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Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests

Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Chapter II, n. 9) – This excerpt on the relation of priests and laity sheds light on the organic cooperation between priests and laypersons in Opus Dei.

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Though priests of the New Testament, in virtue of the sacrament

of Orders, exercise the most outstanding and necessary office of father and teacher among and for the People of God, they are nevertheless, together with all Christ's faithful, disciples of the Lord, made sharers in his Kingdom by the grace of God's call (cf. 1 Thes 2:12; Col 1:13). For priests are brothers among brothers (cf. Mt 23:8; Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, p. 647) with all those who have been reborn at the baptismal font. They are all members of one and the same Body of Christ, the building up of which is required of everyone (cf. Eph 4:7, 16; Constitutions of the Apostles, VIII, 1, 20).

Priests, therefore, must take the lead in seeking the things of Jesus Christ, not the things that are their own (cf. Phil 2:21). They must work together with the lay faithful, and conduct themselves in their midst after the example of their Master, who among

men "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as redemption for many" (Mt 20:28). Priests must sincerely acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity and the part proper to them in the mission of the Church. And they should hold in high honor that just freedom which is due to everyone in the earthly city. They must willingly listen to the laity, consider their wants in a fraternal spirit, recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to recognize the signs of the times. While trying the spirits to see if they be of God (cf. 1 Jn 4:1), priests should uncover with a sense of faith, acknowledge with joy and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity. Among the other gifts of God, which are found in abundance among the laity, those are worthy of special mention by which

not a few of the laity are attracted to a higher spiritual life. Likewise, they should confidently entrust to the laity duties in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action; in fact, they should invite them on suitable occasions to undertake worlds on their own initiative (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 37).

Finally priests have been placed in the midst of the laity to lead them to the unity of charity, "loving one another with fraternal love, eager to give one another precedence" (Rom 12:10). It is their task, therefore, to reconcile differences of mentality in such a way that no one need feel himself a stranger in the community of the faithful. They are defenders of the common good, with which they are charged in the name of the bishop. At the same time, they are strenuous assertors of the truth, lest the faithful be carried about by every

wind of doctrine (cf. Eph 4:14). They are united by a special solicitude with those who have fallen away from the use of the sacraments, or perhaps even from the faith. Indeed, as good shepherds, they should not cease from going out to them.

Mindful of the prescripts on ecumenism (cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism), let them not forget their brothers who do not enjoy full ecclesiastical communion with us.

Finally, they have entrusted to them all those who do not recognize Christ as their Savior.

The Christian faithful, for their part, should realize their obligations to their priests, and with filial love they should follow them as their pastors and fathers. In like manner, sharing their cares, they should help their priests by prayer and work insofar as possible so that their priests might

more readily overcome difficulties and be able to fulfill their duties more fruitfully (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 37).

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