

CLERGY AS FATHER AND PASTOR

Bishops, priests, and deacons are called clerics due to the canonical office which they are granted. Clerics are ordained men to be concerned with the teaching, guiding, and sanctifying of the people in the church, each according to his office.

Bishops and priests are called father because they are ordained to care for their spiritual children in the church as a father in a family should care for his children to teach, guide and make them holy.

Bishops and priests are called pastors in the stead of Jesus the Good Shepherd, in whose place they stand in the flesh, to care for God's sheep which belong to Christ and are assigned to the shepherds on earth.

Clericalism is defined as being involved in the office of the clergy, the clerical state in the church for a priest or a bishop. It is a neutral term, but sometimes assigned a negative connotation. It is appropriate to the cleric to live among his people yet apart from them balancing his role in caring for himself spiritually in prayer, sacrament, scripture, and satisfying minimally his material needs through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, in order that he be able to care for the flock entrusted to him.

A good cleric prays the divine office daily according to his promise when he became a deacon (all bishops and priests were ordained deacons first). The priest celebrates Holy Mass every day if possible for the people and if alone, for himself. He confesses his sins regularly. He reads the bible daily. He prepares his homily. He studies the bible

and catechism. He prays for his people and their needs. He imparts the classic truth of church teaching and holds his opinions when they differ from the church. He fasts regularly, avoiding excess portions, but eating enough for energy to do his work. He lives with a sufficiency for his basic needs. He keeps holy company of good priests, yet is available to be among his sheep in spiritual and social situations for upbuilding the flock and mutual sharing of the Spirit which lives in all Christians souls, among many other characteristics that might be added to this list.

Negative criticism of clericalism usually refers to the imbalance of the life of the cleric for himself and how he lives in relation to his people. Two criticisms commonly used are skinny clericalism and fat clericalism, although where one is apparent, often elements of the other exist as well.

Skinny clericalism is negatively defined as a lack of distinction of the cleric from his people. Skinny clericalism is seen where the priest fails to note his role to teach, guide, and sanctify as an alter Christus, another Christ. Examples might be lack of clerical attire, no distinction between the priest and the laity for whom he is to care, permitting laity inappropriate roles in liturgy and in the parish, in theology, in catechesis which appeals to the people's sinful lives, approving sin as good in order to be just another member of the flock, often seen as neglect when the truth is not proclaimed, living according to his passions rather than according to his call to be Christ as Jesus was for His disciples.

Fat clericalism is the negative term used to describe priests or bishops who are overly concerned with their material benefits, the privileges which are associated with their office, their titles, their authority, their opinions, their domination of the flock, thinking of self as “the smartest man in the room”. Their concern is for themselves, their ambition, their needs, their advancement. Their lives and actions are directed toward these goals. It is lived out in denying the classic truths of the faith, in over weight self indulged men who eat the best meals, drink the best liquor, fly the best class of service, castigate those who do not live or think as they do, propose novelties to be believed while diminishing the long established moral truths of the church. Usually there is a profound narcissism in their souls which they do not allow to be redeemed.

Bishops and priests are fathers by virtue of ordination, and should be fathers to all their children according to Jesus: loving, compassionate, forming in truth and disciplining toward the growth of each Christian child entrusted to them into the image of Jesus Christ in humility, meekness, generosity, magnanimity, diligence, temperance and chastity: in the father’s own life first and in the life of the Christian entrusted to him.

Jesus gave His life for all humanity. He first started with the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel. Then He extended His ministry beyond Israel to the surrounding territories. He gave the message to go forth and teach all nations everything He taught and to baptize all people.

A responsible father tends to his own spiritual needs with excess, and to his material needs abstemiously thus is able to care for his own children entrusted to him by Christ. A cleric does the same. He does not run out into the world first to care for others, but starts with the family entrusted to him. Later, when his own family is satisfied, he may move in charity to others.

Priests and bishops are called shepherds because they are ordained for the flocks entrusted to them to be in the person of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep, rejoices over finding it, guards the flock with care, leads it to food and water, teaches it to care for itself and others in the flock, protects it from all sorts of harm including from sin.

The clergy are not hired hands, that is men who work only for pay and do a job. Clergy are relatives of the family, the Holy Trinity, who own the sheep. As the family business of generating, forming and caring for the sheep, those called to do so must do it with the mind of Christ, the will of Christ, the heart of Christ.

Lately the shepherds have strayed, it seems, through words and actions.

Jesus told us to go forth and make disciples of all nations. Pope Francis says that Jews do not need to be evangelized. Bishops like Robert McElroy of San Diego are inviting Muslims to speak about Islam rather than to speak to Muslims about Jesus. Those who themselves or whose ancestors left the fullness of the Catholic faith for non Catholic denominations are lauded as are their

founders rather than engaged in mutual dialogue to promote unity in a way known to the Holy Spirit.

Cardinal Cupich claims that anyone may follow his conscience and receive the Eucharist if he judges himself in accord with conscience, a totally novel and way foreign to Catholicism of understanding conscience.

Robert McElroy claims that no one needs a priest in the internal forum for that arena is between the person and God alone, and that it always has been that way.

Fr. James Martin is claiming homosexuality to be inborn, created, good, and able to be expressed as a valid way of life. He was appointed by Pope Francis to the commission on communication, is supported by Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, Cardinal Kevin Farrell in the Vatican, Cardinal Blaise Cupich of Chicago, Bishop John Stokes of Lexington, KY, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego; the latter says vehemently that LGBTQ do not need to convert, but just need to be welcomed along with their families and children.

Yet Jesus said that not even one iota of the law would pass away until all is fulfilled. Since He has not yet come for the final judgment, we are awaiting that fulfillment.

If my earthly father were to proclaim himself and his own opinions and lead me away from the solid foundations to make me into a man of Jesus, I would still honor his position as my father, but I would not follow him down that “rabbit hole” as Cardinal Cupich called the scandal of homosexual sin revealed by Archbishop Viganò.

When I see overweight men bursting out of their clerical attire with mouths constantly moving to promote

novel opinions, no example of prayer, fasting, but giving others' alms and not their own, I honor their office and do not denounce every statement publicly.

Rather I walk in the steps of the Savior, looking to the Father in Heaven, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the catechism, the saints of old and all their teaching, guidance, and sanctification instead of their modern successors.

May Jesus guide each of us in truth in order that we guide others the same way. For those who fail to follow as Jesus did, who propose novelties, live in fat clericalism, and pastor themselves with the goods of the flock I pray that God frustrate their designs, convert their hearts, lead them to repentance, retire them from office, and save their souls.

May God have mercy on me, a sinner.

— *Fr. Richard Perozich*