

Clericalism

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In their own words.....

‘In Milestones, a memoir of his life before John Paul called him to Rome, Joseph Ratzinger writes about his ordination to the priesthood. His Bavarian village was given over to days of feasting and festivities in gratitude that a young man from among them had been made a priest. It was a heady experience for that young man, says Ratzinger, and he remembers whispering to himself again and again, “This is not for you, Joseph, this is not for you.” This festivity, this honour, is not a tribute to him but a popular outburst of devotion to Christ and the ministry of his Church. Whatever else may be meant by clericalism, it has its roots in the demonic twist by which the priest or bishop whispers to himself, “This is for me.” – Richard ‘John’ Neuhaus, (1)

And

“I speak, of course, of clericalism, that culture of self-interest which promotes and sustains the presumption of superiority among clergy and their practice of protective secrecy. It is something that priests share with all would-be elites, such as professional associations in law and medicine, bureaucrats and the military.” - Michael Kelly SJ, (2)

And

“By clericalism,” Shaw writes, “I mean an elitist mindset, together with structures and patterns of behaviour corresponding to it, which takes it for granted that clerics—in the Catholic context, mainly bishops and priests—are intrinsically superior to the other members of the Church and deserve automatic deference. Passivity and dependence are the laity’s lot. By no means is clericalism confined to clerics themselves. The clericalist mindset is widely shared by Catholic lay people.” – Russell Shaw (3)

And

”True clericalism is an anomaly and an aberration in that it engenders disdain and disrespect for others, especially for those who are not clerics (ordained). Hence, real clericalism is when a deacon, priest or bishop has an attitude of superiority over his flock in that he believes he is ‘better’ than they are, whether spiritually, intellectually

or otherwise. Clericalism patronizes and denigrates the unordained (laity). It seeks to be treated with privilege rather than seeking to be of service.” – Robert Trigilio, (4)

And

“It also happens to me that when I meet a clericist, I suddenly become anti-clerical. Clericalism should not have anything to do with Christianity. St. Paul, who was the first to speak to the Gentiles, the pagans, to believers in other religions, was the first to teach us that.” – Pope Francis

And

“It’s sad when you see a man who seeks this office and who does so much to get there and when he makes it, he doesn’t serve, but struts like a peacock, living only for his own vanity,” – Pope Francis.

This article does not set out to make a negative assessment or judgment on the Catholic priesthood in itself. What it does attempt to do is to examine the origins of Clericalism and its effects on the priesthood as exercised in both diocesan and religious life. Clericalism affects both in one way or another. The critique pays special attention to what Pope Francis has criticised as Clericalism’s negative pathway to sterile authoritarian ecclesiastical careerism, privilege, entitlement and power. It traces its historical roots back into the post-apostolic Church.

The Beginnings of clericalism in early Christianity

The origins of primitive Christian clericalism are traceable to the concentration of charismata, functions, powers and authorities formerly exercised by many in the early Jesus Movement into the control of an elite few. It happened at an accelerated pace between the Neronian persecution and towards the end of the Apostolic age at the end of the first century C.E. While in the early days of the Christian Communities it was recognised that all the baptised were called to discipleship, mutual service and to bear witness to the Resurrection of Christ, the way these gifts and ministries were exercised gradually became subject to scrutiny and moderation by community overseers or organisers.

As early as Paul’s time, the leadership of the Jesus Movement already had a functioning local leadership structure. Since Antioch was the community which sent Paul on his apostolic mission, it is not surprising to discern the outline of that

organisational structure reflected in his letters. A few decades later, Ignatius of Antioch (c110 CE) provides a very clear description of the titles and functions of community leaders in his community. Church leadership structure and community order as described in the non-Pauline 1 Timothy and Colossians reflects the revisionist views of the Christian apologists who harmonised Paul in order to harmonise community documents with the conservative Roman Household Code.

The structure was probably composed of those familiar elements of the Jewish synagogue worship and the house Christian church, (oikos-ekklesia). It was in this community setting that some of the forms of Jewish synagogal worship preceded the communal meal wherein the Memorial of the Lord's Supper was observed. In addition to the hosts of the house-church, the management of the local community was the responsibility of an organiser or overseer – episkopos who was supported in turn by deacons – diakonoi. It was the evangelical task of the itinerant presbyter-apostolos to do the rounds of local communities to encourage and confirm their faith, strengthen the bonds of unity. The presbyter-apostolos also checked to ensure local adherence to the earliest Tradition. For these reasons, the itinerant visitors were welcomed and treated as genuine successors of the Twelve. – Smyrnaeans, 8 and the Didache, 11, 15.

By the early second century, Ignatius suggests that the age of the wandering charismatic apostles was coming to an end. The overseers had begun to consolidate in themselves both the charisma and functions of the apostles. That being the case, it would be more than of mere academic interest for the Magisterium to summon up the will and courage to have the issue of “Apostolic Succession” critically re-examined and verified.

At the same time the overseers were assuming the role of apostle, they began to exert authority over who would preside over the house Church Eucharistic celebration and the other rites of initiation:

You should regard that Eucharist as acceptable (bebaia) which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. – Smyrnaeans 8.

Increasingly, the role and person of the bishop began to take on the attributes of the sacred world they claimed to mediate. Later Scholastic theology described the effect of ‘ordination’ to priestly/episcopal office as an ‘ontological’ transformation of the one ordained. Even Constantine’s Imperial law recognised the sacred status of bishop, deacon and presbyter by exempting them from civil jurisdiction in legal matters. (5)

In the 11th century the Canonical and disciplinary reforms of Gregory VII further consolidated and elevated the position of the clerical state and guaranteed it protection under Church law which, Gregory insisted, enjoyed superiority over civil law. Under this system, Gregory was able to establish and consolidate a monarchical papacy which held absolute power. It validated and guaranteed a dominant culture of clericalism. (6)

The roots of modern Sacerdotal Clericalism

Oddly enough, a major impetus to Clericalism in its modern expressions came from the Counter Reformation Council of Trent. One of its notable accomplishments of the Council was the establishment of a regulated system and programme for the education of aspirants to the diocesan priesthood. The Jesuits exercised considerable influence on the training of priests in Italy and Germany. They became legendary in their insistence on rigorously high academic and disciplinary standards.

Elsewhere, daring new initiatives were launched to establish and embed the Trent's mandate for the higher standards of education in clerical formation. Church Historian Dr Paul Collins observes "It is the French seminary system as evolved by Saint Vincent de Paul and J.J. Olier, the Sulpicians and others that actually began to produce the professional priest that we know today. It was the Sulpician founder Olier, following in the tradition of Cardinal Pierre de Berulle, who popularised the notion of the priest as alter Christus." (7)

The positive effect of this new professionalism in priestly education and formation was that it addressed the problem of traditional crass ignorance among the secular clergy. The negative side of this was that it further highlighted and intensified the social divide between the clergy and the laity. Clericalism, as a subculture of entitlement and privilege, took on yet another attraction for the ecclesiastical career minded. But there was another dimension of French Clericalism which attracted another kind of character type, the simple, heroic countercultural rustic pastor.

