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QUELQUES PROBLEMES TOUCHANT LES MINISTERES

Y. Congar, O.P. (p. 785 ff.)

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INTRODUCTION

Three questions studied:

1. The (Priestly) Character.
2. "The analogy of priesthood" i.e. a formula which is used to cover two sub-questions: what is the common factor between the ministerial priesthood and the ordained ministry - what is reserved specifically to the ordained minister ?
3. The recognition of other ministries.

These questions interlock and are meant to focus attention on an overall approach to Priesthood.

Our thinking has been historically conditioned by TRENT, FLORENCE and AQUINAS which entailed an appraisal of the priest in isolation. A trace of Augustinian thought endured, i.e. that the ecclesia as such is the real subject of the operations of grace. But the priesthood of the community was scarcely considered. Furthermore, the priesthood of the clergy was never seen in the context of a service to the concrete community but rather as a personal 'potestas' which could never be lost.

"Caracter indelibilis = potestas conficiendi".

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A new approach consequent upon Vatican II. Three new fields of study opened up:-

1. The tradition and discipline of the East.
2. A substantial development in ecclesiology and particularly in the theology of the individual or local church.

The context of priesthood is now the ecclesia. It is the community, particularly the eucharistic community, which re-appears as the real and integral subject of 'l'action sainte' - for the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation.

Two aspects of the position are important: on the one hand, there is the positive i n s t i t u t i o n of the apstolic ministry - the mission given to the XII (Mt 28:18-20). On the other, the whole C h u r c h has the mission of salvation and the idea of the Church as sacrament or sign is closely linked to its service as a community to the world. In other words, ministry belongs to the w h o l e Church in which there exists a specific ministry of the ordained priesthood.

- 3. The re-appraisal of the existence of c h a r i s m s and a renewal of understanding of the part played by the Spirit in the many ministries in the Church.

The result is the possibility of another approach not based on a Christology separate from ecclesiology or restricted to a treatise DE ORDINE i.e. the study of a 'power' personally possessed.

Again it is the question of the priestly community, which is the primary subject of ministry and the need to identify the specific ministry of the priest. The more concrete question: what is the quality and nature of the sacrament which East and West recognise as belonging to Ordination? Sacrament involves the action of God.

CONGAR describes the content of Ordination:-

"Un chrétien est appelé et 'ordonné' pour continuer, avec le corps épiscopal et sous sa conduite, la mission des apôtres, le service de l'Église comme institution divine de salut. Il est appelé, ordonné et envoyé pour le service total d'une part du peuple de Dieu, lui-même envoyé dans et pour le monde. Ce service total comporte la construction d'une communauté messianique et eschatologique dont le Christ est le chef, par la parole et l'éducation de la Foi, par la présidence de la prière et de l'Eucharistie, par la communication sacramentelle de la vie du Christ, par l'harmonisation des services contribuant à édifier le corps du Christ (Eph. 4:12)"

What really happens at an ordination of this kind?

"L'appelé est habilité à exercer ce ministère; il est publiquement désigné pour cela. L'évêque l'introduit dans la suite de la mission des apôtres et atteste publiquement qu'il y est effectivement introduit. Ceci nous amène à la première des questions posées, celle du c a r a c t è r e

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THE CHARACTER

The essential dogma here is that at ordination something definitive occurs which makes the repetition of the sacrament impossible.

C h a r a c t e r is a theological explicitation, in ontological terms, of this fact and a theological explanation of the k i n d of consecration that occurs.

In the East the fact is expressed in terms of a sealing or anointing by the Spirit which is permanent - a permanent charism or grace.

NOTE: TRENT expressly wished to avoid adopting any particular school of theology concerning the nature of 'character' - even to the extent of not condemning the opinion of Durandus for whom the ch. was no more than a 'relatio rationis' indicating the deputing of a person to the exercise of sacred functions.

Neither had the Council any intention of adopting the notion of 'character' as the reason for the non-repetition of the sacrament.

(Cfr. DZ 960. Also J, GALOT: La nature du Caractère sacramentel. Étude de théologie médiévale. DDB, 1957, p.224)

What was therefore firmly determined at TRENT was that a rightly ordained priest could never become a simple layman and this was accepted as t r a d i t i o n a l doctrine.

