

Ministry and Brokenness

Orthodox Insights into the „Authority“ of the Priesthood

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Introduction

To define and even to describe the significance of ministry or the role of the priesthood would, in the past, often have presented an opportunity for the consideration of priesthood as a source of clerical authority or it would have succumbed to the temptation of a certain kind of triumphalism. The first temptation would, at least according to the spiritual tradition, be identified with the sin of pride; the second option would, at best, be seen as a form of naiveté. Yet the depth of the priestly ministry is neither something that is appreciated from a position of strength nor is it discerned in the clerical role of authority; nor again is it understood in terms of priestly performance and achievement. In a word, ministers and clergy have to learn to acknowledge the authenticity - and thereby the authority - of their own woundedness, and not the healing of others; their own brokenness, and not the mending of those for whom they care; their disease, and not their health. In the light of the twenty-first century, clergy should, I would submit, not so much stand tall - with any false feeling of superiority or pride before others; instead, they should be kneeling - in sincere repentance and in hopeful prayer.

In this paper, we shall endeavor to relate ministry and authority in a way different from that which one might normally expect. Rather than trying to impress upon readers particular definitions or notions of the priesthood - whether scriptural, patristic, theological, pastoral, or other - I wish to develop the above-mentioned concept of brokenness: to intimate how the clergy as spiritual directors might embrace this brokenness, how they might make others aware of it, and how we might all learn from and grow through it. In doing so, we shall in fact address certain issues which theologians do not always immediately ponder in relation with the priesthood, and which Orthodox theologians do not always even dare to touch while exploring the vocation of the clergy.

Today, many ministers are confronted with the problem of "role". People feel "called" to do one thing, yet find themselves thrust into another. Some see themselves as „Jack-of-all-trades“, while others take on the role of a social worker, or a political preacher, or a theological teacher. Still others try to empower the laity or become disillusioned with the institution. Most, however, look for one form of "success" in one area or another or at least search for the correct "formula" that will produce results, whether material or spiritual. Few speak of the significance of vulnerability or the value of humility [in the sense of humiliation] of the minister. Yet, in a very literal sense, the priestly vocation is closely connected with the Cross, and not with "suc-

cess". It is identified with the broken Body of Christ, which the clergyman is called not simply to celebrate sacramentally, but in fact to imitate mystically. On the night of His Passion, the Lord said to His disciples:

"I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15).

The priestly authority lies not simply in the commission to break the bread and share the wine, but especially in the command to do as Christ did, namely to be broken and shared as body and blood. If the power of the world is expressed in the ability to compete and consume others in the struggle for the survival of the fittest, then "it should not be so among [us as the followers of Jesus]" (Mt 20:26). The power of the Kingdom is the authority to give from oneself and indeed to give even oneself in imitation of Him who said:

"Take, eat, this is my body ... [broken for you]; drink of this all of you, this is my blood ... shed [for you and] for many" (Mt 26:20-30; Lk 22:14-22).

And when Christ commanded:

"Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19),

He was "instituting" not merely a "liturgical service" but a life-style. In remembrance, in imitation, and in succession of Him, we are to be broken for others and shared with others.

Most readers will be familiar with the book entitled *The Wounded Healer*, one of the more eloquent and sensitive writings of the late Henri Nouwen (d. 1996). This concept of woundedness or brokenness may perhaps sound somewhat negative or unduly morbid to some. Yet the idea of the priest as a wounded healer, as a person who - before all else and beyond all else - is aware of *one's personal weakness as the very source of one's personal strength*, deepens and broadens the notion of the authority of ministry as vocation and service (*diakonia*). As Nouwen describes this profound spiritual axiom:

"Making one's own wounds a source of healing ... does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share" (p. 90).

In this paper, I would like to approach three such forms of brokenness and pain, which ministers must gradually learn to realize and recognize as "rising from the depth of the human condition which all people share" and as constituting the source of personal blessing and ordained vocation:

(i) *the reality of personal sinfulness* - And here, one should underline the truth that the acknowledgement of our sin itself can lead to *communion with God* if only we can avoid what might be characterized as "the cult of piety".

(ii) *the reality of physical or emotional brokenness*. Here, one would venture to propose the truth that the acceptance of disability can lead to a deeper sense of *community with one another*, if only we can avoid what one might call "the cult of perfection".

