

The Impostors of the Ministry of Orders

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My friend, Father José Antônio, with whom I had the great satisfaction of working on Vocations and Ministries of the bishops' conference (1999-2003) in Brazil, in a recent article reported on internet, raised the question about **the main fear of pope Francis**. The question might well be reversed to indicate what the people in the Catholic Church fear of the most audacious renovation proposals presented by Pope Francis, and, in my opinion, condensed in his exhortation **Evangelii Gaudium**. Who in the Roman Church would be afraid to proposals like this: *"I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and evangelical methods of the respective communities"* (EG, 33)?

We would perhaps place in first place, the ultraconservative Catholic groups founded by the schismatic bishop Lefebvre well represented by the Society of St. Pius X. However, pope Francis is not fearful of conservative Catholics, and the pope provokes no fear to them. To react to any change in the Church is in the DNA of these groups, who piously believe that the only historical model of Church is the one built at the Council of Trent; or worse, from the spirit of the Counter Reformation.

Who, then, would cause fear to pope Francis, or rather, who's afraid of the proposals of pope Francis? Father José Antônio, bluntly, says it is the **"chameleon clergy,"** that is, the priests who perceive the ordained ministry as status, as a quite profitable profession, as a pedestal for fame and success. These people fear a pope who insists that the ordained ministry is service and that priests should "smell like sheep."

Continuing in his reflection, Fr. José Antônio warns about something particularly alarming: almost all of the "chameleon clergy" is made up of **young priests and seminarians, future priests, already behaving as if they were ordained ministers**. It is alarming because it was expected that young priests and seminarians, formed after the Second Vatican Council, would be able to accept with enthusiasm and passion the proposed renewal of the Church presented by pope Francis. But is not that what we're seeing. Many remain **indifferent** to what pope Francis is saying. Clear signal of that indifference is the **lack of communication, knowledge, study and implementation of the pastoral exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium***.

Personally I noted that in a recent course to a large group of people, most of them lay people, on the papal exhortation. The general complain was that priests do not talk about *Evangelii Gaudium*. They even talked about priests who did not even know about the existence of the document. A few days ago a lady from a parish in the city of Bahia (Brazil) asked the young priest why in the church sacristy he has not yet placed the picture of pope Francis. She wanted to know why everything had stopped with the picture of Pope Benedict XVI. The pastor answered that the reason was the fact that the glassmakers of the city had no frames. The lady perceived that the pastor was *lying*.

But there is also the group of priests and seminarians who pretend to welcome the proposals of pope Francis, but they behave like the chameleon: by mere opportunism and to continue taking advantage of everything, trying to keep the good life that the ordained ministry offers. This clerical group **pretends to adhere to pope Francis externally but, in practice, whenever possible, hides, distorts and diverts the papal teaching**, not allowing the people to become aware of what pope Francis is proposing with some insistence.

Given this situation the question arises: What is leading these priests and seminarians to act that way? Why do they fear pope Francis? Why do they act with indifference or only pretending to accept the teaching of the bishop of Rome?

Countless studies published in recent years sufficiently explain this problem. These are hard data studies based on sound research. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), the Organization of Seminaries and Institutes of Brazil (OSIB) and the National Commission for Presbyters (CNP) sponsored some of these studies.

Two motives seem to be behind such behavior. The first one is the vision of **the priestly vocation as the "vocation" par excellence**. Being a priest is "the best," it is to be above everything and everybody. Becoming "father" is to rise above all and of all mortals. The second motive would be the **desire of dioceses to address the problem of the lack of priests, leading them to admit in seminaries and priesthood true impostors who take this opportunity as the easiest way of acquiring power, status, fame and money**. Such people do not care about service to the people, but to the benefits they are going to have accessing the ordained ministry.

