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**Aspects of Priesthood**



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## Editorial

The year for priests, from June 2009 to June 2010, has engendered much material on the priesthood, priestly ministry, the vocation and life of priests. There was apprehension in some quarters that this was to stress once again the division in the Church between clergy and laity, or to emphasize the authority of the clergy over the laity. This definitely was not the purpose of this year. Pope Benedict XVI, in the very opening paragraph of his letter announcing the year, stated his purpose: "This Year, meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world"... Let us hope that something of this purpose has been served. Further, in the same letter, while praising the wonderful examples of exemplary priests, Pope Benedict also candidly admitted the scandal and harm caused by priests who did not live up to their priestly vocation. An honest appraisal is essential for any improvement.

The year provided an excellent occasion for priests for renewal. However, it was not meant exclusively for them. It offered a chance to all to reflect upon ministry, leadership in the Church, and the services that different members can render within the Church. The articles in the previous issue, and the present one of Jnanadeepa Journal highlight several aspects and dimensions of priesthood in the Church. It is very refreshing to see that being in India, where one is constantly in touch with people of other faiths, our faith is nourished by dialogue with those of different faiths. Our understanding, even of Christian priesthood, is enriched by our openness to the

understanding of priesthood in other religions.

Priestly formation in India requires a close, detailed and honest look. Evaluation and survey reports do not paint a rosy picture of priestly formation in India. There are many who feel that the end product does not measure up to expectations. The time, effort and money put into the training of priests does not seem to yield results as expected. One needs to ask hard questions like: Is the formation program truly geared for the contemporary Indian context? Are the formators not up to the mark, or are they failing in their mission? Are the formees deficient? Do they have the motivation, the ability and the determination to truly form themselves as the present day requires? Is consumerism, corruption and the ways of the 'world' affecting formees and formators? These questions require well researched and thoroughly studied answers. Not only is thorough research required, but also the wisdom to interpret the findings correctly, and the courage and creativity to follow-up the findings. Research is required because mere opinions or conjectures will not be helpful, and in fact may do harm. Also, different people will have different opinions in this matter, and only a detailed study will convince those who need to be convinced, and more importantly, will provide the way forward.

The history of the Church shows how priesthood has evolved over the centuries. Changes have come in due to many reasons. Historical circumstances are among these reasons. We need to see what changes we need to bring in, in our contemporary world. For this, collective discernment is very necessary. Openness to the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance here. There is urgency to respond to the many challenges before us. Loss of credibility of

priests, priesthood itself being questioned, the lack of vocations to the priesthood, are all challenges that need to be responded to. We have to be open to God, to one another and to discern the signs of the times in order to be relevant to the world of today, and truly responsive to the challenges before us.

Thomas Kuriacose, S.J.  
Editor.

## **A Public Property Called Priest**

**Joseph Lobo, S.J.**

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**Abstract:** The focus is on ministerial priesthood. It is difficult to combine institutional priesthood and the prophetic function. These roles can be combined in the living out of the Eucharist, which is more than a cultic celebration of the Mass. Sharing in the priesthood of Christ is through sharing in His self-sacrificing mission. Being one with Christ makes the priest one with people. A priest is a public person, with priesthood claiming the totality of his human person. The power and authority that a priest has comes from his self-emptying like Christ. Important characteristics of priestly service in the Indian context are spelt out.

**Keywords:** Priest, priesthood, prophet, public, celibacy, priestly function, Indian context.

How to 'tame' a prophet?

Ordain him a priest!

A priest celebrating the golden jubilee of his priesthood is a contradiction in terms.

He should not have survived to see that day.

He should have been 'spent' and 'worn out' long ago!

A loaf of bread is not to be kept in the showcase...so is a priest.

If it is kept, it only gathers fungus.

A loaf of bread is to be broken and consumed...

So that it can enliven the hungry!

"The greatest suffering of the Church is the sin of its priests."<sup>1</sup>

"Priests are celibates, not old bachelors."<sup>2</sup>