

- 1 Ministry in the church is not the same as priesthood; it is a broader and more essential concept. Ministry, is an essential characteristic of our existence before God. To serve God is the highest human vocation, and Jesus insisted that the service of God involves the service of the neighbor.
 - 1.1 Jesus sees this ministry, service, as the center of his mission (Mk 10:42-45, the washing of the feet in John).
 - 1.2 Paul finds the title «servant» to be the one that describes best his apostolic commitment (Rom 1:1).
 - 1.3 Ministry is related to the theology of the cross: *diakonía* (the Greek word which is translated «ministry») means primarily service at table. It was reserved to slaves, but the NT sees in it the highest form of worship and prayer.
 - 1.4 Ministry is an essential dimension of church life and *therefore* sacramental. A sacrament is a fundamental act of the church which is necessary for its existence.
 - 1.5 The validity of ordination depends on the action of the church as a whole and not on an isolated sacramental act.
- 2 Ministry involves authority but not power.
 - 2.1 The Latin root (*augēre*) means «to grow,» and the original meaning of «auctor» was «one who gets things started and made them grow» or «one who builds things up.»
 - 2.2 The authority which is part of ministry is not to be confused with human power and it is not to use worldly means of power. Rather than power, it could be called «episkopē» — the task of overseeing a process so that it will function as it should.
 - 2.3 The phrase «I give you the keys of the kingdom» has often been used to justify the claim of bishops and popes to order others around in the name of Christ, but two things have to be kept in mind:
 - 2.3.1 Jesus himself was not in the business of «laying down the law.» Dogmatic, moral, and ceremonial regulations are refreshingly absent from the authentic Jesus material in the NT.
 - 2.3.2 The keys are a messianic attribute. As possessors of the keys, the apostles are to wait faithfully for the coming of the Lord, managing his affairs, showing others the right way, proclaiming the good news.

- 2.4 The same thing is true of the authority to bind and to loose; it is not precisely the power to forgive sins or to accept into or reject from the church. It is rather the commission to lead the people of God into the messianic kingdom.
 - 2.4.1 In fact, this power of binding and loosening refers first and foremost to the proclamation and the correct use of the freedom which the Gospel gives us. A good example of this power was the decision reached in the so-called Apostolic Council which took place about 49 A.D., at which Christians were freed from the burden of the Jewish Law.
 - 2.5 The Constantinian Settlement (as a result of which bishops came to hold the position of imperial officials) made it easy to forget that the bishop is not called to exercise power but to serve.
 - 2.6 The words «Who hears you hears me...etc.» (Luke 10:16; Matt 10:40; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:46) have also been used to claim Jesus' authority for whatever high churchmen have decided, but it is well to remember that Jesus is the one «who is in our midst as one who serves.» This authority is given to Jesus' followers in so far as they are humble and do not try to order others around. «If anyone wants to be first, let him be the last and the servant of all.»
- 3 Ministry in the early church:
- 3.1 Although it is obviously true that Jesus chose a particular group of followers and entrusted them with a ministry of the word and of healing, in his lifetime and for years after his death we do not find any concept of office in the church, as such (that is, stable positions with well-defined rights and duties); rather, we find a great variety of kinds of service. Some of these «forms of service» were, however, in the process of becoming offices; they were moving in that direction. Phil 1:1 speaks of «epískopoi» and «diákonoi» as though these are already fixed titles.
 - 3.1.1 It seems clear that Jesus did not leave any teaching on this question, and it took some time before ministry in the church assumed fixed forms.
 - 3.2 Prominent among these ministries in the early churches were the following:

