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Priesthood and Professionalism: The Need to Support the Process of Professional Development in the Church

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Abstract: Professionalism can be viewed in positive and negative perspectives. In the contemporary world people expect the positive type of professionalism from priests. The priestly ideal of professionalism is to serve, in a proficient manner, with total dedication, those who are in need. This will require effort to know as much as they can about their field. Today's world does not automatically give respect to priests, but only on the fulfillment of certain standards of behavior and practice, and being accountable. This includes a life-long commitment to keep learning and acquiring professional attitudes.

Keywords: Priest, professionalism, life-long commitment, proficient service, standards of behaviour, accountability.

Priesthood, its lifelong commitment, its evangelical counsels, and the church law are all in full view in informed discussions of priestly professionalism. One must look elsewhere for discussions of those aspects in the history and traditions of the church. Professionalism, its well defined commitment over a much shorter period of some professional occupation, priestly or some other, its character, its principles or code of core values, are more on focus in the discussions in this paper.

There have been voices heard from all over the world

expressing disappointment with the professionalism and lack of fidelity of priests, from bishops, from priests, from laity, from non-catholic and other faiths as well. Whatever be the merits of this observation, people have been disappointed and shocked and they will take necessary actions and precautions to deal with their loss and disappointments. The step taken in this paper is simple to understand how and in what ways priesthood and professionalism complement each other both for priests and laity, where problems could arise either for the individual professional priest or for the church community.

The image of a priest may have changed at the beginning of this millennium from someone who speaks authoritatively on all matters of religion. At sometime in the past, priests, particularly theologians and others had such professional airs that they spoke very authoritatively on all matters of religion. Everyone else humbly listened to what they had to say. That professional image of the priest has changed.

That image is certainly changing, in part we have more variety of professionals in the church and in part because that image has been shattered and broken as we have confused, directionless, incompetent, ineffective, insecure, dictatorial or authoritative, visionless priests and bishops who have no real authority on understanding of matters of faith and religion and are not very convincing. There is no doubt, that there are various professions and professionals in the church and there are also professional priests and bishops who carry out various professional activities. In a recent visit to Belgium, I saw how the professionals respond to deep crisis in the church. It is good to have professionals respond to the crisis and have professionals

show the way forward, out of the crisis.

Someone has said that the “tragedy” of the latter part of the 20th century for the church has been the “professionalization of ministry”. It is a reference to a change, not only in the performance of the ministry, but a lack of movement, a lack of openness to the world. There are more managers than leaders who can lead in the church. There are more therapists than priests or pastors who can bring about healing and reconciliation in the church. There are more maintainers rather than missionaries and missions in the church. It is a reference to a kind of professionalism not well suited for the future of the church in the 21st century. People are asking for change, they want change. No one is sure what the real problem is, whether the professional priest is the problem or professionalism is the problem, and what to do about the so called “tragedy”.

Are Priests Unfulfilled in the Context of their Ministry in the Church?

“Unfulfilled”? No. But the question will not go away. It keeps recurring as though there is some truth to it. Starting with the end of ministry in view, every ministry is for the service of others, but does it bring fulfillment to the priest who performs the ministry? Is there self-sacrifice involved which is part of the fulfillment of ministry? Does one necessarily become unfulfilled because of the self-sacrifice? Does the practice and spirituality of the ministerial priesthood leave room for unprofessional practice making priests unfulfilled and laity disappointed?

“Fulfilled”? Many, yes; but some, no. Most priests who are happy and fulfilled, though they have their imperfections, they continue to develop in their

professional awareness and point to opportunities that are available for their continued spiritual and professional renewal and development.

The spirituality of the ministerial priesthood has been understood as fully ordered to its pastoral mission. It also has its roots in the call to a state of life that includes the evangelical counsels and consecration to the person of Christ. Nevertheless there are concerns raised for accountability, the question of authenticity, transparency, and professionalism.

