The Priesthood of All Believers

There's a Protestant doctrine called "the priesthood of all believers" that was born of the reformation. It's the idea that all people, once they are baptized, are responsible for living out the mission of Jesus. For early Unitarians, back when we were still a Christian sect, the priesthood of all believers came to be interpreted as a radical democratization of spiritual authority. In other words, our Christian forebears believed that we ALL have access to the ultimate truth, we ALL are co-creators of the universe, giving us equal dignity and power.

I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, where all spiritual authority is held by ONLY priests, who are called by God, study and are trained in seminaries, and are ordained by the Pope. It is the ultimate system of patriarchal religion. At least in my mind.

Twenty-plus years ago, when I was in seminary, I kept hearing about the crisis of faith in Catholicism, and how virtually no men in the United States were entering the priesthood, and how fewer and fewer men were actually in the parishes. Young men were all but absent. And new priests all came from Africa and Latin America.

Suddenly my news feed — which favors religious articles — is filled with stories from mainline publications I trust about men flocking to Catholic Churches in the last year or so; attending mass regularly; and becoming big financial donors, leaders in their parishes, and even ordained as priests. At first, I was thinking, "it's just propaganda." But it seems to be true. And young, politically conservative, white, cis-het, straight men are leading the change. This year alone, so far, over 400 of them will be ordained to the priesthood in the United States.

It makes sense that these guys would commit themselves to shoring up this patriarchal system.

For me, this development begs the question: "Who is — or would be — joining religious liberals like us in our quest to dismantle the patriarchy? What is our demographic shift? Who could we reach out to? Whose expansive mission of inclusion should be served by our support as a congregation and as a denomination? And how do we make them feel empowered within our systems?"

I don’t have answers. Yet. But I am so curious. And honestly, kind of jazzed by the wondering.

In Peace,
Rev Denis