In the eighteenth century, revolutionary France generated waves of protest and condemnation of the unofficial status of national Religion Catholicism enjoyed with its attendant culture of clericalism. This violent rejection of the Church was semi-official policy but it was not shared to various degrees in the general population. Out of the bewilderment, confusion and moral waste land created by Revolution, the more resilient branches of Catholicism regrouped and injected enormous new energies and new life into the French nation. During the post Revolutionary reconstruction, new

religious foundations were made precisely to minister to a people grown weary of strife, dislocated, impoverished and spiritually void.

One of the emblematic clerical figures to surface in this highly charged atmosphere of virulent anti-clericalism was Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney (8 May 1786 – 4 August 1859), popularly known as ‘the Cure of Ars’. Like many of his fellow clergy, he was not well educated but what he lacked in that respect, he compensated with his aggressive interventionist pastoral behaviour. His moral rigorism understandably explains his preoccupation with human sinfulness. His preaching constantly focused on the fear of eternal punishment and the consequent obsessive need for full confession and a firm intention never to sin again. These preoccupations were integral to Vianney’s approach to pastoral ministry.. Eventually his rigorism and subconscious manipulation of his peoples’ minds and souls were somewhat tempered by his exposure to the more accommodating, nuanced and compassionate moral praxis of Alphonsus de Ligouri. (8)

Vianney’s writings provide valuable insights into to the collective identity of the Catholic priest in a climate of eighteenth century European socio-cultural flux and anti-clericalism. Interestingly, the literary form of his writings on the divinely established Catholic Faith and the priesthood bear striking similarities to classical apocalyptic literature wherein the comforting conviction that ‘God is with us’ generated the confidence, strength and resilience necessary to survive and flourish in times of ordeal.

The Deification the Priesthood

“If I saw an Angel and a priest, I would bend my knee first to the priest and then to the Angel.” – St. Francis of Assisi (later quoted by St. John Vianney):

It is not difficult to understand why this quotation appealed so much to John Vianney. In his Little Catechism he wrote:

“My children, we have come to the Sacrament of Orders. It is a Sacrament which seems to relate to no one among you, and which yet relates to everyone. This Sacrament raises man up to God. What is a priest! A (priest is a) man who holds the place of God—a man, who is invested with all the powers of God. “Go,” said Our Lord to the priest; “as My Father sent Me, I send you. All power has been given Me in Heaven and on earth. Go then, teach all nations. . . . He who listens to you, listens to Me; he who despises you despises Me. “When the priest remits sins, he does not say,

“God pardons you”; he says, “I absolve you.” At the Consecration, he does not say, “This is the Body of Our Lord;” he says, “This is My Body.” St. Bernard tells us that everything has come to us through Mary; and we may also say that everything has come to us through the priest; yes, all happiness, all graces, all heavenly gifts. If we had not the Sacrament of Orders, we should not have Our Lord. Who placed Him there, in that tabernacle? It was the priest. Who was it that received your soul, on its entrance into life? The priest. Who nourishes it, to give it strength to make its pilgrimage? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, by washing that soul, for the last time, in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest—always the priest. And if that soul comes to the point of death, who will raise it up, who will restore it to calmness and peace? Again the priest. You cannot recall one single blessing from God without finding, side by side with this recollection, the image of the priest. After God, the priest is everything.” – St John Vianney (9)

Thirty years after his death, Vianney’s sentiments were echoed by Abbot Dom Columba Marmion, a Benedictine monk of Maredsous. In a November 1889 letter to a newly ordained former student he wrote:

“A priest can do so much for God if, in offering the Holy Sacrifice, he unites the oblation of himself, his life, his love, all he has, with that of the Divine Victim. He can obtain priceless graces for all mankind, can stay the anger of God, and gain powerful aid for the Church, not to speak of the great merit he gains for himself. Let us try to be faithful and loving towards our dear Lord. It is in the heart of the priest He expects to repose, when He is outraged by sinners; and also, He so often finds even there but coldness and ingratitude.”

The attitudes of sacerdotal clericalism reflected in the passages persist in many form up to the present. The theology of priestly ministry is reduced to the narrow Scholastic categories of a sacrificial mediator, ex opera operato confector of Transubstantiation and absolver of penitents’ sins. The Sacrament of Orders has assumed a de facto importance in Christian existence superior to that of Baptism. The consequent damage done to the dignity of Baptism cannot be underestimated. The ministry of Sacrificial Ritualism has been elevated to a status superior to the wider and more fundamental calls to discipleship, service and proclamation entrusted to all the Baptised. The forced, lopsided comparison is further highlighted when the rationale of sacerdotal self immolation took on a further theological overlay in the Latin Rite with the divine ‘gift’ of mandatory celibacy.

Australian priest Eric Hodgins has drawn attention to the dangers inherent in an inflated theology of compulsory celibacy which neglects its potential negative consequences. He comments:

“But there are other reasons for revisiting mandatory celibacy. Paul VI called it a “brilliant jewel” in his 1967 encyclical on Priestly Celibacy”. But it has a darker side. It occasions an abnormally high proportion of homosexuals in clerical ranks. It aggravates the seriousness of inappropriate sexual behaviour by clergy. It makes a negative statement about sex which is culturally normal for everyone else. It creates an isolated environment for clergy which more easily leads to narcissism, loneliness, depression and alcoholism. It skews the profile of candidates for the priesthood. Finally, it is the most obvious badge of identity of the clerical class. If clericalism is the cancer that Pope Francis thinks it is the abolition of mandatory celibacy must come up for consideration.” (10)

The suppression of the Ego

During the Counter Reformation period the concept of priesthood underwent a profound redefinition. The principal factors involved were the reactive forces already at work in contemporary Catholic thinking. It was a time of deep introspection, reassessment and refocusing. The outcomes included a renewed emphasis on and robust defence of the divine origins of the Church, its theology of salvation and its Sacramental system. Extensive biblical fundamentalist proof-texting and imaginative semiotics in the interpretation of the priesthood are clearly evident.

The modern seminary system came into effect during the seventeenth Century and was largely influenced by the Counter-Reformation vision of Cardinal Charles Borromeo. Its ratio fundamentalis included a regime of indoctrination, rigid discipline and socialisation into an enclosed, self-referencing clerical subculture. It was an age convulsed by rampant secularism and ferocious, doctrinaire anti-clericalism. The response of the Holy See was reactive and geared to counter attack with its own brand of dogmatism. It did so by appealing directly to the divine plan, the very highest authority and validation. The Counter Reformation Church insisted that its doctrines, Sacraments and its priesthood came from God directly through Christ. The young priests of the Borromeo seminaries were expressly commissioned to teach, preach and defend these truths with the utmost vigour, certitude and commitment. This demanded, above all, single-minded, disciplined and loyal men.

To this end, Seminary training was designed to effect the suppression of the individual human will and the near obliteration of the ego. There were prohibitions against close ‘particular’ friendships, socialising with the laity and even penalties for indulging in the lingering psychological and emotional bonds of family. The asceticism involved

here was intended to lessen or even break human attachments was actually a form of social engineering. This form of socialisation was more suitable to a military academy than to a centre for ministerial formation.

