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Eucharist and the Formation of the Clergy

“Living” and “Being Formed” to Preside at the Eucharist
in the Development of Models of Priesthood

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1. Introductory questions

The theme assigned for this contribution, reduced to the bare essentials, hides many complications since it involves a large number of issues to be clarified.

The title, “*Eucharist and the formation of the clergy*,” should be interpreted in at least two senses: 1 - “*The Eucharist in the formation of the clergy*,” where the accent is placed on the role that the Eucharistic celebration has in the formation of seminarians, or on their daily path of priestly formation; 2 - “*The formation of the clergy for the Eucharist*,” where the accent is placed on formation for the Eucharistic celebration as is done in seminaries and institutes of formation.

From this point of view, the perspective widens to embrace an entire series of questions that revolve around the theme *Eucharist and priestly formation*. It means, concretely, asking how seminarians are formed to live the Eucharistic celebration, how it is experienced in the seminary, what the main formation concerns are to prepare them to preside at the Eucharistic celebration, and to prepare the seminarians to develop their future ministry with responsibility and competence. All this should be placed in the broader perspective of formation for life and for the priestly mission.¹

¹ The issue here directly turns toward initial formation and not permanent or ongoing formation, even if these two phases of formation are generally today considered more unified than they were in the past. If since the Council the tendency was to consider ongoing formation as a kind of continuation of initial formation, today one tends to consider and think of initial formation in the light of ongoing formation. The following stimulating studies concern the relationship between initial and ongoing formation: AA.VV., *Sacerdoti per la nuova evangelizzazione. Studi sull'Esortazione*

1.1 *Formation in evolution*

Formation clearly depends not only on the demands of a formation to be carried out in a specified place, but also on the ideal figure that one intends to propose and thus to join to formation itself. Although the Council of Trent had expressed a very precise model to define the figure and interpret the role of the “pastor of souls,” the same cannot be said of the Second Vatican Council. The recent council laid down the foundations for a reformulation of priestly identity in relation to a new image of Church, but it did not propose one exclusive figure or one exclusive model.² Certainly it understood the need to overcome the tridentine concept of a “man of worship,” a concept rooted in an image of a “Gregorian style” Church perfectly inculturated in the spirit of Christendom. Instead, it put forth a radical change in the way that the clergy should live their ecclesial belonging, in relationship to the world and to society, living their own consecration and interpreting their personal mission.³

apostolica “Pastores dabo vobis” di Giovanni Paolo II (ed. E. dal Covolo and A.M. Triacca), Las, Roma 1994; AA.VV., *Il primato della formazione*, Glossa, Milano 1997; AA.VV., *La formazione dei formatori*, in «Presenza pastorale» LXVIII 6-7 (1998); A. CENCINI, *I sentimenti del figlio. Il cammino formativo nella vita consacrata*, EDB, Bologna 1998; AA.VV., *Percorsi della cittadinanza. Materiali per la formazione*, AVE, Roma 2000; AA.VV., *Quando un’asina educa il profeta*, Comunità Edizioni, Fermo 2000; AA.VV., *La formazione nella comunità cristiana*, EDB, Bologna 2002; AA.VV., *La religione postmoderna*, Glossa, Milano 2003; AA.VV., *Formare i presbiteri. Principi e linee di metodologia pedagogica*, LAS, Roma 2003; AA.VV., *Prevedere e provvedere. La formazione in un mondo che cambia*, Paoline, Milano 2004; AA.VV., *Vivere in Cristo*, Città Nuova, Roma 2004.

² For a deepening of the issue of the formation of the clergy in an historical perspective of changing models: GUASCO M., *Seminari e clero nel ’900*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1990; OFFI M., *I preti*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1998.

³ As regards studies on priestly ministry, the bibliography is enormous. Among the studies important for their breadth of treatment and for their summaries, see: GRESHAKE G., *Essere preti. Teologia e spiritualità del ministero sacerdotale*, Queriniana, Brescia 1995 (orig. ed. *Priestersein. Zur Theologie und Spiritualität des priesterlichen Amtes*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau 1982, 1991³); MARTELET G., *Teologia del sacerdozio. Duemila anni di Chiesa in questione*, Queriniana, Brescia 1986 (orig. ed. *Théologie du sacerdoce. Deux mille ans d’Eglise en question. Crise de la foi, crise du prêtre*, Cerf, Paris 1984); DIANICH S., *Teologia del ministero ordinato. Una interpretazione ecclesiological*, Paoline, 1984. For a more spiritual and pastoral perspective, see: AA.VV., *Il prete. Identità del ministero e oggettività della fede* (ed. G. Colombo), Glossa, Milano 1990; DORÉ J. - VIDAL M., *Des Ministres pour l’Eglise*, Cerf, Paris 2001; LUSTIGER J.M., *I preti che Dio ci dona*, Massimo, Milano 2001; MOIOLI G., *Scritti sul prete*, Glossa, Milano 2002. For an up-to-date bibliography, see the following by the Associazione Teologica Italiana, AA.VV., *Il ministero ordinato. Nodi teologici e prassi ecclesiali* (ed. M. Qualizza), San Paolo, Milano 2004.

