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THE PRIEST OF TOMORROW

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Author's thesis: A radical and profound revision in the formation of priests is needed

The Council: A great work of renovation in the Church. The Council demands a revision in the basic structures of the Church; and the priesthood is one of these structures.

The fundamental end of the priesthood: to continue the work of Christ.

The actual situation: lack of adaptation to the world.

Result of: fear of the world.

Based on: rejection of the world in the structures of priestly formation.

These structures do not form priests who are able to act in the world.

Contemporary social conditions: The church bell does not regulate life. Religious life is something marginal. The Church is losing masses of people. Today we see the paradox of physical proximity and affective distance between men. Only the priest can answer this need of men--on the condition that he be intimately immersed in the society of men, that he understand their problems from within, and not by abstract formulas. If he comes from "another world" speaking "another language," he cannot reach modern man. The world is not looking for someone "different," but rather is seeking someone similar in all except sin. The priest must establish contact with men themselves.

Quote from Jorge Sanz Vila: The priest seems a foreigner. The priest himself feels that he is at the margin of society. He feels he causes deception in others. The Church should be "other world" because it supernaturalizes our world, not because it is another world culturally--one of anachronisms, insincerity--in its forms. If our world is not in the Church, it is because the priest has not gone to the world, or because he fears the world. Not that he has lost the sheep, but he is lost. Not that some men have lost God, but the man of God has lost the world. The man of the world asks for love more than for prudence, for knowledge of the times more than for that of the humanities, more for the Gospel than for theology, more for simplicity than for subtlety.

Criteria for restructuring:

The Church, by its nature, is in a permanent state of mission. Continual adaptation and reform are inherent from its very dynamism. Therefore, the priest must be the same. Now he is formed according to a static conception. To ordain this concept to a dynamic reality has no meaning. The question is:

What is changeable and what is not?

Two elements make the Church: immutable (divine) and mutable (human). The mutable not only can change, but must change, so that men can understand the eternal message of Christ. What is not immutable in nature is, by that very fact, reformable. Change belongs to authority. We are not talking here of who can make changes, but rather of what can be changed.

The basic criterion:

Adaptation within a double fidelity: Both to what Christ gave to us, and to whom He gives us. We must have a faithfulness to Christ in communicating and living his message while we are in a continual search for means most apt in each time and place. I must prolong the work of Christ, not myself.

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Concept and function of the traditional:

Man is in continual evolution. The traditional is at the service of man. Respect for tradition means for those things that touch the essence of man. The rest is subject to change.

Lombardi: Institutions of our world are in a state of change. The crisis of our world has no precedent. It signifies a conflict between the institutions which enclose one's life and the obligations that men feel who must live in these institutions.

The idea of Christ:

Redemption: incorporation and assumption of all men and all creation into its head--Christ. The message is not limited to a group--the principal collaborators; the aim is a saved people, not a select hierarchy. The priest is a means to form the whole community--the people of God. Christ's words are addressed to all of humanity--his people, his sacerdotal race. The hierarchy is, in one sense, secondary--the ministers who will build the community.

Special priesthood of the New Testament:

Christ selected twelve.

Christ made all **Christians** priests--the Church is a priestly people
(I Peter 2:5 and Romans 12:1)

The office of preacher or witness: he who also offers the Eucharist and directs the people of God. His is a service to the High Priest and to the priestly people.

Theology of the priestly ministry:

St. Thomas: priests receive a character by which they are configured to Christ. They receive the right to represent the Unique Priest; to speak and work in his name; to take his place; to be conscious instruments of his eternal priesthood.

The validity of his actions does not depend on the grade of his configuration to Christ, but the root of his character is this configuration.

Priesthood:

The priesthood allows one to stand before God and offer Him an agreeable sacrifice. But Christ is the unique offerer. To be his minister the priest must renounce himself so that Christ, in him, is the one who offers to the Father. The exterior is not the essential, the interior sacrifice of oneself constitutes one's act of offering. Only Christ is a priest ontologically (Heb. 10:5-9). He established a priesthood to complete the ministry of administering among men what he gained for them. The priest's interior sanctity must be oriented to the service of others. The grace of priesthood is more for others than for oneself.