The philosopher, sociologist and theologian Denise Arlene Bacarji recently conducted a study on this issue based on data from research from around the world by eminent researchers. The title of her study is, by itself, very suggestive: **The deception in the ministry of Order. Personality disorders and perversion of the Clergy in the light of psychoanalysis and psychiatry.**

After analyzing the origin of the problem of imposture in the Ministry of Order, the author carefully writes about disorders and perversions within the frames of the Church, especially among the clergy. The book deals with institutional diversions, antisocial, narcissistic personality pathology and perversions. At the end it points out some possibilities to get out of the impasse.

Arlene Bacarji shows how the hierarchical nature, a false understanding of mercy, the security that the ordained ministry and celibacy provide as a way of not relating deeply with anyone, easily attract people with personality disorder and many evil people. The person with these diseases **"always gets an inadvertent, gracious, confident referral, and a benevolent bishop accepts the candidate"** (p. 36). Bacarji reminds that the ecclesiastical system favors such people, since **"they learn quickly how to climb to positions of power, how to be elevate to becoming bishops, cardinals"** (p. 43).

The author presents the profile of the impostor in the Ministry of the Order: "Power, showing off, success, just rely on his **eloquence at the altar, of his charm and attractiveness, and his rhetoric, persuasion ability, introjecting feelings and emotions in speech so that the public is wowed, in order to be admired, idolized and worshiped**. The Altar becomes a stage, as the formalization of that power is already given. Imposture in the Ministry of Order for all these personalities is characterized by the vast capacity of the person to do **"theater"**. They are very good in show-biz" (p. 43). And they are so good that they are able to camouflage their aversion to pope Francis and what he proposes, just by means of a "nice speech" (p. 44), ie, with a shallow discourse through which the person speaks a lot of nonsense seducing the uncritical and unaware people, but giving a 'sermon' that says nothing.

What to do? Are there way outs? Certainly. The problem is whether the bishops are willing to implement them. I point at least three. The first is **to demystify the figure of the priest**, taking away all the sacred aura that surrounds him. Present him as a common, normal person, like any other man, called by God to be *diákonos*, ie, mere servant of others. A sacramental sign of Christ the servant of all, who came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:35-45). In this perspective, the emphasis should be placed on the *common baptismal vocation*, as Vatican II reminded us in *Lumen Gentium*. **The important thing is not to be "father", but a disciple, a follower of Jesus, missionary**, as emphasized repeatedly in the Aparecida Document.

A second way would be **to review the current model of ordained ministry**, overly focused on the celibate priest who spends eight to nine years in the seminary and comes out of there pretty trained to be "apparently normal," but in practice, he is a divided person, tending to lie chronically (Bacarji, p. 45-64). There is no way to solve the problem of imposture in the ordained ministry without a serious reform in the ordained ministry, including new forms of ministries to de-centralize power and brake the monopoly and authoritarianism of priests.

The third proposed solution is **to change our behavior** in relation to these people. Bacarji reminds that "Christ and the Gospel are not tolerant of hypocrisy and falsehood" (p. 45). So she says that "mercy to these people should be thought on other ways and not the usual ones. Perhaps it would be more merciful to prevent them from having a chance to experience their perversions and antisocial or narcissistic pathologies, harming people of the Church, the Church herself, God and themselves" (p. 67). That means that the initial training of candidates for the ordained ministry should be more serious, capable of identifying and preventing potential fraudsters to get ordained. But this requires that the persons in charge of the formation in seminaries be balanced people and not deranged and evil beings.

Finally, I must say that most of the priests are honest men, serious, simple and entirely given to the people. And that is a great comfort. But most of the time, these priests are not valued, they are not reported by the Catholic media, being overcome by the impostors usually media-savvy and "charismatic" presented to the people as the only models of priests. And with that havoc is made, for the people, deceived by "wolves dressed in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15), end up being seduced.

"The robes, habits, clergyman, for these people represent power and provide mastery in relation to other mortals; so many of them pay careful attention to these things from the time they are seminarians" (Bacarji, p. 62). So we need to be very careful, because the deception in the ordained ministry "tends to confuse many superiors and all of us" (Ibid., P. 70).