At the level of documents, it may be said that the main lines had already been drawn up, but at the level of the incarnation of the figure of the priest, the panorama is quite varied. There are many styles and various models of priesthood that the seminarians encounter in their beginning years of pastoral ministry, and these models and references are mutually diverse.⁴ The central questions are: what kind of priest? And for which Christian community? And how to interpret the role of pastor and guide of the Christian community, taking into account the cultural, social and ecclesial context in which one lives and works? I believe that on this point no one can offer exhaustive answers, given the utter complexity of the modern world.

The seminary therefore finds it impossible to offer a single or exclusive model of priesthood or, better, to offer an ideal figure of the priest as it has been presented in the post-conciliar era, with the many incarnations and interpretations of the role that make adequate formational programs difficult. The result is that, with all its problems, it is difficult to hand on the theological and pastoral depth of the identity of the figure of the priest. Today's seminaries and institutes of religious formation can only offer criteria, guidelines, principles, through which each candidate can construct his own proper identity as a priest-pastor.⁵

The situation is worrisome, since there is not a strong identity or formation targeted to reach a given figure. For others, however, all this may turn out to be extremely stimulating, since it foreshadows one to invent, to construct and to carve out a role that has not yet been offered.

⁴ Among the more recent typologies of Catholic clergy, see the interesting research in *Priester 2000*, which dealt with diocesan clergy of Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Croatia and Poland. From these studies, four models of priests arise: the a-temporal cleric, the man of God open to the modern age, the modern Churchman, the leader of the modern community. The results of the study are contained in ZULEHNER P.M. - HENNERSPERGER A., *Sie gehen und werden nicht matt. Priester in heutiger Kultur. Ergebnisse der Studie Priester 2000*, Ostfildern, Schwabenverlag 2001; summarized by the authors in the essay *Preti nella cultura contemporanea*, in «Il Regno» XLVI (2001) 885, 483-489. In the Italian context, similar research has been done in 2000 and 2001 by the research institute Eurisko and analyzed by Garelli and his collaborators. There are four kinds of clergy: the mediation model, the modernity and tradition model, the nostalgic-reactionary model, and the social-challenge model. See: AA.VV., *Sfide per la Chiesa nel nuovo secolo. Indagine sul clero in Italia* (ed. F. Garelli), Il Mulino, Bologna 2003.

⁵ It will be the ministry and life itself that will call forth the capacity of reinventing oneself as pastors, continually open to the new, despite an early old age and an expected fossilization. Naturally, human and spiritual maturity occur, with openness of spirit, docility but at the same time firmness in principles, practicality together with a great idealism — qualities to be acquired during the years of formation.

1.2 *The Eucharist in formation*

As regards the role of the Eucharist in the formation of seminarians, the question of law is quickly resolved. I borrow words from Cardinal Kasper who summarized the issue very well: “The celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of our Church.... It is the great legacy which the Lord left us on the eve of his passion and death. It is the most precious thing that we possess as a Church. It is the heart of our Church. Everything is ordered to it, and from it comes the strength for all the other parts of ecclesial life and not least for our personal life. From a *correct understanding* and a *correct practice* of the Eucharistic celebration everything pastoral depends, through which we will never do enough to understand more deeply or to celebrate better this mystery of faith.”⁶

Thus, the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of seminary formation, just as it is of every aspect of ecclesial life.⁷ From this perspective, the operative guidelines for formative practice in seminaries are well repeated in the documents.⁸ The celebration of the Eucharist in the course of the day should take a central position: it is to be celebrated daily and worthily and, it should be said, with a certain solemnity (always singing certain parts, dividing the roles to

