

INCULTURATION OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND MORALS THROUGH PASTORAL MINISTRY TO PROSTITUTION

The workshop centered on a paper by Jean-Guy Nadeau from the University of Montreal, which was followed by a discussion among those in attendance. Nadeau's paper was based on part of his Ph.D dissertation published as *La prostitution, une affaire de sens. Études de pratiques sociales et pastorales* (Montreal: Fides, 1987, 480pp.).

The thesis of the paper was that a body which modifies its practice so modifies its self image, and vice versa. The same process occurs with the church: modifying its practice, the church modifies its ecclesiology, and vice versa. The history of pastoral ministry toward prostitution, which is one of tension between practices of reclusion/imprisonment and of solidarity, and between ecclesiologies of the virginal Body of Christ and of the pilgrim People of God, exemplifies this interaction.

Starting with the social roles which prostitutes played in Virginia City (Nevada) and in Florence (Italy) and their subsequent expulsion from the many positive social functions which they played, the first part of the paper focused on the interaction between church, society and prostitution. The second and third parts dealt with the main trends of the wider pastoral history of the church's approach to prostitution as well as the relationship of pastoral ministry with ambient culture. This report will focus on the second and main part of Nadeau's paper.

History points out that a major pastoral trend towards prostitution resulted in the confinement and imprisonment of prostitutes, be it in the where's and how's of their prostitutive activities, or in their repentant confinement in expiation, reclusion and tears. These women thus found themselves either confined in brothels and prostitutive functions or in convents and penitential functions. The failures of pastoral attempts to break that cycle of confinement and enclosure tell much about that first trend. Ignatius of Loyola, John Eudes and the like, all met with ecclesiastical opposition and scoffing when they tried to open houses where repentant women could live like and with decent women. Such efforts went against the two pastoral tendencies of the times, one to distinguish prostitutes from decent women, the other to insure their salvation through repentance and reclusion.

This pastoral practice of confinement was based on an ecclesiology of the church as the Body of Christ which needed to be distinguished and protected from the other, stigmatized as sinful. As can be seen in the Book of Revelation, or to a lesser degree in Paul, from very early on, virginity was used to single out or characterize the church, and prostitution was used as a metaphor to stigmatize and label the church's adversaries and to distinguish the church from them as well as from the world. If the word prostitute comes from the Latin *pro-stare* (to stand in front of, to stand for), one can say that the prostitute has well played her role, being

made to stand metaphorically in front of the church so that the latter could identify herself against the former. Referring again to symbolic interactionism, Nadeau remarked that this is precisely the role which prostitutes play for their clients: men go to them to act "like men" and be recognized as such.

The second pastoral trend through history, which we find in contemporary practices, emerges from a different context determined by critical discourses—socialist and feminist as well as sociological and psychological—along with the rise of Catholic Action. So rooted, these pastoral practices do not center exclusively on the activity of the prostitute but on society and church themselves. They thus recover a trend of the patristic discourse which stigmatized a society in which prostitution flourished, but they also go beyond it, in their attention to and understanding of prostitutes and in their solidarity and struggle along with them. As the action of Jesus in John 8:1-11 suggests, the pastoral spotlight is thus turned away from the prostitute, who until then bore all the heat of its light, to society which hid itself in its shadows. These new pastoral practices attend to prostitutes not only when they want to change their ways of living, but also when they are still active in prostitution. For instance, the French church denounced the arbitrary fiscal taxation of prostitutes which was added to their judicial repression, along with attempts to confine them anew to brothels and *maisons closes*. The church also gave them shelter and support in their 1975 strike.

The ecclesiological model underlying this more contemporary ministry is one of the pilgrim People of God. According to this ecclesiology, it is the whole church which has to be evangelized and journey forward to conversion with the prostitutes. This new ecclesial consciousness and pastoral practice thus moves us away from a marginal ministry aimed at marginalized people, a fringe ministry aimed at outsiders, to an all encompassing ecclesial ministry experienced by and in conjunction with marginalized people as well as others.

