

Vatican II – Saturday Morning Sessions

Session 12: Saturday 1st March 2014

Feedback from Group Work

Part 1: Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church

Group 1 Feedback:

Using chapter two as your starting point, create a job description for the bishop. Begin with paragraph twelve. Use chapters one and three to support and expand this job description.

One thought occurred to the group as they prepared to create a job description for a bishop: if there had been a job description for a Pope at the time of the election John XXIII, he wouldn't have fitted the bill... and look what he did!

Job description for a bishop:

- Be a shepherd and servant
- Person of God
- Person of prayer
- Person of faith
- Knows and lives the Scriptures
- Open and a good listener
- Have a social conscience and be in touch with their people.
- Able to delegate to the right people who have the necessary skills.
- Be accountable
- Brave enough to ignore Rome if what Rome is saying is not applicable to the local needs.

There should be some involvement of the lay people in the diocese in the selection of a new bishop. But not sure in practice how this would happen – didn't have time to go into this.

Group 2 Feedback:

Describe the sort of person who would be most fit to become a bishop. What qualities would you look for?

- Primary concern is the welfare of souls
- Person of prayer and personal holiness
- Approachable and open to suggestions
- Good leader
- Aware of what goes on in civil society

- Genuine pastor
- Appreciates fullness of their holy orders
- Good communicator
- Steeped in humility and simplicity of life
- Learned person
- Good shepherd who knows their sheep
- Look after and care for other priests
- Willing to serve

Once you make this list of qualities, rank them with the most important ones listed first.

1. Genuine pastor whose primary concern is the care of souls
2. Personal holiness – steeped in prayer
3. Simple and humble of lifestyle
4. Good leader – leadership based service

Think there is a connection between this list of qualities and what Pope Francis said very recently to the Congregation of Bishops about the qualities he wanted in bishops:

- Prelates who are genuine pastors willing to argue with God on behalf of their people
- The church does not need apologists for its causes not crusaders for its battles, but it needs sowers who are humble and confident in the truth of the Gospel.
- Close to the people
- “I need church that has got genuine pastors”

Part 2: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests

Group 3 Feedback:

Create a job description for a parish priest. Use chapter two, up to about paragraph ten, as a starting point.

Before going on to the job description of the priest, the group shared some of the things that struck them as they read the Decree:

1. It says that priests should live in community. This can't be imposed, but it is not an opportunity priests have very often in the church today. Might some priests want to live in community with lay people and go out to parishes from this base?
2. They are graced through the sacrament of ordination for their ministry.

3. The importance of Eucharist. Priests offer their lives **with** us (*the laity*) in the Eucharist. The notion that we (*the laity*) offer our lives with the priest in the offering of Christ to the Father needs, the group felt, to be more explicit in the Eucharistic Prayer (especially in the new translation).
4. Priests have a special duty to assist the weak in their faith and to provide for young people, married people, parents, the sick and dying and women and men religious. But, there is no mention, in this otherwise all-encompassing list, of single and divorced people!!

The Job Description

- Appointed by and accountable to the bishop. But, should the priest also be accountable to the parish he serves?
- Be supported by a fair salary and the love and support of the laity.
- He should proclaim the Word in way that can be understood and related to lives of people – both by word and the way the priest lives.
- Preside at the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.
- Teach faithful so that they can participate fully in the sacraments.
- Maintain the church as a place of prayer.
- Be a person of prayer.
- Exercise leadership with humility, accepting the competencies of the laity.
- Supporting others, especially newly ordained priests
- Obligation to the poor and those in need.

The skills the priest requires are:

- Animator of the gifts of laity – to help them express their ministry.
- Good communicator.
- Good listener.
- Good organiser.
- Be approachable.
- Have humour.

Group 4 Feedback:

Using chapter three as your source, describe the life of the priest as it is foreseen in this document. Pay particular attention to paragraphs 15 (obedience), 16 (celibacy for the Western Church), and 17 (voluntary poverty). What place do you think obedience, celibacy and voluntary poverty have in the life of the present-day priest?

As described, it is a very demanding role and you might wonder why anybody would sign up to it! However, it is important to remember that it is a vocation the priest feels drawn or called to, it is a way of life covering every aspect of their life.

Obedience

- Blind obedience allows no scope for development or any ways in which the church is wrong.
- Church could resultantly become stuck in a time-warp.
- One example of challenging obedience could be trying to expose the cover-up of wrong-doing.
- Another is the refusal to allow discussion on topics such as clergy, marriage and celibacy.

Celibacy

- The text highlights all the wonderful things that, by grace, allows the priest to live without the pleasures of the flesh.
- But celibacy is not just about sex, it is about close relationships, about relating to parishioners and brother priests.
- Many priests live alone and some find it difficult to relate to people.
- Celibacy is not a requirement in Eastern Church, only the West, and is not demanded of priesthood itself, which begs the question regarding the demand of celibacy for our priests.
- Celibacy could be a barrier rather than an aid to the priest in the parish.

