

PRESENT ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

AN OVERVIEW

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The subject assigned me is dreadfully difficult: "Present Roman Catholic Theology of Ministry--An Overview." In that title only two words do not trigger my hiatal hernia: "of" and "an." The crucial word, of course, is "ministry." But there's the rub. You see, you ask of me not simply a definition of ministry: ministry is service, and Christian service is total self-giving to every human person in process of redemption. That sort of answer is not enough. You want a "theology" of ministry. But theology is vast and deep--an agonizing search for God and for man, through systematic reflection on experience. And as in the New Testament, so now: there is no such thing as a theology; there are theologies, within the one community of faith. Nor do you limit theology today when you label it "Roman Catholic." The stuff of theology's search demands that I share the experience of non-Roman communities, their pens and their pews and their pulpits; for there we can hear the whispering of the Spirit. My theology must be leavened by the arts--from Peanuts' reflections on another Woodstock, through Samuel Beckett's "Two times anything equals zero," to Godspell's glorious "God is dead; long live God!" I must agonize over the experience of living man, as he stands mute before an immutable God who does not weep when man bleeds. And the adjective "present" means not that I discard the past, but that somehow

I must gather all the Church's yesterdays into a mighty now for a future in hope. Given all this, are you unchristian enough to ask for an "overview," a comprehensive survey--everything about ministry in a convenient nutshell?

Thus far my jeremiad. Once you grant me that my task is inhuman, we can get on with it. What can I say from within my competence that will respond to your wants and needs now? Despite my predilection for three points, I see four main headings demanded by a respectable overview. To focus the issues, I phrase these four facets in four declarative sentences. These affirmations are topic sentences that introduce what I see as the most promising developments on ministry in Catholic theology (for "most promising developments" read "us good guys in the white hats"). First, the Church is mission, and the Church's mission demands ministry of all Christians. Second, besides the general ministry which devolves upon the whole Church, there is a special ministry conferred on some of the faithful by a specific ordination, a ministry which is distinctive not so much because it bestows unique powers and functions, as rather because it creates a special relationship to the Church. Third, Catholicism's ecumenical ecclesiology will move with fruitful method if its first question is not, Are non-Roman ministries valid? but, Are non-Roman ministries

effective? Fourth, given the effectiveness of non-Roman ministries, the issue of validity does not indeed disappear, but it can no longer be limited to narrow legalistic definitions: validity must take its place within a broader theological complex, the so-called "recognition of ministries."

I

My first point: the Church is mission, and the Church's mission demands ministry of all Christians. You see, till recently it was common to say "the Church has missions." The Church has a missionary thrust: the Jesuits have a mission in Japan, the White Fathers have a mission in Africa, the Medical Sisters have a mission in India. Today theologians prefer to say "the Church is mission." The point is: in the totality of her being, the Church is an outreach; it is the Church's essence to be God's living outreach to the world. The Church is a corporate apostle; and an apostle is by definition one who is "sent."

In Catholic theology, mission has a high-level history; for in Catholic theology, mission is the story of God and man. Mission (from the Latin mittere) is a sending. And the root New Testament revelation has to do with a sending. For the root Gospel revelation is the thrilling affirmation that God sent His only Son. Sent Him when? The day an angel brought the glad

tidings to Mary. Sent Him where? Into this world, to every human being sin-scarred and tear-stained. Sent Him why? That the world might not die but have life--rich and full and overflowing. The first Trinitarian mission was God's unique outreach to sinful man: in Christ, God Himself was sent.

Consequent on this radical mission of God's Son is another mission equally incredible: the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. Sent Him when? On the first Pentecost. Sent Him where? To the Church. Sent Him why? Vatican II put it well: "The Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Penecost, in order that He might forever sanctify the Church" (LG 4).