⁶ KASPER W., *Sacramento dell'unità. Eucharistia e Chiesa*, Queriniana, Brescia 2004, 9 (italics in the citation are mine). Out of this concern comes the plan in the book AA.VV., *Eucharistia. Enciclopedia dell'Eucharistia* (M. Brouard edd.), EDB, Bologna 2004. It is hefty volume (in the Italian version, 975 pages) which pulls together a huge amount of material that is very heterogeneous in methodologies, approaches and results. Eight-one editors from five continents, an expression of various ecclesial traditions, present in summary the results of their specific research. Consequently, it is a text which, thanks to its multidisciplinary approach, attempts to present the various aspects of the Eucharistic mystery in the most complete way possible. Also, another large volume: RAFFA V., *Liturgia eucaristica. Mistagogia della Messa: dalla storia e dalla teologia alla pastorale pratica*, CLV, Roma 2004². This is also an encyclopedic work (of 875 pages) which presents the various parts of the *Ordo Missae* by furnishing a systematic and virtually complete bibliography of specific monographs.

⁷ The expression «fons et culmens» has found large resonance in magisterial documents. The major references are SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10, *Lumen Gentium*, 11; C.I.C. 246.

⁸ I refer to the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* from the Congregation for Catholic Education, 6 January 1970 [AAS 72 (1970) 321-384] and revised after the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law, 19 March 1985 [EV SI, 918-1072] and in *Pastores dabo vobis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the formation of priests in the modern day, 25 March 1992 [AAS 84 (1992) 657-804]. Other documents are in: CONGREGAZIONE PER L'EDUCAZIONE CATTOLICA, *Documenti - Formazione dei sacerdoti nel mondo d'oggi*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 1990.

exercise the various ministries), and with a spirit of faith. Besides, there should be a “wise variety” in the way of participation, to make the celebration subjectively more efficacious and the seminarians better aided in preparing themselves for future ministry in the Eucharistic apostolate.⁹

1.3 Formation for Eucharist

However, when we move from the question of law to the question of fact, things change notably. The way in which the Eucharist is celebrated in seminaries depends on certain variables or contingencies, such as the composition of the seminary community, the number, age, origin and social class of the seminarians, whether the formators are homogeneous or heterogeneous, the kinds of educational methods, etc. Also, some of these factors are stable and always present, even if they are not there consciously or reflexively in the teachers or formators. The form of the Eucharistic celebration and the style of presiding depend on how the priest interprets himself and his proper role. It is worthwhile adding that, just as a priest understands his being in relationship to his mission to be developed, from the concrete ways in which he relates to the world and to culture in general, so does the image of the Church depend on what he wants to promote and the type of celebration that he wants to live out.

On the one hand, the lived Eucharist is a tremendously powerful agent in formation (the Eucharist forms and shapes what is lived in conformity with what is celebrated); and on the other hand, it is a reflection and mirror of a formational proposition (the celebrative “form” is for service, or is conditioned by formational activities and strategies.) Clearly, the various ways of celebrating correspond to the various models of priesthood.

I now move to sketch in broad strokes the various figures or models of priesthood from Trent and from Vatican II, the various ways of living and celebrating the Eucharist linked to various visions of the Church, various formation models and the resulting spiritualities. This encounter allows us more easily to gather up the new elements proposed by the Second Vatican Council and to lay down the foundations for overcoming the tridentine model. Of course, it produced much fruit for the Church in the age of Christendom, but it needs now to be radically reconsidered to correspond to modern times.

⁹ The principal references: VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 17-18-19, *Optatam totius*, 8, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5, *Ad Gentes*, 19.

2. The priest of the Council of Trent and the sacrament of “union”

2.1 *The figure of the “sacerdos”*

When the council Fathers met at Trent, they had to confront issues concerning sacerdotal functioning. They were conditioned by the great task of reacting to the criticisms in the thought of the Reformation. The Reformers had attacked, among other points, the very idea of priesthood and sacrifice. From the denial of the sacrificial aspects of the Mass, they derived the rejection of the dimension and function of the priest in the very celebration of Mass. As a result, they put into opposition a sacramental vision of the priesthood with a ministerial, or diaconal, vision.¹⁰

The council Fathers reacted under the inspiration of the thought of Thomas Aquinas and joined indissolubly Eucharistic priesthood and sacrifice.¹¹ The result was twofold and ambivalent. On the one hand, there came about an important clarification and the fixing of doctrine; but on the other, they failed to draw up a complete vision of the problem, unleashed from the demands of polemics. Thus in its dogmatic texts, for reasons of an immature ecclesiology and a polemic emphasis on the doctrine of the priesthood, there emerged a “reduced” figure of the priest, fundamentally involved only in worship.

