

CRISES FACING PRIESTHOOD IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Crumbling Clayfeet

It used to be said before the Second Vatican Council that the institution of the priesthood in the Catholic Church was a symbol of changelessness and certainty, therefore of security. It was clothed with an aura of mystic sanctity tangible even for ordinary mortals. 'Crisis in Priesthood' was simply absent. Every detail of the priest's life, ministry and spirituality was well defined, carefully structured and stamped with a seal of divine approval. The priestly formation was so well regimented in the monastic model that the priests were prepared to observe these rules with meticulous fidelity. The faithful, as well as the priests were clear about the priestly identity. It is to be a mediator between God and people, especially by exercising the power to consecrate the Eucharistic elements and absolve the sins in the confessional. People knew exactly what to expect from their priests. Priests knew exactly what their faithful, Bishops and other superiors expected of them. It was easy for them to meet these expectations, hence win the approval and appreciations from all quarters. Given the normal circumstances, there were joy and happiness, meaning and fulfillment in priesthood. As a result, it is said that the Second Vatican Council which took so much pains to renew other aspects of the Church's life and personnel, almost reaffirmed, of course with some minor changes, the traditional mode of priestly life, spirituality and formation.

Soon the Church began to implement its new orientations taught in its documents especially the ones like *The Church in the Modern World* (GS), establish a new relationship with the changed

world, and renew the Church's mission and life according to the changed circumstances. This opened the Pandora's box especially for the priesthood in the Church. It became difficult to contain the new wine in the old wineskins. Soon the clay feet of the strong giant began to develop cracks and the structure slowly began to crumble.

Onslaught of Religionless Secularism

The materially developed West experienced the fast spread of a religionless secularism. Human autonomy was so much glorified that human reason, science and technology were considered sufficient to guide and shape human destiny. Religion and spirituality were considered as the residues of the past age sank in ignorance, incompetence and superstitions. Human existence and social processes no longer required religious legitimation, but only rational and scientific approval. Slowly this new value orientation affected a large majority of the Church Faithful in the West, and the Church looked to them as irrelevant and meaningless. They no longer required the priests to guide them in their life. Competent Scholars, Professors, Scientists, Doctors, Engineers, Managers, Administrators, Counselors, Lawyers, Sociologists, Economists, Military Strategists, etc., began to serve society more effectively, each with his/her own specialisation. No longer the majority of the people required the services of the priests. Suddenly the erstwhile jack-of-all-trades was humbly made to acknowledge that he is master of nothing. Priesthood became a socially irrelevant and dispensable constituency. Naturally this created an identity crisis for the majority of the priests.

¹ I am obliged to inform the readers at the outset itself that this article on *The Crises Facing Priesthood* is not the out come of elaborate textual studies. Hence the article will not be peppered with quotes and citations from learned authors, or statistics from empirical explorations. It is a contextual enquiry. The basis is a lot of personal interviews and ordinary conversations with priests both Diocesan and Religious, lay people and even some Bishops who are concerned about the situation of priests, their ministries, life and spirituality at present. In this article, I am not making a clear cut division between the Diocesan priests and the Religious priests. I also should warn the readers in the beginning itself that much of the material gathered tends to be negative in nature, because the issue of enquiry is the *crises* facing priesthood in the Catholic Church. It is a diagnostic study into the symptoms. Hence it does not focus the attention on the prevailing healthier elements, which could be many. Gathering all the negative factors and placing them in one heap may not make a pleasant presentation and create a pleasing effect. Though such an effect is consciously intended, this does not mean that positive and praiseworthy elements are totally absent from the life and ministry of today's priests. That aspect needs to be studied separately.

