

NOTES AND COMMENTS

MIXED PRIESTLY TRAINING

IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY AND THE MAGISTERIUM

An appraisal of certain disastrous reforms in Seminary education which boast of "inventing" today experience that have failed yesterday.

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(Continued)

VIII

Epilogue

The aim of the study made in the previous chapters was not indeed to preclude sound reforms towards an opportune and prudent "openness" of our Seminaries to the world, so as to provide the young candidates to the Priesthood with a useful and salutary knowledge of the world they are called to save. But we are definitely opposed to certain experiments undertaken commonly under the guise of "aggiornamento" and renewal, which seem to ignore or disparage the lessons of history and of the Church Magisterium. Such experiments are surely doomed to failure, and what is worse, they will certainly cause incalculable harm to the clergy and the faithful. It is our belief that the sinister mistake of these experiments will become glaringly evident in a near future. Then, we will have to retrace our steps and try to regain the wisdom of past lessons, but it will be too late to repair the damage already done to the Church. We consider it our duty to spare her the distress portended by such ill-fated experiments. That is why I dwelt minutely on this subject of *mixed priestly training*.

At the end of this study there seems nothing more opportune than to quote here the most recent and authoritative reflections on the matter discussed, made by Cardinal Pericle Felici, Secretary of the Vatican

II Central Postconciliar Commission, and the Holy Father Pope Paul VI. Nowhere can be found better expressed what we all should keep in mind about this momentous subject.

Vatican Radio faced this delicate problem, especially in what concerns authentic "openness" to the world of which so much is said today: it organized a symposium at the beginning of the year 1967. L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO in its issue of February 9 of the same year published the reflections of Cardinal FELICI on the matter. We translate from the original Italian text:

"It seems to me logical that the priest, who is a man and not an angel, and who has to exercise his ministry among men, should be educated in such a way that he may know fittingly the world and men with their individual and collective problems, with their virtues and vices.

"But the problem is not here: it is in the measure and manner in which that 'openness' to the world must be carried out.

"The world, in reality, is not only that fair creature that came from the hands of God. It is also the world of sin, that refuses to acknowledge Christ, and for which Christ does not pray. On the other hand, the young seminarian, notwithstanding all his good will cannot remain insensible to, or immune from, the snares of evil. We should not forget that the *exceptional* nature of the priestly vocation, ministry and commitment does not allow to place in the same level those called to the priesthood and those who are not.

"For this reason it is difficult to give norms of 'openness' to the world, which may be valid for all, for all times and for all peoples.

"But I ask myself: Is this after all the most important problem in the formation of seminarians?

"I do not believe that the dearth of vocations or lack of perseverance among some priest, even among the young, should be attributed precisely to the insufficient 'openness' of the Seminaries of yesterday towards the world, or to the question of the cassock which could alienate or isolate the seminarians from the rest of men. I would rather say that **MANY VOCATIONS ARE LOST OR DASH UPON THE**

ROCKS, JUST BECAUSE OF IMPRUDENT CONTACT WITH THE WORLD, OR BECAUSE OF THE INTENT TO 'SECULARIZE' OR LAICIZE' PRIESTLY LIFE AND MINISTRY.

"I would be more concerned with the intellectual, *moral and spiritual formation* of the Seminarian. I would give him the best superiors and professors, capable of guiding him in the difficult path that leads to the priesthood and of training him with prudence, love and open spirit; directors who could dialogue with him, without paternalism but with kindly authority that comes from one who feels to be a father in the name of the Lord; one who can accept whatever good may come from the mind, heart or experience, however short but intensely lived, of the young seminarian. This, on his part, should study his vocation, and give to the work of his formation that authenticity which finds its highest expression in the imitation of that Christ who was humble, obedient, long-suffering, pure and burning with charity.

"About charity, which is the sum and substance of priestly life and ministry, most strange ideas are sometimes heard. Under the pretext of exercising a sort of charity understood in an absolutely subjective sense, some people undervalue and openly disregard the other virtues.

"Perhaps it is timely to recall that Christ showed his great love towards God and towards men by doing the Will of the Father, and by suffering and dying for mankind; and the precept of love, being the first and greatest commandment of the Lord, constitutes the acme of perfection, which one cannot reach without climbing patiently and perseveringly the flight of steps which are the other commandments. In each one of them, as in the everyday acts of self-denial to keep oneself away from sin, there is alive and operative an act of love.

"But let us go back to the question of 'openness'. With a spiritual training thus well established, I am of the opinion that the seminarian maintain contacts with his own family, especially during vacations. The fourth commandment does not vanish at the threshold of the Seminary: rather it is ennobled and rendered sublime in the Seminary.

"I also welcome the forms of apostolate which we might call of experiment or initiation, for instance, in the parishes, under the pastor's

guidance. Likewise I approved other timely contacts approved by the Superiors.

"There can be no doubt that seminarians must be wisely trained in the use of modern mass media of communication which are so important in the apostolate. But let us bear in mind that *use* is not the same as *abuse*.