There are two important points in the argumentation: 1 - In the New Testament, to a visible and exterior priesthood is joined the power of consecrating the body and blood of the Lord and of forgiving sins; 2 - Orders is a sacrament instituted by Christ himself which imparts a character. Holy Orders is therefore not just a simple office but a sacrament; it is received by means of consecration and anointing and cannot be the object of any rethinking, since it changes ontologically the person who receives it, producing permanent effects.

¹⁰ In Luther’s pamphlet that brought about his break, published in 1520, *Luther Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* affirmed that all Christians belong to the ecclesiastical state, and that there is no difference except for the office proper to each one. “Baptism and the Gospel make all of us religious and Christians.” Consequently, the primacy of the common priesthood of the faithful and of the Word, its ecclesiastical office and the Eucharist. For the description of this model in reaction to the Reformation, I refer to the results of the study of the theme by Luigi Mezzadri in *A lode della gloria. Il sacerdozio nell’écôle française XVII-XX secolo*, Jaca Book, Milano 1989, in particular, the introduction, pages 9-36.

¹¹ Session XXIII, 15 July 1563, on Holy Orders, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (ed. Istituto per le Scienze Religiose di Bologna), EDB, Bologna 1991, 742 ff.

From Trent's reform decrees, on the other hand, there emerges a more complete concept. The pastor should know the people committed to his care, and he should nourish them with the Word, the sacraments, and his personal example, and he should love them in their weakest members. To accomplish this, he has to live in the place where he exercises his ministry, give a homily during Sunday Mass, teach catechism, and pray the Liturgy of the Hours for the people confided to him.¹²

In substance, the image of the priest from Trent is one of a man of the sacred, concerned with the salvation of souls and his own sanctification. Without a doubt the council laid the foundations for a reform of the clergy, but it happened only thanks to the activity of certain great personalities who joined ecclesiastical reform to spiritual renewal.¹³

2.2 *The theological concept of priestly identity*

The figure of the tridentine priest in spiritual literature found its legitimacy in the theological vision inspired by the corpus of writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. In this perspective, the priest is the man of worship. He has a sacral idea of his function, and interprets priesthood as mediation. He is and understands himself as a pontiff, a mediator between God and the community. Just as in the order of angels there are three levels of hierarchy, in which each hierarchy receives divine illumination from above and grants it to the lower levels, so also the ecclesiastical hierarchy is ordered as a kind of pyramid. Through the angels, the bishop communicates with God, and through the bishop, they rain down on the lower grades the powers of order and sanctification. The priest inhabits a lower level than the bishop, but is always lifted above that of men. Because he is lifted above the order of men by the sacrament of Orders, the priest receives an indelible character which separates him from the community and lets him become a man set apart for divine worship. Because of Orders, he undergoes a true and proper ontological

¹² The attempt to limit the phenomenon of the so-called "Mass priest" is clear. An income from a patrimony was a sufficient canonical title for ordination; afterwards, the priest could leave without exercising any pastoral ministry, and so could avoid ever preaching or hearing confessions, but limited himself only to the celebration of the Eucharist.

¹³ In the Church there can be no genuine reform without spiritual renewal. It is impossible to present here the complete sacerdotal movement in the post-Trent period, other than to list its most qualified exponents: For Italy, St. Charles Borromeo, and for France, the work of the Cole franchise, with its major figures: Bérulle, Condere, Oliver, Eudes, Vincent de Paul, and the influence of the teaching of Francis de Sales.

change that makes him different than other men. From this, there developed a complete priestly spirituality that insisted on his radical diversity from ordinary men, on separation, and on the duty of a greater sanctification.¹⁴

2.3 The vision of the Eucharist and the main post-tridentine liturgical deformations

In the Dionysian model, the Eucharist is the “sacrament of union.” The Eucharist lifts believers out of their divided lives to bring them to unity, and through this divine reduction of divisions, it grants them communion and union with the One. This strongly unifying character makes of this sacrament the necessary complement of all the others, which, without it, are incomplete. Thus the Eucharist finds its center in the sacramental ceremonies. For this reason, it appears as the “sacrament of sacraments.”

Union, which the Eucharist (Synaxis) brings about, binds one to God, the supreme One and Only. But since this union is impossible without the reduction of interior division, a person must have the form of the One to enter into communion with Him. In this way, the sacrament of union is radically opposed to sin and to the passions, the bases of multiplicity and division.