Priesthood is seen as gift of Christ to the community and essentially as a service to the community. There is also the long cherished ideals of priest as “representative of the community”, “man for others”, “a docile instrument in the hands of God for the building up of the church community”, “Christ for others”, etc. These ideals appear so perfect, that the church has constantly upheld them as light to the community. In other words, there are processes of personal and professional development taking place everywhere in the Church. The ideal of the twelve and other apostles, going out in all different directions after Pentecost, but united in the love of Christ makes us constantly aware that our priestly pastoral vocation is personal and ecclesial at the same time.

Just like perfect priests in a perfect church, it's left to anyone's imagination to imagine what perfect professionals can be like in a perfect society. That heavenly view may need down-to-earth grounding, having an imagination take root in reality. It is another thing to take a view of earthly or on-the-ground realities of actual professions in actual societies in the way they function currently. And there are changes taking place continually

in both these views of two different worlds, one bounded in possibilities as is and the other boundless in possibilities as always. The process of professional development could bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality, and enable continued personal and professional development of priesthood in the Church.

“Happy”? “in the priestly traditions of the church”? Yes, mostly. There is a living tradition of “traditional priesthood” typically originating in the idea of “mediator” and manifested in its three fold functions of “ministerial priesthood” as being “set apart” through ordination from the “common priesthood”. The living tradition is having trouble to treat the troubles it is currently experiencing. The offices which are integral to the priesthood exercised by any priest are the teaching office, the sanctifying office, the ruling or governing or shepherding office is seen within the context of the church, in its preservation, continuation, renewal, unity and vitality as a lived communion of a community of faith and love, which has hope of eternal salvation. On its journey to becoming a perfect society, the church has a special and most central place for priests in office, in its life, a position of complete trust, complete dedication, lifelong commitment, of proficient service of others, especially of those entrusted to their care.

This living priestly tradition has affinities to the professional and professionalism as experienced and found in the wider society in the world in the diversity of professions and professionals. In some areas of community professionals and their professions have replaced the ministerial offices and roles played by the priest. The affinities make for easy passage to replace various roles, only a few roles remaining un-replaced, to

be fulfilled by priests. In some cases professionals in society may be functioning as “trusted priests”, just as, in some other cases priests also function as professionals.

The living tradition of ministry and priesthood has been explained in tradition as given by God for the purpose of equipping “the saints”, that is, the Church for the unity of faith, until the Lord comes (Eph, 4:11-13). In history there are examples, also in the biblical context, of people chosen and set apart performing certain priestly functions as for example, the patriarch Abraham, as head of the family, is called upon to offer sacrifice (Gn. 22). In the course of time, as history, knowledge and awareness increased, an office of priestly functions or priesthood evolved and a priestly professionalism developed and took root in the church as well.

Are Priests Immature Professionals?

“Immature”? Not all. But immature behaviours are encountered, yes. Immaturity is not simply a matter of “faults and failings” of priests, people understand that. People are disappointed with the immaturity of some priests who do not recognize natural barriers and who break them, who do harm to the suffering victims. A type of immature blindness pervades the priestly profession in the eyes of the lay person.

Most priests who are mature think of the ideals and character of the priestly profession. They live a life of principles in the true spirit of “profession”.

Professional Ideals and Character

Does the priestly service of others meet the professional ideals and characteristics? The professional

ideal requires a complete and total dedication to proficient service for all in need. The ideal also requires the professional to transcend his/her self-interest. This is expected usually under favourable conditions which the society provides for the professional. In such a context, the interests of the professional will be served fairly by serving others.

This means, that it is not only the duty of professionals to serve others without regard for self-interest, and it is not only that they have to serve having enjoyed the privileges of favourable conditions provided by the society at large, they must want to serve others willingly and readily.

Obviously, if they are willing to serve others, they must also know how to serve others. They have to obtain the knowledge, the “oil of gladness” and increase and expand their knowledge to serve others better and more proficiently.