Intimately wed to this sending of Son and Spirit is the mission of the Church: the Church is sent. Sent by the Son in the Spirit. This mission was foreshadowed before the Church was born, when the Lord "called the Twelve to Him, and began sending them out, two by two. . ." (Mk 6:7 ff.). But the definitive sending that constituted apostolate, that focused on a church, came only after Christ's resurrection. It started in fear, behind locked doors, when the risen Lord showed the disciples His hands and His side, and spoke that exciting sentence: "As the Father sent me, I also send you" (Jn 20:21). And with that He breathed on them: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v.22). That sending took on added meaning, the skeleton was

clothed in flesh, on the mountain in Galilee where the Master issued His missionary mandate: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations. . ." (Mt 28:18-20). That mandate was dynamized in a house within the City, where Jesus had bid them wait to be "clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49), where "gathered together in unity of purpose" (Acts 2:2) "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 4); and forth they went, a fellowship of faith and hope and love, so that "every soul was struck with awe, so many were the wonders performed by the apostles in Jerusalem" (v. 43).

But the Church is not a Platonic idea serenely suspended in mid-air; the Church is people. And this people is not simply pope and prelates and priests; the Church is (as someone phrased it so pithily) "the 'we' of Christians." We are the Church, all of us, we in community. We are sent. Sent when? Cardinal Suenens put it startlingly: the greatest day in the life of a pope is not his coronation but his baptism, the day of his mission "to live the Christian life in obedience to the gospel" (Léon-Joseph Suenens, Co-responsibility in the Church [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968] p. 31). Where are we sent? Like Christ, into "the world," to every being born of woman. Sent why? Like Christ, "to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim

release to those in chains, sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed" (Lk 4:18).

Briefly: (1) The Church is mission, is sent, is apostle--all three mean the same thing. (2) This is the Church's inmost essence: take away mission, and you take away Church. (3) We are this Church--all of us born of the same baptism, all who break the same bread. (4) This is our inmost essence as Christians: take away mission, and you take away Christians.

The people of God, therefore, the whole people, is essentially a missionary people, with a Catholic mission of love. Here I find stimulating the summary given in the Report of the Subcommittee on the Systematic Theology of the Priesthood (Sept. 15, 1971; p. 29):

The Church, as a people, witnesses to the Word by proclaiming faith in the Lordship of Jesus (kerygma), manifests itself to the world as a community of unity and charity (koinonia), positively relates to the world in terms of service (diakonia), and worships God by offering the sacrifice of praise and thanks (eucharistia).

Only in terms of this mission can you define the Church's ministry; for ministry relates to mission as means to end. But first note this: the Church's ministry is one common enterprise, where all Christians continue the work of Christ, each with/his his or her calling,

or her charism, his or her competence. Christian ministry is a shared responsibility. There is no Christian who is not a minister of the gospel. That is why our Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue could affirm in a common statement (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 4: Eucharist and Ministry [New York and Washington, D.C.: U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1970] pp. 9-10):

The ministry which devolves upon the whole church can rightly be described as a priestly service (hierateuma, cf. I Peter 2:5, 9), such as that of ancient Israel, whom Yahweh fashioned into "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" among all peoples (Exodus 19:5-6). We are agreed that in Jesus Christ God has provided his people with a high priest and sacrifice (cf. Hebrews 4:14ff.). All who are united with Jesus as Christ and Lord by baptism and faith are also united with, and share, his priesthood. We recognize therefore that the whole church has a priesthood in Christ, i.e., a ministry or service from God to men, that "they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (I Peter 2:12). They are thus privileged and obliged to represent the concerns of God to men and those of men to God.

II

My second main point: besides the general ministry which devolves upon the whole Church, there is a special ministry conferred on some of the faithful by a specific ordination, a ministry which is distinctive not so much because it bestows unique powers and functions, as rather because it creates a special relationship to the Church. (In this second section I shall commonly use the word "priesthood," simply because here I am analyzing the Roman Catholic vision of its own special ministry, and the key word here is "priest." I am not being needlessly parochial or deliberately provocative; the ecumenical Burghardt will rise from the ashes in point 3.)