Therefore, the immutable element is to be "alter Christus." Components of this:

Consecration: (John 17:19) Imitation of Christ in his paschal mystery.

Offering: Christ offers himself totally. The priest must do the same in an interior act of full and generous acceptance of will of the Father.

Love: Filial and fraternal love, without which there is no priesthood.

Liberty: Born of love, the filial sacrifice of Christ is fully free. The sacrifice of the priest must express this sense of liberty and love.

Service: He chooses the priest to serve (John 13:12-15; Matthew 10:45; Mark 9:33). The Last Supper contains two complementary acts: sacrificial celebration of the alliance and a service of love; immolation of the physical body of Christ, and immolation of his mystical body. The Eucharist is the sacrifice and the sacrament of Christ and his body

at the same time. Therefore, the priest must immolate himself out of love to renew continuously the sacrifice of Christ.

Mission: Missioners (sent by him); Witnesses and preachers; Pastors (parable of the Good Shepherd); Ministers of pardon; Offerers of the Eucharist who visibly (sacramentally) reenact the action of Christ.

Means: Prayer (see John 17), Poverty, Obedience, Humility. In short, one must lose his life to save it. Death to self conquers self so that it can be the instrument of the Lord.

Example of the Apostles: Giving oneself (Heb. 5:2, etc.); Inspired by love (epistles of John); Full responsibility (II Tim. 1:6); Prayer (Col. 1:9); Poverty (Acts 32:34); Obedience (Acts 5:29; Rom. 5:19); Humility (II Tim. 2:24).

Celibacy: Ecclesiastical, not of divine origin. It makes one more like Christ, although neither Christ and his apostles nor the first fathers made it a condition for the priesthood.

Celibacy for some (Matt. 19:12) is a gift. St. Paul preferred it.

Conclusion: the gift or charism of celibacy is not essential to the priesthood by divine command.

Questions raised: Is it right that human law impose something that Christ counselled as a personal gift? Is this a result of an influence by those who presuppose falsely, that matrimony is not compatible with sanctity? Does the history of the practice of celibacy teach us that celibacy has been a glory of the Church, or rather that it has been an occasion of disobedience and falsity? But does not the Church have the full right to demand that her priests be chosen exclusively from those who have the perfect gift of chastity?

The Image of the "New Priest"

Psychology of love and truth:

One who does not love, perishes (John). This statement is valid both in the natural and supernatural order. Perhaps the principal reason for the depersonalization of modern man is that he does not know how to love. Man becomes mature through love. The immature man is incapable of love. An immature man cannot lead others, cannot live for others, cannot love.

Men instinctively reject the priest who is egoistic, unmindful of others. One feels that such a man could not love God either. In ages when people were more credulous and less demanding of authenticity, one could dissimulate and appear as a messenger of the Gospel. Today, men demand a true witness.

Christ cannot forgive a lie which is elevated to a system; but a life that is not of love is a lie (in a priest). The world cannot believe in the love of priests because the world does not believe in their truth.

Social Sense:

The priest must penetrate the world. Men will not accept someone who is separated from their concerns and difficulties. Social sense does not mean to bring a message from outside, but rather to communicate it from within--by one's life.

Founders of religious orders thought of poverty as the concrete expression of filial confidence in the Father. But what place is left for the Father to manifest his providence in the security of today's congregations? How can such a priest approach a poor man and speak of the Gospel?

Priests look at the individual in place of the collective. The sin of our times is not so much against the sixth commandment as against the seventh.

The problem of a social sense is not solved by going out to the man who suffers; rather by identifying completely with those to whom he goes, so completely that he is different from them in nothing except sin. A social sense is not an attitude which one adopts, rather it is a reality which one lives. It is the priest who must change, not the people.