The professional is “set apart” from the people also in two important ways. In his dedication to serve others, he or she is seen as second to none, that is, it is a complete and total dedication usually for life once the professional enters it. Secondly, it is his proficiency or knowledge of how to serve others that sets the professional apart from those he /she serves. It is an interesting process by which a professional is set apart for people, something paralleling also the process by which a priest is set apart for the people to serve others. The priest and the professional understand each other, there is the natural affinity but both also have their distinctive areas of operation and the ways of “setting apart”.

Among other ideals, the professional has to respect the autonomy of the client whom (s)he serves with utmost

confidence. It recognizes that the client's life has other elements of the good life or healthy life and it is something not determined or defined by the professional. A professional is required to value and respect client autonomy. Anything that impinges on client autonomy by the professional is seen as unbecoming of that professional and is to be detested.

The professional ideal also means that the professional needs to have an imaginative and probing mind. Professionals are expected to know as much as they can about their field. Even they are expected to contribute to produce new knowledge, from their experience, from their research, from sustained reflection and listening to other professionals in their field and mutually continuously learning from them, interacting with other professionals in professional associations etc. The reality may be that in some this development stops or terminates at some point in the development of the professionals and no new knowledge is added, or no new experience is created, only past experience and knowledge is used to create, to interpret, protect and supply the services needed by people.

The professional ideal is that one does not turn away or send away someone who comes to him/her seeking professional help and does not discriminate the one who comes in any way, whether he or she is rich or poor, informed or ignorant, literate and educated or illiterate and uneducated, privileged or underprivileged. The professional accepts everyone who comes to him/her in need, obviously within the limits required for competent service, a reasonable work load and economic and social survival. Some even make the heroic sacrifice of putting their economic and social survival at risk in the service of

others. The professional does not preselect who should come to him/her. There is no natural selection, or survival of the fittest, that he promotes. In fact it is exactly the contrary he learns to accept the diversity and the entire field of persons who come to him/her from whatever background

The professional has an obligation to meet human needs, but this can possibly be met well only within manageable limits of professional excellence. Certain aspects are seen as guiding the practice whether or not to engage in the service of a new arrival when existing commitments are present. Protecting the existing clients, having regard for their welfare takes precedence. Things can get complicated in some professions, where client autonomy is paramount. Also the principle of service on demand, may take a different form, waiting for the service or the need to be met or going to see another professional who can likewise meet the need.

However, in some cases, in reality, whether in the church or in any society, none of these ideals may hold true, there could be lapses. It is to prevent such lapses, there is need to regulate professional practices to restrain possible immoral and amoral agents from acting primarily from their own self-interest, to support behaviour which transcends self-interest and to prevent harm resulting from self-interest behaviour on the part of the professionals. Every society has such regulations some may be weaker, while others have stronger regulations. Professions have the duty and obligation to comply with such regulations.

What Professional Ends are the Priests Seeking?

There are professional ends, the ideals of priestly profession – whatever they may be – which priests should

be serving. But we have priests seeking professional ends as priests. What professional ends are the priests seeking? Are they seeking their own fulfillment or self actualization?

Finding a Place in the World

One of the ends that priests may be seeking is to find a place in the world, a place of stature, personal wellbeing, and professional engagement. For many priests, they know they have a sure place in the church but that is not enough, they would like to have more – the real problem is that they would like to find a place in the world and make a mark on it, leave a legacy behind, etc. They have aspirations of self-actualization, self-fulfillment, self-realization, etc., which are not met in the framework of the traditional priestly ministry in the church. Particularly where priests are seen as respected, but employees of the church rather than as its equal members, they may seek self-actualization elsewhere if their ministry does not provide the desired opportunities. These aspirations of self-actualization, give rise to the search for opportunities to show they are professionals and they want to be seen as professionals.