An elaborately contrived saccharine spirituality and sacramental theology supported the whole system. The French mind was particularly adept at describing just the right mix of the nobility of the priesthood and the martyrdom it entails:

“To live in the midst of the world with no desire for its pleasures; to be a member of every family, yet belonging to none; to share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets, to heal all wounds; to daily go from men to God to offer Him their homage and petitions; to return from God to men to bring them His pardon and hope; to have a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity; to bless and to be blest forever. O God, what a life, and it is yours, O Priest of Jesus Christ!” Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, O.P. (1802-1861)

A particular genius of Pius X was to master the enormous power and prestige of sacerdotal clericalism. He exploited it constantly as he articulated his response to Enlightenment, the anti-monarchical revolutions and the waves of anti-clericalism across Europe. Pius vigorously enforced a culture of uniform anti-intellectualism, clerical hegemony and a fundamental suspicion of modernity. The Pope's chosen figurehead for his campaign was John Vianney whom he beatified in 1905. The French priest became a highly important symbol of Pius X's attempts to reassert Church authority. This involved a Catholic identity marked by pietistic simplicity, unreserved deference to the clergy and unquestioning obedience to papal authority. Vianney embodied all of these. (11)

The cost of all this was, however, enormously high. The standardised seminary regime had produced generations of priests inoculated against what was accepted as human normality. Growth towards a developed, rounded personality was impeded from the start. Profound psychological, emotional and spiritual retardation were the result.

Blind obedience to authority and compliance with regulations were promoted as virtues. The opportunity cost was enormous and at the expense of independent thinking, initiative and emotional maturity. Seminarians found themselves cut off from those reality checks such as to the levelling effects of exposure to normal family life and socialising with women. Their forced isolation deprived them of practical knowledge of children and their stages of emotional and intellectual development. Institutional exemption from any significant domestic and financial realities greatly retarded the seminarian's moral development and sense of what most people would

regard as normal human experience.

The French novelist Georges Bernanos, who had attended seminary in the full flush of Pius X's reforms, wrote of the experience, 'It made schoolboys of us, children to the very end of our lives.'

Clericalism and the Structures of Contempt

At precisely the same time when priests were trained to be simple, pious and unquestioning pastors of an even more compliant 'flock', their people were becoming better educated and prepared to take their place as confident adult citizens in a complex, modern world. The strength of clerical resentment at the increasingly independent laity from the nineteenth Century to the present is astonishing.

A famous story recounted by Russel Shaw and it features one of the more famous clericalist outbursts against John Henry Newman by Msgr. George Talbot to Archbishop Manning. Newman attracted Talbot's wrath for having published on the necessity for the hierarchy to consult the Faithful even on matters of Doctrine. Talbot loudly complained to Archbishop Manning:

"What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain? These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters they have no right at all, and this affair of Newman is a matter purely ecclesiastical.... Dr. Newman is the most dangerous man in England, and you will see that he will make use of the laity against your Grace." (12)

These attitudes were firmly rooted in what John Ralston Saul describes as the Structures of Contempt. These are linguistic and conceptual devices used by self-styled elites to categorise, to compartmentalize and to exert control over those social groups which they deem to be inferior. Saul describes this kind of attitude and its attendant behaviour as forms of projected collective self loathing. (13)

A powerful recent example of this is described by Professor Pat McNamara in "Reflections on a Seminary Educator" which document some of his negative experiences of clericalism he personally experienced as a lay History professor in a seminary. As a guest writer in *Dating God. Franciscan Spirituality for the 21st Century*, McNamara begins by referring to a piece on clericalism written by a young newly ordained Fr Dan Horan OFM:

“Noting Pope Francis’s comments about clericalism, Father Dan writes that the pontiff’s words are a call for clergy “to remember that their baptism is what matters most.” Sadly, for many, it’s not, and judging from the quality of the men getting ordained today, it’s only going to get worse, not better.

For two years, I served on the faculty of a major seminary, where I got to see clericalism both in its early and its full-blown stages of development. To the students I was clearly an anomaly, if not an oddity. They always addressed me politely as “Doctor,” but there was an underlying element of condescension, as if I were the seminary’s lay mascot. “Oh, you’re so good, Doctor,” one twenty-five year old cooingly said to me. (I half expected him to pat me on the head and send me on my way!)

As a married layperson, I was something of an anomaly on the faculty. In many ways, I felt like an ecclesiastical version of “The Help,” and often was made to feel like an intruder. One priest on the faculty refused to acknowledge me, let alone talk to me, and would sneeringly groan and glare upon passing me in the hallway. My relationship with the clergy was always very formal. Not once in two years did a priest say to me, “Hi, I’m Mike,” or “I’m Bill.” It was always “Father,” even in private. Correct ecclesiastical protocol was truly observed at all times. I was clearly unwelcome in the faculty lounge or dining room.

As far as the seminarians go, cassocks and capes, birettas, collars up to their earlobes, round Roman hats were the norm. It was like every day was a clerical version of Halloween. When they left the grounds, which they rarely did, some students adopted fedoras and double-breasted suits as if to emphasize their antiquarianism. A few even smoked pipes or expensive English cigarettes, with silver cases to prove it. (Many had expressed preference for rare Scotches.) All this was done, clearly, to emphasize their uniqueness. (One seminarian had a picture of himself on Facebook with cloak and walking stick.). Truth be told, while the faculty may have done little to encourage all this, they also did little to discourage it.

From what I could see, these men had little interaction with laypeople people of any kind outside the seminary, except to teach catechism or visit a nursing home once in a while. (Working in shelter homes or soup kitchens was neither an option nor an interest.) During the time of Hurricane Sandy, the seminarians stayed comfortably ensconced on the seminary grounds, which the facilities management staff cleaned up. The reason, I was told, was that there was no gas for the cars (although the seminary grounds have their own gas station).

Frankly it was pretty weird and, if the truth be told, more than a little unhealthy.” (14)

Another observer and critic, Max Lindenman, argues strongly that this kind of clerical subculture is not just unhealthy but dangerously so, pathologically, spiritually, psychologically and emotionally.

“Last year, James Carroll argued that certain disciplines governing the priesthood — in particular mandatory celibacy — fertilize the individual personality for the growth of narcissistic traits. He writes: “immaturity, narcissism, misogyny, incapacity for intimacy, illusions about sexual morality — such all-too-common characteristics of today’s Catholic clergy are directly tied to the inhuman asexuality that is put before them as an ideal.” (15)

Pope Francis warned against the soul destroying narcissism which infects the clericalist caste and which strikes at the heart of authentic priestly mission:

“Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor”. *Evangelii Gaudium*, #97.

It is not difficult to identify the sources of all these pathologies and to name their spiritual justification. When the clerical state claims pre-eminence in the theology and life of the Church then, instead of a means, it becomes an end in itself. In fact, it takes on the characteristics of an ideology. Much of this distortion stems from the theological identification of the priest’s personality with Jesus himself and it is possible to track the historical origins of this phenomenon in both sacramental theology and priestly spirituality.

