

Chapter 11

Priests, Women and the Anima

The Celibate Catholic Priest and the Anima

The sexual misconduct of priests has made headlines around the world whether it deals with pedophilia in the United States or the sexual abuse of nuns in Africa, and so forth. The institutional Church was slow off the mark in addressing these issues, but now in many places pastoral guidelines are being put in place to try to confront these problems more effectively.

But the critical question remains whether it is going beyond responding to this or that particular case and actually looking at the root of these problems.

Donald Cozzens in *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* writes:

"Underneath the scrambling efforts of bishops and vicars to respond effectively and pastorally to the crisis, questions about the meaning and implications of the violating behaviors were studiously avoided. We became absorbed with the task at hand: how to handle the present crisis, *this crisis*. I recall no thoughtful discussion about the causes of the problem its meaning or implications. Attempts to do so were often met with a certain suspicion that a particular agenda was at work."¹

Eugene Kennedy points to the same underlying problem, and speaks of "the controlled dialogue of the church where investigations of the impact of ecclesiastical culture on the psycho-sexual maturity of seminarians and priests are neither contemplated nor encouraged, despite widespread sexual conflicts among Church personnel... The epidemic of sexual abuse by priests and other religious personnel reveals the long-denied structural faults of that environment."²

Priests are, of course, not alone in dealing with sexual and gender issues. It is part of the human condition, and if we

use Catholic laymen as a point of comparison, we will see that they exhibit a wide variety of similar problems: extramarital relationships, spousal abuse, child abuse, etc., etc. And at the heart of the question of the psycho-sexual maturity, whether of Catholic laymen or priests, lies in what C.G. Jung called the anima.

What is the anima? It is a feminine dimension of a man's psyche intimately connected with his ability to relate to women and to express his feelings in regard to them. In every relationship a man has with a woman he is also relating to his own anima. But the question of the anima takes on a special character in the lives of celibate priests. Most priests, in virtue of their ministry, are in constant contact with women, and no matter what his ministry, can never escape from his own anima. She is always influencing his feelings whether he is conscious of it or not.

The Anima, or Men and Their Feelings

At first glance Jung's psychology might appear quiet esoteric, speaking as it does of archetypes, the self, individuation, and so forth. What could all that mean, and more to the point, what could it do for us in our daily lives? For any psychology has to be ultimately judged by how well it contributes to our understanding of ourselves.

So let's put Jung's psychology to the test and see what he had to say about the anima, or men and their feelings. As a general rule men's feelings are less developed than those of women.³ They are less conscious, or put in another way, more immersed in the unconscious, and this gives men's feelings many of their outstanding characteristics. There will be men, for example, who will deny they have any feelings at all, or minimize the value of the feelings they do have, and the role they play in their lives. They pride themselves on being rational, of making use of logic, of advancing by well-reasoned judgments. And it is often true that this part of their personality is more developed and accessible to them. But paradoxically, the more men pride themselves on their logical and rational natures, the more

powerfully, albeit unconsciously, they can be affected by their feelings. It is as if there is a fundamental psychological rule: acknowledge your feelings and give them a place in their life, or else they will enchant you or bedevil you, and somehow have their say.

It is this realm of men's feelings, especially in as much as they are closely bound to the unconscious, that Jung called the anima. More formally we could say that the anima is the feminine side of a man, or more graphically, inside every man is a woman or women whom he must come to terms with. And it is one of the great works of a man's life to try to relate to this woman. Indeed, we could say that a man could not have a relationship with any woman, without this interior woman becoming activated and wanting to have her say.

Is all this some bizarre fantasy which is the product of Jung's unbalanced mind? Not at all. It is, in fact, extremely practical. Clearly there is no woman inside in the sense of an actual person. Rather, a man's feelings to the degree that they are unconscious and immersed in the unconscious take on a certain life of their own and act as if they have a kind of autonomous nature, a partial personality, if you will. They form an energetic center, or archetype, that Jung calls the anima.

This anima cannot simply be ignored because it is connected to the ego and forms one energetic system with it. Deny the anima, that is, your tender feeling side, and that is not the end of the matter. She will become offended and strike back, and can make your life miserable. This is not hyperbole, but rather a simple fact. Not to give the anima her due is to reject a vital dimension of our very psychological being. If we push away the anima we cause her to become negative and hostile towards us. In the worst of cases a war ensues in which the ego tries to eliminate or kill the anima and the anima strikes back by way of feelings of both rejection and desire, and this interior war can easily emerge from their depth and deeply influence our relationships with real flesh and blood women. It is hardly surprising from this perspective that it is men who commit the vast majority of violent crimes

against persons, crimes in which they act as if they had no feelings, or put more precisely, as if they are in the grip of terrible feelings that have overridden their ability to relate to other people as persons like themselves.

Even if things never disintegrate to this degree, the failure of men to relate to the anima brings in its wake all sorts of mischief. Men imagine, for example, that the woman they fall in love with is actually the way they imagine her to be. They fail to realize that the woman within is constantly projecting herself outside and mingling with the woman without in such a pervasive and subtle way that it is extremely difficult to separate the two. Men have to make a great effort to relate to these two women, or in the case of a married man, to be married to two women, one inner and one outer, at once, and it doesn't matter whether a man is married or not, or even if he is committed to lifelong celibacy, he still needs to relate to his own anima.