On the other hand the priests and those in priestly formation were finding it difficult to adjust to the changing scenario. Ground realities were changing so fast that many priests found it very traumatic. The changeless aspects of priestly ministry and spirituality suddenly looked strange and intellectually stultifying. Merely administering the sacraments routinely and occupying only the microcosm of the presbytery and the sacristy helped very little to bring personal satisfaction and meaning to the priests. Greater involvement in the lives of the people and active engagement in the socio-political processes were felt to be necessary for making the priests' life and ministry meaningful and relevant. But when the priests stepped out of their traditional boundaries, they were exposed to myriad temptations. The traditionally effective monastic formation has left the priest miserably ill equipped to meet the new challenges. The bastion of celibacy was badly battered in this new exposure. Soon a large number of priests were caught up with the secular tendencies of seeking power and money, positions of authority, comfort and convenience, consumerism and pleasure-hunting. The eager movement towards reformation seemed to be got grounded in a tragic deformation. Mass exodus from priesthood was witnessed. Lesser number of youth joined the seminaries and very few persevered till the end. The veterans were getting aged, badly in need of rest and retirement. The cumulative effect was an acute crisis in priesthood, quite unheard in the times gone by. Catholic priests became an endangered species, especially in the developed West.

The Indian Scenario

The Indian scenario is not that much affected by the onslaught of religionless secularism as it happened in the West. India, as the other parts of Asia, still remains deeply religious. The values of modernism and post-modernism have not made much inroad here. But this does not mean that the Catholic Church and its priesthood in India are without any problem and facing no crisis. The Indian scenario is creating its own brand of problems and crisis.

Confronted With Traditional Expectations

The Catholic priests in India are generally confronted with the expectations of traditional values, both from the majority of the

Faithful and the Bishops. A large segment of the Faithful, especially from the middle class and urban sector, expect the priests to be pious, always available in the presbytery, performing the sacraments joyfully as cultic mediators, promoting devotions to Mary, Infant Jesus, Saints, etc., becoming effective evangelical preachers who can have a sway over the emotions of the people, interpreting the Bible in a literal and fundamentalist way, and nurturing a spirituality of individualistic emotionalism. Many do not want the priests to be involved in socio-political issues. They have to be holy priests by keeping themselves from active involvement in the secular sphere. Taking sides in liberational and justice issues, participating in people's movements and their rallies, etc., are not seen as belonging to the province of the priests.

On the other hand, the people of God from the rural areas, especially the poor and the Dalits, expect their priests to apply and get a lot of developmental projects and foreign money into the parish. They want their priest to be a manager of mega projects, building schools, houses, hospitals, and halls, digging wells, giving loans, administering schools, boardings and hostels, almost running a parallel government. The priest is expected to be dealing with money and doling it generously. His spiritual ministries are seen almost as unavoidable appendices.

If the rural parish is divided on casteistic lines, then the upper caste people would want the priests to serve their interests exclusively, tolerating only some minimum token services to the Dalits. Anything more would endanger the *status quo*; hence not welcome. But the Dalit segment of the Christian community would expect their priests to be fully dedicated to their interests as they are the most disadvantaged group in every aspect. In the process the priests are torn between these competing expectations.

Empirical studies reveal that a majority of the Bishops also entertain only traditional expectations for their priests. They want their priests to be holy in the traditional way, faithful dispensers of the sacraments, effective administrators of the parish and its institutions, tactful managers of the conflicting interests of competing caste groups, etc. They usually want the priests not to take any sides and precipitate

into any crisis. Clever neutrality is the expected mode of priestly behaviour. Peace at all costs usually wins appreciation and approval. Often many Bishops want their priests to be 'yes men' rather than demanding dialogue and resorting to confrontations. In the process, innovative ministries demanded by the changing circumstances are not much attended to.

Curse of Casteism

The bane of the Indian society is its casteistic culture, social structures and relations. For more than three millennia, the Indian population has been arranged in a hierarchical order of purity and pollution, social power and privileges, permanently fixed by birth. Here the individual's human identity is sadly secondary to the one ascribed by the caste system. One's personal worth is not achieved here by one's effort, but ascribed by one's birth in a particular caste taking a particular place in the caste hierarchy. The higher and higher a person is placed in this infamous caste hierarchy, the greater is his or her social power, prestige and privileges, and less and less are the duties and responsibilities to society. If one's ascribed position moves lower and lower in this hierarchical ladder, there is a diminishment of power and privileges, while there is an increase of duties and responsibilities to society, and more are the disabilities for one's human rights and dignity by being forced to do all the dirty jobs needed for the health of the society, but shunned by others. The dirtier a job is (scavenging, skinning the carrion, etc.) the greater is the pollution of the person who does it, and hence the greater his/her unfitness for normal human interactions and social relations. These unfortunate ones will be treated as if they are lesser humans and made to feel that they are worthless.