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CONGAR himself admits to changing his mind. Instead of seeing the priestly ministry as a further definition of a Christian's participation in the priesthood of Christ (an ontological development of the baptismal character), he now wishes to site it within the context of the m i n i s t r y of the Church:-

"C'est une participation fonctionnelle qui comporte son fondement ontologique mais d'une ontologie de fonction ou de ministère"

Consequently, to the question as to what happens at ordination, he replies:-

"Il est réalisé et attesté (sauf circonstances exceptionnelles, publiquement) qu'un fidèle est définitivement, habilité à exercer en Son Nom les actes du ministère messianique ou eschatologique du Christ, roi, prêtre et prophète. Il l'est par son incorpor-

"ation au collège ou à l'ordo des ministres qui sont tels 'ex officio', par l'imposition des mains qui le relie au ministère des apôtres. Il est situé ainsi dans la réalisation de l'Eglise comme sacrement du salut au sens de l'institution et pas seulement au sens du témoignage et de l'action fraternelle. De ce fait, il représentera le Christ au milieu, à la tête et en face de la communauté des fidèles. Celle-ci, cependant, intervient dans le processus d'élection que consomme l'ordination et qui en est inséparable: influence de la communauté sur la formation du ministre, son témoignage, éventuellement même son acte d'élection: processus tout en dépendance de l'action du Saint Esprit au sein de l'ecclesia (cfr. Acts 20:28)

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II. ? - WHAT IS THERE IN COMMON ?  
WHAT IS SPECIFIC TO THE ORDAINED MINISTER ?

1. This consideration must be based on the eschatological ministry of JESUS - the ministry of the Servant who becomes Lord, the plenitude of his saving power and authority in which there exist the three roles of king, priest and prophet which are intimately interlocked (in a kind of circumincession). The priestly role of Christ must not be isolated from the other roles.
2. In this total ministry the Church shares. - as the active presence and sign of Jesus Christ, royal Servant, priestly Servant and prophetic Servant !
3. What is primary in the creation of the Church is not the establishment of a 'hierarch' who would build up a body of faithful; but the formation of "une communion des fideles dans laquelle le Seigneur suscite des dons et des services par lesquels il construit son corps". It is in this sense that one can say that the charisms are constitutive of the Church.
4. Whereas in Christ there is ONE ministry, in the Church this one ministry is shared by the community of the faithful, each according to the 'division' of the Spirit - yet in a true sense 'tous font tout'.

5. 'Tous font tout' viz. the faithful bear witness, educate, catechise, teach and, sometimes, preach - they pray and can direct the prayer of the assembly. They exercise the ministry of reconciliation (cfr. II Cor. 5:17 ff.) As they do not preside officially over the ecclesia, they can neither absolve nor excommunicate. They cannot exercise the 'power of the keys', though 'confession to laymen' has not been unknown and St. Thomas attributes a certain sacramental value to this practice. The faithful "offer" and "consecrate" the Eucharist and the liturgical language of the centuries does nothing to attenuate the association of a l l in these actions, - collective terms are used (e.g. offerimus: offerunt; ecclesia offert; celebrant, etc.)

e.g. Guerric d'Igny (XIIIe. s.): PL 185, 87:-

"Non solus sacrificat (sacerdos), non solus consecrat, sed totus conventus fidelium qui astat cum illo consecrat, cum illo sacrificat."

6. "Cum illo", yes. But what would happen "sine illo" in a community which, through no fault of its own, has been deprived of ordained ministers over a long period?

Elements of an answer can be found, for example, in the value given by St. Thomas to lay confession. Congar describes this as "sacramental in voto, inchoative".

As regards the Eucharist, God could give through an 'imperfect' sacrament the "res" that is the grace of the perfect or authentic sacrament (which, in any case, is not automatically given - "res non contenta").

Why, he questions, should the "res et sacramentum" be denied in so far as Christ is present, in other modalities, in the reunion of two or three in His name, etc. ?

However, he notes that, in the Communion services of our separated brethren, there is a deficiency in what he calls the "res ecclesiale". If a church does not exhibit the true character of Christ's Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, then its Eucharist will exhibit a corresponding deficiency. Nevertheless, he will not agree that 'authenticity' need be excluded in all cases.