In conformity with this vision there results an entire ascetical spirituality focusing on interior purification. From this comes the insistence on going to confession before receiving communion and of deferring communion to attain the best possible spiritual conditions. Such praxis was promoted in the tridentine seminaries, so much so that, although the Eucharist was celebrated daily, communion was received only once a week. It took place during the solemn *Missa cantata*, after which there was another Mass of thanksgiving. Eucharistic piety lived more through the adoration of the real presence, which had the primary importance, than through the common participation in the sacrament.¹⁵

Out of this vision, in the course of the following centuries, various aspects emerged which have so weighed on the past as to block, even today, liturgical renewal.

The first aspect to be reinforced in the Eucharistic liturgy was the “sacral mentality.” The celebration emphasized the aspect of the

¹⁴ To understand the model, see the celebrated work of ROQUES R., *L'universo dionisiano. Struttura gerarchica del mondo secondo Ps. Dionigi Aeropagita*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1996; orig. ed. *L'univers Dionysien: Structure Hiérarchique du Monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*, Paris 1954.

¹⁵ MEZZADRI L. - ONNIS F., *Missione e Carità. La Congregazione della Missione nel Settecento. I - Francia e Italia*, CLV, Roma 1999, 208-215.

mystery of the rite, along with the priestly function with its character of separation. Worship became more and more clericalized, seen, for example, architecturally in the choir or sanctuary which became more and more separated from the main nave. Through grilles or chancels or balustrades (which correspond to the oriental iconostasis) the people were left with an occasional view of what was happening in the sacred precincts and were excluded from any possibility of participation.

A second aspect of the profound transformation of the liturgy, closely joined with the first, is the loss of the assembly. A throng of people gathered around the officiating priest, but they were only passively present and understood very little. Even the liturgical language, Latin, contributed in increasing the distance. In this way, the dynamism of the liturgy was lost along with the liturgical focus on altar, presiding and ambo. The altar disappeared, since it developed into a support for a huge backdrop or a grandiose tabernacle. The seat disappeared since a priest presided over the Eucharist who was not part of the assembly. The ambo also disappeared, substituted by a pulpit for sermons, while the Word of God was read in a dead language in the area restricted to clerics.

The relationship to God in the Eucharistic celebration came to assume a private or devotional character: it was the celebration of a sublime ritual which served to consecrate the Eucharistic species with which one was nourished (less and less often for the people), and especially to be adored. The tabernacle, placed in the center of the apse, became the main liturgical focus, and the nave was filled with many altars around which developed private pious practices.

To these aspects of deformation (clericalization of worship, loss of the assembly, private devotionalism) there should be added the heavy rubricism which became the standard liturgical practice. The Council of Trent granted the Roman Curia exclusive competence in legislating liturgical matters. This liturgical centralism, established by Pius V, was consolidated by Sextus V with the institution of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. To this was added the competence of officially interpreting the liturgical books and of watching over the exact execution of the rites. In this way, moral and juridical problems took the upper hand over theological and pastoral ones. The mentality thus developed, in priests, of the importance of celebrating the sacrament "validly" (for the assembly) and "licitly" (for the celebrant), on condition that grace be "objectively" efficacious *ex opere operato*. The concerns of the celebrant converged on having a technically perfect celebration, without formal and material errors, scrupulously respecting all the rubrics, and being faithful to all the juridical-sacramental prescriptions. Almost completely absent, however, was attention to subjective conditions, to the reception of sacramental grace.

3. The priest of the Second Vatican Council and the sacrament of unity

3.1 The figure of the “presbyter”

There is no doubt that the Council intended to put forth a renewal of priestly life,¹⁶ but I believe that renewal had an great impact on the Council event itself, with the exception of certain indications in the conciliar documents: chapter III of *Lumen Gentium*, the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* on the ministry and life of priests, 7 December 1965 (the final conciliar document), the decree *Optatam Totius* on priestly formation and the motu proprio *Ecclēsię Sanctę* containing the norms for application, dated 1966. Chapter III of LG is, in the judgment of all the commentators, the least successful of the entire constitution, together with the section about religious life (chap. VI). For this reason, PO lacks a prophetic quality, while the norms for application do not confront in any depth the issue of the evangelical renewal of priestly life. The crisis which has weighed, and still weighs, on priestly life is also due to this lacuna, this lack of strong prophetic signs that the council was able to express on other topics.¹⁷