Intellectual formation:

To be of service to others demands more than good will. It demands a sincere revision of one's mental structures, of one's thought.

The need: Secure doctrine as a basis, a constant assimilation (in a holy anxiety), along with the greatest possible openness. One must understand that Christianity, before being a doctrine is a life. Intellectual orientation must be intimately penetrated with the real problems of men.

Two principles help here: Security in doctrine which makes one faithful to revelation; and a flexible following of human thought which makes one capable of dialoging with and understanding men.

Asceticism and spirituality:

The world desires to see the priest with a spirituality that is simple, evangelical, the simple spirituality of the Gospel. Nothing is more clearly seen by men, and at the same time, nothing is more demanding. A priest living among men will lack many external helps and will have to search for the richness of his spiritual life in a very personal and intimate friendship with Christ. This manner of life is not an attitude which one assumes, rather it is a reality which is manifested with a real spontaneity.

Only a passionate love for the truth will give one the liberty of spirit that will free one from placing value on human judgments. Suenens: Prudence is acceptable only for the service of audacity. This spirit of truth is not dangerous, because it is truth in love. This gift of self in all and to all is the most demanding kind of asceticism--a continuous renunciation of self.

Today, man wants to see clearly the truth in us--an immediate evidence of truth and love. The priest must show through immediate evidence that the priesthood is identical with truth and love. This evidence must come from the priesthood itself, from the institution. It must supercede an asceticism that is individualistic, concerned with one's own perfection, that has a certain narcissism.

How to Form Priests for Tomorrow

Chastity:

The only virtuous chastity is chastity of love. One cannot be chaste because of fear, but only for a love that absorbs all of his affection and the dynamism of his personality. At times we see in the young that the problem of chastity is resolved by falling in love with someone. The fight for chastity is not a fight of abstention, rather it is an interior battle in order to conserve, cultivate and increase love. Abstention from all affection and love cannot be a means to cultivate chastity. If one is inhibited from development in love by his formation, he will not be capable of being a priest. Chastity is worth nothing if one knows not how to love. Chastity is not an end, but rather a means to love. Do we want to run the risk of incapacitating love in our efforts to avoid the dangers to chastity, or to run the risk of losing chastity in the formation of love? The Christian can risk everything in order to love.

Conclusions: Abolish minor seminaries and all kinds of formation which is started when the boy is not capable of choosing his future. Religious and

priestly formation can start only at that age when the young man is psychologically able to know what he is doing. Prepare men and institutions for normal development--where there is no pressure over their liberty, where there is the normal influence of family and society, where there is no influence of priestly or clerical "style" that is premature.

Contact with reality in the major seminary: A monastic type of life is isolated from contact with the world. But the priesthood is a service for others. This type of formation must end. The future priest must live among the people, receiving his training in contact with the people.

Sense of Initiative:

Initiative is finding means to realize ends. Many failures in pastoral action result because initiative had been replaced by passivity, or had never been cultivated in the first place. In the present seminary the system of collective discipline demands that precise norms be imposed on the developing personality so that the group will run smoothly. Individual initiative must be sacrificed for the good of order, and such action develops passivity.

Sense of responsibility:

Responsibility corresponds to one's place in society. The priest, continuing the work of Christ, has much responsibility. Pastoral responsibility is inseparable from initiative. To take initiative one needs to be able to weigh the consequences of responsible action. If one has always been given everything he needs, he cannot possibly develop responsibility.

Conclusion: A new formation is needed--a formation given in an "open" milieu, where each candidate will have the opportunity to exercise his responsibility and to develop it. This sense of responsibility should motivate him to study; teach him to arrange his schedule, regulate his expenses; urge him to make his life an authentic prolongation of Christ.

