

NOTE

UNITAS SACERDOTALIS: THE PRIESTHOOD AND ITS SPIRITUALITY

A spirituality of the priesthood should be based on the theology of the priesthood, and the theology of the priesthood should, it would seem, be based on all the essential data. There are numerous inspiring presentations of one or other aspect of the priesthood. A classical example is that of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who stresses the unity that exists between the bishop and his clergy, and points out its profound significance as an image of the unity existing between Christ and the Father. "You must all obey the bishop as Jesus Christ obeyed the Father, and obey the *presbyterium* as you would the Apostles, and revere the deacons as God's commandment." "I exhort you, endeavor to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and the priests in the place of the senate of the Apostles, and the deacons . . . entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."¹ But while such treatments are valid as far as they go, they do not go far enough; they do not take into account all the essentials. To suggest some of the theological data on the priesthood which, it would seem, must be considered in any synthesis of sacerdotal spirituality, is the purpose of these observations.

1) The Supreme Pontiff has, *jure divino*, immediate and ordinary jurisdiction over each diocese and each of the faithful, a factor which, Pope Pius XII remarked in his discourse *Annus sacer* (December 8, 1950), had not received sufficient attention in the then current discussions. All priests are subject to this jurisdiction; there is no exemption here. Moreover, this jurisdiction is truly episcopal. *Catholicae ecclesiae episcopus* is the title Pope Pius XII used in signing the dogmatic definition of the Assumption. The whole world is, as it were, one large diocese under the Supreme Pontiff.

2) Every bishop of a diocese also has, *jure divino*, ordinary episcopal jurisdiction over the faithful of his diocese. Thus, for each diocese there are two *episcopi*, the Supreme Pontiff and the local bishop, who have ordinary jurisdiction over the same diocese and the same individuals. St. Thomas points out that there is no incongruity here, for one of these two jurisdictions, that of the Supreme Pontiff, is *principalior*.² The Vatican Council

¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrnaeos*, 8, 1; *Ad Magnesios*, 6, 1 (ed. Funk-Bihlmeyer, 108, 90); cf. also *Ad Philadelphenses*, 4 (ed. Funk-Bihlmeyer, 103).

² *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, sol. 5, ad 3m.

sees this jurisdiction of the Supreme Pontiff as sustaining and strengthening that of the bishops.³

3) The immediate and ordinary jurisdiction of the Supreme Pontiff over the whole world is the dogmatic basis for the greater or lesser exemption of cardinals, regulars, and others from the jurisdiction of the local ordinary. Likewise, the Supreme Pontiff is the superior general of every religious order (*CIC*, can. 499). This means that the jurisdiction which the superiors of exempt orders exercise over their subjects is not exercised independently of an *episcopus*, but in union with the Supreme Pontiff. Exemption is not opposed to, but is based on, the constitution of the Church.

4) The priesthood is conferred and exercised essentially in relationship to the episcopal power—essentially as a priesthood “of second rank,” *secundi meriti*, in the words of the Pontifical used in the conferring of priest’s orders. In the same text the bishop addresses the priests he ordains as *cooperatores ordinis nostri*. Abbé J. Colson has shown (conclusively, it seems to the present writer) that not only the priest’s power of jurisdiction but also his power of orders is exercised in a “dependence of cooperation” with that of the priesthood of first rank, that is, in cooperation with episcopal powers. Typical of this is the practice of priests concelebrating Mass with the bishop. The fact that a priest exercises his power of orders illicitly (though validly) when he acts without episcopal authorization, is seen by Abbé Colson as confirming this view.⁴

5) The priest who belongs to a diocese exercises his priestly powers as a cooperator of his bishop in cases in which he receives jurisdiction from his bishop, and as a cooperator of the Supreme Pontiff in cases in which he receives jurisdiction directly from the Code of Canon Law. The priest who belongs to an exempt religious order exercises his priestly powers partly in cooperation with the local ordinary, e.g., in hearing confessions of the faithful, and partly in cooperation with the Supreme Pontiff, e.g., when he hears confessions of his confreres in the order. A cardinal who uses the juris-

³ Sess. IV, cap. 3 (Denziger-Umberg, ed. 24–25, n. 1828).