There is something - s o m e o n e - missing without which the Church-Sacrament is defective = the ordained minister officially linked to the ministry of the Apostles by the imposition of hands, representative of Christ at the Eucharist of the community.

The question remains: "quel est le lieu exact de ce rôle nécessaire du ministre ordonné?"

7. Strong tradition that what characterises the ordained minister is the "potestas conficiendi". Yet there is the other tradition which sees in the very structure of the Church, a priestly community, the need for a minister linked to Apostolic institution by the imposition of hands.

Central question: is this link with the Apostolic church possible in some other way than through the 'impositio manuum' ?

Does the witness of the early church demand that, historically, only those who were ordained celebrated the Eucharist ? If this were not so (cfr. Kung), then it need not be so today ! Research on this point (i.e. the presidency of the Eucharist in the early church) has come up with no clear answers. It remains true, nevertheless, that the Church organised herself very quickly - and the fact of an ordained ministry was firmly established as a necessary part of her life.

"Le ministère de l'unité, qui est par excellence celui du collège des évêques, assure l'authenticité du sacrement de l'unité"

8. Conclusion: "Nous ne voulons connaître d'autre règle que celle-là (cfr. supra). Nous pensons que, dogmatiquement, on ne peut pas exclure l'hypothèse qu'autre chose soit possible "

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III - RECOGNITION OF THE MINISTRY OF OTHER  
CHRISTIAN BODIES

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1. The Catholic Church has never had the slightest difficulty in recognising the sacramental ministries not only of the Orthodox but also of the non-Chalcedonian churches. This has stood firm in spite of differing explanations of the nature of sacramental reality, of doctrinal differences on several points and of consistent opposition to Catholic Petrine teaching. It can therefore be said that the sacramental structure of these churches is radically the same as that obtaining in the Catholic Church.

This has not been so with regard to the churches of the Reformation, even for those like the Swedish Lutheran Church and the Anglican Church who have maintained an episcopate and an "apostolic succession" at least in an historical or material sense.

The criteria, operative in the Church regarding authenticity of ministry, are drawn from two decisive considerations (CONGAR holds they are really one!):-

- (a) The common possession of the f a i t h. Yet even this is not fully verified in respect to the Eastern Churches. The sacramental structures of ministry must also enter into the matter. CONGAR notes the unusual fact that the Catholic Church recognises Orthodox mixed marriage, even though divorce is allowed within the latter - a recognition it does not extend to the Protestant churches.
- (b) It has been a prerequisite that the initial rupture was not caused through divergence on sacramental doctrine and practice. It would seem that, in the mind of the Church, a n e w Eucharist makes a n e w church or religious communion: the same can be said for a n e w ministry, separated from the true Vine and the Tradition handed down.

(NOTE: Congar seems to me to be saying that the Eucharist of a particular church is authentic, even though that church is separated from the Catholic Church, provided that the s a m e faith is held in that church as in the Catholic Church and that it separated from her for reasons other than sacramental faith and practice. If, therefore, a separated church cut herself off because of differing sacramental doctrine, especially Eucharistic doctrine, then a n e w (and unauthentic) church came into being)

2. Today there is a growing consensus in faith. There is also the new approach which he has indicated in the first part of his article: what he calls a change in "l'axe de vision".

A different approach emerges if instead of concentrating on the power transmitted, one looks to the community of faith, of the baptised, a work of the Holy Spirit who inspires the faith of that community and is the source of its charisms and ministries: wherein the memorial of the death and resurrection is celebrated (cfr. De Ecumenismo: No. 22, sect.3)

We recognise the Protestant communions as communities of disciples united to Christ and performing ministries which find their source in the Holy Spirit. In this sense they are churches.

The crucial question = should we not recognise the authenticity of their ministries in the same measure as we recognise the authenticity of their churches ?

3. Here CONGAR suggests we may be going too fast. There is, he feels, no difficulty in recognising Protestant ministries "telles que eux-mêmes les conçoivent".

But for Catholics to recognise the Eucharist of other churches, a substantial unanimity of "conception" is demanded. If that were actually 'given', then there could be no more division - there would be one Church!