And (iii) *the reality of cosmic fallenness*. Here, one could suggest the truth that to assume responsibility for our distortion of the world's image can lead to the seeds of a

connection of the entire world, if only we can avoid what we shall describe as “the cult of pride”.

These areas are not readily or easily discussed in any detail by clergy, but they are in fact very much part of their identity and vocation, of their very authority as ministers. We are called to appreciate the brokenness within us and around us, and to enable others to appreciate it too.

(i) Sin and Brokenness

Perhaps one of the main reasons we often feel uncomfortable or are silent about our sins is that we consider them as frightening failures, rather than as fundamental forces which need to be responsibly confronted and properly directed. We regard them as weaknesses, and not in fact as strengths. Such a way, however, may promote a false image of humility. There is almost a sense of arrogance about such an attitude, inasmuch as it fosters an unhealthy sense of independence, instead of a feeling of interdependence. It leads ultimately to a disintegration or dismemberment of the community.

And this is precisely where the Church as a community offers the gift of forgiveness. For the Church - which is otherwise called the “communion of saints” or the “Body of Christ” - considers us as people who are interdependent upon one another and upon God. Therefore, the community of believers supports us in our trials:

“if one member suffers, [writes St. Paul], then all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice with it.” (1 Co 12:26)

However, we live of course within the context of western culture which highly values independence. We are partly formed by the socio-cultural message that we must pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Independence is something towards which we are asked to strive; dependence is considered as an evil and has to be avoided. To be dependent is to be weak; it is tolerable only for children, for the elderly, or for the sick. Dependence signifies disability; it indicates disease; and so it is disapproved in general by a society that expects efficiency and productivity.

Nevertheless, in a mysterious way clergy are more whole when they recognize that they are incomplete, when [they know that] they are missing something, when they lose or surrender something - whether voluntarily (through an ascetic discipline or effort) or involuntarily (through death, or divorce in the family, or some other form of brokenness, or broken-heartedness, or quite simply through a breakdown). As persons, we are more complete when we confess the hole in our soul; when we are vulnerable, and not when we are invincible; when we are brave enough to let go of unrealistic dreams and to know the reality of our limitations. Then the possibilities are indeed limitless, even transcend death itself:

“Listen [says St. Paul], I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet ... when this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality. Then the saying that is written

will be fulfilled: 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' (1 Co 15:51 f.; 54 f.)

My younger son, Julian, some time ago was reading a book called *The Missing Piece* written by the well-known children's books author Shel Silverstein. The book tells the story of a circle that was missing one piece. So it traveled far in search of the missing piece. This incompleteness, however, caused it to move rather slowly. And as a result, the circle was able to enjoy the scenery: along the way it admired the flowers and the oceans, it chatted with the butterflies and the worms, it soaked in the sunshine, the rain, and the snow. When, at last, it discovered its missing piece, it was quite naturally able to roll along at a much faster pace - but much too fast to be able to notice anything at all. So, the story ends, the circle stopped, left its piece on the side of the road, and moved on, rejoicing in the fact that it was missing a piece.

The irony is that we are not called to search for our missing piece in repentance. We are called to look for "the one thing that alone matters" (cf. Lk 10:42), for "the pearl of great price" (cf. Mt 13:45 f.), for Christ. And we discover Him, as well as ourselves, in others, in community, in the Body of Christ. Therefore, the Church is the place where we recognize that we are not called to be perfect, but to be merciful, "even as our Father who is in heaven" (cf. Mt 5:48, which is interpreted in the light of Lk 6:36). Because it is in the liturgy of the Church - which is "the work of all the people" - that we learn how to share (*koinonia*) with one another, how to be thankful (*eucharistia*) for what we are, and to be mindful (*anamnesis*) of how loved we are. There we are reminded of our vocation to serve, and not to be served (Mt 20:28); to be last and least, not first or foremost (Mt 20:16); to be authentic in all that we do, and not to hide behind any authority in whatever we actually do (cf. debtors).