⁴ J. Colson, “Fondement d’une spiritualité pour le prêtre de ‘second rang,’” *Nouvelle revue théologique*, LXXIII (1951), 1049–59; cf. p. 1059: “Et qu’il soit prêtre diocésain, c’est-à-dire soumis à la juridiction d’un évêque local—et, en même temps, à la juridiction de Celui qui, étant précisément symbole efficace de l’unité de l’épiscopat universel, possède juridiction universelle: l’Evêque de Rome—ou qu’il soit prêtre régulier, et, comme tel, exempt de la juridiction d’un évêque résidentiel, pour dépendre principalement, par ses supérieurs, de la juridiction de l’Evêque de Rome, le prêtre de second rang trouve la ‘spiritualité’ de sa fonction dans sa référence à l’épiscopat, dans son caractère de ‘coopérateur’ de l’Ordre épiscopal. Il n’y a donc pas une spiritualité sacerdotale du clergé diocésain différente, en tant qu’elle est sacerdotale, de celle du clergé régulier.”

diction given him by canon 239 to hear confessions anywhere in the world, is exercising his priestly powers as a cooperator of the Supreme Pontiff.

6) The Church, that is, the Universal Church, is a juridically perfect society, *societas perfecta*. A priest *secundi meriti* who cooperates with the *episcopus* who is head of that perfect society, the Supreme Pontiff, is in a position, objectively, to develop a full spirituality of the priesthood, even though he may belong to a local church that is not fully constituted, e.g., to a mission, a prefecture, or a vicariate. The very name of apostolic (i.e., papal) vicariate or apostolic prefecture implies this. In the same way, a priest in an exempt order, or a cardinal who is not a bishop, can have a complete spirituality of the priesthood even when he exercises his priestly powers without the local bishop, because he still exercises them in conjunction with an *episcopus*, the Supreme Pontiff. Such would also be the case of a secular priest belonging to a basilica exempt from episcopal jurisdiction and subject solely to the Holy See.

7) A diocese or particular church is, on the other hand, a juridically imperfect society, *societas imperfecta*.⁵ As such, it does not possess within itself all the means necessary to reach its end. It follows that a theology or a spirituality of the priesthood based exclusively or predominantly on the local church, is incomplete or disproportionate. It would lack or under-emphasize an essential part, not merely an integral part. Most of a priest's routine ministry may be performed in cooperation with his local ordinary, with jurisdiction received from him, but his priesthood also makes him, necessarily and *jure divino*, a cooperator of the other *episcopus* who has jurisdiction over him (a jurisdiction that is *principalior*), the Supreme Pontiff. If a priest's spirituality does not take that into account, it will suffer, for part of his essential priestly status and part of his essential priestly activity (that part performed through jurisdiction received directly from the Code of Canon Law) will not be consciously inspired by its objective dogmatic basis, which is cooperation with the *catholicae ecclesiae episcopus*.

8) A spirituality cannot be simplified if the essential theological facts are multiple, but it must integrate these multiple facts into a harmonious whole. This is true even on the natural plane. Civic virtue for a citizen of Davenport, Iowa, must integrate loyalty to the city of Davenport, to the state of Iowa, and to the United States. This leads to the principle of superimposed or integrated spiritualities. A second spirituality can further a prior one. St. Paul, who teaches a spirituality of unity among Christians established

⁵ Cf. L. Billot, *De ecclesia Christi* (5th ed.; Rome, 1927), p. 451; Lercher-Schlagenhaufen, *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae*, I (Barcelona, 1945), 241.

by baptism, also teaches (and in the same epistle) a spirituality of unity in connection with the Eucharist. "In one spirit we are all baptized in one body, whether Jews or Gentiles" (I Cor. 12:13). "We, being many, are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). Again, a specialized spirituality can be added to a general spirituality. Thus it happens that various dioceses and religious orders use the same basic Roman Breviary with additional feast days and commemorations proper to the respective dioceses or orders. Finally, two specialized spiritualities can be superimposed harmoniously and with benefit to both, e.g., that of the priesthood and that of a religious founder.

