



Making it an Opportunity:

An Interview with Konrad Noronha SJ

How do you generally evaluate the major crises facing the Catholic church?

KN: There are many crises rearing their heads in the Catholic Church today. The first three crises according to me would be workaholicism leading to spiritual dryness, financial mismanagement, and inappropriate behavior. A couple of reasons why these crises have reared their heads could be because a priest believes he is uniquely able to discern God's will and judge other people's behavior and he believes that he is spiritually above others and deserves special recognition. This is because a certain amount of narcissism is present in Catholic priests which has made the 'flock' feel left out in many ways.

When I talk about a priest and the 'flock,' I think the word 'relationships' is important. Relationships need to be forged. These include personal and administrative relationships. Personal relationships need to take into consideration the evangelical counsels that priests profess, and administrative relationships must consider training, education, skills, and networking. Therefore, there necessarily is a call for dialogue, collaboration and decision making on a war footing. Also, it is imperative that there is more accountability and transparency in the dealings of the Catholic clerics.

What are your views on the crisis, especially with regards to the sexual morality?

KN: Morality can be defined in various ways. It can be understood as ethical behavior - philosophical, professional, Christian and more specifically Catholic. It is usually about decision making or making choices. Morality is more a theological term where decision making is governed by religious tenets. Persons in faith traditions often fall back on their faith in decision making.

The crises in sexual morality for those in faith traditions seems to have arisen because of the blurring of lines between what is right and what is wrong. It involves a dissociative cognitive process that leads to a decision being made in opposition to what is right according to religious tenets. This blurring of lines in the context of faith raises many questions, and if unanswered and not countered can lead the faithful astray. Newer ways need to be implemented in the Catholic Church to make the flock identify, understand and stay away from all that is wrong.

There is also a decrease in the vocation to the priesthood and religious life. What is your impression?

KN: Some of the reasons for the decrease in vocations to the priesthood could be related to decreasing religiosity and spirituality in families, the overpowering influence of media and consumerism and peer group pressures. Fewer children in families is also a problem. What is encouraging though is that older men are joining the priesthood and religious life. This demonstrates choices that are personally stronger, and which are in opposition to claims of a consumeristic society, media, and peer groups. Older persons who join the clergy and religious life know fully well why they join.

To address the decrease in vocations, there could be three levels of responses by clergy and religious (1) inculcating the idea that priesthood is an option when making a career choice (2) addressing issues of studying and working youth through a wide variety of programs. Such programs might light a spark and a

desire in them to serve the Church in a more specific way and (3) priests should model and display their priesthood.

What can the Church do currently to make the crisis an opportunity for growth?

KN: Firstly, it must be said that most clergy and religious are not men in crises. Most of them are well integrated, make a lot of sacrifices and give up a lot in the service of the Church. Secondly, there are several documents the Church uses that govern the formation of clergy and religious. Thirdly, the Church's contribution to various aspects of nation and community building, as well as in the lives of the faithful should also be emphasized e.g. health, education and social work.

There are three points that I consider key in the formation of clergy and religious, which should be looked at critically. They are early and ongoing training in managerial skills, addressing crises at points of transition which are psychological, spiritual and in particular careerism. There should be an emphasis on formation for mission that is other-oriented.

It is also important that there be some form of advertising of the good works done by the Catholic Church. This is important as most of the services of the Catholic Church counter many of the values expounded today like consumerism, wealth, pride and power. Bringing to focus the good works that the Church and clergy and religious are doing, takes away the focus solely from those who have failed to what is being done in the reign of God while accepting the failures.

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