In the first twelve centuries, every Christian, by virtue of Baptism, was regarded as an *Alter Christus* but around the end of that period, the expression began to be applied univocally to the ordained priest. (16)

Subsequently, the idea of the priest as ‘ordained’ *Alter Christus* developed in such a way that the priest himself came to be seen as Christ himself as both sacrificial priest and victim. This came into focus in the late second century. Up until then, it was Christ alone was understood to be the one and only priest, the one sacrificing and the

victim. In time it became evident that the sacrificial priesthood included the human set apart for sacred ritual but that it was a different kind from the common priesthood of the faithful. It was their lot to bask in the reflected glory of their priests. This distorted understanding of the relationship between priest and people in the liturgy points to a major characteristic of clericalism. Anthony Ruff explains this well:

“Even at its best, Mass with the 1962 Missal doesn’t bring out at all that the priestly community is brought into Christ’s self-offering by their own self-emptying to each other for the sake of the world, drawing them closer to the Community. Even at its best, it looks like there’s only the priest, and everyone else is privileged a) to be present as he offers sacrifice and b) to receive grace his ritual brings to them” – Pray Tell, 05/09/10.

It is paradoxical to say the least that a noted theologian, later become Pope, had serious reservations about the adequacy and efficacy of the traditional view of priesthood so distanced and disengaged from the people. John Wilkins, in his insightful, comparative analysis of Ratzinger at Vat II and then post-1968, comments that the ritualism and highly choreographed liturgy associated with its air of remote, elitist sacerdotalism did not inspire some of the great saints of the reforming Church. He writes:

“Interestingly, it struck Ratzinger as no surprise that few, if any, of the great Saints of the Counter Reformation era, Ignatius, Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross sourced their dominant spiritualities from the liturgy.” (17)

Clericalism today: A loss of nerve and a retreat from the prophetic.

Pope Francis has made a habit of criticising many negative elements in Catholic life. One which he frequently singles out for special attention is clericalism. He sees clericalism as sharing little or no common ground with Jesus Christ or his mission. The Pope is constantly invoking the powerful challenge of the Incarnation and its invitation to all to enter a more committed state of mission and he sees the comfortable clerical state as an obstacle in the way of this:

“An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.” Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #24.

The remedy for clericalism, as Pope Francis never tires of reminding us, is a clear recognition that the Church belongs to Christ and that at the heart of his message and his Church is the prophetic spirit:

“‘A church without prophets falls into the trap of clericalism’. These were the words of Pope Francis during a homily at a Monday morning Mass in the Vatican’s Casa Santa Marta. Commenting on the day’s readings, Pope Francis said a prophet is someone who listens to the words of God, who reads the spirit of the times, and who knows how to move forward towards the future. True prophets, the Pope said, hold within themselves three different moments: past, present, and future. They keep the promise of God alive, they see the suffering of their people, and they bring us the strength to look ahead. God looks after his people, the Pope continued, by giving them prophets in the hardest times, in the midst of their worst suffering. But when there is no spirit of prophecy amongst the people of God, we fall into the trap of clericalism.” (18)

A selective amnesia set in during the papacy of John Paul II when, among other things, the voice of prophecy was muted and domesticated. It was the era during which the Roman Curia effectively ‘managed’ the Church almost without restraint and a major concern of the Curia was to guarantee the status quo and to protect clerical entitlement. This agenda was greatly assisted with the March 1992 publication of JP II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. The rationale and ethos of this policy document served to embed and validate clericalism in seminaries throughout the world. (19)

John Paul’s vision for the seminary was preserved and enhanced during the papacy of Benedict XVI. Benedict’s penchant for the antiquarian aspects of liturgy and liturgical dress was perceived by many bishops, priests and seminarians to be validation of an already narcissistic subculture. Benedict’s personal preference for liturgical antiquarianism became a litmus test of orthodoxy and orthopraxis among the young clergy and seminarians who were persuaded that Latin and the Tridentine Mass were powerful instruments of the New Evangelisation! In effect, though, there is nothing courageous, risky, prophetic or evangelical about it at all. Sadly though, some bishops have gone to extraordinary lengths to use a distorted ecclesiology and theology of ministry as leverage to advance their own credentials and aspirations. (20)

A prominent Australian bishop proclaimed at a Mass marking the beginning of the 2014 academic year that “The Seminary is the heart of the Diocese.”

In his homily, he (the Bishop) said the seminary ‘is a place where we discover the mind and heart of Christ, where we are formed to be pastors, forgetful of self, always

mindful of others. It is a place of formation; human, pastoral, spiritual and academic.’

‘Pastoral formation is not merely doing things well in schools and parishes, it is developing an attitude of seeing people as Christ did,’ he said.

(He) ended by quoting St John Mary Vianney: ‘The priesthood is the love of the heart of Christ’; and he thanked the seminarians for their ‘generosity, goodwill and openness to being formed’. (21)

It is no wonder that Pope Francis has many Bishops very nervous at the moment and for many reasons. Francis has shifted the focus away from the Church as an institution led by a managerial class to that of a Christ-imitating prophetic community in the world. There is however a drag effect as a great number of the Catholic hierarchy are simply not receiving or absorbing Francis’ message. Many of them, after years of articulating the rhetoric of the culture warrior, are now themselves identified as selective, Cafeteria Catholics.

On a special interest and flamboyant website, Jose Lisboa Moreira de Oliveira has recently concentrated his hermeneutics of suspicion on a subgroup of conservative clergy. In his estimation, these are the ones who feign loyalty to the Church’s commitment to renewal and acceptance of *Evangelii Gaudium* while they privately work against and subvert Francis. Lisboa Moreira calls them ‘the chameleonic clergy’:

“But there is one group of priests and seminarians who pretend to accept the message of Pope Francisco. Age, porem, como camaleao, por mero oportunismo e para continuar levando vantagem em tudo, visando nao perder as benesses oferecidas pelo acesso ao ministerio ordenado. They are, however, mere Chameleons who are opportunists and who use every opportunity to use the priesthood for their own self-interests. Este grupo de clericais externamente faz de conta que aderiu ao papa Francisco, mas, na pratica, sempre que pode, oculta, desvirtua e desvia os ensinamentos papais, nao permitindo que o povo tome conhecimento daquilo que o papa Francisco esta propondo com certa insistencia. This group of clerics outwardly pretends to support Pope Francis, but in practice, whenever possible hides, distorts and deflects attention away from the Pope’s teachings. They also do all in their power to keep the people ignorant and unaware of what Pope Francis is teaching.” [I have taken the liberty of beating a poor translation into more readable English. The original text is in Portuguese.] (22)

Clericalism: careerism and ideology.

With a few exceptions, the John Paul II plan for seminary formation continues to enjoy the confidence of many if not most bishops. The future will determine whether or not candidates are being wisely and adequately prepared for effective mission among the People of God and outreach to non-believers. The alternative is entropy, sterile clericalism and a culture of self-absorption. The evidence over the past few decades indicates that the latter is prevailing. While the rhetoric of self-sacrificing altruism continues to be broadcast, seminaries continue to be perceived by many to be boys clubs made up of the immature, underdeveloped and self-absorbed.