- 3.2.1 The tripartite division of prophets, shepherds, and teachers seems to have characterized the Jerusalem community.
- 3.2.2 In the Pauline communities, the main divisions seem to have been apostles, prophets, and teachers.
- 3.2.3 Eph 4:11 (*Ephesians* was probably not written by Paul) speaks of shepherds and teachers to prepare the saints for the building up of the body of Christ.
- 3.2.4 In the earliest church, we find the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. Some have spoken of James, who headed the church in Jerusalem as a Christian high priest at the head of a Christian Sanhedrin, but this goes far beyond the evidence.
- 3.3 The Twelve, the Seventy, and the Seven:
 - 3.3.1 The institution of the Twelve has an apocalyptic background (Deut 7); the institution itself is a statement that the end times have begun. It is interesting to note that, according to the synoptic tradition, only Judas was replaced; as other members of the Twelve died, they were not replaced. This probably shows that the Twelve were a significant group only in the very earliest period after Jesus' death. Paul no longer mentioned meeting them when he came to Jerusalem about 36 A.D.
 - 3.3.2 The Seventy were a similar group, almost certainly based on the seventy elders around Moses.
 - 3.3.3 Finally we have in Acts 6:3 the appointment of the Seven in Jerusalem. Did they have the same function for the Hellenists that the Twelve had for the Hebrews? Luke seems to imply this, but it may be that he is glossing over a serious division in the Jerusalem church — a division between the law-observing group under James, and the «Hellenists» - the more cosmopolitan group with roots in the diaspora, who had given up the observance of the ritual commands of the Jewish Law, and who were despised by the group around James.
- 3.4 There is nothing in the NT about how the call to ministry came about. In the Pauline communities, it may have been by a laying on of hands. (Acts 6:3,8; 13:1-4)

- 3.5 Apostle: The word «apostle» seems to turn up first in Antioch.
 - 3.5.1 For Paul, the apostle is the witness of the risen Lord, Christ's representative in the work of preaching.
 - 3.5.2 Paul's call to apostleship was charismatic and not institutional: he insists in Galatians that, like those who were apostles before him, he was called directly by the Lord.
- 4 The question of «priestly» ministry: ministerial priesthood, and the priesthood of the laity.
 - 4.1 OT antecedents:
 - 4.1.1 The tribes who formed the later Israelite confederacy probably brought some kind of cultic, sacrificial priesthood with them when they infiltrated the land.
 - 4.1.2 This institution probably syncretized with the sacrificial priesthood they found in Canaan. The priesthood of the Jerusalem temple may have been, in David's time and for centuries after, a largely Canaanite institution, superficially «baptized» into the Jahweh faith.
 - 4.1.3 This OT institution defined priesthood almost solely in sacrificial terms: the priest was the one who presided over the ritual slaughter of the animal and who poured the blood which was the sign of (the renewal of) the covenant. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, the one who exercised such a priestly office was called *hiereús* - the Greek word which is usually translated «priest.»
 - 4.2 «Priesthood» in the NT: an introduction to the question.
 - 4.2.1 The Greek word which means «priest» (*hiereus*) in the OT sense appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is used to speak of Jesus as the one who, in pouring out his blood, has made a new covenant with God.
 - 4.2.2 What we think of today as «priesthood» (power to consecrate, power to absolve) has left no trace in the earliest communities which we find in the NT — those of Paul.
 - 4.2.3 There were some persons in these Paluline communities who had a leadership role, and some of them were women.
 - 4.2.4 But they were called *epískopoi*, or *diákonoi*, not *hiereîs*. (The meaning of the latter: «sacred persons, set apart to

serve at the altar by offering sacrifice.»)

4.2.5 There is no evidence from the NT that there was a special group, distinguished from the laity, and whose members had as their distinctive task the offering of sacrifice.

4.2.6 The rise of such a group in the early second century was connected with the development of a new interpretation of the Eucharist as a sacrificial act.

4.3 Jesus and priesthood:

4.3.1 But despite the absence of «priests» in the Pauline communities, did Jesus nevertheless ordain the first priests (or, more properly, bishops) at the Last Supper?

4.3.2 A simpler and better interpretation is to see those who were there (they should not be identified with the Twelve) as representatives for all of Jesus' followers.

4.3.3 If this is the case, the words «Do this in memory of me,» would have been an instruction for the whole community.

4.3.4 Did Jesus give the Apostles power to forgive sins when he appeared in the upper room? Not in the sense that the Apostles were given a special «priestly» power which distinguished them from the «laity.» There was no such «laity,» since the group in the upper room constituted the whole church.

