

The European Federation of Catholic Married Priests

Reunion : Brussels 7-8TH. July 2010

Compte rendu

As usual the coordinating group of the Federation of Catholic Married Priests has held its annual meeting. Our experience over these last years allows us to assert that this is a good way to maintain contacts, to share and to work together on the subjects that concern us all and that go beyond geographical boundaries.

Once again the Belgium group (Hors-les-Murs) and especially Pierre, Marie Astrid and Jean Marie Culot offered us an amiable and attentive welcome: accompanying us on a guided tour of the centre of Brussels and inviting us to supper in the Grande Place. It is only right to again offer our thanks to the entire group.

We shares two days of work and reflection, we the delegates: Germany (Damian Sassin: Vereinigung Katholischen Priester und ihre Frauen), Austria (Ennio Bolognese: Priester ohne Amt), Belgium (Paul Bourgeois, Marie Astrid and Pierre Colet: Hors-les-Murs), Spain (Ramon Alario: Moceop), France (Jean Combe: Pretres en Foyer; Marcel Brillant, Marie Jo and Bernard Corbineau: Pretres Maries France Nord), Italy (Franco Brescia: Vocatio) and the United Kingdom (Mike Hyland and Joe Mulrooney: Advent).

Previous contact via E-mail helped to establish, not only the subjects on which we were to share and exchange, but also our working method. On this last point our new approach took the form of asking from the delegates basic documents on the different matters on which we were to work. These were to be sent early in advance in order to facilitate our later work. We considered this to be a good method in order to make our work more efficient and practical.

After supper on the 6th, shortly after our arrival, a convivial meeting allowed us to share an update on our personal lives and on the general aspects of the movement we represented. We also welcomed Edith Kuropatwa, the widow of Louis Fevre a married priest who died a year ago.

Finally, we decided to begin the next day's work- the program for the day – the reference point being the subjects proposed in the preparatory correspondence sent by Pierre. Concerning the most essential contributions and decisions, we must underline the following points.....

1. Presentation of a short update on each group over the past year

We follow the order of the presentations. The Belgium group is well enough integrated with movements of the faithful (PAVES): several individuals are heavily engaged in this network. They have frequently taken part in interviews and programmes on radio and television on topical subjects that have arisen (Anglicans, pedophilia...) even though one has the impression that, in general, it is a question of fairly superficial programmes. The association is also engaged in working for widows' pensions for the wives of priests. The delegates underlined the limits which age imposes on the movement: at the last meeting apologies outnumbered those present.

The Spanish group reported as important activities over the past year: its national meeting (at Las Lagunas de Ruidera: almost 100 people), the reunion to prepare the numbers of *Tempo de Hablar-Tiempo de Actuar* and in different places other meetings for the celebration of Holy Week. There was also its participation in and commitment to the movements (Redes Cristianas) and, in particular, the participation at an assembly held at Bibbao on 'responsible alternatives to the crisis'. The project of a book of monographs from married priests, already well advanced, will be published



at the beginning of 2011. As far as members are concerned, we must underline that they note also the passage of years, though the group is still numerous and participation and commitment are excellent. MOCEOP is a movement well connected to and acknowledged by the Spanish grass roots church.

Damian reported on how the German group had lived through these last difficult months, when the denunciations of cases of pedophilia had been made public. This meant that they were much occupied with different radio and television programmes. They also took part in the meetings of Katholikentag 2009 and l'Okumenischer Kirchentag 2010, two grand reunions respectively of the Catholic Church and the ecumenical movement. They have also been at present following a secularization which has once again brought into debate the theme of celibacy.

Advent, in the United Kingdom, comprises three groups which meet every month and who maintain a web page and a continuous enough contact by various means. They also have been much occupied with interviews and communiqués on the subject of Anglicans and pedophilia. They took part in a reunion for the commemoration of Vatican 11 (*Stand up for Vatican 11*). They remarked on the absence of younger participants in such church reform movements.

Prêtres en Foyer, in Provence, holds its reunions every two or three months, twelve to a dozen people being present. They have another more tranquil and festive reunion to which others are invited. They are closely linked with the association *Plein Jour* to help women who are the companions of priests. They collaborate also with an association for African aid. They took part in the preparation of a program on life testimonies, which was broadcast on the radio throughout the year. Pedophilia has equally been a subject on which they have been invited to speak. For their part, the group *Prêtres Mariés France Nord*, through its bulletin *Chemins Nouveaux*, allows married priests, lay people and priests in ministry, who are asking questions about their situation and that of the church, to express themselves. They research and share on how to live as church or to live the faith in another fashion. They hold an annual reunion with about 100 participants and, this year, with the presence of two married African priests. Their commitment is anchored in the communities where they live and, though they are members of the network *Reseaux de Parvis*, the commitment is on an individual basis.

