

"Clear, brief and easily assimilated by all"

Prophet, Priest, King

THE TEACHING OFFICE of the clergy and laity is not exactly the same.

Vatican II puts the teaching of religion as the first [not the highest] work of a priest in his sharing in Christ's threefold office, the *tria munera*, of Prophet, Priest & King, but does not so treat the laity, though they too share in Christ's teaching office.

Note how we use 'priest' in three ways:

- (1) the ordained priest (presbyter) and bishop;
- (2) the common priesthood of all the faithful;
- (3) offering the Mass as the inner essence of his priestliness, in contrast to his prophetic teaching and ruling as a shepherd-king.

Note also that a prophet is a teacher who teaches on behalf of God, and who teaches what God wants taught. The prophet's role of foretelling the future is sometimes part of his teaching.

The Documents of Vatican II, The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church assign to the clergy a distinctive role in teaching the faith -- they teach the laity. So the teaching given by the laity is subordinate to this prophetic role of the clergy.

THERE IS A KEY TEXT in VCII's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* n. 2(b) where concurrent sentences contrast the sequence of the *tria munera*: "In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission. To the Apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the office of **teaching, sanctifying and governing** in His name and by His power. But the **laity** are made to share in the **priestly, prophetic and kingly** office of Christ; they have therefore in the Church and in the world their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God."

FOR BISHOPS AND PRIESTS, the order in the triple likeness to Christ (*tria munera*) is consistently PROPHET, PRIEST, KING.

BUT for the Church as a whole, and laity in particular, the order is PRIEST, PROPHET, KING.

Why? Because chronologically and logically, Bishops and Priests must **first** teach the faithful. Of course, their **primary work** (ontologically, in its essence) is offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and sanctifying the faithful through the sacraments.

Thus the Liturgy of the Word comes **before** the Liturgy of Sacrifice or Sacraments because the laity must first be instructed by the clergy.

As in the liturgy, so in catechesis. Bishops, priests and deacons are the "teachers of the teachers".

Teaching is their first office in their distinctive service of the faithful, whether for adults or children, parents or other teachers.

VATICAN COUNCIL II

OVER AND OVER AGAIN the documents of the Second Vatican Council assign section after section to each threefold office (*munus*) of Our Lord, and apply them in turn to the Church, to the laity, and to the hierarchy of bishops and priests.¹

In the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 2, the People of God, the sequence is:

- nn. 10-11, baptismal common priesthood;
- n. 12, prophetic/teaching apostolate;
- n. 13, kingly role building up God's Kingdom.

However, *Lumen Gentium* ch. 3, Hierarchical structure of the Church, a contrasting sequence:-

- n. 25, on Bishops as Prophets;
- n. 26, on Bishops as 'Priests';
- n. 27, on Bishops as Kings, governors, shepherds of the flock, i.e. pastors.

But in *Lumen Gentium* ch. 4, on the Laity, the sequence is same as for the whole People of God:-

- n. 34, the laity's share in Christ's priestly office by their "common priesthood";
- n. 35, their prophetic office;
- n. 36, their work for the Kingship of Christ and conquering the reign of sin.

WHAT IS MORE, the same contrasting pattern occurs consistently in other Conciliar documents:

Decree on Bishops, *Christus Dominus*:

- nn. 12-14 is on Prophet;
- n. 15 on Priest;
- n. 16 on King;

Decree on Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*:

- n. 4 on Prophet;
- n. 5 on Priest;
- n. 6 on King.

Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*: within n 4, the order of the *tria munera* is:

- Prophet (ministry of the Word),
- Priest (ministry of Worship) and
- King (ministry of shepherd).

¹ Regarding deacons, Pope Benedict amended Canon Laws c. 1008 by deleting "in the person of Christ the Head, the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling". And in c. 1009, adding §3: "Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or of the presbyterate receive the mission and the faculty to act in the person of Christ the Head, while deacons are enabled to serve the people of God in the *diakonia* of the liturgy, of the word and of charity (*vim populo Dei serviendi*). See also the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 179.