Social Sense:

The priest must participate in the marked social tone of our age. Until now, any interest in social responsibility was paternal and occasional. Today, the solidarity of the poor will not accept this. It is not a matter of spending a few hours with the poor, but rather a matter of living their life, to be as Christ. The priestly vocation is a vocation to poverty, a faithful and sincere imitation of the poor Christ with the total commitment of one's person. The poor--in a subjective (and at times, objective) state of misery--look on the priest as their enemy. The priest will have a social sense only if he lives intimately immersed in the necessities and battles of his brothers.

The Formation of the Heart:

The formation given now removes the man from all distractions in the hope that he will come to love Christ exclusively. Then he will go out to love men in Christ. The difficulty here is that to love Him exclusively, one needs a psychological maturity and rare mystical graces. But many times, God leads one to this love by the experience of human love. God speaks to man through experience, not through a set of rules and laws. The Council realizes this in the orientation it gives through the decree on religious liberty.

It is not enough to teach the intellect. The heart is more important because love involves the whole man, it unifies and orders him. To kill the affective life is to kill what is most rich in the human personality.

To form in love is not to teach what one should love and how, but rather to teach one that he is on earth for others, to give to others, to go out to others, to live for others. As in knowledge--from the visible to the invisible, from creature to creator--so in love. All love of God has its principle in contemplation.

In the formation, nothing must be done against love. One must learn that love is never a danger; the danger is always in a lack of love. Any use of another person is a violation of love. We cannot regulate what must be loved or how. This is artificial--in the area most intimate and vital of the personality. This destroys authentic love. One cannot be separated from false loves by repression or negation.

The greatest evil is not that the seminarian withdraw for a time to convince himself that other legitimate loves are not God's will for him. The great danger is that the seminarian, or priest, have a secret nostalgia that it was never possible for him to know what the love of a woman was. He will always think that others made his life what it is. His liberty was not the decisive factor. It is not enough to remove "temptations." The decision must be fully conscious, and made in conditions that favor this decision. We must work toward helping the youth give himself to a good which is proportionate to his grade of maturity.

The Church cannot seek the greatest numbers of priests. Rather, she must place conditions that favor liberty, that in a pure and free love, a man may follow or not follow his initial choice of vocation.

Relations with Women:

To abstain from all contact with women simply because they are women is to deform the man. Contact with women is not dangerous. Rather, it is necessary that he develop normally. The necessary distance from women cannot come from rules and physical circumstances. Rather, it must arise from the conviction and clear understanding of the difficulty here. There must be a formation in maturity in the midst of the same dangers which every Christian faces, so that the man might choose his vocation as a man and persevere in it as a man.

Chastity:

Chastity is inseparable from affectivity. If one cannot remain celibate then he cannot be part of a celibate priesthood. One must love and live in truth (a fall in celibacy would contradict this). If one falls, the love he had was imperfect and not sufficient to overcome the demands of his nature. The only sexual pleasure acceptable is that which comes from love.

Celibacy:

Its purpose is to make one more like Christ so that his social service will be greater. But one needs the charism of chastity for this. When does this exist? And considering the dynamism of man, how can one judge its presence?

Two choices are open to the Church: Reduce the number of priests to those who show they have the charism of perfect chastity and freely correspond to it in love; or reduce the requirements so that those who need marriage still may be priests.

Intellectual Formation:

A good spiritual formation needs a good intellectual formation as a basis. The open atmosphere of a university is needed. If a university student, on his own, finds motivation to work, why cannot a seminarian? A sense of personal responsibility must enter here.

Studies must be oriented to his pastoral mission. It is not that he have ready formulas for men's problems, rather that he be a man fully in the world with an understanding of men's problems. Living among men, the seminarian would have concrete experience, that is, real knowledge of actuality.

Professors must work as a team. A sociological incarnation of what is taught is necessary, to show its existentiality. With an open milieu, the seminarian, from his intimate contact with men, will draw a vital enthusiasm for his studies, that they be made with a profound pastoral sense in a continual interchange of opinion and experience. Study will then be inseparable from a knowledge of the sociological and psychological reality of the world.