"An 'openness' that is *sound, moderate, PRUDENT* and therefore *GRADUAL* will help the seminarian solve certain delicate spiritual problems, as that of personal affectivity, which must be however brought up in harmony with the ideals of a total dedication to the Lord and to the Church, with a full understanding of whatever is not permitted in the Priesthood, however good and holy it may be in other states of life.

"Let us not think that such grave and hazardous problems that venture the whole life of a priest may find simply their solution in this overrated 'openness' to the world. There is ANOTHER 'OPENNESS', MUCH MORE IMPORTANT, WHICH WE OUGHT TO DEVELOP: 'OPENNESS' TO GOD, from Whom comes all grace, strength and blessing. With His help, the seminarian will become the 'homo Dei'—the man of God—and only in His Name shall he be able to open a heart big enough to embrace all men as brothers."

Here end the wise remarks of His Eminence Cardinal Pericle Felici. Let us listen now the words of the Vicar of Christ. Pope Paul VI in his usual Lenten Address to the clergy of Rome on 17 February 1969 offers us most relevant considerations and warnings about the ambiguously vaunted "openness" to the world:²⁰

"In the first place we must recall some dynamic ideas, which are travelling through the whole Church today, and which are upsetting ecclesiastics particularly. The first of these ideas concerns the figure of the priest. He is nearly always considered from the outside, in his sociological position, in the framework of contemporary society, which as everyone knows, is completely in movement, completely in transformation.

²⁰ Original Italian text in L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 17-18 February issue of 1969. English translation in the English edition of the same L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 27 February 1969. Cf. CHRIST TO THE WORLD, 1969 Vol. XIV — No. 3, pp. 186-192.

"The priest, remaining in his place, has seen himself *abandoned by his traditional community*; in many places there is emptiness around him; in others the pastoral clientele has changed; *it is difficult to approach them*, difficult to understand them, difficult to interest them in religious matters, difficult to reassemble them in a friendly, faithful, praying community.

"The priest, then, has begun to ask himself what he is doing in a world so different from the world he used to assist. Who is listening to him? And *how can he make himself heard?*...

"And then the new dynamic idea came to him: he must do something: he must *do his utmost to draw near to the people again, to understand them, evangelize them*. The idea, in itself, is an excellent one; and we have seen it germinate from the charity in the desolate heart of the priest, who felt excluded from the world in which he should have been the central figure, the teacher and pastor...

"The incongruity and the suffering of this fate have become intolerable. The priest has sought inspiration and energy in the depth and essence of his vocation. We must move, he said, and take up the 'mission' again; and he *sometimes* said so **TO THE DETRIMENT EVEN OF THE CELEBRATION OF DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE NORMAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS.**

"The idea, We say, is excellent and the sign of a noble priestly conscience. *The priest is not for himself, he is for others; the priest must go in pursuit of men to turn them into faithful*, and not just wait for men to come to him; if his church is empty, he will have to "go out into the streets and lanes of the city" in search of poor people... This apostolic urgency is weighing on the hearts of so many priest, whose churches have become deserted. And when it is so, how can we fail to admire them? How can we fail to support them?

"But **LET US BE CAREFUL**, keeping in mind the experimental and positive character of the apostolate. In the first place: **IT IS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS.** *There are still communities of faithful overflowing with people and EAGER FOR NORMAL OBSERVANCE:* why should we leave them? why change the method of ministry for them, when the latter is still authentic, valid and magnificently

fruitful? Would we not be wronging the fidelity of so many good Christians to embark on adventures the outcome of which is uncertain?

"WE MUST BE CAREFUL. *The need, nay the duty, of an efficacious mission inserted in the reality of social life may produce other drawbacks, such as that of DEPRECIATING THE SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL MINISTRY, as if it were a curb and an obstacle as regards the direct evangelization of the modern world; or the attempt, rather widespread today, to MAKE THE PRIEST A MAN LIKE ANY OTHER, in dress, in secular profession, in going to places of entertainment, in WORLDLY EXPERIENCE, in social and political commitment, in the formation of a family of his own WITH RENUNCIATION OF HOLY CELIBACY.* People say this is an attempt TO INTEGRATE THE PRIEST INTO SOCIETY.

"Is this the way to understand the masterly word of Jesus, *Who wants us IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD?* Did He not call and choose His disciples, those who were to extend and continue the announcement of the kingdom of God, DISTINGUISHING THEM, IN FACT SEPARATING THEM FROM THE ORDINARY WAY OF LIFE, and asking them to LEAVE EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW HIM ALONE?

