

# Ten measures to combat clericalism

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## **1 / Set priests in their rightful place**

In the first place, etymologically, clericalism seems to target priests. The Pope defines it a “deviant way of conceiving authority in the Church”. It concerns the priest both in the way he perceives himself, and the laity in the way they behave towards him. Respect for the priest as a superman, blind confidence in his authority, ignorance of his weaknesses and, of his humanity in general ... are some of the ways to describe clericalism, which very often surface in cases of abuse committed by priests.

A liking for hierarchical titles is another aspect the Pope decries. He did not make a mistake when he generally restricted the attribution of the courtesy title of “Monsignor” to priests as from January 2014. It was also a way of fighting careerism within the clergy.

Today, the way young priests are trained excludes, “this notion of careerism; hierarchical ambition is outdated”, according to Father Jean-Luc Garin, Superior of the Inter-diocesan Seminary of Lille. Likewise, cooperation with the laity is seen in a much less formal way: “The priesthood is made for service, not for itself”. For one thing, at Lille Seminary, the candidate’s human dimension is taken into account and accompanied by a psychologist.

Therefore today, the period of formation of young priests, decisive for the exercise of their future ministry, seems to be planned precisely to prevent the excesses of clericalism, as outlined in the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* — *gift of the priestly vocation*, or “programme” promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy on the training of priests, at the end of 2016.

## **2 / Set the laity in their rightful place**

Some parishioners, who have been members of the pastoral animation teams for twenty years, prevent their renewal, others pose as defenders of an established order on the pretext that they feel they have been entrusted with a mission by the parish priest.... Such examples of secular clericalism abound.

People sometimes tend to “reduce the People of God to a small *élite*”, states Archbishop Jérôme Daniel Beau, President of the Episcopal Commission for Ordained Ministers and Lay People on Ecclesial Mission (CEMOLEME), meaning: to be a good Christian one had better be in the parish priest’s good books. This conception leads to friction and division in communities where every-one has difficulty in adjusting, finding his/her place, especially the young people.

According to Archbishop Beau, service is still the key to set the lay faithful in their rightful place. “A lay ‘cleric’ exercises a power; he/she does not render a service”. Now, with the decline in the number of priests, more and more baptized people are being entrusted with duties. “This invites us to rethink ecclesial communion”, Archbishop-elect of Bourges insists. He sees the future of parishes as becoming “self-supporting communities” in which no one, not even the priest, will be in a dominant position.

In this perspective, setting the layman in his rightful place amounts to speaking of a mission rather than of a function to which a power would be attached. Therefore, for some years now, lay people in ecclesial mission have been issued a renewable mandate of three years. Ultimately, the laity’s mission is: “to give up positions of authority, to serve in charity”, Archbishop Jérôme Beau concludes.

### **3 / Recall the equality of all through Baptism**

“It is quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of the Christian life”, the Second Vatican Council affirmed (*Lumen Gentium*, Ch. V, n. 40). In this sense, Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald, teacher at the Centre Sèvres, recalls, “baptism establishes a fundamental principle of equality among all the baptized, and this prevails over all the rest”. Vatican II also asserted that all the baptized have the “*sensus fidae*” and that this gives them certain rights, including the right to assemble. “The faithful can organize themselves into groups as they wish, to read the Gospels or to exercise solidarity”, Father Theobald says. “But if it is a question of a private law association, the faithful are not obliged to report what they have done to the clergy”.

While acknowledging the real difficulty in living Baptismal equality, Fr. Christoph Theobald observes that this is not specific to the Church: in all sectors of society, a hierarchy is established between specialists and others. “It is easy to mistake clerics for ‘religious specialists’ and to let them do the work. However, this produces tension, both for the clerics who are overworked, and for the faithful who are disappointed at no longer having priests who are available”.

This equality of the faithful and the clergy is all the more fundamental since it is based on the relationship of “inverse hierarchy” that Jesus lived. “But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves”, Christ declared after the institution of the Eucharist (Lk 22:26). Because Jesus inversed the hierarchical order, “clerics take second and not first place”, says Father Theobald, who likes to use the image of a priest water-diviner in front of the immense water-tables of the Church and of society. “Let them be the first to be surprised by the fraternal relations and the initiatives of the faithful, before taking the initiative and launching their own projects”.

### **4 / To assume the faults of the Church publicly**

Any Catholic who publicly speaks of the faults of the Church is exposed to two types of reaction. Either he will be congratulated for his courage and his concern for transparency, or he will be blamed for having “hurt” the Church and fuelled the arguments of its detractors; including when it comes to crime.

On the return flight from Ireland, the Pope did not hesitate to point out that the silence started first in the families affected by sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy. “Sometimes it is the parents who cover up the abuse by a priest. They do not believe it, or they convince themselves that it is not true, and the boy or girl is left like that”, Francis said, appealing to them: “speaking out, this is important ... speak up” (26.07.18).