There are several felt problems experienced by priests today, indicating perhaps that many do not find opportunities for self actualization in the context of their appointed ministries. Examples are:

1. The way authority is exercised in the Church
2. Too much work
3. Unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people
4. Loneliness of priestly life

5. Being expected to represent church teachings with which they have difficulty
6. Celibacy
7. Uncertainty about the future of the Church
8. Relationship with the diocesan bishop of the diocese in which they work
9. Relationships with superiors or pastors
10. Difficulty of really reaching people today

All these problems indicate lack of support for their self-actualization and professional development. Most know what a priest is and what priesthood means, there is no problem there. Most priests receive remarkable support from their families, from non-priest friends, from staff and people they minister. But it may be that there is need to have support for professional self-development while engaged in their ministries. In the future, the vision of ministries is likely to change and cause some kind of diversity in understanding. There are indications that some would be satisfied to restrict their work to sacramental and liturgical duties, while others would be dissatisfied with such restrictions. A process of professional development may be necessary.

Many young priests want to be seen as professionals, as men of advanced training and specialized expertise. The urge for professional standing is not necessarily related to the desire for more money, but to the underlying need or fear of security for what lack of money can do to self-worth, to a strong sense of individual identity. In one way a healthy trend is developing, as more and more people are taking to specialization and are preparing for a specialized ministry rather than the traditional form of generic

ministry where one was rotated from place to place with a number of general common jobs. To be in a specialized ministry you have to be professional and have advanced training and education that go with it.

There are others who are concerned with their personal growth and want to achieve self actualization with the priesthood, within the church. Professionalism is linked to the desire for self actualization. They aspire to a higher status, professional status, something more than self-esteem and relationships with others. They want to be seen as achievers. They want to be more independent, more self-defined and more high-status. They want to do quality work, keep up their self-esteem as a professional. A generic theology and philosophy formation is not enough, many given an opportunity would want to do master's degrees or more advanced training and openly shift to a more economic and financial rationale seeing themselves as considerable value to the diocese and to the church.

In the light of such developments it appears that many are still satisfied with the model of traditional ministerial priest without any pretence of professionalism, and there are others who are satisfied with being specialized ministers wanting to carry out a specialized ministry which requires professionalism. The need to find a place in the world can be expressed in both these ways, but the professional way appears more attractive and appealing.

Professionalism as a matter of skills and competence

Professional skills and competence are in demand today. Some have referred to professionalism in the context of the church as the skill and competence possessed by the minister enabling him to fulfill the Church's task. It means professionalism is placed at the

service of the church and it is a quality worth developing and nurturing. But we are in a society where services provided by professionals are valued more than those offered in the church.

In many places, it is likely that in a consumer society, as the consumer society developed and rose in prominence, the church also was seen as a “service provider” to people, where the Bishops and their diocesan teams as administrators and employers, and the priests and laity as employees, or frontline sales and marketing persons. If not careful, this type of “management model” contains a secular reality, but distorts the deeper meanings and vocation, the dedication and commitment of priests and laity for the ministry in the church. In the environment of scientific management that swept across societies enabling a few at the top to control and direct large organizations with powerful impacts on the lives of people regarded as members. It created also efficient bureaucratic levels of ministry and service. The central value in such forms of providing service is “control” and also a social control over the priests and laity both engaged in the ministry and over the people in general. In the past, one preferred to work for the church when a position became open and opportunity became available. The church had the preferred choice of talent that most other organizations lacked. The church had outstanding talented people with the intelligence, the brilliance that marked the church members. This has changed. The choice of talents that church has is limited, as people prefer professional bodies in the secular society, in preference to working in and for the church. The talent pool available for the church has shrunk.