4.4 Ministry in the earliest communities: (It is better to use the term «ministry,» rather than «priesthood,» because there is no evidence for a sacrificial priesthood before the second century.)

4.4.1 John's community probably thought of its own leaders as having a special role in the dispensing of reconciliation, and this was projected back into Jesus' own time by the author of the Gospel.

4.4.2 In general, the idea in the earliest times seems to have been that Christians all received reconciliation with God and (as Paul urged so strongly) with each other, from and through Jesus, and that our task as Christians is to extend it, to offer it to each other.

4.4.3 The Jewish-Christian church of Jerusalem may have been an exception, and some kind of hierarchical leadership seems to have appeared there rather early. Peter was the first leader of this community, although he may

have shared his leadership with James and John (whom Paul calls «pillars of the church»). And Peter may have been pushed out of his leadership role by James some time in the early fifties.

4.4.4 This «hierarchy» of the Jerusalem church may have its antecedents in the institution of «elders» in the Jewish communities, but it is also possible that it is based on Peter's creation of the group known as «the Twelve.»

4.5 Summary of data from Jesus and the early church:

4.5.1 The conclusion seems inevitable: it is the experience of the *Christian laity* (in the original sense of the people — the *laós* — of God) in celebrating Eucharist and in sharing reconciliation with each other which goes back to Jesus and to the earliest communities. In other words *the priesthood of the laity is the original situation*. (But note again that the word «priesthood» here means simply «the power and the call to celebrate Eucharist and to grant reconciliation.»)

4.6 What happened to change this original «charismatic /democratic» church order, even in NT times? The reason for the change seems to be this: after Paul's time, those who had risen to leadership in the church saw that it very often led to confusion, disruption, disunity, and «disedification.»

4.6.1 They came to see (apparently with the consensus of most members of the church), that more order was needed, together with a stable way of exercising authority and handing it down to those who would follow. They apparently felt that less uncontrolled spontaneity in celebrating Lord's Supper would be a good thing.

4.6.2 But at least in the Gentile communities, this step of creating a separate ministerial priesthood, whose members would be called to exercise the priestly office which was, in principle, the possession of all, was one that came about very gradually, from the sixties until the end of the first century.

4.6.2.1 This will be easier to understand if we realize that the church was not founded on one day or at one moment. Church

and NT came into being together, and are part of each other's definitions.

- 4.6.3 Many institutions came into existence gradually. They cannot be traced directly to Jesus, but they were felt to be necessary if Jesus' word and work were to continue in a completely new situation. Many of them probably *were* necessary in this sense.
- 4.6.4 But we should never lose sight of the original situation: we are the community called and given the power to celebrate the presence of our living Lord in our midst at meals which continue his practice of eating with sinners as the sign of their unconditional acceptance by God. The priest celebrates with us, for us, in our name; he is the one in and through whom our common priesthood is exercised.
- 4.7 Degrees of priesthood or office in the church: introduction.
- 4.7.1 We cannot trace priesthood *as a separate office in the church* back to Jesus; does this mean there is no structure of ecclesiastical office which is normative for all time?
- 4.7.2 Office in the church is essentially charismatic, in that it is the Spirit that is mediated.
- 4.7.3 The word «ordo» — orders — is not in scripture. It was of Latin origin, and originally referred to fixed structures of Roman society. This shows how much the structure of the church was stamped by the structure of civil society.
- 4.7.4 The division of orders into different levels (bishop, priest, deacon) is a fact of church history. We cannot trace it back to Jesus, but we do find it in the later writings of the NT.
- 4.7.5 The term «ordination» was first used in the eleventh century.
- 4.8 The office of bishop:
- 4.8.1 Some argue that the Council of Jerusalem was proof that the College of Bishops possessed the highest degree of priesthood and that this was recognized by all, but this is an anachronistic retrojection.
- 4.8.2 The development of the monarchical episcopacy: we know next to nothing about the process. Some have spoken of the gradual formation of «committees,» in

which followers of the apostles would have had a favored position, but there is no evidence of this. It is more likely that this practice arose when it was found that the Jerusalem-Antioch model worked better and kept disorder under control.