THE CODE OF CANON LAW has the same contrasting sequences: for those in the Sacred Ministry, the order is Prophet, Priest and King, e.g. canon 375 §1 for Bishops; c. 519 for priests; c. 255 for seminarians; c. 1008 for Holy Order generally; but in c. 204 §1 for the laity, the order is Priest, Prophet and King.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

On "Hierarchy, Laity and Consecrated Life" n. 873 quotes *Apostolicam Actuositatem* n. 2 as above.

On the "People of God":

n. 784 the priestly office;

n. 785 the prophetic office;

n. 786 the royal office.

By contrast, on Bishops and priests:

nn. 888-892 prophetic/teaching;

n. 893 their offering of the Eucharist and sanctification of the Church;

nn. 894-896 their governing office.

But in treating the laity, it reverts to the sequence for the People of God:

nn. 901-903 the priestly office;

nn. 904-907 the prophetic office;

nn. 908-913 the kingly office.

COMPENDIUM OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

n. 180 Priests exercise their ministry in communion with their own bishop, who, in:

n. 184: mission of teaching;

n. 186 ministry of sanctification;

n. 187 function of governing.

Lay Participation in the Church:

n. 189 in the Church's priestly office;

n. 190 in the Church's prophetic office

n. 191 in the Church's kingly office.

BACKGROUND REFLECTIONS

Zadok priest & Nathan prophet anointed Solomon king.

1 Kings 1:34

The Lord Jesus spent three years teaching, three days Priesting in Sacrifice & its Resurrection acceptance, and after forty days Ascended as universal King.

Christ Teacher in Liturgy of Word, Priest in Liturgy of Sacrifice, sending us forth to build the Kingdom.

PRIESTS IN PARISHES -- catechetical teaching

Canon 773 It is pastors of souls especially who have the serious duty of attending to the catechesis of the Christian people, so that, through **doctrinal formation** and the **experience of the Christian life**, the living faith of the people may be manifest and active.

Canon 777 In a special way, the parish priest is to ensure, in accordance with the norms laid down by

the diocesan Bishop, that:

1° an adequate **catechesis** is given **for** the celebration of the **sacraments**;

2° children are properly prepared for **first confession & first holy communion**, and for the sacrament of **confirmation**, by means of catechetical formation over an appropriate period of time;

N.B. Sacramental Confession must precede First Communion -- canon 914.

3° children, **after** they have made their first holy communion, are given a **richer and deeper catechetical** formation;

4° as far as their condition allows, catechetical formation is given to the mentally and physically handicapped;

5° the faith of **young people** and of **adults** is strengthened, enlightened and developed by various catechetical methods and initiatives .

PROPHETIC ROLE OF THE LAY FAITHFUL at HOME & PARISH and in wider society

FAMILY CATECHETICS is vital (& possibly home-schooling) **Informal**: in car or kitchen (washing-up):

- singing hymns, chanting Q&As,
- reciting Bible texts;
- reciting lists (e.g. Works of Mercy 7 + 7);
- competitions.

Formal, learn by heart from St John Paul II's list:

Catechesi Tradendæ n. 55

1. Words of Jesus;
2. other Biblical texts;
3. the Creeds (Apostles' and Nicene)
4. the Ten Commandments;
5. liturgical texts;
6. essential prayers (e.g. *Hail, Mary*);
7. key doctrinal ideas etc (*etc* in original).

N.B. "Parents should be provided with... **catechisms designed for families.**" [emphasis added]

Rite of Baptism for Children: Ministries and Roles 5(1).

A suitable **catechism for families** [emphasis in original]... clear, brief and easily assimilated by all.

Christian Family in the Modern World, *Familiaris Consortio* n. 39.

STATE SCHOOL CATECHETICS Scripture Classes.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS in Parish Catechetical Classes for Sacramental Preparation and follow-up.

STUDY GROUPS, LECTURES & group discussion, for:

- Husband & Wife and/or Groups of Spouses;
- topics: Bible, VCII, Political & Civic activism;
- RCIA, Convert & Adult Education classes;
- Matrimonial Preparation evenings;
- Baptismal Preparation evenings/home visits.

Father James Tierney