Precisely, taking refuge in silence, coupled with a form of embarrassment, Pope Francis terms “spiritual corruption”, becomes a form of passive complicity. Dominican theologian Véronique Margron, thinks “this conspiracy of silence must really disappear. Such silence, excused both by the mediocre argument of ‘not wanting to harm the Church’, and by corruption, complicity, is no longer possible”. For the moralist, breaking the silence is not enough. “Taking on the faults of the Church is not just asking for forgiveness, it means taking strong action *vis-à-vis* the abusers, on a case-by-case basis, making financial redress for what can be fixed and instituting less opaque procedures. All too often, we do not know what happens to the files of the guilty priests”.

### **5 / Organize areas for debate in the Church**

Debate, between lay people or with a priest, means freedom of speech, freedom to express disagreement; a notion explicitly formulated in the Code of Canon Law. A few months ago *La Croix* had wondered about the possibility of debate in the Church (see our edition of 31 January), and had

noted the lack of a culture of debate among Catholics, and the absence of areas dedicated to its exercise.

This lack is undoubtedly linked to the pyramidal structure of the Institution which tends to turn to a higher authority, rather than to debate among equals. But it is also due to the sociology of French Catholicism, often described as a juxtaposition of “chapels”, of groups that seldom meet, and often do not like one another.

The Internet has not solved the difficulty, quite the contrary, although there has been a proliferation of blogs or Twitter accounts on which lay people express their views freely. These new interlocutors always tend to talk to “theirs”. To engage in a healthy culture of debate, “we still need to master the means”, theologian, Father Jean-François Chiron stressed: in order to educate oneself, choose the best institutional framework, such as a parish or a Faculty of Theology : do not set a new standard....

Initiatives of this sort already exist, such as the Centre Sèvres in Paris, which has revived and up-dated the tradition of *disputatio* between students. But it's still rare.

## **6 / Use your freedom of speech**

“This reality is still terribly deep-rooted: lay people efface themselves before their priests, they do not dare to express any disagreement to their face”, laments Monique Hébrard, journalist and author of the book, “Prêtres. Enquête sur le clergé d’aujourd’hui” (Priests. Survey of Today's Clergy).<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to explain that many of the faithful are reluctant to exercise this freedom, although explicit in the Code of Canon Law; feel too embarrassed to express their opinion in the Church? Fear of entering into conflict; feel intellectually inadequate....

“The freedom of speech of the laity depends on the attitude of the priest, on whether he maintains his distance, is unavailable, because of his consecration”, states Father Christian Delorme of Saint-Côme-Saint-Damien Parish in Caluire, in the suburbs of Lyons. Fr. Christian, in charge of the parish assembly, is also very committed in the political field on contentious subjects — i.e. against the far right, for Islamic-Christian dialogue.... In the Catholic ranks he encourages debate among his parishioners: “they dare to disagree with me, but always with due respect”. He affirms that, “allowing them the freedom to call it what they wish” has favoured this frank exchange.

To get out of this phenomenon of secular self-censorship, “the laity would need to be better trained in theology, pastoral care, and humanity”, Monique Hébrard enjoins. She was formerly a member of the “Paroles” group, and represented the Voice of the Laity in the media during the 1990's. “Not improvising, but assuming a stance of serious opposition would give them a more structured thought-pattern and enable them to dare to engage in dialogue with their priests, freely”.

## **7 / Governing the dioceses in a more collegial manner**

On 17 October 2015, in his Address to the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis recalled that “synodality is a constitutive element of the Church”, and stressed that “the first level of the exercise offers us the most appropriate framework had in the Particular Churches”, that is to say, precisely in those dioceses in which the government of the bishop often appears to be very personal.

“Unintentionally, Vatican II opened the door to this”, Father Patrick Valdrini, professor of Canon Law at the Pontifical Lateran University, observed. “By emphasizing the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders as the source of the bishop's power, he gave that power a sacred dimension. However, even if power in the Church is personal, it is never arbitrary: there are always authorized Colleges to counter-balance it”. In Fr. Patrick's view, it was precisely to counteract this trend that Francis stressed *synodality* so much.

In his speech in October 2015, the Pope recalled that apart from the Diocesan Synods there are various Councils around the bishop, and he underlined that: “these means of Synodality, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing”.

In practice, these Councils have undergone deviation. Thus, the College of Consultors, which the bishop is obliged to consult on the most important matters: (this “Council of Sages”, heir to the former Cathedral Chapter considered to be the “Bishop's senate”), no longer necessarily acts as the counter-power it was reputed to be. All too often, the Bishop appoints his Vicars General or clergy who then, by their function, support the bishop and his decisions.

As for the Pastoral Council, open to the laity but only on an advisory basis, which the Code of Canon Law does not yet oblige the bishop to appoint; nor is he even obliged to publish its work. This precariousness of the Pastoral Council also exists at the parish level where, sometimes, the priests do not hesitate to by-pass these lay people, perceived as seeking to slow down their initiatives.