Formation in Love for the Truth:

One of the principal services of the priest in the world is that he speak the truth. Fidelity to himself is the most important thing here. All passion tends to decline one from the truth. Therefore, freedom--disinterestedness--is of great importance.

Formation in the Spirit of Charity:

This spirit is identical with the spirit of being an apostle. No division of loves exists here. Divine love is simply the perfection of human love, divinization of the human.

We must ask certain questions. Do we want a priest who is more faithful to habits and customs or one who looks for ways to reach those who are lost? Do we want a priest who is observant and disciplined or one that has an inflamed heart, anguished for the loss of masses of men? Do we want a priest with an ordered and ecclesiastical bearing and a mediocre life, or a man who communicates everywhere the fire that burns in his heart?

Spiritual Formation:

Man is a totality, a unity who lives in a certain milieu of which he is a part and by which he is influenced. One cannot abstract from this milieu when talking about formation. The secret of formation lies in not pulling the man out of the circumstances where he will work; but rather, taking the formation to the man in his actual setting--helping him realize his vocation. A spirituality formed in circumstances the opposite of those in which one will later live will result in either the isolation of this man from his fellows to conserve his spirituality, or a spirituality which will be unreal and artificial.

Daily contact with men, conquest of self to work for them in love, imploring Christ for them, giving good for evil, interesting himself in their problems, showing them the gospel as the ultimate solution for the contradictions of their life, helping them to live a life of love for God--these will be the best means for interior growth and intimacy with God. This continual contact with men, the almost sensible realization that it must be God who opens men's intelligence and strengthens men's wills, will make the priest understand better the necessity of prayer and of intimate union with God.

***** Seminary Formation:

Abolish the minor seminary. Nothing should give the impression of preparation for the priesthood before age 18. At this age the student will be capable of freely deciding about a vocation and to begin priestly formation.

Seminarians need some ascetic preparation and mature reflection for this decision--something similar to what is called a novitiate. This period could be placed between his philosophy and theology study. The object of this

period would be that the young man fully realize the mission of being called by divine choice, that he arrive at a clear idea of vocation and its realization in the world. One or two years of such reflection would constitute the only time during the formation when he is separated from the world.

The milieu for his philosophy and theology program should be, externally, the same as any university program. He should not live in a house exclusively for seminarians. He must independently organize his own spiritual development, his studies, his relations with other persons, etc. If possible, he should also work at a job to help support his studies. He should live poorly.

Common Life:

Community Mass and paraliturgical services should be held once or twice a week. A talk or discussion with the spiritual director should be scheduled about once a week. This interview should never be a passive one for the seminarians.

Intellectual: Candidates for the priesthood should assist at classes and seminars to stimulate team work and a spirit of investigation and analysis of the reality in which they are going to work. They must establish the necessary equilibrium between knowledge of doctrine in depth and the concrete means to communicate and apply this knowledge.

Seminary Contact: The Directors should try to discern the man's love for his vocation and the concrete effort he exerts toward his formation. The director of studies should require that certain books be read and analyzed. The spiritual director must try to see the circumstances of this man and then judge him in the context of these circumstances and his personal characteristics, not solely in regard to general rules of conformity. The man will then acquire the habit of organizing his life in conformity with the particular reality and will acquire a personal spirituality that is more profound and real. The liberty and responsibility will provide the opportunity for superiors to judge the degree of conviction and free and efficacious determination of each candidate to follow the demands of his vocation.

Orders:

Ordination to the subdiaconate should take place after the candidate has finished his intellectual formation. A period of two to five years apostolic work would follow. Celibacy would be preserved for priests, while marriage is permissible for deacons. Ordination to the priesthood would take place near age 30. If by this time, the candidate finds that he does not have the necessary love for a celibate priesthood, he would be allowed to become a married deacon, or to choose a different life.

Formation of Religious

Pius XII declared that Religious life is not of divine law. Therefore, the particular constitutions cannot be of divine law either. They must be changed in the measure necessary to serve the Body of Christ. The evangelical counsels are of divine inspiration, but many prescriptions concerning them are simply the reflections of the needs of the times of the founder of the congregations.