In the case of the priesthood exercised through a diocese, two spiritualities must be superimposed: the priest must see himself as the cooperater of the local ordinary and of the Supreme Pontiff. Every priest, secular or religious, is, in this sense, *juris pontificii*. A priest belonging to a diocese is both pontifical and diocesan; no priest can be merely diocesan. An exempt religious who, through the jurisdiction received from the local bishop, administers the sacraments in a diocese, is both pontifical (in matters pertaining to his exemption) and diocesan (in administering these sacraments). The secular priest and the regular priest who are working in the same diocese are, both of them, "diocesan," and, both of them, "pontifical," in degrees or domains partly different, it is true, but the difference is a material, not a formal one. The priest in an apostolic prefecture or vicariate might be considered purely "pontifical," for the territory has no bishop of its own. But his priestly spirituality need not thereby be incomplete or undeveloped, for he has the essential requirement for the exercise of the priesthood *secundi meriti*, of second rank, that is his through the sacrament of holy orders.

9) The spirituality proper to a particular religious order is not the spirituality of the priesthood as such in that order. The sacerdotal spirituality of a priest who is a Redemptorist is not per se different from that of a priest who is a Dominican.⁶ But the spirituality of a distinctive school can be integrated with the spirituality of the priesthood, to the advantage of both. However, the spirituality of the priesthood itself is not changed essentially when another spirituality is harmoniously combined with it.

10) The spirituality of St. Ignatius of Antioch on union with the local bishop needs integrating, it would seem, with a similar theology of union with the Supreme Pontiff. This latter theology can be expressed in words borrowed from another Oriental, St. Theodore of Studium. In one of his catecheses St. Theodore recalls the Pope's condemnation of the adversaries of the holy images, the Ikonomachi. "If they are separated from the leader (the Pope), they are also separated from the other patriarchs, and they are

⁶ Cf. J. Colson, *art. cit.*, p. 1049.

also separated *from Christ* who is the head of all these other heads." In the year 821 Theodore wrote to the Emperor Michael, pleading with him to end the schism of the Byzantine Church. "Our Church is separated from the four patriarchs. . . . But now is the time to reconcile ourselves *with Christ* . . . to unite ourselves *with the Church of Rome*, and through her *with the patriarchs*, so that all together with one voice we may glorify the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost."⁷ Here St. Theodore teaches that union with the Supreme Pontiff means (1) union with the other patriarchs and (2) union with God. What St. Theodore said of the Church of Constantinople can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the priest of second rank: through his union with the Supreme Pontiff every priest is united (1) with all other priests and (2) with Christ.

Here we have the basis for a spirituality of the priesthood as a cooperation with Christ—which it is above all else. Here we also have a basis for the fraternity of all priests. Besides the divinely established fraternities of those priests who belong to the various dioceses throughout the world, and are united to their respective bishops, there is a larger brotherhood, also divinely established, which embraces all the priests of the Universal Church, and unites them among themselves and to the Supreme Pontiff. This latter brotherhood may be thought of, in St. Thomas' term, as *principaliior*.⁸

In conclusion, every priest of second rank is, necessarily and by divine right, a cooperator working with and united to the Supreme Pontiff. Hence there is an essential unity and brotherhood of the entire priestly body throughout the world, whether the individual priests belong to an exempt basilica, to an order of regulars, to a vicariate, or to a diocese. We see that oneness and fraternity, a true *unitas sacerdotalis*, when we turn to the Apostolic See: "ad Petri cathedram atque ad ecclesiam principalem unde unitas sacerdotalis orta est."⁹

Whatever factors may and must enter into a theology or spirituality of the priesthood, there is one that cannot be omitted—that divinely established unity which makes the entire Catholic priesthood one brotherhood under the Vicar of Christ, the *catholicae ecclesiae episcopus*.

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⁷ Theodore of Studium, *Epist.*, II, 66, 74 (*PG*, XCIX, 1292, 1309).

⁸ The existence of the brotherhood of all priests under the Supreme Pontiff is overlooked in a recent work by J. C. Fenton, *The Concept of the Diocesan Priesthood* (Milwaukee, 1951), *passim*; cf. p. 26: "Within the Catholic Church the diocesan priest and only the diocesan priest is a member of a bishop's *presbyterium* and of *no other established sacerdotal brotherhood*" (italics added).

⁹ Cyprian, *Epist.*, LV (*PL*, IV, 358).