Even from the days of St. Thomas the Apostle, the Indian Church succumbed to this unchristian value system for the sake of winning a few upper caste converts. For their sake, it threw the gospel equality of all humans as God's beloved children into the dustbin. After the Sixteenth Century, missionaries like Robert De Nobili fought tooth and nail to permit the upper caste converts to continue with their traditional caste practices and caste symbols, wrongly assuming that they were only harmless social and cultural practices. The fact that these caste values and practices emerged from the *vedic* anthropology,

and hence were diametrically opposed to the biblical anthropology, was conveniently ignored.

Due to this capitulation to the caste system, the positions of authority in the Church were traditionally given to the persons from the upper castes. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, those legendary catechists, the *upadesiars*, who served as the hands and feet of the European Missionaries to go to the remotest villages, were called *koil pillais*, the word *pillai* denoting the *vellalla* caste. When the European Missionaries began to recruit Indians for the seminary, they preferred those from the upper castes and avoided those from the Untouchable castes, though they were the majority in the Church.

As long as the European Missionaries were here, the caste was not a dominant factor among the Indian clergy. They all had to stand together against the White Missionaries in demanding their share of power and positions in the Church. After the Independence of India, the White Missionaries became few in numbers. Slowly the Indian clergy began to assume the positions of power. Even at this stage the caste had not emerged as a disturbing factor, because those who assumed the offices of power were non-Tamils, priests from Goa, Mangalore and Kerala. The Tamil priests stood together on the basis of their region and language, rather than on that of the castes. Soon the priests from other States began to be rare and scarce, the Tamils alone were there to take all the cake for themselves. This is the period when the internal caste contradictions began to show their ugly heads among the Church personnel.

At this stage, the Government's policy of protective discrimination for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as the Backward Class people through special reservation programmes in education and employment, played a crucial role in the fresh fragmentation of society and social mobilization on the basis of castes. This process was further aggravated by the electoral politics that depended very much on caste based vote banks. Frequent elections for the various democratic bodies kept alive the caste consciousness; and even intensified it. These social effects spread into the Church because the Church also was having a lot of positions of power, and running a number of powerful institutions with enviable opportunities for

admission and employment. A naked competition to capture these positions of power, and utilize the opportunities for the people of one's own caste, caused the polarisation of the priests and Religious on the basis of castes.

As a result, the caste factor plays such a powerful role in many Dioceses and Religious Congregations at present, that normal functioning is almost paralyzed. Competing groups are formed on the basis of castes and they control admission and appointments. The recently declared policy of the Indian Church to go for a preferential option for the Dalit Christians is also meeting with stiff resistance from the erstwhile powerful castes. So the administration is forced to follow a quota system to please all the constituencies. Every appointment is seen, interpreted and evaluated on the basis of the castes.

This has made the Church very much inward looking, spending most of its energies in trying to solve its internal bickering. Such unprofitable engagements have affected the Church's mission to the wider society. As a result the priests are caught in the whirlpool of caste consciousness, and priesthood is desolately drowning in the quagmire of caste conflicts. Caste groups are formed among the priests in the model of casteistic political parties to press their parochial demands. Very few priests experience the necessary apostolic freedom and holy boldness for preaching the Gospel of God's Reign, and the peace of mind necessary for administering the sacraments meaningfully and guiding the Christian community to live its high ideals. Many priests are, in some Dioceses, burning with caste hatred and animosity that they become unfit for the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to them. Nay more, they become a big scandal.

According to some priests coming from the Dalit community, the traditional casteistic mindset prevalent among the majority of the priests from the upper castes, is not very helpful for building a cordial community of priests, consisting of brothers and friends of Jesus. They do not seem to feel happy to see the Dalit priests sharing power with them as equals, or assuming positions of greater responsibilities. The tendency to exclude them and treat them as lesser humans still continue in so many subtler forms. If they are especially in positions of greater responsibilities, often there are passive resistance and

deliberate non-cooperation. The mute question is: How can the one who was taking orders from us all along, now come and order us? On the other side of the spectrum, the priests from the upper castes accuse the Dalit priests of playing their Dalit card too much to garner positions of power, to go abroad for higher studies, etc. As a result the *presbyterium* is a divided house, greatly in danger of self-destruction.

