

"Common" priesthood and ministerial priesthood¹

Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos

A proper understanding of the distinction and mutual relationship between the "common" priesthood and the ministerial priesthood is central to the vitality of the Church. Even as the Church emerged from crisis in the 1970s and vocations began to flourish again (60,142 major seminarians in 1975; 106,345 in 1995), here and there practices were established, often inspired by good will, but in which sometimes the appreciation of the priest by the laity diminished. When it was precisely the ministerial priesthood, lived and exercised in its authenticity, that could have guaranteed the proper promotion of the common priesthood!

One could consider that the lack of priests is not the most dramatic aspect – 955 Catholics per priest in Switzerland, 10,941 per priest in Haiti, according to the 1996 Statistical Yearbook – but that the faithful need to make better use of their priests. Or rather, to understand them better. So that the gift of the priesthood can inform their daily lives.

In this sense, we can see that the countries where the mystery of the priesthood is currently best understood, where it is lived, where every faithful knows that he is a Christian because somewhere there is a priest who is his pastor and whose presence he desires, and where this translates into a great abundance of solid vocations, are countries where changes in the rites have been accepted peacefully, carried out with balance, a sense of the sacred and respect for popular sensibilities, in the sense of fundamental continuity and without ever causing divisions.

Thus, the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood both contribute to the building up of the body of Christ, which is the Church: they "are ordered to one another, since both participate in their own way in the one priesthood of Christ. Thanks to the sacred power with which he is invested, the priest, as minister of Christ, instructs and governs the priestly people, performs the Eucharistic sacrifice as Christ's representative, and offers it to God on behalf of the whole people; the faithful, by virtue of their royal priesthood, share in the Eucharistic offering and exercise their priesthood through the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, through the witness of a holy life, through self-denial and active charity" (*Lumen Gentium* 10).

I thank C.I.E.L. for choosing this theme of priesthood and for the love of the Church that such an undertaking demonstrates.

¹ Proceedings IV. Poissy. 7 to 9 October 1998.