My springboard is the 1971 Synod of Bishops and its schema on ministerial priesthood. The working paper ascribed the current crisis of priestly identity to twin causes: a radical secularization that leaves no room for transcendent realities, and the seductive influence of the social sciences, which tend to cast doubt on the Church's mission and the priest's ministry. The solution? Give history, psychology, sociology a pat on the head for their slight contributions and get back to God's revelation. And precisely here lies a defective methodology. The schema assumed that there is a determinate essence of ministerial priesthood, a core idea of the Church's specialized ministry,

that can be easily uncovered in Scripture and in the authoritative documents of Church tradition, without recourse to human disciplines such as history.

The assumption is as astonishing as it is unexamined. Revelation does not give us a clearly articulated notion of ministerial priesthood; the Bible does not offer a clearly defined view of the essence and forms of the Christian priesthood, does not furnish a detailed and fixed concept of the ministry. Take for example, the report, commissioned by the American bishops, on the biblical theology of the priesthood. This summary, based on the best available scriptural scholarship, should be sobering:

From what has been said it should be evident that we can expect to find in the Scriptures an evolution in the concept of ministry that is eminently in keeping with the nature of a pilgrim people of God. . . . It will mean, first of all, that we cannot use the Old Testament as a primary referent for our conception of Christian ministry. The reason for this is that the "evolution" of ministry from the Old Testament to the New was radically affected by Jesus Christ. . . . Acceptance of the concept of evolution will mean, secondly, that even in the New Testament we should not expect to find a clearly formulated definition of Christian ministry from the beginning, or at any single

point in the development of New Testament revelation. Christian ministry was never "frozen" in any one mold but continued to develop and to be adapted in the succeeding moments of history. . . . This does not mean that there is no normative character to the New Testament canon. But the normative character will not be seen in a definitive "canonizing" of one exercise of ministry without regard for another, or of one historical manifestation at one time or place in isolation from other such manifestations. Development itself is canonical and therefore normative. . . .

(Eugene H. Maly, ed., The Priest and Sacred Scripture
[Washington, D.C.: NCCB, 1971] pp. 4-6)

And further on (p. 61):

One thing stands out from any careful study of New Testament texts relating to ministries in the Church and it is that the Church itself felt, from the very beginning, competent to establish and denominate these offices. In the earlier stages the community appears to have done this without a commitment to anything beyond the principle of kubernēsis. Individual offices were subject to modification and coalescence with others, and titles had an elasticity commensurate with the diversities of time, custom and place. Nevertheless the Church was confident of the

guidance of the Spirit and of the divine commission inherent in her appointed ministers. The ultimate emergence of a clear-cut threefold ministry (bishops, priests, deacons) is to be attributed to her developed consciousness of the need to extend the ministry of Jesus into all times and places and of the permanent requirements of Christian life.

Not that the New Testament is silent on special ministry. Raymond Brown has sketched, with a scholarliness rivaled only by his pastoral sensitivity, how the New Testament furnishes four facets of Christian ministry which the Church sees as basic in her priests. (1) The priest is a disciple: he is called to full-time, wholehearted service of one master, and Him crucified. (2) The priest is an apostle: he is sent, by Jesus, to others, to serve them, to carry Jesus to them, not only His message but His presence--by word and work, by sacraments and sacrifice, by prayer and suffering. (3) The priest is a presbyter: he is a churchman, represents an institution, is responsible for the pastoral care of the churches, "must hold firm to the sure word he was taught" (Tit 1:9). (4) The priest presides at the Eucharist: whatever else he does, in school or slum, in collective bargaining or the halls of Congress, at some point the priest gathers his people around an altar, around a table, to share

with them a thanksgiving where the work of redemption is accomplished and in unparalleled fashion man is made one with God and with man. (Cf. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections [New York: Paulist Press, 1970] pp. 21-43)

All well and good: this is splendidly scriptural and pre-eminently pastoral; this is special ministry. And still two interrelated remarks, sobering remarks, are in order. First, as Father Brown points out, these New Testament facets of Christian ministry were not all present from the very beginning in one and the same person: apostle, disciple, presbyter, Eucharistic president. The Church has gradually brought them together to help fashion her notion of what a priest is. Second, you cannot draw from the New Testament, from Scripture, a function or a set of functions which defined special ministry then, functions therefore which define priesthood now and forever. In this sense God's written word does not provide some unchangeable essence of priesthood, of special ministry.

