked the sacramental life of the church and transformed it into a package of commodities that are rationed and controlled by a self-appointed ruling elite. This group has total control of the club - membership is restricted and promotions are designed to ensure that only persons with cloned mental pathways are chosen. This is most obvious when reviewing the bishops appointed by JP2 and B16. They cannot be blamed for the way they respond to the crisis in the Church today

because they were chosen precisely because it was anticipated that they would choose loyalty to the clerical system of privilege and exclusion rather than care of the people. The continuing revelations of sexual abuse by clergy are compounded by the systemic denial and complicity of the hierarchy including papal nuncios. The promotion of Cardinal Law and the obstinate defence of Marcial Maciel by JP2 is just an obvious example of the corruption that is inherent in the clerical system.

To suggest that "the ordained priesthood is essential to the encounter with Christ through word and sacrament" suggests that one is stuck in the mire of the old paradigm. The word and the sacraments belong to the church, which is to the people who believe. As noted the clergy are no longer the only educated folk in the village, and often not the best theologically trained in the community. Women in faculties of theology have for decades far surpassed seminarians in academic standing and theological perceptiveness. The clergy candidates did not need to excel as their promotion and ordination was pre-determined by the exclusive criteria of the club.

Richard McBrien (NCR, Sept 14, 2009) has suggested that there are at least ten issues that need to be considered when trying to understand the malaise that B16 hopes to cure with this special "Year of the Priest". Certainly celibacy is one of the big issues, but this is not simply a matter of "let them get married". The celibacy issue encompasses the whole gambit of related aspects - including the selection of pre-pubescent candidates who were "formed" in artificial male hierarchical institutions which perpetuated a disembodied ethos of spirituality. There are troubling signals coming from candidates to the priesthood and recently ordained who cherish the symbols of clericalism - indications that they seek exclusion and privilege apart from the body of the church. Those priests ordained in the enthusiasm of Vatican II find themselves challenged by a new breed of JP2 priests and bishops who seek a restoration to a status common before Vatican II.

"You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, clergy nor laity, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (NIV - Galatians 3:28-28 modified) In the Church of Vatican III perhaps "priesthood" will be taken out of ministry. The community needs its guides, its mentors, its spiritual lanterns. The community needs its teachers and its prophets. I think of the little old ladies who in my parish in Peru would come on Saturdays to clean the sanctuary and adorn the altar with fresh flowers. Theirs too was ministry. With respect to St. Jean Marie Vianney, the community does not need a group that still thinks it can command God to be contained in a "small host" or that thinks it has exclusive rights to a Burger King type franchise that distributes the sacraments only to a clientele of its choosing. If the clergy take ownership of the sacraments, it is to perpetuate a false denial that the sacraments belong to and are already within the people of God. Jesus taught us that forgiveness is an act of liberation and that it is the path to healing. People can forgive and be forgiven without priests, and yes, even celebrate forgiveness as a way to build community. Through the breaking of bread, or perhaps just an ordinary pot luck dinner, the community can nourish its body and soul.

The official Year of the Priest is a blatant attempt by the high powers of the curia to restore a fallen dynasty. This system has expropriated and abused its self declared exclusionary powers to interpret the word and to control the sacraments turning them into commodities rather than encounters with the mystical energy of a loving and healing God. A new paradigm of leadership is needed, that will require continual renewal and

scrutiny. The people cannot be denied Eucharist due to a shortage of ordained fingers. This is what the Pope and his entourage most fear - that the community of the faithful will discover that the word and the sacraments dwell within them as a community of faith. All they need to do is to exercise those gifts in a spirit of inclusivity and love.

Doing so they will encounter the Lord as on the road to Emmaus, in retelling the story and breaking the bread.

Clericalism and the Liturgy

by Fr. Paul Philibert

... A type of clericalism has been revived over the last 20 or 25 years that is subduing the apostolic vision of the church sketched by Vatican II. It is overemphasizing the part played by the ordained in the life of the church. There are many symptoms, from cardinals unpacking their 15-foot trains of scarlet silk — cappa magnas (ceremonial capes) — to seminarians and young priests living full time in cassocks; from the disappearance of inclusive language in church texts and preaching, to the nearly exclusive focus upon clerical vocations in diocesan letters. Seminarians are in short supply, and officials fear that the generalized secularization of the culture and particularly the promotion of laypersons to ministries of service in the church will have the effect of discouraging vocations to the ordained priesthood. The consequent demotion of the spiritual dignity of the faithful and a chilling of social relations between clergy and people are all too clear among some church leaders. These details are debatable; they vary from place to place. Far more significant is the underlying vision and practice of what goes on in the local church.