One of the matters increasingly noted and discussed in recent public, secular conversation is the extraordinary status afforded the clergy in Catholic Church life. The interest is not without context but rather against a background of the clerical sexual abuse scandals. There has been and is a huge popular outrage that sexually abusive clergy have apparently been shielded and protected by the Catholic hierarchy instead of being not only dealt with according to Canon Law but surrendered to the civil authorities for due process. People are asking the question, why? Increasingly they are arriving at the conclusion that the Church has created such an intense devotion and respect around the priesthood, that it is convinced of John Vianney's aphorism that 'after God, the priest is everything' and that therefore secular authorities have no right to punish clergy for their 'moral failures' whatever they are.

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson has commented on the disordered subculture of clericalism and what it has led to:

“One of the saddest sights in the Church today is that of some young, newly ordained priests insisting that there is an ‘ontological difference’ between them and laypersons, and enthusiastically embracing the mystique of a superior priesthood. Whenever I see young priests doing this I feel a sense of despair, and I wonder whether we have learned anything at all from the revelations of abuse.” (23)

Canon Law provides a clear insight into the origins of deference, devotion, respect and protectiveness of the institution of the priesthood:

“By divine institution, some of the Christian faithful are marked with an indelible character and constituted as sacred ministers by the sacrament of holy orders. They are thus consecrated and deputed so that, each according to his own grade, they may serve the People of God by a new and specific title” – Canon 1008.

A newly ordained priest in a Theology on Tap evening addressed a mainly young

Catholic lay group on what he was experiencing even during the early days of priesthood:

“What a tremendous gift is to be called ‘Father’ By virtue of my ordination, I have the capacity to change lives forever . . . I wake up every single day thinking you really do have the greatest life in the world, because no one knows what you see. No one sees what you see. By virtue of being a priest, you see the world in a completely different light. In your homilies and in your preaching you can change people’s beliefs. One person said I was like Adolph Hitler. I said, ‘what do you mean.’ She said, ‘I mean in a good way.’ I said, ‘a good way of being Adolph Hitler?’ She said, ‘Yes, I’ll believe everything you tell me.’ ”

And he continues by recounting what a ‘very holy man’ said to him:

“How wonderful it must be to be loved in the way that we love you.’ And he went on to qualify that and said, ‘and it is not because of what you say, not because of what you do, but because of who you are, you are Christ. . . . Priests are other Christs.’ ”
(24)

“It made schoolboys of us, children to the very end of our lives.” – George Bernanos

Endnotes

1. Richard J. Neuhaus, “Scandal and the Scandal of Clericalism,” *First Things*, April, 2008. ([Link here.](#)) See also Russell Shaw’s articles on Clericalism ([Linked here](#) and [here](#)).
2. “Next Item on the Catholic Reform Agenda,” in *Pearls and Irritations*, 02/05/’14, ([Link here](#))
3. Richard John Neuhaus, “Scandal and the Scandal of Clericalism,” *First Things*, April, 2008. ([Link here](#))
4. “Need to explain to the Laity,” in *The Black Biretta*, 13/01/’14
5. Theodore Bergenke, “St Constantine the Great: Influential Figure in the History of the Church,” *The Journal of the Chicago Pastoral School*, 1, (2006) 1. ([Link here](#)). See notes 16-19) Another decisive development facilitated by Constantine was the elevation of Byzantine episkopoi, bishops to the status of royalty thus distancing them

even more from their own people. Furthermore, in a mutually beneficial exchange, the Emperor became sacralised by association with the Bishop and the Bishop acquired enormous political clout by being a senior member of the royal Court. Architecture too reflected this two way relationship. Church buildings were constructed along the lines of royal palaces and were aptly named, basilicas.

6. For references and documentation, see my article, “The Reinvention of the Fisherman,” in OMG, April 1, 2014.([Link here](#))

7. The cited remarks were in an email conversation early 2015 between Church Historian Dr Paul Collins and three of his colleagues, including me. See also John W. O’Malley, What Happened at the Council, Cambridge, MA, 2013, HUP, pp 17, 183, 186, 212-214, 258.

8. “Let it not be imagined, however, that the gentleness with which M. Vianney welcomed sinners degenerated at any time into weakness. He absolved them only after he had assured himself of the sincerity of their contrition. Until 1840 he certainly followed the rigorism which at that time prevailed in most of the confessionals in France. He still applied the principles that were taught in 1815 in the Grand Seminaire of Lyons. – From 1840 Abbe Francis Trochu, “Study of the theology of St. Alphonsus, sensibly less strict” (The Cure d’Ars, by TAN edition, p. 294)

9. From “The Little Catechism of the Cure of Ars,”([Link here.](#)) And “Saints and the Priesthood,” ([Link here](#)) See also Benedict XVI, “He (Vianney) spoke of the priesthood as if incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the gift and task entrusted to a human creature: “O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...”. Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: “Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest.” “Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Cure of Ars,” June 16, 2009. ([Link](#)) Pius XI in his 1935 encyclical writes:

“...wherever religion is professed, wherever altars are built, there is also a priesthood surrounded by particular marks of honour and veneration. Yet in the splendour of divine revelation the priest is seen invested with a dignity far greater still.....the ineffable greatness of the human priest stands forth in all its splendour, for he has power over the very body of Jesus Christ and makes it present upon our altars.....besides this power over the real Body of Christ, the priest has received other powers, august and sublime, over His mystical body.....a priest is the appointed ‘dispenser of the mysteries of God’.....dispenser of grace and

blessing.....the power to remit sins.....these august powers are conferred upon the priest are stable and perpetual, united as they are with the indelible character, imprinted on his soul whereby he becomes a priest for ever.....even if he loses both faith and virtue he can never blot out from his soul the priestly character....” – Ad Catholici Sacerdotii.

A Pius XII Encyclical provides validation for this theology of sacerdotal victimhood: “As priest, one stands before the altar to make the sacrificial offering; as victim, one lies upon the altar to be offered in sacrifice. The victimhood of the priest is an exemplary victimhood: it constitutes the single most compelling invitation for the people to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass by offering themselves together with the Divine Victim. This is the clear teaching of Pope Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* art. 98. See also: *Sacrificer, Victim, and Mediator* “You, Dom Benedict, are set apart to be, not only the image of Jesus Christ, the Father’s well-beloved Son — such is the grace of all the baptized — you are set apart to be, in your very person, the image of Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim; Jesus Christ, the Sacrificer and the Lamb sacrificed; Jesus Christ, the Mediator who stands between God and man, saying to God, « Here, Father, are Thy children, here is the Body of Thy Christ », and saying to men, « Here is your God ».” “Dom Benedict’s First Solemn Mass,” *Vultus Christi* November 2, 2014. (Link here.) See also the remarks of the Patron Saint of Priests, St John Vianney: Oh! How great is the priesthood! It can be properly understood only in Heaven...if one were to understand it on this earth one would die, not of fright, but of love!”

Anthony Ruff OSB also offers insightful comment on this point: “Even at its best, Mass with the 1962 Missal doesn’t bring out at all that the priestly community is brought into Christ’s self-offering by their own self-emptying to each other for the sake of the world, drawing them closer to the Community. Even at its best, it looks like there’s only the priest, and everyone else is privileged a) to be present as he offers sacrifice and b) to receive grace his ritual brings to them.” (Pray Tell, 05/09/10).