For the professionals or those seeking a place in the

world, those wanting to learn professional skills and competence, the world outside the confines of the church greatly enlarged and grew to be far bigger than most in the church could imagine or think. As human relations model and movement became prominent in the 1950s, it also had its rubbing shoulders effect on the church as well. Another central value “healing” became prominent, and there appeared a therapeutic model in part to heal the employees and other members of institutions of the society and build human relations and nurture good and healthy human relations. More “healing” through various professions and professionals is seen taking place in response to peoples’ desire for healthy lives. This development may have recast the priest and lay model or the management employee model into something of a therapeutic leader follower model or a counsellor client model. It may also have reduced the role of the priest offering healing and comfort to those in distress. Just as the previous model this model too distorts the relationship which the church members experience with its real head as forming one spiritual body or unity. It is not to be applied directly or strictly. But “priest as healer” carrying out healing, reconciliation ministries in general is compared to others who are engaged in “healing” and found to be unprofessional or ineffective.

The ineffectiveness could come from many different factors. But the contrasts between two kinds of professionalism is evident in that when control is the focus, the priestly calling remains largely confined to the fulfilling of managerial and bureaucratic roles of contemporary society and when healing is the focus, the priestly calling does not move away from the controlling aspects to the healing aspects of the ministry. It is a loss

when bishops, head teachers do not teach, and head doctors are too busy to heal.

It may be noted that in our contemporary society, professionals are paid full time and differently from part time or amateurs. It made sense to develop oneself professionally and learn the skills and competences expected of any professional. Professionals were marked by the sound advice and professional service they rendered to those who came to them. They had through their service acquired a reputation for professional service. It created a class, a class which meant they were sociological equals sharing the stature in the community. These sociological dimensions of professionalism also provide a self understanding and basis for “esteem” and priests can get caught in these temptations as well, just as others in the society, forgetting their main calling and focusing more on learning professional skills and competence.

With many lay people skilled in professional provision of care and having the competence and trust of the people and reputation of practice behind them, the priests need not any more understand themselves as the sole providers of pastoral counsel and spiritual direction, as there are many other persons in the church who are not ordained, who can perform these roles with ability and grace and professional excellence. Our contemporary society does not bestow on the priest automatic respect for counsel or guidance or direction any longer as it once used to be the case. Standards of behaviour and practice have to be met by everyone, whether they are priests or lay persons. If the priests and lay professional expect the same sociological privileges of being professional, they have to have same standards of behaviour and practice, offering the same level of professional excellence.

Where “experience” is emphasized more than skills and competence, there can be other concepts of lifelong commitment than professional as “manager” or as “therapist”. There can also be another concept of professionalism that goes against, or in contrast to these sociological dimensions, namely, the concept of the “elder” in which lived faith is valued more. An elder is someone who voluntarily and freely does a service and is not paid for the services he or she renders. There are many elders, their services are valued for the community, not necessarily for their advice they bestow, but for the focus they bring to its self understanding as a community. For example, an experienced “professional theologian” can be an elder who can guide and can serve as an important resource, something much more than simply a source of information and authority, creating bonds of mutual accountability and co-responsibility for the local and global church.

Professionalism as Building a Character

“Profession” as a word with its origins from the Greek, means “principles” or “character”, so the term professionalism when used as a process of building or developing an indelible character, one which marks out the professional from other people. In the past, this concept of indelible character was used to communicate an image of the priest as “professional” rather than as “elder” in the community. As “character” it has connections to ethics and also for the priestly life and ministry, even a reference to divine ordination in the sense of an indelible character. It has created a problem for the church to understand what is the precise nature of the priestly character, is it more ethical or is it more a transformation

through grace of the ordination. Priests were set apart by their “consecrated character” and by their “lifelong commitment”. For the priests, “character” (“profession”) is indeed a part of ordination. The “character” produced is a result of the divine action, which is emphasized here, rather than the human agent’s moral condition (Heb 1:3). It is the consecration of one’s whole life to God for the service of the church. But building a character and the professional characteristics requires motivation, sustained effort and time, resources and support.