In the communion of the Church, the members of the body that *seem* to be weaker are invaluable and indispensable. God has so constituted the Body of Christ that the members have the same care for one another. Each person furthermore contributes to his community, not by doing but by being. This is the way that St. Paul describes the dynamic:

"There are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand: 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet: 'I have no need of you'". On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with great respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Co 12:20-25)

The Liturgy, too, is not afraid to refer to our short-comings. It repeatedly speaks of our failings, our neglect, our hard-heartedness. Not because we are unaware of these or because the Church finds joy in reminding us of them, but because only in community we can come to know these weaknesses and overcome them. We misunderstand the message of the Liturgy if we hear it as a message of criticism, or correction, or con-

demnation. It is a message of communion, whereby we are taken to task, Sunday by Sunday, for ignoring, lying to, and hurting other people. And it is this knowledge which allows the healing to take place, and life to awaken. This knowledge is the "great understanding" that repentance is all about, according to *The Shepherd of Hermas*¹. And so we begin to feel at home, speaking openly and freely. We are enabled to make sense of the voices of our parents and of our past, to raise up the other ghosts from our growing-up years. If we are wise enough to understand our limitations, and generous enough to share, and strong enough to forgive, we will be in a position to achieve wholeness as well as to open the doors of paradise now, by widening and anticipating "the gates of repentance"².

We can refer to contemporary society as a culture of progress; in the Church however, particularly among the clergy, we have developed a cult of piety. This is because of our identification of sin and weakness with guilt and imperfection. As a result we try to avoid presenting any image of our sinful reality, of our broken existence. The clergy, for instance, often feel that they have to be there for others, that they are obliged to heal the wounds and bear the burdens of others. They forget that, in the Church, others, too, heal the clergy's *own* wounds and bear the clergy's *own* burdens.

We fail to recognize that our tragic ability to sin is our greatest gift from God. And it is only in the Church that our sin is accepted as an opportunity to encounter God, as an occasion for genuine repentance. For our sin is the authentic measure of our estrangement from and our relationship with God, the prerequisite for and starting-point of our genuine thirst for God. This, ultimately, is the joyful and hopeful "gospel" of the Church. This is the invitation to participate in the Body of Christ, to share in the communion of saints. Therefore we are no longer afraid in the Church but learn to love (cf. Jn 4:18)³.

(ii) Disability and Community

Beyond the spiritual brokenness which we have just considered there is yet another dimension that is not always readily appreciated in our communities, among our clergy, and perhaps even among ourselves. I am referring to the reality of physical, emotional, or intellectual disability. We do not talk about these things too much in society; and we certainly are not very comfortable to mention them in discussion in the Church. We belong to an age and a culture that refuses to accept mortality, vulnerability, and frailty. And yet, our society is, I feel, in many ways judged by the way it treats the disabled. The disabled show people, their relationships and their values for what they are, and for what they are worth. They remind us in a very critical way of our priorities and our preferences. I shall endeavor not to analyze mental or physical disability in abstract categories out of reverence for those who face such challenges. My own son, who has cerebral palsy, is a constant reminder to me that I have less to teach him than I have to learn from him. I shall also avoid entering too deeply into the debate about language: "disabled person" - "person with disabilities" - "differ-

¹ Mandate IV, ii, 2.

² Orthodox Hymn from the Sunday Matins of the Lenten or pre-Paschal period.

³ Cf. *Anthony*, Saying 32: „I no longer fear God, but I love Him.“

ently-abled" - "challenged"⁴. Instead I would like to address the *cult of perfection* - just as I addressed the cult of piety above - as it acts to stigmatize disability. I believe that we need to rehabilitate our sense of wholeness and community interdependence.

So let us begin with a simple question: Is a disabled person a whole person? One would expect that the natural response of most people would be "Of course." Yet, in spite of that immediate reaction, the issue is not so clear cut when we examine the historical tradition and ongoing practice of the Christian Church. Leaving aside the traditional sources, in particular the Canonical Tradition and current practice of the Orthodox Church, which leave a great deal to be desired in this regard, I would like to turn to the Canon of Scripture as an example for common interest. The Old Testament, for instance, has an ambivalent view of persons with disabilities. On the one hand, the disabled must not be mistreated or oppressed:

Lev 19:14 "You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind" (cf. also *Deut 27:18-19*).