Voluntary poverty

- Cardinals and bishops often live fairly opulent lives which couldn't be described as living in poverty!
- Priest should be paid a reasonable amount, but on the other hand don't have the worry of a mortgage, heating bills, etc, that lay people have. They have some sort of security.
- Financial openness through all areas of the church is essential.
- Lay people have the responsibility for providing for their parish and should have clarity of the parish finances.
- Finance in the church, in general, is a mystery.

Group 5 Feedback:

1. [In ten words or less, what is the overall message in the document about the support of priests? \(Please refer to part three of chapter three\).](#)

Priests need support in matters spiritual, knowledge and material.

The key to the support of priests is the celebration of the Eucharist. In paragraph 14, it says:

Above all, priest should strive to unify their interior spiritual and emotional lives with their exterior programme of pastoral work.

*By uniting themselves with Christ, who is united to God, priests can accomplish this inner unity which will produce great fruit for the Gospel. The Eucharistic meal is the place where this happens most readily. By **offering themselves each time they preside** priests will come more and more to resemble Christ, who likewise offered himself to us.*

There is a resonance here with work we did during Bill Huebsch's third session with us last September - the call to holiness. This was about us, through acts of self-giving love, creating our connection to the Paschal Mystery. This is what the priests are encouraged to do in celebrating the Eucharist each day and what we are also called to in the call to holiness (wholeness).

The Eucharist is seen as the way the priest comes most closely together with his parishioners.

2. In the conclusion, the Council Fathers acknowledge the difficulties faced by priests in the 1960s. In your experience, what are some of the challenges priests face in 2014, fifty years after the document was written?

- Fifty years ago there was still a bit of a mystery and status associated with priests.
 - There was a different structure back then – most parishes had two or more priests. There was often great camaraderie amongst the curates from the different parishes (if not, sometimes between the parish priest and the curate). That has gone now. There is not the same spirit of priests being together. Fr Mike has though tried to instil this here, to set up community, in the setting up of Cluster.
 - Much less charity amongst priests than we would hope for – not as good with one another as we would hope.
 - The Lack of time for priests – a very demanding role. They are always on duty.
 - The stigma arising from priests who have perpetrated sexual and other types of abuse – this casts its shadow over all priests. Now priests are scorned, laughed at and demonised.
-

Part 3: The Decree on Priestly Formation

Group 6 Feedback:

1. Using chapter four as a starting point, create a list of traits that you would look for in a seminary candidate today?

The group felt that reviewing the formation plan in the seminary was as important as any trait in the individuals entering the seminary.

There is also the important question of the role of the priest in today's world – he is called to be part of the community and not apart from it. This should shape the students' formation.

With regard to the traits, the group identified:

- A willingness and desire to be of service - this comes from the deep call of the Spirit.
 - Open to learning from Pope Francis.
 - Able to allow the gifts of the community – to thereby fulfil their role as members of the community
 - Committed to ongoing spiritual and personal development.
2. How would you provide spiritual formation for an individual training to become a priest?
 - Spiritual direction.
 - Disciples of good teachers – Scripture scholars, etc.
 - Awareness of one's own brokenness and open to healing.

Group 7 Feedback:

1. Using chapter five as a starting point, create 6-8 bullet points outlining what you think should be included in the academic aspect of seminary training.

The group considered the language that should be employed, what should be taught and how it should be taught.

- Working knowledge of Latin required but fluency only needed for those taking up further study.
- What should be taught?
- Integrate theology, liturgy and philosophy – a novelty in the 1960s but fundamental today.
- The teachings and work of Thomas Aquinas should be an essential given, but this needs to be balanced with modern theological works.

- Should be schooled in modern thinking and scientific thought and have the skills to critique both with competence.
- Need to be familiar with current ideas in order to contribute to the debate and challenge it.
- With regard to how it should be taught, there should be a move away from instruction towards more inclusive, creative and innovative teaching methods. An approach that focuses on teaching the individual to think.
- Canon law is mentioned as being an essential, nonnegotiable element of curriculum. Canon Law is very poorly understood and not accessible to ordinary folk.
- Ecumenism is hinted at – restoring other churches in unity with the catholic church was a central theme of Vatican II and this came through in the curriculum. Must study other churches' teachings so that they can have a better understanding on that pathway.

2. Using chapter six as a starting point, describe how you think formation or training for pastoral ministry should occur.

- Catechesis.
- Preaching skills.
- Evangelisation.
- Liturgical presiding.

All of the above should be part of pastoral formation, but pastoral ministry requires more than mechanics of doing the job – it also needs the softer skills:

- Communication.
- Empathy.
- Reciprocity with the laity.
- Listening.
- Healing.
- Counselling.
- Recognising the role of lay people and able to draw out their skills.

The need for ongoing education/formation throughout life is crucially important.