

THE CONGREGATION: ECCLESIOLOGICAL DYNAMICS

By Ken Barley

1 ...
... We've written songs about, 'You can't have a local church without a cadre,' a congregation can't be a congregation without a cadre, a cadre can't be a cadre without a congregation. What would be a proper analogy? It's hard to use the body anymore to say that without a heart you can't be a body...

1 How do you get hold of the cadre, congregation, and parish? The parish is where the happenings of God are taking place. The cadre is that group of people that are always looking at the parish, that are always looking to see what new thing the Lord of Heaven and earth, or the Lord of History is bringing into being and taking out of being. What the signs of the times are is always being revealed in the midst of the parish. Here is where suffering takes place. Here is where creation takes place. It is as though the cadre were at the receiving end for signals that the parish transmits, signals about what in the world it is that is happening. The cadre then takes those signals and recreates and builds the models that enable this congregation, this group of people to respond to what is going on in the midst of creation.

Today the particular area that I want to talk about is the pole of the Congregation. To talk about the congregation is to talk of the seminary, the college, and the sodality. In the document of Council IV on the inside cover of the back page, the whole model is laid out in detail as a beginning. As many of you know, when these documents are written, they are written with a rationale. Sometimes the chart revealing the rationale comes with the document. In this case it didn't. Maybe if you've studied it and tried to figure it out, you can begin to sense after why the rationale is not spelled out in the chart. It gets pretty complex before it's through.

Let's turn to Paragraph 41, which is on the congregation to get a sense after one of the rationales used in writing this document. The way this particular document works is that each section is divided into four parts. The first of those four parts deals with the dynamic of the congregation. It deals with the congregation as a whole in relationship to the seminary, in relationship to the sodality, and in relationship to the college. It spells out the dynamic that takes place in the congregation between each of those bodies. The form of that dynamic is that the congregation in its relationship to the seminary, the sodality, and the college serves the function of being an agent of judgment. It has a judgment that it always makes upon each of these. It has a judgment that it makes upon the seminary. It has a judgment that it makes upon the sodality. It has a judgment that it makes upon the college. Then it has a supportive role. It dynamically supports the seminary, the sodality, and the college. Then in addition to the supportive role, it has a creative function, or a function dynamic that is served in relationship to each of these. As you move through the document you'll see that there are really three arrows or three dynamics that the congregation plays in relationship to each of these.

Then the document does the same thing in talking about the sodality. First of all it talks about the relationship of the sodality to the congregation, dynamically. Then in addition to that it talks about the relationship of the sodality to the seminary, and it talks about the relationship of the sodality to the college. It does that in terms of judgment, support and creation. The third is the seminary, the fourth is the college. In each case it does this kind of butterflying, or clover-leafing kind of

spelling out of the relationship dynamically of each to each, speaking first of all of the judgment that the seminary has on the sodality, how it is that the seminary supports the sodality, and what the creative role of the seminary is in the life of the sodality. So you can begin to see the complexity that's behind this whole document, just at the congregational level. And it not only moves through the congregation, but the same kind of thing happens as the cadre is talked about and the parish is worked with.

To turn to talk about the congregation and the dynamics that take place between each of the parts, the congregation and the sodality, the congregation and the seminary, and the congregation and the college. First of all I'd want to talk about the relationship of the sodality to the congregation. The role that the sodality plays in relationship to the whole congregation is to call the congregation to love the world. This dynamic is what's taking place. You can see that what's behind all of this is the Ecclesiola. Or what we've been working with in our evening time is this whole dynamical relationship. What we've done is each evening pull part of it out and stand present self-consciously to that particular going-on-ness. On Tuesday nights we've pulled the college out, particularly with the conversations and the team meetings. Wednesdays we've pulled the seminary out and work particularly with intellectual care. Thursdays we've pulled the whole area of sodality out. In one sense nobody is really clear yet on what the Ecclesiola is. We've been experimenting with it in a number of different ways. But it is at least a hybrid of attempting to bring self-consciousness to the activity that takes place in every congregation wherever there is a congregation. This is not something that's different, that's imposed upon a congregation, and therefore you wouldn't call that a congregation. Wherever you see the activity of spirit care--and what I mean by spirit care is caring in the depths for a human being. You're concerned not just with whether he's got enough food, or whether he's properly prepared for that day. What you're caring about is his whole stance in the midst of life, and in particular his stance as a revolutionary, or as spirit man in the midst of life. Wherever you see spirit care going on in the midst of life, that's the college dynamic. And you could see just spirit care and nothing else.

Then to add to that the intellectual care. That's really what the seminary is all about. The congregation is always a caring unit that enables its people to move into the midst of the parish. That requires not only spirit care but intellectual care. Then for the sodality, I guess you'd talk about model care, or planning care. Here's where the models or the plans are shaped which enable this congregation to move out into the parish. Where ever these three things are going on, there is a congregation, whether there is a building or whether there is not a building, whether you've got a lot of people or a handful of people. Wherever these dynamics are going on, there's the congregation.

The word 'Ecclesiola' is not another word for congregation. 'Congregation' is these dynamics. What Ecclesiola is is a hybrid, a word that has been created. Ecclesiola has the meaning of, 'little church.' It is a means of bringing self-consciousness of these activities which are going on. The Ecclesiola is not automatically the congregation. In a moment of the spirit it might become the congregation, but in the first instance it is not that at all. It's a way of bringing self-consciousness to these dynamics. What we're about each evening is to sharpen our senses, sharpen our awareness, so that we'll be able to see in the midst of the congregation, where these spirit activities are going on, and also to sharpen our senses as to how we can better enable that activity to take place in the midst of that congregation. It's that way that I'd want to talk about the Ecclesiola.