More than the strength of the documents, it has been the council event itself which, together with rapid cultural and social changes, has shaken priestly life to its roots. The result has been a great variety of incarnations of priestly ministry, authorized by an extensive and thorough reading of the conciliar documents.¹⁸ Thus to define and better understand the figure of the priestly minister of Vatican II we have to examine not only the texts dealing with it directly, but the complex of acts that gave rise to the documents: in the light of a renewed vision of liturgy and a new image of Church; in

¹⁶ Already on the level of terminology, the newness is clear. It was preferable to turn to the term *presbyter*, used in the patristic age, rather than *sacerdos*, used at Trent. This speaks a lot about the attempt to overcome a certain tradition.

¹⁷ See the developmental story of *Presbyterorum ordinis*, compiled by WASSELYNCK R., *Les prêtres. Elaboration du décret de Vatican II. Histoire et genèse des textes conciliaires*, Desclée & Cie, Paris 1968.

¹⁸ A note on methodology: if we take into account only the documents that look exclusively at the figure of the priest, the texts allow themselves to be interpreted in a traditionalist sense, from a reading which is limited to the letter. In this case, Vatican II would be nothing other than a deepening of Trent. But if the texts are interpreted in a broader framework of a renewed vision of Church and in a different way of relating to the world in general, then there emerges quite a different figure of the priest in respect to Trent. Consulting the *Thesaurus conciliorum oecumenicorum et generalium ecclesię catholice*, Series A - Brepols, Formae, Turnhout 1996, is particularly revealing.

the context of the new mission to be developed, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*; in relation to the pastoral activity of the laity and the critical issues posed by modernity, with a network of relations that the Church is summoned to establish with the world of culture, the social and political realities present in various countries, other religions, with a heightened ecumenical sensibility and openness to the contemporary world in general. This is where the true novelty of the Second Vatican Council is to be found.¹⁹

3.2 The identity and interpretation of the role of the pastoral minister

I turn now to lay out in broad strokes the vision of the figure of the priest of Vatican II by gathering together the important changes brought about by the council in our work of thinking about this ministry.²⁰

When the Council was working on which has been called, regrettably, the *hierarchical constitution of the Church*, it began with bishops. To them has been conferred the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, and the threefold power of teaching, sanctifying and governing. The definition of the person who has received the sacrament of Orders as pastor in the image of Christ orients him directly to the community: *pastors for the community*. And they are pastors by reason of a charism recognized by the community but which came from the Spirit. For this reason, the Council insisted on the unity of charism and sacrament for the pastoral minister.

Just like the bishop, the figure of the presbyter is defined by a global responsibility for a community. The priest is considered as the representative of the bishop and his first collaborator. Thus he exercises the pastoral responsibility of Jesus Christ on a part of a particular Church: this is his responsibility. Following Irenaeus and Augustine, the Council explained that priests are ordained to contribute to building up a community of living persons who are to be, through their mutual charity and witness, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God. Their ministry is ordained to the construction of the Christian community. For this reason, they are called to collaborate,

¹⁹ AA.VV., *L'Eglise de Vatican II* (ed. G. Barauna), vols. I-II, Cerf, Paris 1966; AA.VV., *Vatican II. Bilancio & prospettive* (ed. R. Latourelle), Cittadella, Assisi 1987; ROUTHIER G., *L'ecclésiologie catholique dans le sillage de Vatican II. La contribution de Walter Kasper à l'herméneutique de Vatican II*, in « Laval théologique et philosophique » 60 (2004) 13-51.

²⁰ For a global vision, see LAFONT G., *Immaginare la Chiesa cattolica. Linee e approfondimenti per un nuovo dire e un nuovo fare della comunità cristiana*, San Paolo, Milano 1998, especially pages 153-201, dedicated to deepening the « Il carisma diversificato della Presidenza » (chap. 7).

according to what is proper to them, in the building up of the Christian community (they are not its only builders, but co-builders of the community.) And what is proper to them, that is, their specific ministry, is to preside over the community.

The priest, therefore, is (or should become) the animator of the community, the coordinator of its various charisms and ministries, the guarantor for the community itself of the apostolicity of its various expressions (this is what binds him to the bishop). He is the one who exercises (or should exercise) the function of the moderator of the community and who possesses the charism of discernment and vigilance. He is no longer the *holy man* for worship, but the presider over the community, the *dialogue man*, and the agent of communion. In this perspective, the Eucharist becomes the sacrament of the unity of the various expressions of the charismatic and ministerial nature of the Church.

