

Cardinal Mayer at the fourth C.I.E.L. Colloquium

Conference given by His Eminence Cardinal Mayer, former prefect of the congregation for divine worship, on the occasion of the official presentation of the proceedings of the fourth C.I.E.L. Colloquium, in Rome, March 17, 1999.

The “Centre International d’Etudes Liturgiques,” the name of which is found recapitulated under the beautiful sign “CIEL” (heaven), today presents this fourth volume, the proceedings of the colloquium which took place in October of 1998, in France, in the diocese of Versailles. I would like to make clear, for those who do not yet know precisely what this Center is, the characteristics of the work carried out by C.I.E.L.

By whom was it founded? Why was it founded? By what means does it seek to accomplish its mission? And what a beautiful mission it is!

By whom was it founded? By faithful laity. Permit me to see in this a “sign of the times,” and a very positive “sign of the times.” Today the idea grows more widespread that the laity must always be contributing to the life of the Church, by taking part – just like missionaries, in the proper sense of the term – in communicating the gift of the faith and the patrimony of the Church, particularly concerning the liturgy. This is to be done in the strictest collaboration with priests who are under the guidance of bishops united with the Pope.

C.I.E.L. was founded, then, by laity. But it is necessary to be precise about this. These are laity who are not rebels, who are not more or less arrogant in the desire for a new Church, but who are profoundly Catholic. In brief, these are laity who profess the faith of the Church in its totality, with orthodoxy, and who accept in the spirit of obedience the entire sacramental, doctrinal, and canonical authority of the Church. They do not place themselves on the same level as official institutions, do not exercise a “parallel magisterium,” do not attribute to themselves any kind of right to regulate and direct the liturgy. But they do, on the other hand, avail themselves of the provisions contained in canon law concerning autonomous associations of the laity, which are free, and in a certain sense encouraged, to make known to ecclesial authority their own desires and perhaps also, sometimes, their own fears.

Why, then, was C.I.E.L. founded? Because these faithful have recognized, sometimes bitterly, the urgent need to provide better information for the faithful in general, particularly as regards the liturgy, since they are given to confusion. Though

not in the same way, in all cases, everywhere, but in diverse “strata” of the Catholic people, this confusion has markedly increased and is sadly apparent. There is practical and doctrinal confusion – which one can also observe in discerning the “connection” between the ministerial priesthood and the “royal priesthood” of all the faithful. This confusion is found addressed in the instruction dealing with questions concerning the collaboration of the faithful in the ministry of the priest (published in 1997 and signed by eight heads of Roman dicasteries). The reactions provoked by this instruction are also very significant, and they have made it apparent how necessary it was to intervene.

And now, by what means does C.I.E.L. attempt to achieve, to abide by, and to carry out its mission? By seeking to maintain contact with everyone, in the broadest manner possible, and in seeking personal contact with numerous bishops. This last must be emphasized because personal contact is a great help; it opens hearts, and the spirit, to mutual understanding. In addition, the high-level university professors who participate in the colloquia, impart a scientific note to the work, as well as an interdisciplinary character, an avowed and accentuated internationalisation, and an “internationality” of publication. In fact, the proceedings are printed in three languages, namely, French, English, and German, and thus they benefit from a steadily broadening distribution.

And so we arrive at this fourth volume, entitled *The Ministerial and Common Priesthood in the Eucharistic Celebration*. It follows the three previous volumes, which concerned themselves with themes of no less importance. One observes that this lay association has understood how to bring these particularly crucial themes “up to date.”

The proceedings of 1995, *The Liturgy, Treasure of the Church*, presents to us the splendour of the liturgy, and its magnificence. Even if it is sometimes delivered into the hands of everyone’s own “unauthorized creativity,” the liturgy remains always a treasure of the Church and consequently must be considered with great veneration and great delicacy.

The proceedings of 1996, *The Veneration and Administration of the Eucharist*, confronts us with the central mystery of ecclesial life.

The proceedings of 1997, *Altar and Sacrifice*, has a very significant title in that it makes clear immediately that it concerns not just a “table,” or a “banquet,” or a “meal,” but an altar, which evokes a sacrifice.

The themes of the colloquia provide a witness to the perception of the “delicate” problems that concern the Church of today in the domain of the liturgy and equally in those of doctrine, faith, and pastoral matters.

Needless to say, it is not possible here to evoke all the riches afforded by the “contributions” to this fourth volume.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to single out the “claim” made on behalf of the Catholic priesthood which is developed in this fourth volume, where it is a question of the priesthood of Christ, the unique participation in our ministerial priesthood of the unique priesthood of Christ. The volume courageously faces the controversy – loud enough in our time – regarding this priesthood, a controversy coming from the outside, as it always has come, not diminished, even sometimes more pronounced, but coming today also from within the Church, which is more painful still.