Another striking example of the patronising sacerdotal clericalism Ruff refers to comes from John Todd Zuhlsdorf. He is an American priest who lives in the US but well outside of the Italian diocese of his incardination. He is effectively a sine-cure Mass stipend priest and business man spruiking a largely vacuous, populist conservative agenda. His simplistic views support the more mechanistic elements of Scholastic theology of sacrificial priesthood. These share little if anything in common with modern mainline Catholic Sacramental theology:

“On the other hand, today I was at the altar and, when reading, I said the proper words, prayerfully and with measure of Christian joy, God made them change their

substance into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Had I said them loudly or whispered... same effect. If I had merely read them, rather than intensely concentrating on their meaning, same effect. If no other human being had been in the church, same effect. God did it through me, as His alter Christus, not because I am earnest, not because I was celebrating or presiding, but because I am ordained and lay people aren't. And let's remember that deacons are ordained but they aren't priests. Only priests and bishops are priests, sacerdotes, who confect the Eucharist.

Lay people in the pews have no effect whatsoever on the sacramental, real change of the bread and wine to the Body and Blood of the Lord, transubstantiation.

Of course we priests do what we do for you.

But wait! We also do it for ourselves, whether you are there or not.

We also do it for the whole world, whether you are there or not." 'I read Mass this morning. Wherein Fr Z Rants,' Fr Z's Blog, 21 December 2014. ([Link here](#))

Zuhlsdorf reaffirms the free ranging personal piety dimension of lay participation at Mass while the sacerdos carries out the essential business of offering sacrifice. The underlying clericalist contempt is staggering:

"When Hearing Mass, you can attentively pray along with the choir. You can, make your responses to the priest's greetings and promptings to pray, for example, at the congregations Domine, non sum dignus. Or you can pray along with the priest... silently, of course, during his own prayers. You can use the rosary to meditate on the Lord's life, Our Lady's intercession, and the graces showered upon us. Perhaps meditate on other aspects of our Faith. You might express your sorrow for sins you've committed, pray for the needs of your family and friends, or use the time to simply give thanks to the Blessed Trinity.

Holy Mass is the highest prayer God has given the Church to offer to Him. It stands to reason that the closer your prayers are to the prayers of the Holy Mass, the more efficacious they will be. There are wonderful old missals and prayer books that can help to keep your mind and heart focused on the action of the Mass, on Christ's action in the Mass. Don't ever worry that there's some special "formula" of prayer during Mass that's absolutely optimal.

Sometimes it's enough just to "be" at Mass.

Follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If anything seems off, or difficult, or

unusual, consult your confessor next time you go.

And don't forget a prayer for the priest who is reading Mass." "What am I supposed to do during Mass?" Fr Z's Blog, 22 December, 2014. ([Link here](#)) Even the Traditionalists at the blog Novus Ordo Watch are outraged at Zuhlsdorf's self-serving boutique form of contrived antiquarian Catholicism. ([See here](#))

10. "Celibacy – Icon of Clericalism," Pearls and Irritations, 18/12/14. ([Link here.](#))

11. An extraordinary modern testament to this kind of spirituality is reflected in Pope John XXIII's encyclical on the priesthood, *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*, of August 1, 1959, published for the centenary of the death of St. John Vianney. "When We gaze from this height of the Supreme Pontificate to which We have been raised by the secret counsels of Divine Providence and turn Our mind to what souls are hoping for and expecting, or to the many areas of the earth that have not yet been brightened by the light of the Gospel, or last of all to the many needs of the Christian people, the figure of the priest is always before Our eyes. If there were no priests or if they were not doing their daily work, what use would all these apostolic undertakings be, even those which seem best suited to the present age? Of what use would be the laymen who work so zealously and generously to help in the activities of the apostolate?" (nn. 45-48, 52-53, 59, 98-99). Here I note a comment made in a mid 2014 email conversation I had with Kieran Tapsell, author of *Potiphar's Wife*. The Vatican's Secret and Child Abuse: "It is interesting that you mention John Vianney, because I don't think it was incidental that he was beatified in 1905 and canonized in 1925. It was around that time, that we saw the apotheosis of clericalism – the priest is someone special and therefore needs to be protected from the civil law. Of course, privilege of clergy goes back to Constantine, but at least until 1922, the Church's attitude for 1500 years is that clergy sex abusers were to be stripped of their status as priests and handed over to the civil authorities. That all changed in 1922, and some 1500 years of tradition was simply trashed." 16/01/14. See Pius X's 1906 Encyclical *Pieni L'Animo* (The Clergy in Italy) in which he exports the Italian bishops to be vigilant of modernistic ideas and secular influence in the training of their priests. ([Link here](#)) See Pius X's February 11, 1906 Encyclical, *Vehementer Nos* in which he set out the distinctions between the clergy and laity in ecclesiastical social structure. What is striking here is the depth of presumed privileged Clericalism in this document with its subtext of patronising infantilisation: "This Church is in essence an unequal society, that is to say a society comprising two categories of persons, the shepherds [bishops and higher] and the flock. These categories are so distinct that the right and authority necessary for promoting and guiding all the members toward the goal of the society resides only in the pastoral body [the bishops]; as to the multitude its sole duty is that of allowing itself to be led and of following its pastors as a docile flock."

12. *To Hunt, to Shoot, to Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity*, Ignatius Press, 1993. (For a review in the conservative journal *Catholic Culture* ([Link here](#)) See also the excellent article on Vatican II, the Laity and Clericalism by Peter Price “Vatican II: End of a clerical Church?” *Compass Review*, 38 (2004) 1, ([Link here](#)) See Peter Rosengren, “A night the when the priesthood shone brightly,” in the *Catholic Weekly* 12/11/14 editorial on the installation of Anthony Fisher as the ninth Archbishop of Sydney. ([Link here](#))

13. *The Unconscious Civilization*. Melbourne, 1997, Penguin, 1-39. “Clerical Narcissism: Myth or Mess?” *Hosting the Conversation on Faith*. 05/08/11 [here](#). James Carroll, “Celibacy and the Catholic Priest,” *boston.com*. 16/05/10 ([Link here](#)) See also Francis on ‘The dictatorship of narrow-mindedness’ typical of the elitist religious leaders who were the chief opposition to Jesus. Pope Francis is clearly making a contemporary applications, ([link is here.](#))

See also Marie Keenan on the relationship between elitism at the heart of clericalism and general lack of psychological and emotional equilibrium: “Ranson (2000) argues that within an all-male culture of superiority, participants develop a competitive energy with a growing incapacity for genuine internal reflection, and inability to relate with intimacy, dependence on role and work for self-identification, and the loss of humanizing tenderness. Such a scenario breeds isolation and discontent. It is important to recognize that Ranson (Australia); Greeley and Cozzens (United States); Doyle (United States and Europe) and Flannery (Europe) are all Catholic priests, committed to and working for the Catholic Church and experiences in priesthood representing three continents.” – *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power and Organizational Culture*. Oxford, OUP, 2011, 43. For an insight of a priest who has healthily negotiated his vocation through the gauntlet of often unjust collective punishment meted out to priests in general over the clerical child abuse scandal, see Michael Kelly SJ, “I’m a Catholic Priest. Mea Culpa,” *The Hoopla. News through the Eyes of Women*, 15/10/14 ([Link here.](#))

14. *Dating God. Franciscan Spirituality in the 21st* ([Link here](#)) *Counter cultural Catholicism – habits of Clericalism criticised by Francis* ([Link here](#)). And for the referenced ‘Save us from Clericalism’ ([Link here](#)). On the idea of structures of contempt see, James Gertmenian “The Structures of Contempt. The Selfishness of our lesser natures has taken over vast regions of the national soul.” *MinnPost* 11/04/11 ([Link here](#)) See also Pope Francis warning about contempt for outsiders such as Gypsies ([Link here](#)).