In short, there is a dimension of a man's psyche that acts like a woman, a woman that is not seen clearly, one who appears for a moment and then disappears. She is, in turn, beautiful and alluring, obsessing us with desire, and then perhaps scornful and rejecting, driving us to contemplate dark deeds. But her conduct is not simply capricious. It is often strongly influenced by the conscious attitude we take towards her. If we are rejecting and cold, she will respond accordingly. If we are welcoming and loving, her face can become beautiful and deeply harmonious feelings can flood our hearts.

The hardest thing about the anima is believing that she actually exists. Men will deny it vehemently all the while their rigorously logical plans are awash with feelings from below. They deny the existence of the anima, not only because she is unconscious, and therefore hidden from view, but also she can be young and immature, and not in harmony with the manly image they have of themselves, or she can even be ugly and repugnant because she has been ignored and abused for so long.

There are many facets to a man's anima. He can be happily married and yet besieged by fantasies in which he is trying

to relate to other women. These fantasies are the other faces of the anima, and if he fails to understand that they are interior aspects of his own personality that must be integrated, and begins to act out these fantasies, he can destroy his own happiness and that of his wife and family. Men can be obsessed by the hunt for the perfect woman. Real life women are never quite good enough. But what they are hunting for is once again to make contact with their own deep feelings, and a perpetual chase after women will never accomplish this goal. The anima can also be split. Men can put some women up on a pedestal and worship them as if they are goddesses, but they can also abase other women or even the same woman, and treat her in a crude and abusive way. In essence, men live out their anima feelings and fantasies in their relationships with real women. The anima can also be caught up in a tug of war in which the ego tries to drag her to consciousness while the instinctive depths of the unconscious resists. This interior drama of great importance for psychological maturation gets projected outward and confuses men's outer relationships with women. In more extreme cases men who cannot make contact with their own deep inner feelings, with their own anima, run the risk of hurting themselves and others. They may become obsessed, for example, with younger and younger girls with whom they want to have inappropriate sexual contact, and who they sometimes injure and kill. We are rightly horrified by this behavior, but it is important for us to understand the inner psychological situation that generates it. All in all, it is one of life's great challenges for a man to learn how to relate to his own anima.

The Anima and Celibacy

These anima problems afflict the celibate priest in a particular way. Candidates for the priesthood in the past often entered the seminary before they had a chance to reach some level of psycho-sexual maturity. Their formation neglected for the most part this aspect of their lives. They could not openly relate to women, especially as potential girlfriends or wives, and they often could not

relate to the anima within because nothing in their training informed them of such a possibility.

Therefore a great deal of powerful psycho-sexual energy had no normal outlet. In certain cases the seminarians may even have had difficulties in these areas, and chosen the priesthood as a safe haven from them. The result was a dangerous situation in which these energies could grow more powerful over time, generate fantasies and impulses, and in some cases, inappropriate actions. Is it impossible to imagine a situation in which these energies, denied their normal outlets, could seek inappropriate goals in terms of the age and/or sex of the person they were directed to? Can we immediately dismiss the possibility that pedophilia, an attraction to preadolescent boys and homosexuality among the Catholic clergy may not just be the result of inclinations that existed prior to their entrance into the seminary, but in certain cases the result of a lack of any way in which to develop psycho-sexual maturity.

Poor formation is one issue. The relative isolation of priests is another. Men in the diocesan priesthood are often much on their own, living without family around them, and without an outlet to express their feelings. The absence of normal feeling outlets can lead to repression of those feelings which can be followed by their explosive release in outbursts of temper, or in some form of destructive behavior like alcoholism. Priestly culture, itself, provides little guidance on how to deal with the question of the feminine. Those in charge have suffered from the same deficient formation and are not equipped to deal effectively with psycho-sexual problems. Therefore, they take refuge in denial or repression. The whole problem is compounded by the long-standing history of celibacy enshrined in Church doctrine and practice. Largely unconscious and deficient relationships to the anima, instead of being dealt with precisely as deficiencies, become protected from examination by being considered as spiritual virtues. There is a genuine charism of celibacy following the councils of Jesus about dedicating oneself to God and the service of others, but to impose this from above as an essential requirement for the Latin rite Catholic priesthood is to imagine that God is constrained

by our arrangements, and will make good our deficiencies in dealing with the feminine. What takes place, instead, could be called a sacralization of the fear of women and the anima in which a male celibate institution tries to hold them at arm's length. They must somehow be kept away from the priesthood, and this unconscious feeling mixes itself in any attempts to have a rational discussion about married priests or the ordination of women. Then Rome's insistence on these issues becomes more suspect precisely because of its unwillingness to look at the issues we have been discussing.

NOTES

1. Donald Cozzens. *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. p. 113-14
2. *National Catholic Reporter*, March 8, 2002. p. 17.
3. From the point of view of psychological types they fall mostly in the third or fourth place. See [Tracking the Elusive Human, Vol. 1](#).

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