Erosion of Authority

— The caste conflicts among priests have led to the undermining of the authority of the Bishops in so many ways. If the Bishop is from another caste, then there is an organized resistance and non-cooperation. If he is not taking the appeasement route, then a character assassination campaign is set in motion. Anonymous letters are written and sent to all and sundry at the church expenses. Damaging articles are published in yellow journals. Some times sit-in strikes are organized within the Bishop's residence. I was also shocked to hear that anti-social elements were hired in one place to blackmail, threaten and even to harm Bishop physically.

In some Dioceses there are some parishes where the upper caste people are in the majority and had been in the dominating position in the past. In one such parish it was said that their church was built by their ancestors, and therefore it is considered to be the private property of that particular caste. Some years back the awakened Dalit Christians demanded their equality in the parish and equal participation in the church affairs. But the upper caste Christians rejected their demands altogether. Even they won a court case on the pretext that the church was their private property and the Dalits cannot have any right over it. When the confrontation became a great scandal, the local Bishop decided to stop the celebration of the Eucharist in that church, and arranged to provide the mass for the whole community in a make-shift shed in a common place. The Bishop ordered that no priest should go and say mass in that Church, as quite a few priests have come from that community. But some priests working in other dioceses do not respect this injunction of the Bishop and regularly go to that church and celebrate mass for Christmas and other important festivals. This thwarts the entire effort of the Bishop to make the high caste Christians give up their caste domination over the Dalit Christians. Such a

flagrant flouting of the Bishop's authority leaves the priests divided and demoralized.

- This divide between the priests and Bishops become acute because frequently the most capable and deserving candidates are not chosen for the responsibility of ecclesiastical oversight. There is a widespread suspicion whether the Holy Spirit is consulted at all these days, while choosing the leaders of the local churches. Juicy rumours are making their rounds regarding the unhealthy practice of string pulling, sending forged letters of recommendation from the ecclesial and political leaders, attempting to win the favours of godfathers who stride the corridors of power, uncharitable letter campaigns against the potential candidates from the opposing camp, allowing the caste factor ultimately to decide the choice of the Episcopal candidate, and so on. Such rumours are not augmenting to the authority and respect of the Bishop's office these days. Soon such disturbing discourses percolate through the *presbyterium* and becomes the crisis of priesthood.

The Second Vatican Council has declared that the fullness of priesthood is conferred in the Episcopal Ordination (LG 21). Hence from each Bishop an exemplary priestly commitment is expected. Their life and ministry are to be a model for their priests and people. It is true that the Church is gifted with many an exemplary Bishops. But, even here, some Bishops' careless actions and approaches are said to be causing or heightening the crisis in priesthood. Priests and people primarily expect their Bishops to be the Chief Pastors, inspiring, motivating, guiding, coordinating and facilitating the diverse charisms and ministries of their priests and lay faithful. As a crowning of this leadership ministry they are also expected to be leaders in the celebrations, especially the liturgical ones, at the Cathedral more frequently, and in the Parishes scattered all over the Diocese as the local needs may demand. Ofcourse, the Bishop has to be there for the sacrament of priestly ordination and may be to a lesser degree, for the sacrament of Confirmation. But these days, many people express surprise and wonder how the Bishops are more busy frequently celebrating feast day masses in the parishes, convents, etc., especially in the cities and towns, blessing weddings, officiating even baptisms and first communions, especially of relatives and rich friends. It has become a competition among the rich parishes to get more Bishops for

the novena celebrations of their Parish Feasts. Some influential and rich parishes manage to get one Bishop per day, during almost all the nine days of the Novena, sometimes even by paying air-fares for the Bishops coming from distant places. One Bishop does the flag hoisting. So also another Bishop does the lowering of the flag, while all the days in between, or on quite a few days, there are some Bishops to celebrate the Novena masses. Some times it has become a scandalous sight to see half a dozen Bishops, or even more, and a host of priests con-celebrating the wedding of some rich families of friends and relatives. The presence of retired Bishops and priests on these occasions is rather understandable. But how can other Bishops who are active in office afford to spend their precious time meant for doing so many important things in the diocese, for such trivial and frivolous celebrations? If the Bishops do not set an example in ordering their priorities, then who will bring such order among the priests? What is the pastoral fruit of such celebrations? Perhaps they go only to fatten the ego of some individuals and groups, creating jealousies and divisions in the Church. Such extravagantly lavish and glamorous celebrations, and their pomp and show, end up only in a counter witness to the Christian gospel. Much of the funds meant for building up the people and equipping them for their ministries, especially the poor, go down the drains in these ostentatious celebrations.