What I have just said comes simply from the ecclesiological inspiration of Vatican II. In reality, there is a noteworthy change as regards Trent, which would demand a great deal of time to be able to enter the mentality of a believer. The priestly spirituality of Trent insisted in the first place on the sacramental function of the priest (everything was directed to the Eucharistic celebration), and consequently to a certain idea of sacramental character which made such a function possible, seeing in it what is exclusive in the area of apostolate and mission. If, according to Vatican II, the specific task of the priest is presiding or moderating a community, this does not mean that this covers everything in the Church. It is normal and necessary that the laity intervene, according to their proper charism, full-time or part-time, in the exercise of the power of teaching, sanctifying and governing.²¹

3.3 Liturgical reform and the goal of formation

The Second Vatican Council decided also on a radical development in the understanding of the meaning of the liturgy in the life of the Christian community. It intervened with a renewal of the structure of ritual itself which had noteworthy implications for the way of conceiving and interpreting priestly ministry. From this

²¹ The reference is to the various services exercised according to what is proper to each one with their various ecclesial components: the *service of the Word* (evangelization and mission, liturgy, catechesis), the *service of the tables* (all the ministries of compassion and charity), the *service of administration* (looking to the goods of the community). These are services which should be exercised fully in themselves, without showing the character of supplying for an absent clergy or for simply helping the clergy who are present.

there emerge today various formation needs, around which should revolve the educational work within the life of seminaries and institutes of formation.

Liturgical renewal has developed around three key issues: 1 - the recovery of the centrality and the dynamic of the paschal mystery in the Eucharistic celebration; 2 - the rediscovery of the assembly as the subject of the Eucharist; 3 - the renewal of sacramental language rediscovered in all its symbolic depth, to favor participation in the salvation event as celebrated.

From these principles spring forth the foundations of a formation for "presiding over the community" which should respect major pastoral demands for more meaningfully lived Eucharist.

The primary and basic factor is therefore the *formation of the Eucharistic assembly*. The Eucharist is the celebration of the Christian community for the Christian community. Its main efforts are directed toward creating the conditions for the formation of the community through a renewed work of evangelization and catechesis.

In addition, active, full and conscious participation of the assembly in the Eucharist should be promoted through a solid *initiation to liturgical symbols*. The sacramental language should be deciphered, and therefore the faithful should be initiated into Christian symbols and accompanied in perceiving their own communal nature that the sacrament produces. In other words, the capacity of reading the Eucharistic ritual should be promoted by means of an initiation, along with the action of God through a *mystagogical activity*. Initiation and mystagogy are the two foci of the same ellipse, each helping the other in liturgical and sacramental practice.

A new mystagogy calls for a new *esthetic*. The entire system of Christian symbols should recover a certain esthetic quality, that is, it should be able to amaze, to provoke emotions, to capture the attention of people and favor the turn to the activity of God. The way of celebrating, the place of celebration, the way of arranging the assembly, the songs, the sacred vestments, etc., are not just secondary or ornamental elements. The "how" of celebration is fundamental, provided the "how" is contained in the "if": the possibility of bringing about a significant experience of God depends on the mode of celebration.

Nevertheless, today the esthetic quality of the rites has generally declined. It is therefore urgent, on the one hand, to return splendor to the symbols and, on the other, to generate in persons the capacity to understand them. It is the problem of the relationship between the theological and the esthetic, between the action of God and the way

of perceiving it.²² Also, esthetics is the doctrine of perception. The ancient Christian tradition had taught such perception to be able to consider worship at one and the same time a physical and a spiritual act, through the *doctrine of the spiritual senses*. If today people are in the grip of their own sensible perceptions and are conditioned and inevitably bound only to their emotions, this is why the art of deciphering them, or esthetics, is reduced to the theory of mere adornment. There should be a return to having the teaching of Christian perception, so as to educate people's esthetic sensibilities and to bring them to the transfiguration of their senses in God. Only in this way can be born the capacity of spiritually accompanying the people to accomplish their path of faith and charity, to sustain them in their ecclesial membership and in their Christian witness.

In the circle of catechesis-initiation-mystagogy and in the search for a new esthetic the entire redefinition of priestly ministry enters in concerning the Eucharistic celebration. All this is demanded by our age and current circumstances. This is therefore the educational issue from which initial and ongoing formation should begin.