Priestly Identity: Vocation and Professionalism

Priestly identity is for ministry, it is not so much the psychological or anthropological aspects that matter. Speaking about priestly identity, it is possible for the sake of understanding to compare the vocational model and the professional model. The distinctive nature of the priestly vocation in relation to other occupations is always emphasized. The theories of vocation as seen in the vocational literature dealing with occupational choice, career development, and professional identity, etc., focus on individuals who are thinking about careers, preparing to enter the world of work, pursuing and changing jobs, and making the decision to retire from permanent employment, etc. Most individuals find greatest satisfaction in occupations or jobs that are congruent with their view of their selves.

Most general theories of vocation propose “self actualization” as the core motivation for their choice of occupation and job. This humanistic element can be atheistic or it can also be seen in the light of the Christian understanding of the mystery of the human person. In the Christian understanding of the mystery of the human

person, the priestly vocation has its existential and essential reference to the new humanity in Christ and the priesthood of Christ and the realization or actualization of self takes place in a graceful relationship that transcends the human self and embraces the divine, self orienting itself towards God. This means all anthropological and psychological theories of vocation and identity while adding an element to our understanding do not complete the mystery of the human person and are insufficient to understand the identity of priestly vocation. Anthropology and psychology may provide self concepts, but self-ideals transcend any concept so offered.

Professional model also has been used to compare and contrast priesthood with other occupations. The social and cultural development of professions has been traced to the rise and expansion of educational academies, institutions, and universities. The professions that developed and rose to prominence are “learned professions”. So while comparing priesthood with other occupations or professions, it is natural to encounter serious theological and sociological questions depending on what one’s core beliefs are. At the back of the professional model, as its support, is the university in all its faculties, powers, knowledge, and wisdom. Priests working in the universities are competitors to other professionals. The university, as a place where occupations and professionalism is exercised does not distinguish priestly professionals from non-priestly professionals. Their commitments are also well defined and limited to a segment of their life which is professionally most rewarding. Getting into a university system with entrance into higher education and remaining in it by contributing to it professionally, and guiding the younger generations

in their search for self-transcendence and self-realization and self-fulfillment in knowledge and wisdom, indeed requires a deep commitment to the development of the university itself by the professionals.

Professionals at the university were models of cultured gentleman (woman), and one learnt to be a member of the profession under the guidance of a senior member of the profession. To be a professional was a status to which one belonged by virtue of education in a hierarchically ordered society. One's engagement though was within a specific occupation, through it one engaged with the hierarchically ordered society. One built up a reputation as a professional through professional engagement and professional development.

There are structural affinities of priestly profession with other vocations or occupations of professionals. It provides an idea of societal structure that characterizes professions and supports its continued development including (1) the creation of a full-time occupation in response to needs in the social structure (2) the establishment of a training school which transmits specialized knowledge and skills (3) the formation of professional associations which are responsible for selection and training (4) the development of a code of ethics enforced from within the profession itself.

There are several attitudinal affinities among priestly and other vocations and occupations, of professional attitudes including (1) a sense of accountability to the professional body (2) An ideal of service rather than profit orientation (3) an ideal of merit (4) an ideal of conducting oneself in accordance with the principles of the profession (5) an ideal of non discrimination, etc.

All these structural and attitudinal affinities are not a substitute for religious commitment of the priestly profession because of the central role of the development of a personal relationship with God which marks out priestly vocation and occupation from other vocations and occupations. But the affinities can mean a greater involvement in the secular world, more financial and economic security in life for necessities of life, lesser engagement with sacramental and liturgical involvement, greater professional recognition, etc. So these vocational and professional models may not lead to the development of a stronger sense of priestly identity, but to a stronger sense of professionalism in ministry. It is a possibility that priestly identity can be lost, though it is not necessarily so.

There must be space within the priestly identity to develop the sense of a society, which is priestly, apostolic and prophetic within the context of priestly vocation.