At the same time, however, persons with disabilities were unable to undertake sacred roles:

Lev 21:17-20 "No one of our offspring... who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs (or crushed testicles)";

and the passage is continued with further language of this picturesque style. Even animals that appear lame or sick were deemed unacceptable before God (cf. *Mt 1:6-8* and *Lev 22:21-5*).

Central to such prohibitions was the concept of pollution and sin and conversely people's perception of purity and perfection. The latter concepts of so-called "purity" and "perfection" are of concern to me here. The exclusion of such persons - either from a community or from some sacred activity - symbolizes their less-than-acceptable status before the altar of God. Those who serve at the altar are seen as close to God, indeed as being in God's image. And there can surely be no "flaw" in the image of God. The sinful presumption in this way of thinking comes closer to a Hellenistic worldview rather than the patristic point of view since the idealization of beauty and wholeness, frequently accompanied by the exclusion of difference and brokenness, is more characteristic of classical Greek aestheticism rather than of healthy Christian asceticism.

One of the reasons for excluding disabled persons was the conjunction that was seen between disability and sin. The Old Testament sometimes explicitly represents disability as God's punishment for sin (cf. *Dtn 28:15; 28-29*), as we know also from the long account of Christ's healing of the blind man in the Gospel according to St. John:

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (*ch. 9:1-2*).

⁴ I highly recommend here the book by Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, Abingdon Press, 1994, esp. pp. 26-28.

Christ's response debunked the narrow idea of sin:

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (v. 3)

His "gentle touch" on the broken body of this blind man (cf. v. 6:11) allows us to move "from a theology of handicap to a theology of human being"⁵. The healing miracles of Jesus point beyond, to a world where humanity is no longer torn or divided.

The idea of sin is of course no longer used with reference to disability - though there is, among certain peoples and especially among those of the Mediterranean, an additional *cultural* stigma. However, today it is in fact replaced by the misconception of perfection. We witness this, for example, in the way people respond to the more subtle question whether disability should be overcome/ healed/ prevented? The traditional view is to say "yes" and to claim healing is necessary. This, by the way, further implies that disability is not only wrong, but is also *unacceptable*. Yet Jesus Himself did not heal everyone suffering from illness or disability. I think of the numbers of people around me who would prefer my son Julian being healed, as if somehow he is not whole, as if his disability renders others uneasy, as if it would be easier for others to bear rather than for Julian himself. It may be helpful to remember Christ's words:

"he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

This is precisely the reason why another person is born with sight - *so that God's works might be revealed in that person*; and this is precisely why my child was born with cerebral palsy - *so that God's works might be revealed in him*; and why each of us is the way he is - *so that God's works might be revealed in us*. It is so tempting, but at the same time ever so dangerous to present disabled persons as patient sufferers or heroic strugglers. In this way they become stereotypes for misplaced views about God's will or "normality". The way in which we exist reveals something about the diversity and beauty of God's glory and being.

In a human rights sense, persons with disabilities are entitled to services that enhance their well-being. And as a society, especially in certain countries, there is a great deal yet to be done in this matter. In a political sense, the disabled are entitled to a fair share of material resources. And as consumers, we have a great deal to learn and accept in this regard. In a community sense, the disabled ought to be accepted as full citizens. And as honest people, we must admit that we have to embrace them in this way. In a religious sense, the disabled are equal participants of faith and worship. And as churches, we are obliged to repent of our exclusive, elitist behavior. However, there is a further sense, the spiritual sense, according to which the disabled should be accepted just as they are.

Therefore our notion of perfection is of serious spiritual concern. For the disabled present an uncomfortable challenge - especially for us as clergy "endowed" with particular authority and "ordained" for particular functions - to the illusion of human greatness, perfection, and progress. We must stop seeing God as a projection of our own image; indeed, we are continually called to remember that we are made in God's image (Gn 1:26). We have already mentioned that, when Jesus appeared to Thomas after the Resurrection, He said to him:

⁵ Title of the book by David Palin, London 1992.

"Put your finger here and *see my hands*. Reach out your hand and *put it in my side*. Do not doubt, but believe" (Jn 20:27).

The risen Lord presented His *impaired* feet, His *wounded* hands and his *pierced* side. Disability does not contradict human-divine integrity. Rather, it becomes a new model of spiritual wholeness. Jesus rose *with* His wounds; so do we.

