

E ditorial

From the beginning of the Church, the life and ministry of the priests has been the centre of attention. The world has perceived the priests with admiration, awe, esteem, respect, suspicion, contempt, criticism, doubt and a sense of mystery and wonder. However, in the recent decades Catholic priesthood/priest has occupied considerable space in the media and the theological discussions. The media have vigorously reported a number of scandals involving the Catholic priests and vehemently attacked them. There have been also planned and well-plotted attacks on Catholic priests by the media and the centres of power to tarnish the image of the priests and thus to destroy the moral power of the Church. Besides denigrating the image of priests in the society, all these have shaken to a great extent the self-esteem of the priests and have created confusion in the minds of many about the value and worth of priestly life and ministry. The priest himself and the Christian community and the society as a whole realizes more and more the fragility of the priestly life. But, within the consciousness of this fragility itself, it has confirmed once again the divine nature of the priestly vocation, that it is the divine initiative and design that has given this "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). It is the "fidelity of Christ" that sustains the priest, who is a weak and fragile human being like anyone else, to be faithful.

In the theological circles as well priesthood occupied a central role with the discussions/debates on the ordination of women, clerical celibacy, the shortage of clergy or the decreasing number of vocations to priesthood, ordination of homosexuals and so on. Together with these, there have been theological discussions on the modes and new forms of priesthood and priestly ministry, the relation between the priest and the rest of the faithful, the identity

and uniqueness of ordained ministry, etc. Without denying the cultic function of the priest, the priest is seen more as a servant and as a prophet. Though he is “separated”, he is one among the faithful, lives “with the rest of men as with brothers” (Second Vatican Council, *O.T.*, 3), and identifies with them in their pains and struggles, guiding them, sanctifying them, but above all serving them and being one with them and among them. In the scriptures and the tradition we can see different roles of the priest and different modes of priestly ministry. The Christian concept of priesthood does not limit itself to a mere cultic function, but reaches every realm of the ecclesial and social life. Christian theological and anthropological vision does not compartmentalise life into different spheres where God is present and is not present. Hence, every sphere of human life and activity is to be touched by the divine and so also priestly ministry.

In this Year for Priests, “meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world,”¹ we join the worldwide discussions on priesthood and priestly ministry. We are not attempting an exhaustive discussion on all the dimensions of priesthood, but trying to highlight some aspects, which may help us understand more profoundly the Christian concept of priesthood and priestly ministry and thus enhance the renewal of priestly life.

“Priesthood of the Baptized and of the Ordained: Correlated but Different” reflects on the interrelationship and the differences between the Common priesthood and the Ministerial priesthood and tries to see them as complementary. Jos Puthenveettil points out that both the “vocation crisis” and the Second Vatican Council’s theological emphasis on the participation of the lay people/all the faithful in the ministry of the Church has led to a lively discussion on the delicate relationship between these two modes of priesthood. Jesus’ threefold ministry as priest, prophet and king is entrusted to all the baptised and this is the basis of the interrelationship between ministerial and the common priesthood. Puthenveettil further proceeds to discuss this interrelationship within the Christological and ecclesiological frameworks and underscores that though the Church has only one mission, it is carried out differently. Although the priesthood of all the faithful cannot be ignored, the difference of the ministerial priesthood is

¹ Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming A Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars”.

affirmed so as to delineate the identity of the ordained the uniqueness of their ministry. This in no way signifies that common priesthood is less important. All are called to holiness and to carry out the mission of Christ. Emphasising too much the difference between the two modes of priesthood may lead to wider chasm between the ordained and the other faithful and thus will affect the sense of mission that all Christians should have. On the other hand, completely ignoring the difference may make the ordained doubt the relevance and significance of their ministry. What is needed is a sense of interrelatedness keeping the uniqueness and special charism of both the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, argues Puthenveetil.

The following two articles depict how priesthood and its spirituality are lived differently in different traditions and places - in two different contexts of Asia. Learning from the tradition may help us to reflect on what is missing today. Though the spirituality of priesthood is radically the same, it is expressed and lived in different ways. Thomas Kalayil in his "Priesthood in the Tradition of the St. Thomas Christians of India" depicts the concept of priesthood and the life of priests in the Syro-Malabar Church. From early times the bishops and priests were held in high esteem not only in the Christian community, but also in the wider society. The position of the Archdeacon - who was not only an ordained priest, but also the head of the Christian community - was something unique to the Syro-Malabar tradition. The candidate for priesthood was to be presented to the bishop by the parish community and he was ordained for the parish. Thus, though ordained, the priest was one among the faithful and this was a special mark of the spirituality of the priests in the Syrian tradition. Kalayil points out that even the titles used to address the priests show the profound understanding of priesthood and that those terms also reflect the concept of priesthood in other religions. Thus, the concept of priesthood though basically Christian, could also integrate the concept of priesthood in the Indian tradition. Marlon A. Lacal shares the Philippine experience of priesthood and its spirituality. In his "Priesthood, its Spirituality: The Philippine Experience," Lacal shows how the ordained ministers have been helping to shape the Church and the society. Down through the centuries, priesthood in the Philippines evolved into a relevant and responsible ministry, responding to the needs of the times, even facing suffering and persecution. A good number of priests took the challenge of responding to the real needs of the people and to embrace "the less travelled road of accompanying the people especially the poor." The Filipino priests arise and are born out of the people and this concern for the people is central to the identity