In such a situation, it is not very uncommon these days that the Bishop-Priest relationship is at a very low ebb. It is not a very cordial one, as that of a father and son in God's household. Therefore, the obedience of the priest to the Bishop is not inspired by love and respect. Many experience only a business relationship, a relationship between the boss and the underling, employer and employed. The Bishop is often imaged as if he is the CEO of a big multinational corporation with a lot of money and authority to hold sway over others. Hence many priests appear to be respecting the Bishop. They are even quite pompous in expressing their put on loyalty to the Bishops, observing irrelevant European customs of the Middle Ages. But in the heart of heart real love and respect are often found wanting. There is no problem as long as the Bishop gives in to all the requests and permissions. But if he refuses something, then all kinds of comparisons and accusations are brought. When the frustrated fraternity joins together, it is ready to descend to any depth, totally incompatible with

the dignity and vocation of priesthood, indulging in a well-calibrated campaign for hitting below the belt, thus indulging in the character assassination of the Bishop. This sad trend can be said to be the result of serious erosion of values and a famine of genuine spirituality.

Erosion of Values

People expect their priests to be men of prayer and faithful followers of their Master Jesus, who said that he came not to be served but to serve. But quite a number of priests have given up the habit of regular personal prayer. They also do not consider that priesthood is for service. Rather, they make use of their priesthood as a ladder for their personal progress and enjoyment. In my interviews many have been unanimous on this point: priesthood has become more a careerist profession than a vocation for selfless service and personal holiness.

In one diocese, a group of priests demanded their Bishop that they should be given a monthly *congrua* of Rs 5,000, apart from generous foreign mass stipends. They also told the Bishop to provide every newly ordained priest with a motorcycle, TV, fridge, cot, mattress, table and other household articles necessary to start their pastoral life. These articles will be considered as his personal possession, which he would take along with him at the time of transfer. They proposed that a car be provided to those priests who have served ten years and more. The Bishop was also urged to freely permit them to go abroad for lucrative pastoral ministries, and to get foreign projects independent of the Bishop's approval. It is evident that in such demands money, not ministries to the people, are the central concern of some priests.

Some priests also have developed an expensive life-style. Some priests rush to buy the latest consumer goods and electronic gadgets as soon as they are introduced to the market, even before the rich consumers. Frequently some of them undertake expensive tours for holidays, including foreign jaunts. Sometimes people are shocked to see some priests wearing thick gold chains, diamond studded bracelets, or watch chains, and driving expensive air-conditioned cars. How credible will their anti-consumerist sermons be? How effective will their witness to the naked and crucified Christ be?

It is the opinion of many senior priests and lay faithful that quite a

few younger priests often gather as groups to experience and express their friendship and fellowship. This is quite legitimate. But often they become superficial caste gatherings in which personal frustrations and caste gossips are shared, and caste-oriented strategies and actions are planned, or some retaliation plotted. Breaking of the Word and breaking of the Bread in which they could encounter Jesus are often felt by their absence. Further, these parties are also said to turn out to be booze parties with lavish and rich food. For all this they require a lot of money. To meet this need often they tend to go easy with the church funds and the project money. At the end false accounts are cooked up and submitted to the donors and to the diocese. Such dishonesty eats into the very vitals of priesthood.

No wonder that such persons, bankrupt of spirituality, get fully engaged in the power struggles of the diocese using their caste as the launching pad. Now-a-days some priests show their ambition to capture political power even in the secular world. It was reported in during the mid firm poll for an assembly constituency in Tamil Nadu in 2003, some newspapers that a Catholic priest came to Chennai to file a petition at the AIADMK headquarters asking for election ticket to contest as the ruling party's candidate. And he seemed to have paid an enormous amount of money for this. It was shocking to hear that a Catholic priest had done this when the whole TN Church wanted to punish the ruling party for bringing legislation against religious conversions.