And returning to the notion of dependence on community, we might once again note our dependence on one another and on God, indeed on the entire Body of Christ. Sometimes we try to "tone down" this concept of dependence by speaking of interdependence. This suggests that we are "abled", that we consider ourselves as being in the benevolent position to give and receive. While there may be some truth to this, in the spiritual life it is crucial to know that we always receive; it is God who gives; we are always indebted to God (cf. Lk 17:10)

I would say, therefore, that dependence is a defining characteristic of the human person, an essential quality of the spiritual life, the quintessence of freedom in Christ. Of course, this is not congenial to the modern mind that considers humility as a form of abasement rather than a careful and accurate estimation of our place in the world. Dependence, or humility, is our true nature; independence houses pretence. I dare to suggest, that we pay closer attention to the disabled and to our own disability, because it is in them that we discover authentic models of spirituality and ways of salvation. Disability can show us what true humanity is - far from perfect, and yet totally loved by God. The reality of disability must serve as a criticism of our illusions and our ambitions. It reminds us that we are called simply to "be", and not to "do" or "have". Spiritual growth is not obtained by effort or achievement. Gifts are bestowed, not earned. They must prayerfully and humbly be awaited. This "silence", as our mystical tradition would perhaps prefer to call it, is the proper corrective to our incessant activity or our clerical activism. It provides an authentic measure of our spiritual standing.

This notion of prayerful waiting brings me to my third and final expression of our brokenness, as we stand - or kneel - before the twenty-first century. I am referring to our attitude toward the shattered world around us in the environmental crisis that we face. For I am convinced that the brokenness of creation reveals a further aspect of ministry and authority.

(iii) *The Shattered Environment*

There is a paradox in our concern for the environment: in spite of our admirable efforts to respond to the global eco-crisis, the situation is deteriorating. We are becoming all the more articulate about the contributing factors to the destruction of the ozone layer, all the more informed of the alarming statistics and prospects. So why is it that we are still so distant from any solution?

A simply answer, at least from the perspective of a theologian and a clergyman, is that we are not doing what we are "ordained" to do. And as an orthodox clergyman, I am called to preach the death and resurrection of Christ, to hear the confessions of sinners, to shed tears for the world, and to bury the dead.

Indeed the first step in ecological repentance is precisely confession, not any form of denial or repression. I am convinced that the most mystical of experiences is the profound realization of who we are and what we have done. We are privileged to know the effects of the world debt crisis on international poverty. This is why we have currently coined the term "eco-justice". Yet with regard to the environment, it is only proper that we recognize that we are in fact not the "good Samaritans" but the "highway robbers" (Lk 10:29f.). It is an unacceptable form of self-righteousness to imagine that we have truly cared for this world; it is God who has granted the beauty of the world, beyond and before any of our frail efforts. The best that we can do is to maintain this beauty, caringly and carefully, as its stewards.

When we assume responsibility for our sin, just as God took responsibility by "assuming the sin of the world" (cf. the Great Doxology) in all its horror, cruelty, and pain, then the situation may be gradually transformed and recreation begins to happen.

Think of it in this way: I cut down a tree. I want, in all fairness, to be creative - to build a home perhaps, or enjoy a boat. Yet I simultaneously create a problem. And so, in making a home, I have - perhaps unwillingly, possibly even unwittingly - prepared a coffin. This is not a far-fetched image. It is the startling revelation and natural consequence of the interconnectedness of all things. For in cutting a tree, I have also cut down the level of oxygen. I have buried not just the tree and the earth, but myself and my very own child. Now I behold my own soul and my own child laying in the coffin, in the earth's very soul. How can I simply dare to preach about the environment, unless I personally bear the responsibility for the tragedy of its brokenness? How can I think that I am part of the solution, until I have first realized how bound I am with the problem itself?

Instead I must kneel silently; I must weep. The dismissal hymn of the ascetic Fathers and Mothers tells of the sacred way in which "the stream of tears gives fruit to the sterile desert". St. John of Damascus (d. 749) reminds us that "the whole world is the living icon of God's face". And Dostoevsky exhorts us to embrace the earth: "the whole of it and every grain of sand". So I must venerate the earth. I must desire back my child. I must grieve the loss, perceive the sin, sense the decay, sincerely want back even the tree. I must ask for forgiveness. For this is my only hope of resurrection. And so it is death again that teaches me about life; brokenness is once more what brings about healing.