Priest as Theologian and Teacher

The priest also functions as teacher and as theologian. The professional also acts as a teacher and in doing so acts as a priest theologian. There are two ideological models of the teacher and they have been distinguished. In one model the teacher is acting like a missionary. It is not uncommon for teachers to act as “social and cultural missionaries” dedicated in a secular way to the work of building the “civilization”. This is the ideology supported by secular education and it could be a form of secular control exercised by the ruling class in their interests. Nevertheless, there is a secular missionary dimension to the “teacher” in our secular societies. Then there is another ideology, referred to as the “professional” ideology in which teachers see their profession as representing more

of their concern for respectability, for advancement and self-actualization. It could be that the two ideologies conflict or they could be reinforcing each other.

The question we can ask, of our priest theologians whether as teachers, they too share a missionary dimension, if not an explicit missionary ideology, along with their professional dimension, if not necessarily a professional ideology? Could it be that the pursuit of one ideology, has meant that the other is left for some “non-professional” to fulfill? Is the church which we serve, fundamentally missionary or professional? If the church priests serve, is fundamentally missionary, then what role does professionalism have while it does not engage itself in missionary activity? What really is missionary activity in the future? What is our mission, after all, whether as professionals or as priests? Can we say those values which comprise the core of our mission is what makes us truly professional as we act on them, having knowledge of them, having deeper levels of understanding and judgment, making affirming decisions guided by them?

Professions have autonomy and controlled by the opportunities or prospects for advancement. Can these conflict with the mission and the missionary side or can these ideally complement the mission and the missionary side of priestly theologian teacher professionalism?

Professional ideology thrives on certain characteristics like, performance of task or service, mental labour (as opposed to manual or technical or skilled), appeals to reason more rather than to form, sponsors the service ideal with its orientation to clients, values individual action (as opposed to collective action), etc. As professional individuals, they will have different perspectives and

strategies on how best to accomplish the vision and goals they have set for themselves in their capacity as professionals. Even when the professional dimension complements the missionary dimension, it may not take into account the whole community as having and sharing the missionary dimension.

Professionalism and Professional Education

Professionals have been at the helm of managing public affairs without representing the public or without having their consent as in a democracy. Unlike the professionals who control public life and public affairs in society and wield all forms of earthly powers, a priest is meant to represent people before God and meant to represent God before His people. As a mediator of the covenant between God and people, a covenant renewed and sanctified by the life of Jesus, a priest must act as one who is above all earthly powers and desires.

A priest offers eternal salvation, priesthood provides the assurance of that for all times. Obviously, this is a turn to something other-worldly, not of this world. In contrast, what the professional offers is this worldly service which meets some felt need of the people. Just as the priest claims legitimacy as the authentic, real interpreter, the protector and supplier of this grace of eternal life, so also the professional claims legitimacy for the this-worldly service he/she provides, claiming legitimacy for being its authentic, real interpreter, the protector and the supplier of this worldly service. This structure appears intrinsic to both the priest and the professional, making it a real possibility that we already have in many areas an effective replacement for the priest, that fulfils many a need of the people, except perhaps, eternal salvation.

What is the mark of the professional? Can it be the income that he or she earns, the long training which qualifies him/her, the special and delicate task he or she does professionally, or the social standing with which he/she is accepted and recognized? None of these things appear to be the mark of a real professional. It is his/her authority and power to describe and define a person as client in need of his/her services, to define or determine that person's need, and to hand out the need fulfillment prescription. The professional usually has an idea of a more complete person, but deals with a less complete person without his/her services, creating a need. The professional values his or her autonomy and thrives on it, he or she has learnt the art of using his or her professional autonomy to shape the future as he or she sees it.

