

Why the overkill in reaction to lay roles?

Some might be tempted to regard the recent Vatican instruction on lay ministers as an example of ecclesiastical overkill. They will find no disagreement from this quarter.

The document is signed by no less than eight separate Vatican offices: the Congregation for the Clergy, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Congregation for Bishops, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts.

What concern could possibly require the attention of so many Vatican dicasteries?

Simply put, it is the fear that the extraordinary growth in lay ministries since the Second Vatican Council will somehow diminish the status of the ordained priest and further depress the level of vocations to the priesthood.

The key line in the lengthy document is in paragraph 12 of the foreword: "It must be remembered that collaboration with does not, in fact, mean substitution for."

What worries the Vatican is the possibility that, in the minds of many lay people, the line between ordained and non-ordained ministries will be erased, and



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

that they will come to look upon the various ministries they have been performing since the council as a normal part of their service to the church.

Before Vatican II, the laity, except for sacristans, were prohibited from touching the sacred vessels (chalice, paten and ciborium) used for Mass. The idea of touching the consecrated Host (except on the tongue during the reception of Communion) was nothing less than unthinkable.

After Vatican II, lay people (including lay women!) not only touch the consecrated Host but distribute Communion, at Mass and to the homebound sick.

Before Vatican II, laity were enlisted, without formal preparation, to help the sisters "teach catechism" to the public school children of the parish, under the direction of the curate in charge of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) program.

After Vatican II, lay people, now

armed with graduate degrees in religious education or theology from Catholic colleges and universities, not only bear the major burden of handing on the faith to the young, but the direction of the entire parish program is also committed in many instances to a lay person, with the title of director of religious education (DRE).

Before Vatican II, if the truth be told, there was no liturgical planning to speak of. The priest simply consulted the daily Ordo (a liturgical calendar written in Latin) to determine the Sunday of the church year (e.g., 15th Sunday after Pentecost) or feast day, the color of vestments to be worn, and whether or not the Gloria or Creed was to be recited. There was no music (except at weddings and funerals), and the content of the sermon (not yet called the homily) was determined entirely by the priest.

After Vatican II, lay members of many parish staffs not only participate in the planning of the Sunday liturgy (including the homily), but a lay person may even serve as director of liturgy for the parish.

Before Vatican II, only priests served as chaplains in hospitals, prisons and campus. After Vatican II, about three-quarters of the 3,600 members of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains are nuns and lay people.

Before Vatican II, only priests served as pastors of parishes, by whatever name (administrator, etc.).

After Vatican II, many parishes are administered by nuns and lay people, without being recognized in any canonical sense as pastors. But, in fact, they are.

One U.S. bishop has tried to assure us that the recent Vatican document says nothing really new and that its only intent is to reaffirm the importance of the ordained priesthood without in any way devaluing the positive contributions of lay ministers. But the document's spirit and tone are unmistakably defensive with regard to the pastoral prerogatives of priests and wary of the encroachments of lay people on territory formerly reserved exclusively to the ordained.

A few European bishops have been more forthright in expressing reservations and concerns about this document. Karl Lehmann, bishop of Mainz and president of the German bishops' conference, deplored the "atmosphere of distrust" the document created toward the laity. And the head of the Austrian bishops' conference, Johann Weber, bishop of Graz-Seckau, challenged the document's assumption that many recent lay initiatives are on an emergency basis only (with the idea that, once the clergy shortage is corrected, the laity will have to recede from these ministerial roles).

Does the Vatican really want to turn back the clock?

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Once baptized, let your light shine

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22. (R1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7. (R2) Acts 10:34-38.

Sunday celebrates the baptism of our Lord. Jesus was baptized to mark the end of the mission of John the Baptist. After Jesus' baptism, John's career came to an end. At the same time, the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus after his baptism marked the beginning of his own public ministry.

Jesus' baptism marked the end of the Old Testament; whereas the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him marked the beginning of the New Testament.

It might be well to reflect a moment on the difference between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament gave God's chosen people the Law, the Ten Commandments, on Mt. Sinai. But law is something external to man. It regulates his actions; but leaves his heart untouched. Thus God's chosen people often fell away from him.

In the New Testament, however, God gives his people the Holy Spirit. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us so that we become temples of the Holy Spirit. But in coming to us the Holy Spirit transforms our very being. ... We are given a new heart and a new spirit so that the burden of the law becomes easy and the yoke light.

The Holy Spirit was given to Jesus at



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

his baptism that he might be a light for the nations. "Here is my servant, ... my chosen one ... Upon whom I have put my spirit ... I formed you to be a light for the nations." He is given to us for the same reason at baptism.

That is why a lighted candle is given to one after baptism, so that he too, like Jesus, might become a light to others and bring to them the good news of God's love for all. We are called to be lights in a dark world.

Once upon a time a certain Cave lived underground, as caves have the habit of doing. It had spent its lifetime in darkness. One day a voice called out to the Cave, "Come on up to the light and see the sunshine."

The Cave growled back, "What do you mean 'light'? There is nothing but darkness in the world."

But the voice urged, "Come on up and see."

So the Cave came up and was surprised to see light everywhere.

Looking up at the Sun, however, the Cave said, "Now come with me and see the darkness."

The Sun asked, "What is darkness?" "Come with me and you'll see," the Cave answered.

So the Sun went down into the earth and entered the cave.

"Now show me your darkness," the Sun said.

There was none! So our baptismal role is to dispel the darkness of sin and error everywhere simply by the witness of our lives.

Our baptized youths, are they different from unbaptized youths? Do they swear like everyone else? Indulge in drugs, drink, premarital sex, like some of their peers? Do they view the church and religion, like the godless media? Do they show disrespect for parents, authority, property, like the rest of the gang?

And for baptized husbands and wives — husbands, do you treat your wives as mere conveniences or as temples of the Holy Spirit? Do you care about the hurt and pain you inflict by your indifference, lack of affection, unconcern, and sometimes downright adultery? And wives, do you nag, be-

little, tear down your husbands or do you lift them up, encourage and love them?

And mothers and fathers. Is your home a domestic church? Is there family rosary? Sunday Mass together? Monthly confession? Is there discipline — love imposing order? Is there love and peace and joy in the home?

In other words, are we in the darkness or are we lights in the darkness?

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, January 12
1 Samuel 1:1-8; Mark 1:14-20
Tuesday, January 13
1 Samuel 1:9-20; Mark 1:21-28
Wednesday, January 14
1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Mark 1:29-39
Thursday, January 15
1 Samuel 4:1-11; Mark 1:40-45
Friday, January 16
1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22; Mark 2:1-12
Saturday, January 17
1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19, 10:1; Mark 2:13-17



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