So when they tell me that there is a hole in the ozone-layer, I feel nothing ... until and unless I sense the hole, unless I grieve the missing link, recognize my own child in that hole. Only then God's hand is able to reach through the hole and transform the emptiness into the openness of His grace. Only when I can see in the face of the world the lineaments on the face of my own child, and the face of all faces - the image of Jesus Christ - that I also recognize in each tree a face, and a name, and a time, and a place, and a voice, and a cry that longs to be heard. "Can we," asks St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), "ask for a louder voice than that" as we move into the twenty-first century?

My *confession* before the environment then becomes a *conversion*. And so I can change my attitude to, and my treatment of nature, in order to begin a *conversation*

with my environment, a conversation of equals. I have learned that I should not treat people like things; but I also need to understand that I cannot treat things like things.

My presence, then, in this world should enhance and embrace nature, not threaten or destroy it. I should neither be arrogant in my relationship towards the world; but neither should I be autistic - locked up in my own perception of what the world is and has to offer. There is always a larger reality, a greater economy. The context of creation is larger than any single person, than you or I. And so there again is a quality of humility involved here.

Pride, curiously, is a uniquely human quality; it belongs to Adam. All other species seem to know - instinctively, in fact - where they fit in the order of things. Human beings alone seem unable to understand just when to stop, how far to go, just how much to gather. There is a kind of "cult of pride" that characterizes humanity, and the only remedy for our excess in consumption is asceticism, an ascetic restraint or discipline, which acknowledges that the earth belongs to heaven, not to us. It is a matter of doing with less - in terms of food, clothing, consumption, work, entertainment ... It is the virtue of travelling light; and we can always manage with a lot less than we might imagine. An ascetic approach not only assists us to be more sensible in our attitude to the world, but also to be more sensitive to the people around us. For the truth is that we respond to nature with the same delicacy, the same tenderness with which we respond to people. By some connection that we do not always understand, the willingness to exploit one becomes the eagerness to exploit the other.

St. Nikiphoros of the Greek Island of Chios (d. 1831) once preached that "people are poor if they do not love the trees ... If you do not love trees, you do not love God." Clergy are called to know how to serve at the altar of the heart, just as how to minister at the altar of our parish church - but also how to celebrate God's presence in the cathedral of the universe. We must communicate the truth that if we lose the forest, then we sacrifice not just an esthetical but in fact an essential quality of life: we lose our imagination and our inspiration, we lose the mystic of nature and the mystery of life, we lose our sensitivity and (as mentioned above) our own soul. The most endangered species is not the whale; and it is not even the human being. It is the very earth that we all tread, and that we all share. This is our home (the "eco-crisis" is the crisis of our *oikos*, our dwelling-place) where we, whales and people alike, live and die. This is where we must concentrate our efforts, just like the coffin in the space where I must focus my attention and pray for resurrection.

Conclusion

As we stand at the threshold of the third millennium, it may be tempting to believe that we are, as clergy, to review our past achievements and failures as well as to calculate our future visions and programs. Perhaps we are, above all, accountable - before God and people - for not embracing our failures and not accepting our weakness, ultimately for not valuing and validating our brokenness. The Scriptural model of the priestly vocation should not be sought in the arrival of Moses in the Promised Land, but rather in the departure of Abraham into the dark unknown. This is, in a sense, the mystical side of our vocation, the dark side of discipleship. Yet this dark side is then

mysteriously transformed into the light that sheds the love of God in a dark world. It is no wonder that the Church Fathers speak of God Himself in terms and images of darkness: for it is in darkness that we see God:

"The darkness", says the Psalmist, "is not darkness with you, but the night is as clear as day. The darkness and the light are both alike" (Ps 139:12).

To close with the words once more of Henri Nouwen:

"Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated His new creation" (p. 98).

Yet such a "new creation" can only begin to dawn when we are, as clergy, prepared to face the darkness that is within, and not anxious to validate or justify any authority from without. Then, as the Greek poet Nikiphoros Vrettakos almost mystically observes in his poem "The first thing of creation":

"I don't know how
But (suddenly) there is no darkness left at all
The sun has poured itself inside me
From a thousand wounds."