A three-fold example of this controversy arising from inside the Church was recently provided by Herbert Haack, Swiss exegete, who has been for long years a professor at Tübingen. Previously, Haack had published a book entitled *Devil's Leave* (*Abschied von Teufel*). More recently, he has “taken leave” of the Catholic priesthood. According to Haack, the ministerial priesthood of the Church would not exist at all except for the inculturation of the Church in the Hellenistic world – an assertion already heard previously from very liberal Lutherans, but which now finds itself repeated in the Catholic world. According to Haack, in the earliest days of the Church, the Eucharist had not been celebrated by a priest but rather was “guided” or “directed” by a president, either male or female.

Obviously, our faith cannot be “sacrificed” to a dubious historical hypothesis, for it is a living reality in the ecclesial life. It is well that the volume in question takes great care to describe, starting from the New Testament, the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, in the living faith of the Church, the ministerial priesthood.

In the last part, it treats equally of the “royal priesthood” of all believers, which manifests itself particularly in the liturgical celebration, and in “active participation” (the key word of the last ecumenical council on the constitution of the liturgy), an expression which must be correctly interpreted, as the Holy Father himself has emphasized on numerous occasions. This participation is not limited to words, chants, and gestures (which enter necessarily into “active participation”), but must be an interior relation in faith, hope, and charity with all that Our Lord did; and in this domain, one can be immensely active in silence.

It is in this manner that the relation between participation of the faithful and the Eucharist becomes apparent, a relation which one sees developing in the first six centuries, and afterward in the Middle Ages. Besides the radical hypotheses of professor Haack, there is presently an “inter-ecclesial,” “intra-Catholic,” tendency which avoids using the term “priest” and substitutes for it “president,” especially in the English “Presider,” as it was employed in a long letter issued by eminent bishops in the United States. They speak in general of the “President” of a democratic society. We are as a consequence aware of the fact that, with this expression, we enter – whether we desire it or not – into an interpretation of the “president” who finds himself elected by an assembly – so as to be deposed by the assembly as well.

Unhappily, the “taste” for this title of president seems to be widespread in the Church. I once had occasion to hear a certain important Roman ecclesiastic make the following three assertions:

- What is the “priestly seat”? – The presidential seat;
- What is the Eucharistic prayer? – The presidential prayer;
- What must the priest learn? – The art of presiding.

Before such a deformation of the priesthood one is simply astounded.

We can ask ourselves, in such a context as this, if it would not be preferable to use the expression “ordained ministers.” Ministers ordained from here, ministers ordained from there, ministers ordained by us Catholics, ministers ordained in the Lutheran church. But that usage proposes a spiritual reality which would be equivalent in the two cases, whereas the word “minister” (or the expression “ordained minister”) assumes a very specific meaning when it is applied to a Catholic priest, and a very specific spiritual reality when it concerns a Protestant pastor.

The priest is consecrated, as the proceedings emphasize. Joseph Pieper, the great philosopher, who died two years ago, used to say “consecrated priest,” and not merely “ordained.” We understand him thoroughly now, for by itself an ordination “gives little.” When I accept a duty, that doesn’t change me, whereas a consecration changes one interiorly, and forcefully. It is a profound spiritual change, a quasi spiritual identification with Jesus – not perceptible or verifiable psychologically, but real. Identification with Jesus, who then offers the possibility of acting “in Christ” (“*agere in persona Christi*”).

The priest consecrates, and the words of the consecration are not a simple recital of the institution; they are the words of Our Lord spoken through the intermediacy of the priest, and it is this identification with the priestly character which the proceedings vigorously describe.

One last observation: in the Church there is a sharing (“communion”) of diverse gifts, a reciprocal gift between the “ministerial” priesthood and the common “royal priesthood.”

Please permit me here to refer to an experience I had as Secretary of the Congregation of Religious, on the occasion of a work managed in common with the Congregation of Bishops, for the purpose of preparing the document “*Institutione Mutuae Relationes*,” This document concerns relations between bishops and religious. The theme was approached under the aspect of “structure.” What do bishops expect of religious, and what do religious expect of bishops. One of the members at this time, the cardinal archbishop of Berlin, declared: “It advisable to modify this structure.” Such a declaration seems to be much in line with those made by unions and employers, who state what they expect and what they demand of the other party. In actual fact, it would be more Catholic to say what the bishops can give to the religious and what the religious can give to the bishops. And it seems to me, finally, that the proceedings of these colloquia – from the practical rather than the intellectual perspective – show that between the ministerial priesthood and the “common priesthood” of the faithful, there exists a profound “exchange”; and if this exchange is effected on the part of both parties with faith, with humility, and with greater love, then the Church cannot help but be enriched.

I thank you.