I am trying to describe here an implicit popular theology of the church that appears to be widespread. These ideas represent not only people's general understanding of what the church is about, but also much in pulpit preaching and in church documents as well.

Here is a brief description of the problem:

(a) In this popular theology, the priest represents Christ, while the people represent those to whom Christ ministered. During this "Year for Priests," we have heard lots about how important the figure of the priest is. However, I have yet to hear anyone echo the clear teaching of St. Paul that each of the baptized is an alter Christus — another Christ — and has a vocation to share the church's mission through an apostolic life in the ordinary world.

(b) In this popular theology, the ordained presbyter (priest) is understood to be the one who is active in the Eucharist as the agent of reenacting Holy Thursday and Good Friday, while the people are sacramentally passive as recipients of the priest's sacred action. Some of those who buy into this vision of the Eucharist are hungry to hear Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony and Latin texts while they are edified by the priest's awesome rites. This reduction of the laity to passive bystanders instead of active participants in Catholic worship is the most characteristic manifestation of clericalism.

(c) One additional aspect of this implicit popular theology has to do with the Holy Spirit. It imagines that if the Spirit is bestowed on the faithful, it will come exclusively through the ministry of the ordained. It presupposes that the faithful are directly dependent upon bishops and priests for their sanctification. This ignores the rich teaching of Romans and First Corinthians that baptism gives the faithful the power to live and act under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and to be powerful witnesses to God's action in the world.

Speaking through the council fathers, the Spirit at Vatican II left no doubt that all three of these theological manifestations of clericalism are wrong. In the "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests," we read: "Jesus gave his whole mystical body a share in the anointing of the Spirit with which he was anointed. In that body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ ... therefore there is no such thing as a member who does not have a share in the mission of the whole body" (Presbyterorum Ordinis 2). Put another way, each of the faithful, positioned in some way at the church's periphery, has the potential to initiate a more dynamic expression of the living church, calibrated precisely to the real existing possibilities for life that are always emerging there.

To the idea that the priest celebrates the Eucharist and that the faithful are nourished from afar, the council insisted on the contrary: "The eucharistic celebration is the center of the assembly of the faithful over which the priest presides. Hence priests [must] teach the faithful to offer the divine victim to God the Father in the sacrifice of the Mass and with the victim to make an offering of their own lives" (Presbyterorum Ordinis 5). By offering themselves and their apostolic action in the world, the faithful bring the fruit of their baptismal priesthood (which is essentially non-liturgical and lived out in the world) to the church's fundamental act of sacrifice and self-offering to God at Mass. When this role of the faithful is denied, then Sunday Mass becomes the place where people assemble not as a priestly people offering their lives to God, but as individuals praying private devotions as they watch the priest offer sacred rites on a distant altar.

To the idea that the faithful are sanctified uniquely through the ministries of the ordained, the "Constitution on the Church" clearly says: "The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all their Christian activities they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the marvels of him who has called them out of darkness into his wonderful light" (Lumen Gentium 10). In other words, the vocation that the church offers to the faithful is not a secondary role as clients of clerical ministries, but a Spirit-filled participation as pioneers in the church's role as herald of the kingdom of God.

... The laity is supposed to be the link between the church and the world. Pope Paul VI describes laypeople as those whose vocation places them in the midst of the world, in charge of the most varied temporal tasks. He goes on to say: "Their primary and immediate task is ... to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 70). A church that forgets this and fails to commission the laity to this irreplaceable dynamic role in the culture has let go of the great commission that Christ left to the church as his last mandate: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15; Matt 28:19). It is a church that has forgotten that it is baptizing and confirming missionaries "to make the church present and fruitful in those places in circumstances where it is only through them that it can become the salt of the earth" (Lumen Gentium 33).

Finally, we should also note that there has never been a moment in which the irreplaceable role of the ordained minister has been more important. We need a ministerial priesthood at the service of the common priesthood of the baptized (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1547), we need presbyters who can teach the faithful

to offer their own lives along with the divine victim in the sacrifice of the Mass (Presbyterorum Ordinis 5), we need ministers of the Gospel who recognize that “the distinct character of [their] activities is the aim to proclaim the Gospel of God” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 68) in ways to draw people effectively to the heart of Christ. But this ordained ministry cannot be the condescension of a patriarchal master, but only the loving service of an apostolic brother. The very nature of the church demands it. The parish is not about giving passive Christians spiritual comfort; it is rather the recruiting center for an apostolic priestly people. The Spirit is waiting. The people are waiting. What are you waiting for?

The full article, and a biographical sketch of the author, is available at [Celebration](#), a publication of the National Catholic Reporter.

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