

## Separating the sacred and the secular

Dennis Coday | Sep. 17, 2009 NCR Today

In light of several discussions going on at NCRonline.org -- such as [here](#) [1], [here](#) [2], and [here](#) [3] -- the comments today of Pope Benedict XVI to a group of bishops from northeast Brazil who had just completed their "ad limina" visit, seemed especially relevant.

He tells the bishops not to see the shortage of priests as "a normal state of affairs," and warns against "the 'clericalisation' of the laity."

"The lay faithful" must be active "in real life," he says, "while priests must distance themselves from politics."

It seems to me that this is call to separate the sacred and the secular. Is that possible? Is it desirable?

Here's the report from the Vatican Information Service:

Highlighting the functions of the various members of the Church, the Pope explained how "the particular identity of priests and laity must be seen in the light of the essential difference between priestly ministry and the 'common priesthood'. Hence it is important to avoid the secularisation of clergy and the 'clericalisation' of the laity".

"In this perspective", he went on, "the lay faithful must undertake to give expression in real life - also through political commitment - to the Christian view of anthropology and the social doctrine of the Church. While priests must distance themselves from politics in order to favour the unity and communion of all the faithful, thus becoming a point of reference for everyone".

Benedict XVI indicated that "the lack of priests does not justify a more active and abundant participation of the laity. The truth is that the greater the faithful's awareness of their own responsibilities within the Church, the clearer becomes the specific identity and inimitable role of the priest as pastor of the entire community, witness to the authenticity of the faith, and dispenser of the mysteries of salvation in the name of Christ the Head".

"The function of the clergy is essential and irreplaceable in announcing the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. ... For this reason it is vital to ask the Lord to send workers for His harvest; and it is necessary that priests express joy in their faithfulness to their identity".

The Pope made it clear that "the shortage of priests must not come to be considered as a normal or typical state of affairs for the future". In this context he encouraged the prelates "to combine efforts to encourage new priestly vocations and find the pastors your dioceses need, helping one another so that all of you have better-trained and more numerous priests to support the life of faith and the apostolic mission".

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