Apart from these, there is a new trend among some diocesan clergy these days, a trend of which the religious priests are already guilty. They want to leave the direct pastoral ministries to the people in the parishes and take up the powerful jobs of being school teachers, head masters and correspondents in the diocesan schools, especially the English medium ones, and other institutions. They want to be managers and administrators sitting in well-furnished and air-conditioned office rooms as the top executives of big corporations. By doing this they forget that the special charism of the diocesan clergy is to be engaged in the direct pastoral ministries with the people in their parishes. As a result there is a cut-throat competition to capture these offices of power.

Very few priests and religious ask these days the radical question of Jesus, "Who is my brother, sister and mother?" and answer it in the radical way Jesus did, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk 3:35). It is quite evident these days that the family has a tremendous influence on the priests, even in the choice of ministries and projects, and the beneficiaries. People do see that some priests have a hidden agenda very close to their heart: the project of family development. People suspect that church money is often siphoned off to promote family welfare. The family members and the caste people are given preference to profit from the employment opportunities available in the Church institutions. The deserving poor are given only the crumbs, if any is left.

Lack of Social Analysis and Pastoral Focus

A genuine priestly spirituality should lead to a joyful commitment for the people, and to take up demanding ministries to build God's Kingdom. But if some priests are wasting their precious time, energy and resources in trivialities and in shallow enjoyments, it is because they lack the necessary spirituality. Such a spirituality demands, apart from their intimacy with God, greater intimacy with their society, its culture and history. This intimacy with society is possible only with a proper social analysis, the identification of the various social forces and their locus of action in society, and the proper grasp of the pressing problems of the people, the church, the nation and the world. In today's India the priest has to be aware of the globalizing forces and their agents, communalizing forces and their instruments, casteistic forces and their effects, etc. He also should be familiar with the various people's movements and their causes, and the NGOs and their struggles. When such knowledge and analysis are lacking, the signs of the times and of the contexts cannot be properly understood, the problems besetting society and people cannot be properly diagnosed, discerned, time-bound and target-clear action plans can neither be formulated nor implemented, and proper motivations and methods cannot be worked out. Political naivety, personal immaturity and irresponsibility are the outcome of this lack.

Some one who has properly analyzed society and has identified the various players of power and their social implications, cannot

remain neutral or naive in a situation of grave injustice and oppression. Moreover, one cannot be self critical of oneself and one's group without such analysis, that is, one cannot be aware of one's own caste and class affinities, vested interests and the hidden agendas. Besides, if one lacks a proper social analysis, it would be difficult for him/her to discern who are friends of God's Kingdom and who are not. The danger is one may be associating with the wrong people and thus be betraying the cause of the Kingdom. Such a person cannot make any worthwhile contribution to the civil society. This may be one of the reasons why our priests, after so much of western education and specializations, are not able to be present in the civil society in a significant way and influence it constructively with their creative contributions.

Another serious effect of such a lack of social analysis is the alienation of many priests from the poor and the needy. They are not able to understand and accept the preferential option for the poor and the powerless as a demand of their faith in the God of Jesus Christ. They are the ones who are too quick to oppose any policy of reservation for the disadvantaged people, both in the Church and in the wider society. Being friends of the rich they are easily carried away by their value system and vested interests. Sadly they forget that we can be friends of God and of Christ only when we are friends of the poor. Great persons like Mother Teresa had understood this fully. Many priests are yet to understand this basic truth of our faith.

Wrong Theological Emphases

Though the entire crisis in priesthood can be traced to the wrong theological orientations, it would be profitable to point out a few of them.