4. "Il y a la voie de la conversion: que les protestants acceptent la doctrine et reçoivent l'ordination catholiques. Mais il s'agit aujourd'hui d'autre chose; l'oecumenisme suit une autre voie. On nous pose d'ailleurs une autre question, à savoir la reconnaissance (mutuelle) des ministères" (p.796)

Whatever way is opted for, substantial unity in faith cannot be dispensed with. In fact, present events show that this is the way that different dialogues are following.

5. Crucial question: by what criterion does one establish the authenticity of sacred orders ? The Catholic position has been that orders of a minister are valid because he belongs to the true Church.

Differing perspectives are detectable among theologians today.



G. TAVARD suggests that there can be an alternative criterion of validity, i.e. the role the minister actually plays in a Christian community = to celebrate the memorial of the Passion of the Lord according to the faith of the Church, irrespective of particular theologies. This method would mean that one would not be looking for a transmission of sacramental grace and of apostolic succession (in the material sense) so much as the continuing existence of a conformity in Eucharistic doctrine with Catholic tradition. (Reference in art.cit.)

J.M.R. TILLARD (in 1967) argued that Protestants receive the *r e s* of the Eucharist at baptism which thereby influences their sacred rites thereafter. CONGAR notes, however, that the *v o t u m* is precisely directed to the *r e s* and cannot be invoked to establish the *r e s e t s a c r a m e n t u m* (i.e. the Real Presence) (Reference in art.cit.)

~~CATHOLIC~~  
The ~~ANGLICAN~~/LUTHERAN DIALOGUE in the U.S.A. produced from the Lutheran side this question:

"Whether the ecumenical urgency flowing from Christ's will for unity may not dictate that the Roman Catholic Church recognises the validity of the Lutheran Ministry and, correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic celebration of the Lutheran churches" (p.32) "Eucharist & Ministry"

while the Catholics invited their Lutheran colleagues to declare that:-

"the ordained Ministers of the Roman Catholic church are engaged in a valid Ministry of the gospel ... and that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly present in their celebrations of the sacrament of the altar" (p.22)

CONGAR is inclined to think that the conclusions of this dialogue are too optimistic.

6. To TAVARD Congar replies that his solution leaves open the question as to the authenticity of Protestant orders on Catholic criteria. However he is not contrary to pursuing the ideas suggested and he outlines the ideas of J. BUDILLON (cfr. text art.cit.).

The indispensable basis, he continues, in agreement with TAVARD, is a process of *g r o w t h* (maturation), of explanation, of purification of thought and expression concerning the doctrine of the Eucharist and of Ministry - in order to achieve a substantial

agreement. In this way a "communion" of faith would be established which would entail attributing to the churches involved the ecclesial quality specific to Christ's Church - the rest would follow.

7. Would a mutual imposition of hands be involved which would have, in Catholic eyes, the content of an ordination? Or could one appeal to the principle of "economy"? This principle is only invoked in the Latin Church in the exiguous formula of "Ecclesia supplet" - but, according to Congar, it is indispensable even in this form to the life of the Church. The Orthodox position is not particularly helpful here. As I read him, he appeals to the actual history of the Church to record that what actually governs Catholic faith and practice is: the Church has regarded as valid the sacraments or Orders it received (even though canonical invalidity might be later discovered).

He also asks that no more should be asked of Anglicans than is asked of Orthodox.

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His resumé: "on pourrait penser à un rétablissement de la communion dans laquelle la reconnaissance des ministères serait donnée, sur la base d'une profession de la même foi substantielle, sans ambiguïté comme sans surcharge de théologie particulière. La reconnaissance des ministères se ferait par mode de 'réception'. A notre avis, un usage de l'economie serait engagé, du côté catholique, dans cette réception"

The future has its problems. What exact value is attributed by Protestant communities to the episcopal structure of Christ's Church? The Catholic Church has stringent dogmatic requirements in this field - especially if it is a question of universal recognition of ministry. We must establish firmly the link of continuity with the apostolate which has as its source the consecration and mission of Christ Himself (cfr. Jn 10.36)

The whole article, CONGAR notes, is a series of questions and hypotheses - the present situation both ecumenically and in the field of historical research demands that such questions, raised and answers explored.

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