The ministries dealing with prostitution have been generally well adapted to their times and ecclesiologies. Based on a model of a pure body, and of the mercy of God bound to the cessation of the deviant's activity, pastoral ministries of reclusion were aimed at the conversion of the deviants whom the church acknowledged only if they conformed to its morals. When that model changed to an interactive model of the people of God in which all Christians are pilgrims joined together in their journey towards the kingdom and all needful of God's mercy, the ministries focused on prostitution changed accordingly.

What we witness here is a major evolution in both pastoral ministry and ecclesiology, which is bound to the evolution of culture. In our age of communication, individuality, concern for human rights as well as social responsibility, we do not value imprisonment or reclusion as much as did our predecessors. Salvation is not mainly sought in reclusion but in better interaction with others, particularly those who seem to be the most oppressed by our social system. Being the ones who benefit the most from that system, we are then the first ones called to conversion.

This is also true of our relationship to prostitution and its functions. As Nadeau remarked, men make up the majority in what is called feminine prostitution. Notwithstanding male pimps, policemen, lawyers, judges, moralists or field workers in the area, we find many more male clients than female prostitutes. True,

it is the women who are prostituted but we cannot keep silent about men's roles in that activity and the ones exercised by the media, legislators, tourist agencies and even the church. We well know the strength of ideology, the strength of social and religious representation in human praxis. Prostitution does not exist in a vacuum. As such, it is not the mere meeting between a client and a prostitute which we believe it to be. Each of them, as well as their meeting, is preceded by social and personal images of men and women and of their relationships. We know the role the church has played in establishing those images, as the church of Quebec recently reminded us about marital violence (*Violence in Heritage*). What is true of prostitution is also true of the ministries attending to it. They do not exist in a vacuum either, but in particular cultures and communities that harbour determined representations not only of men's and women's relationships, but also of the social and personal factors leading to and sustaining prostitution.

To conclude, Nadeau reaffirmed the value and importance of the prostitution metaphor and of pastoral ministry with regard to prostitution. If it is true that God keeps his love for his/her prostitute people and church, as tradition often stated, is not our relationship to prostitutes called to be a sacrament of God's relationship to us and to the church? In the end, is it not our faith in God's love for us all and for the church which is at stake and on trial in our pastoral relation to prostitutes and prostitution?

Discussion

The discussion focused more on actual pastoral questions than on historical or theological ones. Some questions concerned the political position the Canadian church took and the one the church should take about prostitution: legalization and regulation, decriminalization, criminalization? Would decriminalization help to remove part of the prostitute's stigma or be counterproductive by encouraging more women to turn to prostitution? Nadeau said that criminalization has an effect on prostitutes' leaving the trade, although on another level it mainly helps "to renew the stock" as policemen told him. As for the regulation of prostitution, he went along with S. Brownmiller and the Canadian bishops saying that it could give support to the notion that the use of a woman's body is a right accorded to men by money, if not by God.

Health issues were also raised about drugs and AIDS. Prostitutes seem to be more conscious than clients about the latter, answered Nadeau. In Montreal, they will often use condoms against the clients' will, which reveals much about the clients' relationship to reality and history. Nadeau believes that clients go to prostitutes not only for sexual release, which they could get by themselves, but also to meet someone, whatever the moral worth of such a meeting, in order to be center stage with someone playing the part they decided.

It was also felt that ministries of reclusion and of solidarity, the latter being favored by Nadeau, were both missing the point which would be better answered by a ministry of justice and nontolerance of evil. Taking this comment seriously, Nadeau went on to say that a ministry of solidarity is one way of trying to be just and of trying to understand what justice might be from a prostitute's point of view. Attention was then called to social analysis of violence, sexism and poverty, asking for the demythologizing of the notion of women's agency in prostitution, on

one hand, and of women's submission, on the other hand—the feminist critique can go both ways on this issue, Nadeau noted. Some felt that it was disgusting to be sitting there talking about a ministry of solidarity with these victims without moving as a church to strategize and seriously criticize the structural problems which keep perpetuating prostitution. A ministry of solidarity may be necessary but we cannot stop there. The whole church and society must be converted with regard to violence and abuse, and with regard to indifference, in order to change such a situation which appeared to be more aggressive to the women than to the men attending the workshop.

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