

CLERICALISM: (cf “Divine Renovation” pp72-80)

Fr James Mallon (the author of “Divine Renovation”) was promoting the ALPHA course in his parish, explaining how it dealt with a relationship with Jesus, the Gift of the Holy Spirit and the need to share the good News. He asked one man coming out of Mass: “Would you like to join us?” Ah no Father, he said, “I’m not that religious!”....

He was a regular at Sunday Mass but felt that was all he needed to do.. For the average Catholic, holiness and mission is not their job...that’s up to the priest.

This attitude is a result of Clericalism.....a heresy that we have all been guilty of.....no use now blaming anyone or feeling guilty about the past. Our task (like Francis of ASSISI) is to rebuild the Church; to change the culture within our parishes.

Pope Francis has several times spoken about “Clericalism” as one of the reasons behind the widespread Sexual Abuse Scandal among Catholic Clergy. But most people don’t understand what he means or how clericalism and sex scandals are connected.

Clericalism may be defined as **“a disordered attitude toward clergy, an excessive deference and an assumption of moral superiority.”**

Popes, Bishops and Priests, since the Reformation, have felt that they had to establish the importance of the Priesthood and how wonderful it was that they could be God’s instruments in changing bread and wine into the Body & Blood of Christ. But they **over-did** the plea for respect and submission of lay people. So in a sense they made themselves into a religious upper-class...and came to enjoy this exalted status.

Unfortunately lay people fell into the same trap....and contributed to the acceptance of Clericalism.....simply because it was an easy option. They began to think that their contributions to the life of the Church were only second-rate, or that in all things, surely “Father knows best - priests are better at this so let them get on with it.”

But there was another situation that lay people accepted: viz. That some lay people could be Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Ministers of the Word, Sacristans, Catechists and so on. These people were therefore clericalised and raised above ordinary Catholics. But the vast majority in the benches were told to Pray, Pay and Obey. The special Ministers thus became clericalised ...special people.... while the rest of the laity gladly accepted that nothing else was expected of them and were happy to go off after Mass and forget about it for another week.

This is to misunderstand totally the Vocation of the Lay person.

HOMILY BY FR AIDAN MURRAY AT ALTON DAY OF RENEWAL SEPTEMBER 2018

True, the Clergy have the Gift of Holy Orders..... **But this fact of the power of Holy Orders does not mean that the clergy are automatically wiser or possessed of better judgment than lay people or that they are morally superior to anyone else. They too are sinners.**

Popes from the time of St. Gregory the Great have taken the title *servus servorum Dei...*(*Servant of the servants of God*). The clergy are not here as masters, but as servants.

Pope Francis wrote, **“Lay people are part of the faithful Holy People of God and thus are the protagonists of the Church and of the world; we [priests] are called to serve them, not to be served by them.”**

The vocation of the lay person comes through their Baptism. The Sacrament of Baptism confers on each one the task, the responsibility for being PRIESTS, PROPHETS AND KINGS.

Through Baptism all Christians are empowered, through the Holy Spirit, to **share in the Church’s ministry of sanctification, teaching and governing. Is this happening in your parish?**

In recent years, whenever I did a Baptism I always emphasised this Vocation of the child. He or she is called to share in the work of Evangelisation...to carry God’s love to those in need...to share the Truth of the Gospel and to seek personal holiness. I tried to impress on parents their duty to bring their child up in this way so that they understood their call from God to be holy and to share the Good News. In Salesian terms: **We are called to be signs and bearers of God’s love for all people.**

So when we send people out at the end of Mass it is good to remind them of this obligation.....and of their dignity as fellow-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord. We must not allow Clericalism to rob them of that dignity and that vocation.

At the end of every Mass there is a choice of different words of Dismissal....but saying something like HAVE A NICE DAY..... or Go in Peace.....is seldom the right one..

GO & ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD!.....is a powerful reminder of their vocation... that’s why people come to Mass...to be empowered. Andto be commissioned to fulfil their vocation.

But what has this got to do with the Sex Scandals?

Clericalism means that priests, nuns, Religious are seen as super-Christians who can do what others can’t do. This leads to two extremes: the isolation of the clergy and the immaturity of the laity.

HOMILY BY FR AIDAN MURRAY AT ALTON DAY OF RENEWAL SEPTEMBER 2018

Clergy were trapped by the inhuman expectations that they would never ever fail...never sin. Holiness and mission was their job and the credibility of the Church depended on how perfect they were...

This was the culture that contributed to the sexual abuse crisis. The reputation of the Church had to be defended at all costs.

But I don't believe God expects anyone to be perfect. Even Pope Francis says "I am a sinner"so occasionally members of the clergy will sin.....and the Church won't come tumbling down.

However, because they felt that impeccability was necessary for the credibility of the Church they decided to cover up their sins. And the result was that the cover up only made it more likely that abuse would be repeated and that things would get worse. And they did.

We all have a duty to bring about a change of culture in the Church. Pope Francis can't do it on his own. We can begin by asking the Holy Spirit to inspire and support us in our efforts.