Professional education is very important to the professional something like a "passport". Professional education is guided by the ideal of professionalism, that is, by an ideal of commitment for the sake of service. The services sectors of the society and of the economy have grown and presently in its variety of services that comprise the services sector, the services sector is the major contributor to the national growth and development. The importance of the services and the professionalism necessary for the growth and development of the services sector drives the professional education and development. An examination of the values implicit in professional education may clarify the ideal of commitment for the sake of service.

This ideal of service and commitment should not be lost from view in professional education. The knowledge and skill set contained in professional education and passed on to younger professionals has been changing and

perhaps will keep on changing. But the ideal of commitment to service is worth preserving and supporting even when it is not of religious nature. Professionalism is understood as an ideology of commitment to mastery in order to serve. In that respect, it demands a moral commitment to a way of life and for the priest, a way of life keeping in view his ordination vows. The moral commitment implies being committed to distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' professional practice and having the courage and commitment to putting good above the bad, and doing the good practice with the excellence it deserves, attained through professional education.

Commitment to professionalism also involves commitment to lifelong learning and commitment to acquisition of professional attitudes. Lifelong learning is not cherished by many priests active in ministry, resulting in slow decline in professionalism and lay people whom one ministers have reason to be disappointed in the lack of professionalism. In preparing the person for professionalism, it would be helpful to have opportunities for those attempting to master the skills and knowledge necessary to practise professional occupations and to serve clients, to explore what professionalism really means, what professional commitment really means.

In Conclusion

Professionals are people with vision, with a sense of creative fidelity to the mission, mature people, fulfilled people, people who are able to commit themselves, develop professional characteristics that are helpful in serving others in the society.

The idea of priestly professionalism makes people nervous and may be raises discomfoting questions. But

people who are comfortable with professional development in society, see priests as lagging behind in professionalism in their ministry and service. Even sometimes they recognize priestly commitment as falling short of professional commitment, though it should not be.

The idea of “indelible character” may or may not facilitate the development of professional characteristics necessary for professional engagement with society and other professionals in the service of the people. Diversity of professions, can also make us ask, whether there are diversity of vocations in the Church which may also be marked with “indelible character”, which involves doing something for Christ, whom one has chosen to follow most closely and lovingly, with a lifelong commitment? Are there ways open to all those who follow the Lord Jesus, and who want to do something for Him in the church with a lifelong commitment? Is there professional freedom in the Church, as all are one in Christ? (Gal 3:28) Is there need for priests to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond the church boundaries? Is there a felt need for priests to achieve greater status as competent professionals in the eyes of the Catholic community? Is it true that priestly identity is felt more strongly in sacramental ministry, worship and preaching and less in professional activities in the service of people or this is a reflection of exclusive sacramental and worship leadership roles allocated to priests and closed to non-priests?

Priest and bishops are theologians, that is, teachers of the word, the word that gives eternal life, and they are expected to be very close to Jesus, the one in whom eternal salvation is offered by God to humankind. They are expected to teach as Jesus taught the people and carry

out their ministry for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Like everyone else, they are expected to be born of faith and the spirit. Interesting questions are raised about the offices of priest and bishop in the church today from the perspective of professionalism. A Priest, who devotes all his time to the Church's work, will also be able to serve the church and its people professionally. Priesthood contains within it an element of professionalism that serves to serve people better.

Professionals have exerted institutional and social control over individuals and over societies. A professional is also the creator of the need for his services and in doing so he acts like the role of priest in the society. Professionals as a body only complete that control and ritual for the society. Examples are many:

The teacher professional: The professional teaches his profession, effectively replaces the theologian priest

The entrepreneur professional: The professional creates the need for his / her services, effectively replacing the pastoral priest.

The activist professional: The professional like the missionary hunts down the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, the marginalized, effectively replaces the missionary priest.

Priestly professionals therefore understand how competitively they have to respond and keep to the deep characteristics of their commitment as professional researchers, teachers, knowledge creators and providers, as missionaries, as visionary leaders, as builders of church communities.

The church needs professionals and their service. We

need to support professional development in the church more actively.

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