4. The principal characteristics of the new figure of the priest

We turn now to attempt to redefine the role of the presbyter-priester over the Christian Eucharistic assembly through the use of a term taken from Hebrew tradition: *ba'al tefillà*, master of prayer.²³

The priest has the responsibility of creating a liturgical community, transforming a plurality of individuals who are praying in a worshipping community recognized as such before God. It is up to him to create an atmosphere in which the search for absolute values is awakened, in which interest in the Spirit is shared with the whole community. On this point, the priest today experiences his greatest frustrations. The invitation to prayer runs up against a brick wall. The assembly is not always disposed to or ready for a gesture of worship and an act of grace. The priest has to pierce the shell of indifference of the many. Literally, he has to fight to get a response (just consider certain weddings and funerals: the assembly often does not know how to respond or even know the formulas for the responses.) In a certain sense he has to conquer those who assist to be able to speak to them.

²² Exactly on the study of this point Pierangelo Sequeri has dedicated a large part of his teaching. In particular: SEQUERI P., *Estetica e teologia. L'indicibile emozione del sacro: R. Otto, A. Schönberg, M. Heidegger*, Glossa, Milano 1993; *L'estro di Dio. Saggi di estetica*, Glossa, Milano 2000; *Sensibili allo Spirito. Umanesimo religioso e ordine degli affetti*, Glossa, Milano 2001.

²³ The reference is to the essay of HESCHEL A.J., *Il canto della libertà. La vita interiore e la liberazione dell'uomo*, Qiqajon, Magnano 1999.

The tragedy that we often experience is that of the anonymity of the Eucharistic assemblies. As a rule, the ritual does not generate any participation. The words reach the ears but do not touch the hearts, and the gestures reach the eyes, but do not lift the gaze.

The office of the priest is to “guide the prayer.” He stands before the assembly not as a separate or isolated man, not as an individual, but as one with the assembly itself. He is called to become identified with the assembly (from which he receives the priestly character of his office). His role is that of representing the community and at the same time of inspiring it and leading it, at least some times, to the threshold of mystery. He is the one who guides their faith experience by means of the liturgy at which he presides. His function is fulfilled in helping the people to live with intensity the moment of encounter with the presence of God in a critical self-examination, to be opened at the end to praise and thanksgiving.

The presbyter is the one to arouse the singing, since praying in an assembly without song means a loss of the active participation of the community. It can happen that some people do not know how to pray any more or never learned how, but everyone knows how to sing. Song leads to prayer, and prayer arouses joy in the spirit, without which there is no paschal celebration. The separation of music from the liturgical word is a real drama that we have experienced for centuries. In some periods, music overpowered the word because of its excessive splendor and complexity. The *schola cantorum* substituted for the assembly, making it mute and passive. In other times, the esthetical quality of liturgical music declined terribly, and made it impossible to communicate the spiritual meaning of the words. Between music and text there should be a certain harmony connected with the spiritual experience that the assembly is living out. Sometimes the assembly appears traumatized listening to stupendous verbal expressions that appear in a mistaken musical guise: sublime words combined with vulgar music. A large part of today’s liturgical music distorts and at times contradicts the words instead of giving them their intensity and exalting them. Music of this type has devastating effects on the search for prayer.

Then, the only thing remaining for the priest is the Word, whose servant and spokesman he becomes. He is personally called to be transported by the words of the rite that he is celebrating in the name of and on account of the assembly, and as the assembly. In this way he will be led by the Eucharistic liturgy to live certain moments in which he will forget the world and its daily worries, moments during which he will be overcome by the consciousness of Him in whose presence he stands. The assembly, then, will listen and realize that the priest is not just reciting but is adoring God, that praying does not mean repeating formulas, that singing does not mean listening to music or simply giving voice to a melody, but rather identifying

oneself with what has been spoken and proclaimed. In this way the temple or church will be transformed into a house of prayer. When all this happens, and only when this happens, will the priest have fulfilled his responsibility.

Masters of prayer are not improvised and cannot become such just by perfecting the art of liturgical “performance.” They are masters of prayer through grace. Formation, consequently, should bind together ability and technical capacity to become a good liturgical animator, along with faith, to be able to preside over the community with authority. A pastor without faith would be a caricature, incapable of doing what only he can: that is, of representing the community publicly, presiding over its assemblies, guiding prayer, and supporting the members of the community in the witness of his life.

(JOHN E. RYBOLT, translator)