"*The whole Gospel speaks of this qualification, this "SPECIALIZATION" of the disciples who were afterwards to act as apostles. JESUS TOOK THEM AWAY, not without their radical sacrifice, from their everyday occupations, from their sacrosanct affections; and He wished them to be dedicated to Himself WITH THE COMPLETE GIFT OF THEMSELVES, COMMITTING THEMSELVES FOR EVER, and although this response was to be free and spontaneous, He expected it to be one of TOTAL RENUNCIATION AND HEROIC IMMOLATION. Let us listen again to the list of what we must relinquish from the lips of Jesus Himself: EVERYONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSES, BROTHERS, SISTERS, FATHER, MOTHER, CHILDREN OR LAND FOR THE SAKE OF MY NAME...*" (Matth. 19, 29). And the disciples were aware of this personal and paradoxical condition of theirs: Peter says: "WE HAVE LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED YOU" (Ib. 27)

"Can the disciple, the apostle, **THE PRIEST, THE AUTHENTIC MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL BE A MAN SOCIALLY LIKE OTHER MEN?** He can indeed be poor, like others, a brother, for others; a servant, of others; a victim, for others; but *at the same time HE IS ENDOWED WITH A LOFTY AND VERY SPECIAL FUNCTION.* "*You are the salt of the earth... You are light of the world!*" And it is clear, if we have the concept of the organic composition of the body of the Church. St. Paul could not be more explicit in this connection... "*Nor is the body to be identified with any one of its many parts... If all the parts were the same, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one...*" (I Cor. 12, 14-21 ss.)

"*The diversity of functions is a constitutional principle in the Church of God; and IT CONCERNS FIRSTLY THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD.* Let us take care **NOT TO LOSE THIS SPECIFIC FUNCTION OUT OF A MISTAKEN INTENTION OF ASSIMILATION, OF "DEMOCRATIZATION" as is said today,** in the society around us: "**IF SALT LOSES ITS TASTE, WHAT IS THERE LEFT TO GIVE TASTE TO IT? THERE IS NO MORE TO BE DONE WITH IT, BUT THROW IT OUT OF DOORS FOR MEN TO THREAD IT UNDER FOOT.**" (Mt. 5, 13)

"*These are the words of the Lord, which must make us reflect on the discernment necessary in the application of the formula quoted: TO BE IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD.* The lack of this discernment, of which **ECCLESIASTICAL EDUCATION, ASCETIC TRADITION, CANON LAW HAVE SPOKEN TO US SO MUCH,** may lead to just the opposite effect from the one we had hoped to obtain when we imprudently abandoned it: *effectiveness, renewal, modernity.* **IN THIS WAY, IN FACT, THE EFFICACY OF THE PRIEST'S PRESENCE AND ACTION IN THE WORLD MAY BE WIPED OUT:** that very efficacy which we hoped to obtain when we *imprudently* reacted to the separation of the priest from the rest of society. **WIPED OUT: IN THE ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE,** and by the *practical necessity of dedicating to secular occupations and human affections: time, heart,*

freedom, superiority of spirit (cfr. I Cor. 2, 15), which SHOULD HAVE BEEN KEPT FOR THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY.

"We repeat, venerated and beloved brothers, WE MUST BE CAREFUL. THIS DESIRE TO INSERT THE PRIEST IN THE SOCIAL SETTING in which his life and his ministry take place, IS GOOD IN ITSELF, but *from being a generous intention to emerge from the shell of a crystallized and privileged condition, IT MAY BECOME A GRAVE ERROR WHICH MAY PARALYZE THE PRIESTLY VOCATION in its most intimate, its most charismatic, its most fruitful aspects; and IT MAY SUDDENLY DEMOLISH THE EDIFICE OF PASTORAL FUNCTIONALITY.*

"AS IT MAY ALSO EXPOSE GOOD PRIESTS, YOUNG ONES PARTICULARLY, TO THE INFLUENCES OF THE MOST QUESTIONABLE AND DANGEROUS MOVEMENTS OF THOUGHT FASHIONABLE IN THE WORLD, IT MAY THEREFORE MAKE THEM VULNERABLE FROM THE OUTSIDE AND EXPOSE THEM TO SUPINE ACCEPTANCE OF OTHER PEOPLE'S IDEAS AT THEIR FACE VALUE. *Ideological and practical GREGARIOUSNESS has become contagious.* In a serious report on the events of last May in French university circles, we could read, for example: "It has also been pointed out that *certain student chaplains were impregnated with Maoist thought.*"

"WE MUST BE CAREFUL. Another dynamic idea, which is also basically praiseworthy but *often intemperate in its formulation and explosive in its application to problems, is that of the so-called 'structures' . . . People would like to change the structures, and many of them, when they say this, are thinking of the vexation of authority in the Church.* They wish to abolish it, and they cannot; they wish to trace its source to the community; and they are violating a constitutional character of the Church, which Christ willed to be apostolic; they wish it to be service, and this is all right provided it is the rightful service of the pastoral authority; they wish to ignore it, but how can a Christianity remain authentic WITHOUT A MAGISTERIUM, *without a ministry, without the unity and authority derived from Christ?* (cfr. Gal. 1, 8-9; 2 Cor. 1, 24; 2 Cor. 10, 5; etc.: St. Ignatius of A., to the Magnesii, c. IV).

(to be continued)