

PREFACE

The universal brotherhood of all men and by default global communion and solidarity should be the logical consequence and theological derive of the universal fatherhood of God in view of his being the creator and the universal motherhood of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. However, the concept of fraternity appears to be less stressed in religio-spiritual and socio-ethical circles and by pastors and preachers than those of paternity and maternity. This is so, in spite of the fact that Christ by his Incarnation united himself with every human being, and even in a more concrete manner with those who receive him in the Holy Communion thereby transporting them to the status of adopted children and heirs of God and partakers in the glory of God in the vertical line and in the horizontal sphere making of all, brothers and sisters in and through him (Cf. *Rom* 8:14-17; *LG*, 8; *CCC* 460). The neglect remains so even while the call to communion is surely scriptural and despite the ageless witnesses of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the mass of magisterial materials on the matter. Many theologians and writers on Spirituality have also dwelt on the issue but they usually stop at indicating the doctrinal aspects. This apart, the ultra-modern means of communication available today is a divine gift that could serve the realization of such a life-uplifting relationship. Unfortunately, till date, it has been applied more for the propagation rather than the proscription of evil.

The binding cords of fraternal communion increase in number for priests as a result of their sharing in the one eternal ministerial priesthood of Christ realized sacramentally through ordination. In fact, by virtue of their consecration and the attendant configuration into Christ, priests are united in a sacramental brotherhood (cf. *PO*, 8; *LG*, 28). Yet there has not been an in-depth exploration of the theme of sacerdotal fraternity during the formation periods and sessions both in the foundational in the seminaries and the ongoing for the already ordained. May be precisely or at least partly but surely regrettably, because of this lack, the strings of fraternal communion look thinner and truncated, exactly here where they should appear thicker and tethered together.

Thus the presbyterium which should showcase a fine network of admirable and educative relationships is often found to be a weak nest of frayed nerves that is as demoralizing as it is disorienting. As such many presbyteria are infested with various ills against communion, even among those living under the same roof or discharging the same duties: non acceptance that grows into hatred, disagreement that degenerates into disregard, rivalry that opens up into character assassination, disinterest that develops into marginalization and alienation, opposition that leads to oppression, insecurity that metamorphoses into

infighting, class consciousness that evolves into vicious cliquism, silence that bursts into slander, self-importance and ambition that sink into the struggle for position and power, individualism that results in self-isolation, egoism that waters the insatiable desire to accumulate and whets the inhuman appetite to extort. The list is interminable.

Floodlighting this fascinating facet of sacerdotal, nay Christian spirituality, and prospecting to arrive at a climactic novelty of how this near neglected aspect of spirituality could be reinstated and reinvigorated, our redoubtable author undertook to underscore not only its centrality in the lives and labours of individual priests and the presbyterium but also its importance for the entire holy project of evangelization and mission. This is because, as the Second Vatican Council envisaged, the unity and fraternity among the hierarchy should only well up and overflow into the faithful, producing a robust ecclesial communion through Christ and in the Holy Spirit (cf. *LG*, 18). Swimming swiftly across and digging deeply into such pivotal theological themes as the Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology, the Priesthood, Communion etc, with the competence and diligence of a dedicated theologian, he finds what I dare to call Fraternal Spirituality embedded in the womb of Theology.

He shows that the *Mandatum Novum* of Christ to his disciples in which Christ is the lofty standard aptly translates into fraternal sacerdotal communion. He furnishes New Testament prototypes of priestly fraternal communion and proves that the Fathers of the Church not only bore witness to it but also lived it out. Thereafter, he portrays the copious and masterly treatment of the subject by the Magisterium, and warmly wheeling into the theology and liturgy of the priesthood, the talented writer establishes the profound sense of the Presbyterium as a brotherhood, indeed a family within the family of the people of God, comparable in qualities but essentially different in origin from the human biological family. Then he rides on, always maintaining an inviting and flowing language, discovering and demonstrating that ideally the priesthood is characteristically a communion and fundamentally a fraternity in which the Presbyterium is the propelling hub of various and variegated relational possibilities.

That is not all, as a proactive and praxis oriented thinker, though he laments that the ideals so bountifully put on paper are lacking in the day to day lives of priests and in various presbyteria, resulting in many sordid situations, he did not dwell on chronicling the problems, nor did he just stop at describing the despicable status quo vis-à-vis the doctrines and designing the desirable alternative, his greater focus was rather on charting the course that could lead from the baneful to the beautiful, thereby breaking into a welcome novelty. He places the source of the poor testimony of fraternal communion among priests squarely, though not exclusively, on the lack of adequate formation, both initial and ongoing, of candidates for the priesthood and the already ordained respectively. Elaborating in details on the nature of formation necessary for fostering fraternal communion in the presbyterium, he recommends that forma-

tion at all levels should take place in a family atmosphere that will lead to the instilling of the family spirit in the priest to be and its continuous consolidation in the ordained in such a way as to enable its fruitful diffusion both in the seminaries and presbyterial communities. He proposes a necessary path to formation in fraternal communion, insisting that it should be marked by the centrality of spirituality, commitment to conversion and the renewal of the theological life of faith, hope and love. He took exception of the formation in the art of loving, a delicate but very important theme that is usually evaded or only barely scratched in systems of formation.

In all, our versatile author holds that this *familia – fraterna* dimension of the priesthood, marked by *adfectus fraternitatis* and manifested in *actus familiaritatis* is made possible by, and yet in turn promotes sacerdotal spiritual communion. Through an adequate and formidable formation, this mystical communion, attained through ordination, manifested in the con-celebration of the Eucharist and the holding of other exercises – spiritual and otherwise – together in faith by priests due to the same common hope, is able to effect concrete fraternal actions in the presbyterial community such that all vestiges of the Cainian fratricidal defense are reversed and every priest becomes truly his brother's keeper. Not only this, since communion is intrinsically contagious, such a bond of fraternal love beaming with mutual care and concern will inevitably widen into the entire Christian community. And so both the priests and the entire people of God can acclaim with the Psalmist: "Behold how good and beautiful when brothers dwell in unity" (*Ps* 133:1).

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