The priest is not merely a *doer* of some rituals and services. He has *to be* somebody in order *to do* those ministries meaningfully and fruitfully. Unfortunately in today's world of over activism, *doing* is more emphasized than *being*. Many priests suffer from the Martha complex of being busy and fretting about many things. They become workaholics and victim of hypertension. Jesus tells his priests, as he told Martha, "No use worrying about many things. There is need of

only one thing." That one thing is to nourish one's *being* by taking time to be intimate with the Lord, to listen first to his likes and dislikes, dreams and desires, and then plunge fully into action carrying out what the Lord wants. The priest cannot be only a contemplative in the model of a traditional monk. He is called to be active in society. But his actions have to flow from his contemplation of the Lord in human and historical realities. His actions have to be those of a contemplative with certain spiritual depth. If the priest's *being* is nourished by his intimacy with God, then his *doing* will certainly nourish the Church and the world. This kind of *doing* also has an enormous capacity to enrich the *being* of the priest.

The second wrong theological emphasis of the priest is the wrong conception of Christ and the Church. As Peter, he too wants a Royal Messiah who will have nothing to do with the cross. But Jesus has deliberately chosen to be a Servant/Suffering Messiah. The cross of Jesus continues to be a scandal for many even today. Some priests are also included among them. But the cross is a sign of God's power and wisdom only for those who have faith. If the priest's conception of Jesus is a Royal Messiah with power and might, then the priest's pastoral approach also would be based on power and might. Instead, if the priest's conception of Jesus were that of a suffering, servant Messiah, then the priest would be joyful in being a servant of the people.

Similarly, the priest could have a wrong model of the Church. In fact quite a few priests seem to consider the Church as a mighty institution with a lot of power, possession, positions, prestige and privileges. That is why many of them are after that power resulting in so much disunity among the priests, causing so much scandal. The Church, in fact, is a servant body symbolizing the one who said: I came not to be served but to serve, and to lay down my life that many others may have life. If the priests are convinced about the servant model of the Church, then the very approach and attitudes of the priests would be so different.

Another wrong theological emphasis may be the wrong conception of 'building the church.' Some of our priests are compulsive builders of huge structures: churches, schools, houses, halls, hostels, etc. These facilities are, of course, necessary for the

community and for the service of the wider society. But along with building the material structures, the priests should also be equally busy, if not more, in building up the community of God's people. If the community is not built up, then there is no use for our mighty structures. St. Peter urges the faithful and the Church leaders, "Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," (1Pet 2:5). Here he identifies the effort to build a believing and practising community to building a living temple, formation of a holy priesthood and offering of an acceptable spiritual sacrifice to God. Hence our priests should give greater emphasis to building the community than building merely the material structures.

Similarly, many of our priests are not clear about the notions of common priesthood and ministerial priesthood. The majority tends to over emphasize the ministerial priesthood. This wrong emphasis emerges from the traditional understanding of the cultic priesthood with the mystique of mediating powers to consecrate and to absolve. This conception saw the faithful merely as the beneficiaries of the ministerial priesthood but not as partners. However, the uniqueness of the biblical priesthood is not its cultic dimension entrusted to a few ritual specialists, but a revolutionary declaration that priesthood primarily belongs to all the people of God, as people's priesthood or common priesthood: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Pet 2:9; Ex 19:6).

People's priesthood is the primary and fullness of priesthood as it shares in the fullness of Christ's unique priesthood through Baptism. This unique and supreme priesthood of Christ is not a cultic priesthood performed on temple altars, but a social and historical priesthood that is carried out by living a holistic life of love and service, truth and justice according to God's will. By such a committed social existence they are to mediate to the nations the will of God for a new humanity, and loudly proclaim his mighty deeds he has performed in order to create it. Everyone who is baptized into Jesus Christ is conferred with this unique priesthood of Jesus. Thus baptism is the first and full ordination ceremony: the life of the baptized is oriented to live the very

life of Christ.

The special ministerial priesthood is conferred on a specially called few that they may serve the faithful by nourishing and nurturing their common priesthood. Common priesthood is the source and summit in union with Christ's priesthood. The ministerial priesthood is dedicated for its service. Common priesthood should not be crushed under the heavy weight of ministerial priesthood. In the words of St. Paul, "The Gifts he (God) gave were that some would be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the(ir) work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..." (Eph 4:11-13). If this clarity is always kept in mind, then no ordained priest can entertain any superiority attitude in their relationship with the laity. They would not be searching for distinctions between the ministerial priesthood and people's priesthood, and gloating that they are different not only in degree but also in essence.

