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Pastors Must Serve the People, Not Be Served

Pope Francis

Clericalism is a danger to the Catholic Church not only because on a practical level it undermines the role of laity in society, but because theologically it “tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace” of all believers, whether they are lay or clergy, Pope Francis said. “No one has been baptized a priest or bishop,” the pope said in a letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. The fundamental consecration of all Christians occurs at baptism and is what unites all Christians in the call to holiness and witness. In the letter, released at the

“A shepherd cannot conceive of himself without his flock, whom he is called to serve.”

Vatican April 26, Pope Francis said he wanted to ensure that a discussion begun with members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America March 4 “doesn’t fall into the void.” The topic of the March discussion, he said, was on the public role of the laity in the life of the people of Latin America. In the letter, Pope Francis said that in lay Catholics’ work for the good of society and for justice, “it is never the pastor who tells laypeople what they must do and say; they know this better than we do.” He said, “It is illogical and therefore impossible to think that we as pastors should have the monopoly on solutions for the multitude of challenges that contemporary life presents.” The pope sent the letter in Spanish and Italian to the cardinal; a Vatican translation of the letter follows, copyright © 2016 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

at the end of the meeting of the Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, I had the opportunity to meet with all those attending the assembly, during which there was an exchange of ideas and impressions concerning the public participation of the laity in the life of our peoples.

Now I would like to recount what was shared in that encounter and to follow it up with a reflection on those days so that the spirit of discernment and reflection “doesn’t fall into the void”; so that it may help us and continue to encourage us to better serve the faithful holy people of God.

It is precisely this image from which I

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