15. “Ratzinger at Vatican II. The Pope who can and cannot change,” *Commonweal*,

June 4, 2010. See also Robert McClory, “The New Pope’s real target: Clericalism,” NCR April 3, 2013. (Link here.) See Peter Price again in “Vatican II: End of a clerical Church?” Compass Review, 38 (2004) 1, Price discusses the difference in appeal between the Solemn Monastic liturgical celebrations of the divine transcendence and the beautiful while the less theatrical celebration of the Low Mass lent itself to personal devotion. (Link here).

16. Vatican Radio, 16/12/2013 (Link here) See also Paul Philbert OP, “Clericalism and the Liturgy, NCR April 5, 2010 (Link here)

17. Pastores Dabo Vobis on (the Major Seminary: “This institution has produced many good results down the ages and continues to do so all over the world.”(189) The seminary can be seen as a place and a period in life. But it is above all an educational community in progress: It is a community established by the bishop to offer to those called by the Lord to serve as apostles the possibility of re – living the experience of formation which our Lord provided for the Twelve. In fact, the Gospels present a prolonged and intimate sharing of life with Jesus as a necessary premise for the apostolic ministry. Such an experience demands of the Twelve the practice of detachment in a particularly clear and specific fashion, a detachment that in some way is demanded of all the disciples, a detachment from their roots, from their usual work, from their nearest and dearest (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 10:28; Lk. 9:23, 57-62; 14:25-27). On several occasions we have referred to the Marcan tradition which stresses the deep link that unites the apostles to Christ and to one another: Before being sent out to preach and to heal, they are called “to be with him” (Mk. 3:14).” It should be noted that John Paul II follows the practise of ‘proof texting’ a naively received theological position which accepts that the Apostles we candidates for the priesthood until their episcopal ‘ordination’ at the Last Supper. (Link here.)

The issue of Bishops bringing in foreign priests to fill the diminishing ranks of local clergy or accepting unsuitable candidates from among nationals continues to be contentious point among the Catholic people. Pope Francis himself has recently criticised bishops for not using enough wisdom and caution in recruiting clergy: “We have many problems today and in many dioceses because of this chicanery [Italian: *inganno*] of some bishops to take those who come – sometimes expelled from seminaries or from religious houses – because ‘I need priests,’” complained Francis. “Please, think of the good of God’s people.” – Pope Francis. (Link here).

See also Peter J. Wilkinson, “Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing Disaster?” Catholics for Ministry, 2011. Note Wilkinson’s concluding remarks:

“The on-going priest shortage cannot be solved simply by recruiting priests from

overseas on short term contracts. Only long-term and broader policies can rebuild a vibrant autochthonous presbyterate. These will have to deal courageously with the current 'priestly package' of male, celibate, life-long and full-time. In this Australia's bishops will need to show leadership and initiative, and a willingness to discuss with their people all the options, including the ordination of married men and the role of women in ministry.

Vatican II stated that 'the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served. To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel' (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.3-4). 35

The times are always changing, as are human environments, and all organisms which exist in these environments must also change and adapt if they are to survive and thrive. The Church is an organism in this changing world and it too, if it is to survive and thrive, has no choice but to adapt. Guided by the Spirit and holding fast to the Gospel, it can. The purpose of Vatican II was 'aggiornamento', ensuring continual renewal of the Church, making it relevant to today's world, and adapting it to its new environment. The Church, universal and local, is always in need of boosts of renewal. Now is surely the time for one in Australian Catholicism." ([Link here](#))

18. This inspired and validated the reestablishment of what amounted to a pre-conciliar seminary system. This was sheer magic for those on the nostalgia side of the Catholic spectrum. In 1996, George Pell, when Archbishop of Melbourne, imposed the ethos and modus operandi of the JP II plan. This led to the mass resignation of the staff of Corpus Christi College. Pell was thoroughly unmoved and his action had a profound ripple effect throughout many dioceses in Australia. When he became Archbishop of Sydney he simply repeated what he did in Melbourne and reincarnated the 1950s. Of note is a 1997 US article offering a glowing encomium of Pell's achievements as Archbishop of Melbourne. The article deals, inter alia, with Pell's sacking of the staff of Corpus Christi Seminary and the reasons for his action: "I want them (the seminarians) to be able to pray better, to celebrate the sacraments more devoutly and pray the word of God more devoutly, especially by example," explained Pell. When presented with the reforms, the staff of the seminary made headlines across the country by resigning en masse. Father Paul Connell, rector of the seminary, explained that he and his staff were not willing to run the seminary according to the Archbishop's "new style." An anonymous staffer complained to the press about a stricter and more regulatory regime. Pell was gracious in victory. He said publicly that he felt no animosity towards the Corpus Christi staff. "They are

good people who have done a good job,” said Pell, “but they have a different vision of seminary formation.” Like a good sportsman, he did not add that it was his vision that had taken the field.’ See Richard Rotondi, “A Voice in the Desert. How one Bishop is Bringing Life to a Dry Continent in Catholic Culture.” ([Link here](#)).

19. A link to the report is [here](#). A musing: A prominent Australian theologian who was ordained a priest just as Vatican II was beginning to make serious progress, once commented on the experience having spent seven years of preparation and now emerging into the apostolate. He commented that it was like being “splendidly trained for a world that no longer existed.”

20. For Christ’s Sake: End Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church for Good, Melbourne, 2013, John Garratt Publishing, , 83-84 See also Steven M Kellett’s pertinent comments on a critical check on conservative – Trad priests: : “As an informed and educated laity, perhaps the kindest and most constructive reform we could attempt would be to call our new priest “Brother John (etc)” and never refrain from reminding him that any respect he gets must be earned as a person, and any authority he exercises derives from our consent,” *Catholica Forum* 26/08/14 ([Link here](#)). See Pope Francis’ warnings about a sterile clerical mentality ([Link here](#)). It is noteworthy that in the Eastern Church tradition clericalism is almost unknown: “.....within the Eastern Rite Churches the concept of episcopal, priestly and diaconal vocation is different from that within the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas in the Latin West priesthood is seen as a vocation from God, in the East it is a vocation from the Church. Hence, the stories of the Fathers are replete with men running off into the desert to avoid ordination at all costs, at times being dragged back to be ordained as a priest, or more commonly, a bishop by their congregations. Another major difference in Eastern ecclesiology is that the deacon, priest and bishop remain members of the laity. – Patrick Hampshire in a letter to *The Tablet*, July 31, 2014 on Eastern Churches and Clericalism. Tom Richstatter ofm on the idea of alter Christus. “Leading the Eucharist,” in *Theology of Ministry*. ([Link here](#))

21. “Imposters of the Clerical Order,” in *Directions Association*, 19/08/14 ([Link here](#)).