## **8 / Entrust the laity with responsibility**

In this battle against clericalism, the laity has to take a stand: both symbolically and by assuming positions of high responsibility. Archbishop Jérôme Beau of Bourges, and President of the Episcopal Commission for Ordained Ministers and Lay People on Ecclesial Mission (CEMOLEME), states that shortly it will be necessary to ask oneself: “what constitutes the vocation of the lay person?”.

Even in the Vatican, Pope Francis would like to see lay people at the head of the important organizations directing the Church. In an interview with « Intercom » magazine, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, said that the Pope had confided to him “his weariness at seeing all the congregations taking the lead in absolutely everything”. These congregations are all headed by priests or bishops. And Cardinal Farrell added: “the most important people in the Church are not the priests or bishops, but the lay people”.

These hopes have still to take shape in the governance of the Church. A layman, on ecclesial mission in the Diocese of Paris for over eight years, observed “that he had not seen the laity so much as take a decisive place” in his diocese where “priests are not yet lacking”. According to him, this is “partly due to a lack of training, especially of the pastoral workers, and the fact that some priests do not view them as sufficiently qualified, compared to them”. In spite of the fact that a real training effort was made in the French dioceses.

This mistake is logical according to Anne Soupa, President of the Catholic Conference of the Baptized Francophones (CCBF), because, “Since the eleventh century, the priest, by his different nature, has been invested with the ‘triple munus’ of teaching, sanctifying and governing. That must change”.

To this end the CCBF wrote an open letter to the Bishops of France, urging them to hold a meeting on Church Governance to discuss the question of: “joint-governance with all the baptized” of the ecclesiastical institutions.

## **9 / Involve more women in the training of priests**

“This ordering and this familiarity with the feminine, so present in parishes and many ecclesial contexts, are beneficial to the human and spiritual formation of the seminarian and should always be seen in a positive light”, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, n. 95, (2016), promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy. These Proposals follow up the Recommendations of the Final Report (2015) of the Synod on the Family, which called for “enhancing the value” of feminine participation in the formation of future priests. However, this is far from being the case.

Of course, there are a few women teachers in most seminaries in France. But they are generally “allotted disciplines without direct theological bearing, such as classical languages or

history”, says with regret, biblical scholar Anne-Marie Pelletier who taught at the Seminary of the Diocese of Paris. At the Saint-Sulpice Seminary in Issy-les-Moulineaux, there are only seven women — including two who teach ecclesiology and theology — as against 40 men. Now, from this term, a mother of a family will assist the Superior of the Seminary. She has become a member of the Board with a letter of introduction from the Compagnie Saint-Sulpice.

“There is no reason why women should be excluded from any discipline. All branches of theology can be approached through the dual gaze of male and female, and future priests cannot be properly trained through the exclusive channel of a priestly word”, insists Dominican theologian Véronique Margron, former senior member of the Theology Faculty at Angers. She also calls for women to be members of Seminary Councils, recalling that during the years she taught moral theology at a diocesan seminary she was “never” invited to attend the Council meetings. “Given my discipline, one might have thought that I had had deep conversations with seminarians and that this would have justified my presence”. “The more plurality there is, the better equipped we will be to face authoritarianism”, Véronique Margron says, adding that clericalism and authoritarianism are not solely the prerogative of men or clerics: “There can be female clericalism too”.

## **10 / Place women in positions of authority**

“Women in the Church must be valued for themselves and not clericalized”, Pope Francis said in December 2013, rejecting the view of the Cardinals. In a way, to clericalize women would in effect perpetuate the clerical model. “Women must have their place in the Church as women”, insists feminist historian Lucetta Scaraffia, then head of the “Women, Church, World” supplement of *L'Osservatore Romano*. She does not believe in women priests, nor in deaconesses; a subject Pope Francis has entrusted to a commission whose work seems to have got lost in the sands of Vatican inertia....

Nevertheless, last April, Francis appointed three women consultants to the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: a first ever. And, by designating a layman at the beginning of the summer to head the Dicastery for Communication, he also opened the door to women prefects in the Dicastery.

Are Women Religious on the front line here? On the contrary, their representatives did not have the right to vote at the Synod, unlike the men religious. However, the leaders of large religious congregations would be well qualified to assume governing posts. The President of the International Union of Superiors General (representing 650,000 women religious around the world) would be in a good position to advise the Pope. Including at the “C9”.

In the dioceses, even more women could be appointed as chancellors or seminary teachers. Nothing prevents them from being spiritual guides, even from preaching retreats. “I dream of the Pope asking a woman to preach the retreat for the Curia”, Lucetta Scaraffia says who, like many others, questions the prohibition on women to comment on the Gospel at mass.

Finally, it should be remembered that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the General Presentation of the Roman Missal identify 17 different liturgical functions: so many avenues to explore specifically female ministries.

(1) Ed. Buchet-Chastel, 2008, pp. 280, € 22.30.

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