

## Bishops & Priests - Teachers of the Faith, "Teachers of Teachers"

- This *Handouts* explains...
- **Christ is Prophet, Priest & King.**
- Similarly His Church and her members are all three.
- But is the order different for priests and laity?
- Is it **Priest, Prophet, King** for the lay faithful?
- Is it **Prophet, Priest, King** for ordained priests?
- If so, **WHY?**

**LONG, LONG AGO** — just after Vatican II, in fact — a highly gifted member of the Christian Brothers was asked to prepare a brochure for the priestly vocation campaign.

He chose a particularly effective presentation using a lot of little pictures to show the priest at his sacred work for our Lord:

- at the altar **offering the Sacrifice of the Mass**,
- at the communion rail **giving Holy Communion**,
- at the font **baptizing a child**,
- in the Confessional **forgiving sins**,
- at a sick bed giving the **Anointing of the Sick**,
- before the altar solemnizing a **marriage**,
- **visiting** homes, schools, directing youth groups,
- talking, advising, counselling, consoling, and so on.

It was an attractive brochure using an excellent teaching procedure, and it did a lot of good.

Its coverage of a priest's activities was excellent, except for one thing: **it omitted entirely a priest's work as a teacher of religion:**

- not a picture of a priest **teaching in the pulpit**,
- nor a priest **teaching in the classroom** (most young priests led their catechists into state schools),
- nor a priest **teaching a class** in a Catholic School,
- nor a priest **teaching in 'the front room'** of the presbytery preparing a couple for a mixed marriage (in the days when they had to receive 'the five instructions'),
- nor a priest **teaching a convert class** (before RCIA).

The teaching brother **did not think of priests as teachers**, and who could blame him? Neither did most priests, though it was something that most of them were doing, day in, day out, and doing it well.

Scarcely anyone noticed this defect in the vocation brochure. When it was pointed out, no correction was made — except that a subsequent brochure in New Zealand did include the teaching work of the priest.

Further, as more and more of the Religious brothers and sisters in the schools got university degrees, and as more and more of them were replaced by lay teachers, and as 'professionalism' became the in-word, some priests felt inferior, despite their practical success as teachers. They were like graduates who had done a lot of teaching but lacked a Diploma in Education and who were referred to disparagingly as 'untrained graduates'; or like those Religious and laity who taught successfully for years without paper qualifications.

### COUNCIL, CODE & CATECHISM

**THE** Second Vatican Council lists the **teaching of religion as the FIRST work of a priest** in his share in Christ's threefold office, the *tria munera*, of Prophet, Priest & King. It does not so treat the laity even though they also share in Christ's teaching office.

Note 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 another consideration, not always his main function.

Note also that we use 'priest' in three ways: (1) the ordained priest (or bishop); (2) the common priesthood of all the faithful; and (3) the inner essence of priest-hood in offering sacrifice in contrast to prophetic teaching and ruling as a shepherd-king.

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.

The authoritative documents treat the triple office of Christ our Lord using a different sequence for clergy and laity:

**FOR BISHOPS AND PRIESTS**, the order in the triple likeness to Christ is consistently **PROPHET, PRIEST, KING**. But for the Church as a whole, and for the laity in particular, the order is **PRIEST, PROPHET, KING**.

Surely this seems back to front? Surely, for a priest, being 'priest' comes ahead of teacher and shepherd? Does it matter, anyway? Yes! very much.

Why? Because logically and chronologically, teaching is the *first* work of Bishops and Priests. On the other hand, their *primary* work on the level of being (i.e. ontologically) is their *highest* work, namely the offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and sanctifying the faithful through the sacraments.

Since Vatican II, not only the Mass but all the sacraments have a **Liturgy of the Word before** the Liturgy of Sacrifice or Sacraments because the laity must first be instructed by the clergy. It is like the sequence of our Lord's Public Life of teaching, then the climax in His priestly Passover of Crucifixion and Resurrection, and finally His Kingship shown in His Ascension.

**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.

### COUNCIL

**OVER AND OVER AGAIN** the Second Vatican Council assigns section after section to each work of Our Lord in His threefold office, and applies them in turn to the Church, to the laity, and to the sacred hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons:-

In the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, ch.

2, on the People of God, **the sequence is:-**

§10-11, baptismal common priesthood;

§12, prophetic/teaching apostolate;

§13, kingly role of building up the Kingdom of God.