22. Cited in Kieran Tapsell, *Potiphar’s Wife. The Vatican’s Secret and Child Sexual Abuse*, Adelaide, 2014, ATF Press, 172-173. It is worthwhile paying close attention to what Russel Shaw has written on the distinction which needs to be made between vocation and state of life. “At bottom, it comes from erroneous thinking about vocation. The fundamental, and profoundly mistaken, idea behind it does much to explain the apparent shortage of new vocations to the priesthood and religious life and the persistent failure of carefully planned programs to recruit them. (As I’ve remarked elsewhere, there’s no shortage of vocations in the Catholic Church. What we have

today is a shortage of vocational discernment, with accompanying disastrous results. But that's another story.) The bad idea at the heart of clericalism equates "vocation" with "state in life." A state in life is a large, and overall framework of commitment within which different people choose to live their Christians lives. State in life is one meaning of "vocation," but not the only one. Starting from that mistake, bad thinking about vocation then makes the great leap of supposing that the only real vocation worthy of that name is the clerical state in life. Those whom God doesn't call to be priests (or, by extension, religious) – the laity, that is – may have a vocation in some weak, analogical sense, but they don't have the vocation that's the gold standard for everything else – the vocation to be a priest. All other callings are evaluated by how well or poorly they approximate the clerical norm." Russell Shaw on Clericalism is linked ([Link here](#); this is supported by Francis to Jesuits in Korea ([link here](#).) See also: Russell Shaw on 'Everyone's Vocation,' about the end to lay clericalism in America Magazine ([Link](#))

See a compendium of Francis' statements on the profoundly un-Christlike dimensions of Clericalism: 'Hierarchical "careerism" is "a form of cancer," Francis has said, comparing bishops who strut about in church finery to "peacocks." Instead, he wants pastors who act as shepherds and who "smell of the sheep." He does not want "airport bishops" who buzz around the world padding their resumes and preaching a doctrinaire gospel while living the good life. "Little monsters," he calls such clerics. Hierarchical "careerism" is "a form of cancer," Francis has said, comparing bishops who strut about in church finery to "peacocks." Instead, he wants pastors who act as shepherds and who "smell of the sheep." He does not want "airport bishops" who buzz around the world padding their resumes and preaching a doctrinaire gospel while living the good life. "Little monsters," he calls such clerics.' David Gibson, "Analysis: Pope Francis' plan for Reform: Convert the Church," Religion News Service, March 5, 2014 ([Link here](#)).

See also A.W. Richard Sipe, Marianne Benkert, Thomas P Doyle, "Spirituality and the Culture of Narcissism," August 30, 2013.([Link here](#)): "Throughout his years of training the seminarian practiced docility, obedience and deference realizing all the while that the day would come when he would enter this mysterious and privileged class. The understanding of the priesthood is not shaped by service to others and a fundamental equality of all People of God. Rather, the emphasis is on the powers given at ordination, the superiority of the celibate, clerical life and the identification of the priest with Jesus Christ." The following is quoted on the memento card of a newly ordained Melbourne priest in 2014: The Patron Saint of Priests, St John Vianney: Oh! How great is the priesthood! It can be properly understood only in Heaven...if one were to understand it on this earth one would die, not of fright, but of love!" See also Anthony Ruff OSB, "Pastoral Difficulties with Recently Ordained Priests," Pray Tell,

Jan 26, 2015. (Link here and a follow up article here). For an account written by an American Seminary Student on what he considered to be not only questionable psychosexual formation but somewhat deviant, see Paul Blaschko, “Inside the Seminary. Is There Reason to Be Worried About Formation?” *Commonweal Magazine*, February 17, 2015. (Link here).

23. The institution of priesthood has not profited from the cloying piety and bizarre psychological displacement of Cardinal Piacenza the former prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy: “Mothers of priests and seminarians thus represent a true and veritable “army”, which from earth offers prayers and sacrifice to heaven, and from heaven intercedes in even greater number so that every grace and blessing may be poured out upon the lives of the Church’s sacred ministers. Therefore, with all my heart I wish to encourage and offer special thanks to all mothers of priests and seminarians – and along with them to all consecrated and lay women who have received (perhaps through the invitation addressed to them during the Year of the Priest) the gift of spiritual motherhood towards those who are called to priestly ministry. By offering their lives, their prayers, their sufferings and their hardships as well as their joys for the fidelity and sanctification of God’s ministers, they have come to share in a special way in the motherhood of Holy Church, whose model and fulfilment is found in the divine maternity of Mary Most Holy.” (Linked here and here) See also reflection on a traditional custom which involved deference to the mother of the priest but is in fact fine example of the reflected glory from Alter Christus to his mother:

“According to tradition, the mother of a priest is to keep this precious cloth in a safe place. When she is buried, the cloth is placed in her hands. In the case of an open coffin, it serves as a reminder that one of her sons is a priest — a rare honour given to few Catholic women.

The practice also evokes a pious legend, which imagines that when the mother of a priest finally meets our Lord face to face, and is asked that fateful question — “Did you love me?” — she can reply in the affirmative, presenting as part of her case, her Christ-fragranced hands. This demonstrates that she loved our Lord so much, that she gave to him one of her sons, to serve him as a priest.” John Corrigan. “The Mother of the priest,” Blog of a Country priest, September 17, 2014 (Link here)

24. Tapsell, Potiphar’s Wife, 172-173.

See Cardinal Burke’s patronising and infantilising contempt for laity, (Link here.) In the same interview, Burke manifests even more arrogance in relation to Pope Francis and what the papal Magisterium should be exercised.

You said that *Evangelii Gaudium* is not part of the Magisterium. Why?

The Pope himself says in the beginning of the document that it is not magisterial, that it only offers indications of the direction in which he will take the Church.

Does the average Catholic make this distinction?

No. That is why a careful presentation to the faithful is lacking, explaining the nature and the weight of the document. There are affirmations in *Evangelii Gaudium* that express the Pope's [personal] thinking. We receive it with respect, but they do not teach an official doctrine. – *Vida Nueva*, November 1-7, 2014 edition (pages 38-39)

And finally a comment on a "fictitious" prelate:

Pope Francis at his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square Nov. 5 said, "It's sad when you see a man who seeks this office and who does so much to get there and when he makes it, he doesn't serve, but struts like a peacock, living only for his own vanity," the pope said. (Link here)

Pope Francis' Christmas message to the Roman Curia is reported here.

Presbyterorum Ordinis and Clericalism, see here

David Timbs has been an active member of *Catholics for Renewal* from its formative year until its wind up in January 2025

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