4.8.3 By the end of the first century, the east, using the Antiochene model, had the monarchical episcopacy everywhere. The Roman west knew only collective leadership during this period, and we cannot trace the monarchical episcopacy at Rome back before 120 A.D.

4.9 The office of priest:

4.9.1 As the monarchical episcopacy developed, priests appear as assistants to the bishops.

4.9.2 As the church grew, and the community in a town or city could no longer all meet in one place for the celebration of Eucharist, priests undertook to celebrate the Eucharist for smaller communities.

4.9.3 Priestly office is tied especially to the Eucharist and to preaching.

4.10 The office of deacon:

4.10.1 The office seems to have arisen out of the need to have some who would take care of the more mundane concerns of the community (dispensing funds to the needy, providing for Eucharistic celebration, etc.), but later on the deacon became associated especially with the task of preaching, up to then a prerogative of the bishop or priest.

4.10.2 Although the deacon is a cleric, his task is to keep office in the church from becoming clericalized. His task is also to bond the laity and the hierarchy.

5 The position of Peter: although distinct from the question of papal primacy, the question of ministry in the church is connected with it at a number of points.

5.1 The principal connection is the question of the kind of office which Peter had and which his successors have claimed.

5.2 No one has ever claimed that papacy is a higher form of priesthood or of episcopacy. Peter and his successors are not

«higher» in the priesthood than are other bishops; rather, the responsibility (*episkopē*) which each bishop has for his own church, Peter and his successors have for the universal church.

- 5.3 French theologians (even very good ones) have a tendency to talk about collegiality which is 90% construction and 10% based on data. Some have said that in the early church, Peter was the head of the apostles and James the president of the congregation, but this is not borne out by a careful interpretation of either *Acts* or *Galatians*.
 - 5.4 Some speak of how well the apostolic college under Peter and the College of Presbyters under James got along, but it is more probable that Peter was forced out of the leadership of the Jerusalem by a clique which supported James.
 - 5.5 In the west, it was commonly asserted that when Peter went to Rome, he transferred the original universal episkopē of Jerusalem to the capital of the Empire.
 - 5.6 Matt 16 was used to defend papal claims at a rather late stage. The first trace is in Justin, Dial. 100:4. Practically speaking, there is nothing in the first two centuries that would make it possible to see the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter.
 - 5.7 Was the transfer to Rome a sign that the «time of the Jews» had ended and the «time of the Gentiles» had begun?
 - 5.8 Protestants, in general (in those churches that have bishops), argue that all bishops can see themselves as followers of Peter, because he was the first to exercise episcopal office.
- 6 Apostolic succession.
 - 6.1 Consecrating bishops do not pass on power as though it were their own; they are rather vehicles of the Spirit.
 - 6.2 Rather than «apostolic succession» it is better to speak of the invitation to join the episcopal body. There is no «cession,» but rather an act of incorporation into the apostolic college.
 - 7 Women in the church, women in ministry.
 - 7.1 The unique quality of feminine being implies a special kind of service.
 - 7.2 Is the priest the representative of Christ as the head of the church, and is this the reason why some say that women cannot be priests?

7.2.1 This is the *ostensible* reason.

- 7.3 But does the refusal to ordain women really rest on an unwillingness to let women have power and authority in the church?
- 7.4 There are no valid (that is, scripture-based) arguments against ordaining women.
- 7.5 Those Protestant churches which ordain women (and the number grows every year) are not going to stop.
- 7.6 Ordaining women will create problems with the Orthodox churches of the east, but other problems, historical and emotional, rather than dogmatic in nature, are more serious obstacles to table and pulpit fellowship.
 - 7.6.1 Another problem: no one can speak for all of the Orthodox churches. The Patriarch of Constantinople is accorded a primacy of honor by most of the Orthodox, but if he ever suggested that welcoming Catholics to the liturgy, or suggesting to the Orthodox faithful that they occasionally take part in Catholic liturgy, he would probably incur the wrath of most of his co-religionists.