Similarly in ch. 4 on the Laity, the same sequence:-

§34, the laity's share in in Christ's priestly office by the "common priesthood";

§35, their prophetic office;

§36, their work for the Kingship of Christ and conquering the reign of sin.

**BY CONTRAST**, in *Lumen Gentium* ch. 3 on the Hier-

archical structure of the Church, **the sequence is:**  
§25, on Bishops as **Prophets**;  
§26, on Bishops as **Priests**;  
§27, on Bishops as **Kings**, governors, shepherds of the flock, i.e. pastors.

What is more, **the same contrasting pattern occurs consistently in other Conciliar documents:**

**The Decree on Bishops, *Christus Dominus*:**

§12-14 is on Prophet; §15 on Priest; §16 on King;

**The Decree on Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*:**

§4 on Prophet; §5 on Priest; §6 on King;

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

Prophet (ministry of the Word),

Priest (ministry of Worship) and

King (ministry of shepherd).

**THERE IS A KEY TEXT in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §2,** the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, **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."

#### CODE

**THE CODE OF CANON LAW** has the same 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 the order is **Priest, Prophet and King** for the laity in c. 204 §1.

#### CATECHISM

**IN ITS TREATMENT** of "Hierarchy, Laity and Consecrated Life," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §873, quotes *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §2, the key text, as above.

**On the People of God,** the *Catechism*

§784: the priestly office is first;

§785: next the prophetic office;

§786: then the royal office.

By contrast, on **Bishops & priests**, the *Catechism*, §§888-892 treat their prophetic/teaching office; §893, their offering of the Eucharist and sanctification of the Church; §§894-896, their governing office.

**But in treating of the laity,** the *Catechism* reverts to the order of the *tria munera* for the People of God:

§§901-903 treats the priestly office;

§§904-907 the prophetic office;

§§908-913 the kingly office.

#### PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**IN THE ROMAN CURIA,** it is the Congregation for the Clergy, **not** the Congregation for Catholic Education, **nor** the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is responsible for catechesis and

catechisms. The implication is clear: catechesis is a key work of the clergy.

By contrast, in Australia, the Bishops' Committee for Education has been assigned responsibility for catechesis (currently there are no catechisms), **not** their Committee for Clergy and Religious (diverse entities needing separate committees anyway).

**IN AUSTRALIA TODAY** (and elsewhere), one of the Church's gravest wound is deficient teaching and neglect of the 'true doctrine', *vera doctrina*, in season and out of season (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-5), by the Divinely instituted hierarchy of bishops, with their priest co-operators, and their deacon helpers. As the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops said, "everywhere in the world today the transmission to the young of the faith and moral values deriving from the Gospel is in peril. The knowledge of the faith and the acceptance of the moral order are often reduced to a minimum." *Final Report*, St Paul Edition, p. 31.

Also, administrators in diocesan offices and the Catholic Education Offices have, wittingly or unwittingly, **marginalized the teaching role of priests**. Some lay teachers of religion, some Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) and, dare we say it, some priests themselves and even bishops, seem unaware that priests have any teaching ministry at all outside of Mass and the Sacraments, or that parish priests are the chief teachers of religion in their parishes. Too often the conferences of the clergy are addressed by lay Religious or other laity and rarely, in any significant way, by the Bishop or one of his parish priests.

**THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY** requires that priestly responsibility for catechesis be **reinstated rather than usurped**.

To the extent that priests are not effective teachers of the faithful, or not teachers of true doctrine, the true way forward is to help them become so.

**The laity, of course, do have their own proper teaching role and this must not be usurped either.**

Also, many teaching tasks of bishops and priests can and should be *delegated* — bishops and priests are definitely **not** meant to teach all the teachers themselves, let alone to teach all the children themselves.

Nevertheless, bishops and priests need to overcome any diffidence and at least talk *with* the teachers and pupils (not just *at* them) and discovering for themselves the general **ignorance of basics** on Creed, Sacraments, Commandments and Prayer, and then reveal to the teachers how to **practise the faith**, and **what** to teach the children, and even **how** to teach it. Too many of our teachers do not practise the faith; and too many have been kept ignorant of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Catechis in our Time*.

Perhaps parish priests might be declared **Religious Education Directors** (REDs) of all the schools in their parishes, i.e. Chief Executive Officers, and thereby chairmen of all teacher-meetings on catechetics or sacramental programmes. The present Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) might be rescheduled as **Religious Education Facilitators** (REFs), i.e. administrative officers for priest REDs, rather than RECs for Diocesan Education Offices that bypass parish priests.