From the Italian group *Vocatio* Franco Brescia told us that there had been no official reunion since their reunion on the occasion of their 30th anniversary. This suspension coincides with the resignation of Mauro del Nevo as president and with a certain void in the organising since then. There are still small meetings, in the base communities, but very little coordination. In his opinion, certain difficulties of a personal nature and of leadership prevent one from seeing clearly what the future will be.

For Austria, Ennio reported on the existence of two groups: one at Linz with reunions twice a year and where there is a good relationship with the diocese. There is another at Vienne where fifteen to twenty people meet once a month – it takes the form of an extended celebration which finishes with a fraternal meal. The relationship with the cardinal is formal: he thinks that he must not accord them too much importance because they are a 'numerically insignificant' group. They have good contact with *Nous Sommes Eglise*. They initiated and took part in a liturgy of penance during Holy week following the pedophilia scandals. They promote a movement for church purification faced with the phenomenon of the loss of members to the church, calculated at about 80,000 individuals. They are not numerous, older, and busy themselves with what is concrete and urgent for those who seek and ask for help.

Following this rapid resume of the contributions of the different groups we can underline important lines of convergence:

- a. Our concern to help those who, after years of priestly ministry, feel the need and seek help to live the faith in another fashion.



- b. The search to maintain our place in the community of believers: a community which is open, pluralistic, fraternal and open to serving.
- c. The choice to integrate ourselves into small communities or to live out our faith in simplicity and in proximity to our neighbor.
- d. The choice not so much to be victorious or to assert ones rights as to construct another way of living in the church.
- e. The acknowledgement of our limitations in respect of age, resources etc.: all of that makes us humbler and simpler.
- f. Our tuning into the victims of structures, in the first place ecclesiastical.
- g. Our preoccupation with the crisis which the church experiences and with the lack of will for change which we observe.

2. News about other groups or movements with which we are in contact

We highlight with great pleasure the communication we have with the Latin American Federation, by means of news bulletins sent by Mario Mullo and by the dispatch of ur own news. Damian Sassin informed us of his attempts to correspond with Ciril Berther, coordinator of *Priester in Beziehungen* in German speaking Switzerland, although up till now he has not had any reply. Jean Combe gave his impressions of the groups of Lyons and Grenoble without being able to give any concrete details. Bernard spoke of the need to keep in contact with the African priests who came to their reunion. As to the contacts with Poland it was thought that there might be a possibility on the occasion of the next meeting of *Eglises et Libertes*. In general, as to the future, it is interesting to maintain these contacts and see how they develop.

3. Reflections on the lack of response which our movements receive among priests who have left ministry these last years.

This is a question that has arisen many times in our groups: why do so few married priests of the last generations not join our movement? In certain cases (e.g. Moceop) the arrival of several young priests who left during these last years has helped to reformulate their objectives and the manner in which they organize themselves. On this subject we were helped by a paper prepared by Jean (Annex 1). Evidently we are aware of the fact that it is a question of another generation, with a different formation, another way of approaching the faith, the life of the church....We really wanted to pursue this question in depth and here are some of the contributions shared:

- We have to admit that we are really not au courant with those who abandon ministry in each diocese. We lack the information.
- Certain experiences show that that they are less numerous than in previous years and that when they do enter into contact with our groups they do so with great intensity.
- Often the image that they have of our groups influences them – identified with nostalgia and our own claims.
- They have probably experienced a formation and an exercise of ministry which was more individualist.
- Sometimes they give the impression of having had enough and even too much of the church and they feel the need to leave this world aside.
- It is possible that they experienced the process of leaving in a more isolated fashion.



- It is perhaps that they sometimes see us as too centered on clerical demands and specifically that of priests.

In conclusion, this fact must push us to set out clearly our style of life and our demands. The more they see us as open and egalitarian communities, the easier, perhaps, it will be for them to find in us a valuable reference point in developing their searching. At the same time we will need to rethink the means by which we get ourselves known, the message which we transmit, the attention we give to them, the importance of increasing our personal welcoming contacts.

4. The work of preparing a dossier on the social status of married priests

This is again one of the subjects which has demanded part of our work. The objective is as always to prepare a dossier which could be presented to the Council of Europe.

The truth is that since last year we have made little advance on the preparation of this dossier. We have scarcely produced the detailed inclusive reports that were expected. France has presented a series of questionnaires to be filled in individually. Spain has sent an inclusive dossier worked up by a specialist, incorporating the actual situation and the progress made so far. Belgium has brought along a general study of the Belgian situation. Germany has presented a resume of the situation, making a distinction between the situation of diocesan priests and religious.

Although we are trying to make progress it has been impossible granted the lack of an inclusive analysis country by country. We reached agreement on the following:

- To produce for each country a general report, taking into account the basic questions.
- Those who wish could take as their base the Spanish document already presented (Annex 11) which will be translated into French to facilitate the work.
- In so far as is possible to contact a specialist in the subject in each country.

Bernard and Paul will coordinate the work.