Pius XII also said that Fidelity to the founder is not fidelity to what he did and proscribed, rather to what he would do and prescribe in these circumstances.

The most important point in formation is a full intellectual and affective acceptance by the candidate of the coherence and effectiveness of the ideal proposed. A state of crisis exists among religious when the presentation and realization of the ideal proposed is not seen as relevant to contemporary reality and needs.

The vows: Our present understanding of vows comes from a feudal and later paternalistic background. Our present concepts of liberty, the dignity of the person, the duty to seek the truth, make it difficult for one to accept a bond which is not founded exclusively on the free impulse of supernatural love. We see religious remaining in a congregation and becoming less and less zealous. They accommodate themselves to the demands of the common life, avoid new work, do badly what is given them, seek a certain comfort and a great number of distractions to enliven their monotonous life.

It is necessary to revise our concept of the vows. They are a means to perfection, which is love. Without this love the vows have no meaning. When this love fails, the reason for the existence of the vows no longer exists. The community and the individual have the right to terminate the vows.

Poverty: Poverty was originally based on two realities: insecurity and dependence on the providence of God. Today, few men in the world enjoy greater security than religious. The greater part of mankind--the poor--see nothing poor in the life of religious.

Founders of congregations saw the possession of goods, individually and institutionally, as a great danger. It is impossible to love poverty and live it in an institution which is rich. Why could not the religious live as the poor do, from his work (regulated by obedience)? Is it enough to serve the Church with persons and the spirit of the congregation? Is the service of Christ inseparable from the physical growth of institutions? Where does the idea of institutional property come from? Do we run the risk of seeking the glory of the institution and losing the interior spirit of the congregation? A solution must be found so that the religious can arrive at a personal, sincere and profound affection for poverty. The contradiction of speaking to the religious about poverty while he lives in the midst of plenty, sows in him a dualism and hypocrisy.

Chastity: (see above) However, no marriage is possible for religious.

Obedience: Two conditions are necessary for obedience--the candidate is sufficiently mature to make this vow, and he sees the sincere and reasonable efforts of his superiors to maintain a continual adaptation.

Obedience consists in seeing Christ in the superior. This supernatural conviction has to have with it an effect of psychological faith--security and confidence in him who commands.

Minor Seminaries: Everything said above about this subject also holds with religious.

The congregation must help the candidate arrive at a decision free of any social or circumstantial pressure. He must be given every opportunity for a free decision, not that he choose the only thing he knows. Everything that hides or obscures a full and healthy understanding of the alternatives of choice is dishonest.

Novitiate: The aim should be to form a man habituated to supernatural exercise of his liberty and initiative, of his responsibility and love. The duties and practices of the congregation should be explained to him. Then the novice should be allowed to carry them out on his own initiative.

Temporary vows should be made for as long as necessary, probably up to the time of ordination.

Intellectual formation: The candidate should have contact with the world so that the fulfillment of his religious obligations flow from his love for the world, not from the pressure of superiors.

Formation and the Supernatural

The grave faults outlined in this book are in the social and apostolic order and are not a matter of personal maliciousness. The world has changed and priestly formation has not. Today, a greater authenticity, a greater contact with reality is demanded.

It is necessary to renounce clericalization of institutions and to prove that the ministers of the gospel have such a great likeness to Christ--shown by their lives and the integral doctrine of the gospel--that they will be irresistible. Great numbers of ecclesiastical customs prevent the world from seeing Christ because the world does not see in priests the simplicity, humility and meekness of Christ. Clerical structures, instead of leading men to Christ, drive them away. Solidarity with men is the necessary condition for contemporary action. But it is also absolutely necessary that the priest be possessed by Christ. The life of Christ must be manifest in him. To be formed in the priesthood is to realize progressively and effectively the vocation to prolong Christ. The priest of today needs a greater supernatural life--more intense and true. The present system of formation cannot give this.