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THE PATHOLOGY OF POWER: Part II

POWER AND PROSTITUTION: SELLING OUR MOTHER INTO SHAME

"And the devil led him into a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time; And he said to Him: To Thee will I give all this power, and the glory of them; for to me they are delivered, and to whom I will, I give them."

(Saint Luke 4.5-6)

None of us are beyond these temptations, but note well that now, as in the beginning, the evil one again tempts the woman, "the mother of all the living"¹ --- but this time he tempts the woman as Holy Mother the Church, the Mother of all who live in Christ ... That father of all misery and lies appears to be consistent in his choices and uses the methodology that worked so well --- and to so disastrous an end --- in the beginning. He seeks to seduce the Woman. But this time there is a twist. The first woman sold herself into sin to the desolation of her children. The second Woman, Holy Mother Church --- is sold into sin by her children, into desolation by those whom she bore and nourished and who sell her into prostitution that they may benefit from her. There is no polite word, no adequate euphemism, for this betrayal of the Mother by the children. It is vile.

This is a time for repentance, a time for vigilance and prayer. As in the beginning, no one is beyond the devil's malicious jealousy and implacable anger ... how many bishops and priests, religious and laity, have been lured away from the zeal of first conversion with its lofty ideals, its gleaming exemplars in the lives of the Saints ... into ennui and mediocrity, by the blandishments of the spirit of this world from which they were first called away and to which now they return, as Saint Peter tells us, as "dogs to their own vomit, as sows returning, after having been washed, to wallow again in the mire."² Not a very polite assessment, to be sure. Saint Peter was seldom tactful. How many of our bishops --- to say nothing of our priests and Religious, our euphorically "empowered" laity --- lack this holy tactlessness! How many are seduced and influenced by ... how many so utterly infatuated with acquiring and exercising power --- in the Church!

How eager they are to seduce their own Mother that they may profit from her shame, and once surfeit with power, how readily they would sell Her into prostitution for profit! Having acquired power in Her and through Her, they now use Her to their own evil and selfish ends --- and make a wage for themselves, and a living to boot! Brood of bastards, they plunder the inheritance of the children --- and subdue them lest their power and profit fall to the heirs. This is the genealogy of power. It is the genesis of sin.

POWER AS PETTY

All too often within our churches, so-called "ministries" (and they are numberless ...) have proliferated to the point of meaninglessness. Unable to acquire the perceived "power" of the Ministerial Priesthood, and indoctrinated with the notion of ecumenism at the cost of genuine Catholic identity, the more "progressive" elements in the Church sought to participate in --- to acquire --- the perceived "power" intrinsic to the priesthood through bifurcating what is "Ministerial" to the priesthood, from the priesthood --- and making a parallel power of it. In so doing, in collaboration with equally "progressive" theologians and priests --- they relegated the priest to a truncated conception of the priesthood, usurping what is Ministerial of the priesthood to newly "empowered" "Lay Ministries". The result is a conflation of identities confusing to the faithful: priests as eager to relinquish the responsibilities of the ministerial dimension of their priesthood and laity as eager to acquire this relinquished "power" of "ministry" --- because it is in nature sacerdotal, albeit pseudo-sacerdotal --- and an acquisition of sacerdotal power.

This ancient grasping for power, especially priestly power, goes back as far as Israel's wandering in the wilderness where 250 of the "leading men of the Synagogue" confronted Moses and Aaron in their indignation, protesting that, "...all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"³ Upon which Moses replied, "You have gone too far! ... would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore it is against the Lord that you and your company have gathered together."⁴ Even Miriam and Aaron reproached Moses --- jealous of God's intimacy with him, and resentful that the power given Moses was not equally invested in and shared among the people of Israel at large --- who coveted that power for themselves.⁵

How familiar this scenario ... how contemporary as it is ancient! The laity indignant of, even as it covets for itself, the power of priest! How many "pious" Catholics, dissatisfied with and disaffected from the call to holiness in their own vocations, clamor for a share in priestly power, for a charism as unique to the priest as wedlock to the spouse. It is a grave misunderstanding of the notion of holiness to which all alike are called, although not all in like manner.

In the end, this pernicious effort is the illegitimate demand to stand "in locus Christi", in the place of Christ, which belongs to the priest alone. Unable to become priests, they become "Ministers" ... a term which, in American and European culture, is fraught with

historical implications of competing and always presumably sacred power invested in the "Minister" in place of the "Priest".

"Ministry" --- the personal acquisition and exercise of the power of "Ministry" --- acquires a value of itself and precisely through the power perceived within it, a relished power that takes precedence over all else --- especially the "ministered-to" who become merely a means to an end that is neither in Christ nor in themselves. The end, under whatever pretense and however cleverly articulated, is the participating in perceived power, the possession and the exercise of power by those who, in the end, are ministering to themselves under the guise of ministering to others. In their newly acquired pseudo-sacerdotal role, unlike the faithful, they are not the needy, but the benevolent dispensers of what is needed ... and which is now in their power to give ... and equally, albeit implicitly, to withhold. This is power. It is power as petty, and all the more reproachable for its pettiness.

Because this power is petty, it is never anonymous. It aggressively asserts itself through faces, offices, titles, photo ops; it is splashed across Church bulletins, promoted, advertised, publicized ... that the benevolence of the one in possession of power is not overlooked, unrecognized, and unappreciated.

So many of God's servants and handmaids are being lured away from the holy humility that is ever acceptable to God --- enticed by the meretricious glory, the petty power, the sinister whisper of the spirit of this world, by glamour, name recognition, the promotion of personalities, by the bright lights ... instead of the promotion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the expense of which --- because it is the means through which --- such petty power is acquired.

All --- Bishops, priests, religious, laity alike --- have a sacred duty to the Christ we claim as our God and our Redeemer, to call hearts back to Him from errant paths to empty places.

The people ... like abandoned sheep with no earthly shepherd --- perish for lack Christ, and we are all responsible! We have lost sight of the simplicity and the urgency of the Gospel message of love and in our arrogance sought Him among the crumbling towers of Babel where all the tongues are clamoring for power.

All of us need to look again into the mirror of the life of Jesus Christ and see our own lives in that mirror. We are not to lord it over one another as the pagans do but to serve each other in humble love. Jesus did. And we are not greater than our Master.

Jesus Christ used all the powers of His intellect, of His heart and soul --- and they were poured out in His Self emptying and giving, making manifest His Father's love to us here on earth that we may know the path to eternal life. Jesus Christ willed our total good. He wills it now. This is love ... that which nurtures and promotes the good of others and gives life.

Mary Said, "Behold, the handmaid on the Lord , be it done unto me according to Thy word". In this we have the example to which we are called by grace --- to imitate and indeed to become, other Christs, other Marys in this world --- not through power, but through love. Jesus Christ --- "the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords", surrendered Himself to dwelling within an apparently 'powerless' piece of bread, the Most Holy Eucharist --- wherein, in such utter humility, the plenitude of God Himself dwells.

The greatest King that ever ruled exercised the greatest power ever wielded ... from the Cross, nailed and bound, emptied of everything but love --- and of His kingship, of this power, there will be no end.

After all, "The Kingdom, the power and the glory are His" ... and not ours ...

¹ Genesis 3.20

² II Saint Peter 2.22

³ Numbers 12.1-15