Sometimes some priests make so much about the institutional power and authority vested on them in ordination and juridical appointment. But what is the use of them if there is no personal orientation to participate in the holy life and mission of Jesus along with the other Faithful. Their priestly ordination orients them to live an exemplary life of Christian service, always seeking a spiritual depth in everything, fired with a passion for the contrast but constructive values in order to become effective agents in building the new humanity and the new world.

Psychological Crisis

Given the above circumstances, many priests experience these days a perceptible lack of job satisfaction. They seem to be doing so much. But no perceptible result or social change is seen. The work one does is not satisfying; the relationships one enters into are not satisfying; the person he is becoming through the ministries is not that exciting; the feed backs he gets from the people, confreres and Bishop are not that encouraging. The fear of failure and losing one's reputation often brings an internal paralysis to the priests.

The withdrawal syndrome sets in. In their loneliness and depression they take to alcoholism and other evils.

Added to that many priests also experience a lack of competence to cope with the new situations and to deal with the new problems and challenges. Without the needed self-confidence they are not able to handle new pastoral challenges. Many are also plagued with inadequacy to adjust to the new collaborative ministries with the laity and religious. Many priests still find it difficult to understand that the ministerial priesthood is meant to coordinate the various charisms of the common priesthood.

Many priests experience after many years of ministry that they have not grown up in all their potentials, in comparison to some of their companions in family life. They seem to be doing the same thing again and again. There is a haunting feeling of being struck and being stunted. Emotional and intellectual potentials seem to be poorly realized. Priesthood offers very little opportunity to develop emotionally satisfying intimate relationships. The affective dimension of the priest's personality is felt to be slowly withering away.

There is also an experience of superficial complacency with the power, authority, status, respect, etc., one enjoys as a priest. But when the time of retirement comes, the priest feels that he has nothing in hand. He has nobody to call his own. That emptiness and loneliness are quite depressing for many priests.

Communalism and Fundamentalism

Today, not only India, but also the whole world, is affected by the virus of communalism and fundamentalism. Racial, regional, linguistic, religious and casteistic bigotry and fanaticism are really harming humanity today. People are easily whipped up by emotional rhetoric and fundamentalist discourses. They are not patient enough to reason out things and weigh their responsibilities. Reactionary terrorism by some fanatic fringe groups is met with more brutal retaliatory terrorism of the State. In the spiral of violence many innocent people are killed, including helpless women and school children, as it recently happened in Russia. Such trends are increasing especially after the Ayodya demolition and the Gujarat carnage as far as India is concerned, and as far as the world is concerned, after the U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the escalating brutalities on the people of Palestine by Israel. Our priests are ill-prepared and ill-

equipped to meet these new situations.

Similarly the run away popular success of the Evangelical and Pentecostal groups is posing a great challenge to the priests and their pastoral ministries. They are left with a serious dilemma: To create an awakened congregation of Christians, being fully aware of their socio-political responsibilities, ready to take up their places in the civil society and make their due contributions as committed citizens? or to create a devotional congregation drowned in the sea of an infantile piety while being impervious to the contemporary socio-political challenges and responsibilities? Meanwhile the sheeps are being stolen in great numbers by those popular evangelical preachers. The spectre of empty stables is giving many pastors sleepless nights. The church as a whole is yet to come with a concrete policy and a strategic programme to meet the menace of Christian fundamentalist sects, and thus strengthen the hands of the priests.

The church is also yet to be liberated from the fundamentalism of male domination. Many priests are not even informed about the growing feminist consciousness for equality of men and women, and thus the healing of whole humanity. Much less are they prepared in their formation to respond to this new situation sensitively. Due recognition for women's partnership in the church is still a distant dream. Many priests are still strangers to the concept of collaborative and participative ministries with women. Priesthood continues to be the impregnable male bastion. This is another area where new forms of crisis are brewing for priesthood.

Epilogue

— Do not think that I have exhausted the narration of the various crises that Catholic priesthood is facing today. But I think I have listed quite a few major areas that need to be looked into. This diagnostic exposure is not to disparage or ridicule priests and the sanctity of priesthood. It is done with a genuine concern that proper prescriptions would be sought and due curative measures would be initiated. I believe that the other articles in this volume will address this need. Let me end with a sincere note of gratitude for all those who made this presentation possible by their insightful sharing.