

the BridgeDialogues

laity & clergy reimagining the church

A collaborative effort of Voice of the Faithful, FutureChurch, & Association of U.S. Catholic Priests



What Pope Francis has to say about clericalism

1. "It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives. This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the Church's authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred. Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that 'not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.' Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemn-

ing today. To say 'no' to abuse is to say an emphatic 'no' to all forms of clericalism." (Letter to the People of God, August 20, 2019 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html)

Question: How do you respond to Pope Francis saying "that clericalism (is) an approach that not only nullifies the character of Christianity but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people"?

2. "Clericalism, far from giving impetus to various contributions and proposals, gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness in the heart of her peoples. Clericalism forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belong to all the People of God not only to the few chosen and enlightened." (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html)

Question: How do you respond to Pope Francis stating that "clericalism forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belongs to all the People of God, not only to the few chosen and enlightened"?

3. "Leaders of the Church have often been Narcissus, flattered and sickeningly excited by their courtiers. The court is the leprosy of the papacy. Sometimes when I meet a cleric, I suddenly become anti-clerical. Clericalism shouldn't have anything to do with Christianity." (2013 Interview in La Repubblica at <https://snd->

denjpic.org/2013/10/05/pope-francis-the-court-is-the-leprosy-of-the-papacy/)

Question: Have you ever shared the experience of Pope Francis that "sometimes when I meet a cleric I suddenly become anti-clerical"? If so, describe your experience.

4. "Clericalism, my dear ones, is our ugliest perversion. The Lord wants you to be shepherds; shepherds of the people, not clerics of the state." (Pope Francis meeting with seminarians from the Sicilian coastal city of Agrigento on November 24, 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2018/11/26/clericalism-is-ugly-perversion-pope-tells-seminarians/>)

Question: What do you think of Pope Francis telling seminarians that "Clericalism is our ugliest perversion" and "the Lord wants us to be shepherds of the people and not clerics of the state."?

5. "There is that spirit of clericalism in the Church, that we feel: clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people. Clerics always say: 'this should be done like this, like this, like this, and you – go away!' It happens "when the cleric doesn't have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil [of the religious 'authorities' lording it over others]." But 'the victim is the same: the poor and humble people, who await the Lord.'"

~Homily in Casa Santa Marta, December 13, 2016

Question for priests: Have you ever caught yourself as a cleric thinking as Pope Francis states "this should be done like this, like this, like this and you- go away...when the cleric (you) doesn't have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick? Or have you noticed this in others/

6. "A clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making." ~Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*

Question: Pope Francis affirms that "a clear awareness of the responsibility of the laity..." may be rooted in their "not being given the formation needed" or "because ...room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to excessive clericalism." Have you been aware of these issues and dealt with them and if so how?

7. "But I often think of Jesus knocking on the door, but from inside, because we [do not] let him go out,



There is that spirit of clericalism in the Church, that we feel: clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people. Clerics always say: ‘this should be done like this, like this, like this, and you – go away!’ It happens when the cleric doesn’t have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil [of the religious ‘authorities’ lording it over others. But the victim is the same: the poor and humble people, who await the Lord.

because we often, without witness, hold him prisoner to our formalities, our closures, our selfishness, our clerical way of life. And clericalism, which is not just clerics, is an attitude that affects all of us: clericalism is a perversion of the Church. Jesus teaches us this path of exit from ourselves, the path of witness. And this is the scandal – because we are sinners! – that we do not go out of ourselves to give testimony.”

~Meeting with young Italians, August 11, 2018

Question: Have you ever thought as Pope Francis thinks “ of Jesus knocking on the door but from inside, because we don’t let him go out because we hold him prisoner to our formalities, selfishness, our clerical way of life.” If so, when and what did you do about the situation?

8. “The lack of consciousness of belonging to God’s faithful people as servants, and not masters, can lead us to one of the temptations that is most damaging to the missionary outreach that we are called to promote: clericalism, which ends up as a caricature of the vocation we have received. A failure to realize that the mission belongs to the entire Church, and not to the individual priest or bishop, limits the horizon, and even worse, stifles all the initiatives that the Spirit may be awakening in our midst. Let us be clear about this. The laypersons are not our peons, or our employees. They don’t have to parrot back whatever we say. Clericalism, far from giving impetus to various contributions and proposals, gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness. Clericalism forgets that the visibility and the sacramentality of the Church belong to all the faithful people of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-14), not only to the few chosen and enlightened.”[2]
~Meeting with the bishops of Chile during apostolic trip to Chile, January 16, 2018

Question: Have you ever noticed in yourself or other clerics that a “lack of consciousness of belonging to God’s faithful people as servants and not masters can lead us to one of the temptations that is most damaging to the missionary outreach that we are called to promote, clericalism which ends up as a caricature of the vocation we have received.”? If so, what have you done or not done about it?

9. "If we hope for a new and living chapter of faith in this [Latin American] continent, we will not get it without women. Please, do not let them be reduced to servants of our ingrained clericalism. For they are on the front lines of the Latin American Church, in their setting out with Jesus, in their persevering amid the sufferings of their people, in their clinging to the hope that conquers death, and in their joyful way of proclaiming to the world that Christ is alive and risen. I would like to repeat something I recently said to the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. It is imperative to overcome the clericalism that treats the *Christifideles laici* as children and impoverishes the identity of ordained ministers."
~Address to Conference of Latin American Bishops, September 7, 2017

Question: What do you think of Pope Francis affirming that " if we hope for a new and living chapter of faith in this (Latin American) continent we will not get it without women.." and "do not let them be reduced to servants of our ingrained clericalism."? Is this true in your country and what do you want to do about it?