5. Reflection on the situation brought about by the document on the Anglicans (Anglicanorum Coetibus).

We came to the positive judgment that this subject could help us to precise our own positions and to produce a joint communiqué with the Latin American Federation. Joe and Mike sent us a detailed analysis of the Vatican document (Annex 111). They indicated some important ideas:

- The basic agreement among our groups, though there are nuances, does not coincide with the content of Anglicanorum Coetibus.
- The conviction that the whole document is based on ideas which are reactionary and against renewal: baptismal equality, collegiality.....
- Equally it indicates a step backwards re a respectful ecumenical dialogue between equals.
- We are about to receive into the Roman Catholic Church a group of disaffected Anglicans who are opposed to reforms undertaken by the Anglican communion.
- That appears, as a consequence, to be an attempt to recruit from among the Anglicans a group of bishops and very conservative priests opposed to reforms which grant to lay people and to women offices of decision and leadership.

Joe and Mike are engaged in integrating into their work those elements which could be clarified, following the reunion of the Anglican Synod on the weekend of the 10-11 July.



6. Preparation for the 50th. Anniversary of Vatican 11

Pierre has presented a complete dossier on the preparations for this anniversary celebration (Annex 1V). This initiative is led by the international movement *Nous Sommes Eglise*. Following the explanation of the steps taken up till now and the calendar of events to follow (National Assemblies in 2012; World wide Assembly of the people of God 2015) we agreed the following:

- To take part as Groups through the networks of our respective countries.
- To send a letter of support in the name of the European Federation along the lines already suggested in convening our reunion: our priority is for the grass roots movements and for ministries of communion as opposed to ministries of separation.
- Evidently to pay attention to reunions organized in each of our countries; e.g. Lyons (Parvis 2010) and Zaragoza (Comunidades Cristianas Populares 11th. – 12th.X1.2010).

7. A document of reflection and analysis on the cases of pedophilia

Our starting point was a document presented by Ramon (Annex V). This was unanimously accepted though the assumption was that that this was not a work prepared to be delivered as such to the media (it is not a press communiqué). In any case it was not conceived as a new way of attacking compulsory celibacy even if it calls it into question. It is above all an attempt to analyse this situation from our particular perspective. There was an overall agreement in saying that that the relationship with celibacy was not direct, but indirect – it was a facilitator, given the style of life of the clergy, their formation and, above all, the power situation, allegedly sacred and unquestionable, which was their general life style. There was a series of amendments especially relative to the global context in which these events were situated: it is a general problem, not limited to the church: it affects the victims in key values for their personal development which is emotional and sexual: there will perhaps always be abuse of this kind but it is a challenge to struggle for their diminution and to contest that they do not go unpunished.

8. Our project for the publication of *Ministerium Novum*

We value the interest that this internet publication can have (at this moment we have some 300 addresses). On the other hand we think that it should involve less work than foreseen previously. At this moment it would be interesting to profit from the material and documents from this year's meeting to launch a monograph. Evidently we will need to complete the translations which are still lacking.

On another matter, it is worth the trouble to recall the importance of keeping up to date the translations on our web site and to seek out helpers.

9. On the usefulness and advantages of holding these meetings

We are in agreement on the fact that certain tasks and the sharing that we can bring about at these meetings in Brussels, even though we can carry on electronic contacts, would lose the richness of contact and closeness that we celebrate today.

In addition the reunion of the European federated movements which we represent in one place allows us to arrive at agreement and to finalise the tasks which were shared beforehand by electronic means. That is why we are fixing the date for the 2011 reunion for the 7th. and 8th. of July (with the possibility of arriving on the 6th.) in the same Franciscan house at Brussels.



Our contact with the Latin American and Philippine Federations exists even though it is rather reduced. That is why we are thinking of suggesting to them the possibility of preparing well in advance an eventual meeting of the Confederation in 2015, in Rome, on the occasion of the World Assembly of the people of God.

This preparation could consist of:

- a). An exchange of letters in order to send information and state clearly the positions that we have taken.
- b). A possible video conference.
- c). An invitation for the presidents and others to participate at our 2011 reunion, for which we would try to give economic help.

These contacts would permit us to affirm ourselves as a Confederation and give us a better presence in this great assembly.

Consequently we will have to initiate these proceedings as soon as possible.

Another matter, after the presentation of the accounts by Jean we saw that there were sufficient funds (some 1,300 Euros) to meet our expenses (the web page and other little matters) and decided not to ask the groups for a subscription for 2010. Again we asked Pierre to reclaim his expenses for journeys and registration at the international meetings in which he participates as official representative of our federation.

Although we still have plenty of time it would be interesting to reflect at our 2011 reunion of renewing the coordinating group: Pierre, Jean and Ramon.

After the last work session, towards 5 o'clock on the 8th, we left with the conviction that that we had completed an interesting task and accomplished the programme that we had set out.

Cabanillas del Campo, end of July 2010

Ramon Alario, secretary.