of the Filipino priests; they are servant-leaders. This in turn demands a constant transformation and conformity with Christ. These together lead to the prophetic role of criticising the unjust structures in the society. Laca, reflecting on the Filipino experience of priesthood, points to the need of making the priesthood relevant and meaningful by responding to the needs of the times, identifying especially with the poor. This also challenges us to go beyond the cultic and fixed forms of priesthood and to the new levels of priestly spirituality.

Priesthood is an integral part of most of the religions. There are also religions which arose as a reaction to priesthood or as a revolt against certain forms of priesthood. Understanding the concept of priesthood in other religions can enlighten the Christian concept of priesthood. This attempt is made by Alex Thannippara in "Priesthood in the Indian Religions." Whereas the cultic function of the priest priesthood is central to Hinduism, the original concept of priesthood in Buddhism and Jainism is much different. It is difficult to say that Buddhism and Jainism assigned to priests any official cultic role, though later the people began to ascribe the monks roles similar to those of the priests. Sikhism, on the other hand rejected the concept of a priestly class and the Brahmin domination prevalent in Hinduism. Although Thannippara does not attempt a detailed comparative study of the idea of Christian priesthood and that of other Indian religions, his work invites us to profoundly reflect on different concepts related to Christian priesthood, such as the role and function of the priest, the distinction between the ministerial and common priesthood, the hierarchical view based on priesthood and so on.

Joseph Kanjiramattam explores how the life of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a saintly priest lived in the 19th century, can be a model and a source of inspiration for priests in this year dedicated for the renewal of priests. Like St. John Mary Vianney, Bl. Chavara brought far-reaching changes in the Church of Kerala and India, through the renewal of priestly life and priestly formation. He was a holy, erudite priest who could influence the spiritual, intellectual, social and cultural life of the Church and the society. God in his loving providence, guides and renews the Church from time to time through saintly priests like St. John Mary Vianney and Bl. Chavara, underscores Kanjiramattam in his "Bl. Chavara, an Eminent Visionary Priest of 19th Century of Syro-Malabar Church." Evidently, priests like Bl. Chavara inspire the priests of today and challenge them to creatively respond to the needs of the people and the signs of the times so as to live the priestly ministry meaningfully.

Without entering into the debated issues like the ordination of women, Kusum reflects on the “Role of Women Religious in Pastoral Ministry.” She looks at pastoral ministry from different angles, relating the identity crisis that women religious face today to the obsolete concepts of pastoral ministry. She tries to maintain a balanced approach, critically evaluating the structures, but without blindly accusing them and points out that women religious also should be open and sensitive to the changing world and its needs and should take pain to equip themselves to respond to the pastoral needs of today. Kusum is bold enough to point out that many priests need to re-consider their outdated views of pastoral ministry and learn to collaborate with women religious who can contribute a lot in their unique ways to the care of the faithful. “Pseudo-glorification” of women will not serve the purpose, but their equal dignity and rights and the creative contribution that they can make must be recognised. There are signs of changes both from the part of the Church authorities, as well as from the part of the women religious themselves. “Role of Women Religious in Pastoral Ministry” invites us to see pastoral ministry as entrusted not only to priests, but to the Church as a whole, in which women religious can play an important role. Reflecting on the renewal of priestly life and priestly ministry shall take into serious consideration the role of women religious in pastoral ministry as active collaborators.

It is indeed fitting to reflect on the recent encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, which has invoked great interest not only in the ecclesiastical circles, but also in the wider society. John Chathanatt gives a critical appraisal of *Caritas in Veritate* beginning with its general setting and methodology, but focussing on its view of integral human development in the background of globalization. The process of globalization may be irreversible, but we need the humanization of globalization, Chathanatt agrees with the encyclical’s view. In spite of its many shortcomings the teaching of the encyclical is a relevant response to the socio-economic conditions of the world today and it has universal significance, underscores the author. Development should not be at the cost of the weak and the poor, but it should ensure charity. Only then can it be considered to be real human development.

“The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus”.² Priesthood is a gift, a gift for the community. It is also a challenge that demands

² “*Le Sacerdoce, c’est l’amour du cœur de Jésus*” (in *Le curé d’Ars. Sa pensée – Son cœur*. Présentés par l’Abbé Bernard Nodet, éd. Xavier Mappus, Foi Vivante, 1966, p. 98), as cited in Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming A Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars”.

whole-hearted commitment, profound reflection and constant renewal. In spite of the human limitations and fragility, God continues to keep the Church and humanity in his loving care through the gift of priesthood. The renewal of priests thus leads to the renewal of the Church and the whole society.

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