Similarly with the Church's postbiblical tradition: the Synod schema operated out of a defective methodology. It assumed that, to uncover what a priest is, all you have to do is read Roman documents. Out of the Church's history will come a core concept of priest that focuses his function and isolates it from all that is not priest.

The joker here is history itself. If you are thinking of priesthood in terms of unique powers and unique functions, the Church's experience of ministry is chockfull (perhaps even shock-full) of change, of diversity, of adaptation. Take, for openers, the ordination ritual that spelled out my specific priestness in 1941, and set it side by side with the ritual for the ordination of presbyters in third-century Rome (or was it Egypt?). If anything specified my Christian ministry in 1941, it was a twin power: to offer sacrifice for the living and the dead, and to forgive sin in the name of Christ. In third-century Rome (Egypt?) these liturgical powers were specifically episcopal. The crucial sentence (see Hippolytus' Traditio apostolica) on the power of a presbyter runs like this: "O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .look upon this thy servant and impart to him the spirit of grace and the gift of presbyterate, that he may be able to direct thy people with a pure heart" (cf. Joseph Crehan, S.J., "Ministerial Priesthood," Theological Studies 32 [1971] 491). The history of the episcopate, Gregory Dix reminded us, is in a sense the history of the steady breaking down of the bishop's liturgical monopoly.

The point I am making is this: in different periods of the Church's history different theologies of ministry, different models of priesthood, have come into prominence. Avery Dulles

has pinpointed five (cf. unpublished paper, "What Is a Priest?" [1971]). First, there is the jurisdictional model, where the priest is the one who holds the plenitude of authority in a perfect society, where to teach is to impose authoritative doctrine as a matter of obedience. Second, the cultic model, where the priest is primarily the hierophant, the performer of sacred mysteries, who offers to God, in the community's name, the totally pleasing sacrifice of Christ. Third, the pastoral model, where the priest is primarily the pastor or community leader, who brings people together and activates in them the graces and charisms which the Spirit bestows on each for the benefit of all. Fourth, the prophetic model, where the ordained minister is predominantly proclaimer of God's word, issuing to believer and unbeliever a resounding call to repentance and conversion. Fifth, the monastic model, where the priest is the holy man, the guru, the spiritual director, where meditation and breviary, community and celibacy, are the rule, where the priest is withdrawn from the world and lives in a way that foreshadows the life to come.

Now these models are not necessarily in conflict; but the choice of one model will overshadow aspects of priesthood that seem central in another model. More importantly for us here, this quick foray into history should suggest how difficult, how

impossible, it is to isolate some function, something a priest and only a priest can do, and proclaim that this is priesthood, here is ordained ministry, utterly changeless, unaffected by history, unconditioned by culture. You know, you might end up with a function that takes a half hour of your time, once a week, exclusive of vacation!

What, then, is left? How does today's theology identify a priest? First, a priest has a special relationship to Jesus Christ. This we have seen from the New Testament itself. And in the vision of Vatican II, Christ is the heart and soul of the priesthood. It is His service I enter; it is His ministry I share; it is in His name I act, in His person (cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, nos. 1 and 2). For one purpose: to build up the Body of Christ, until the full measure of His manhood is achieved.

And so, second, a priest has a special relationship to the Church. Precisely here we learn (or do not learn) what it means for a human being to be ordained a priest. Here contemporary theologians break in. For a viable theology of priesthood, they insist, you must get behind the functions. Don't define an ordained priest in terms of what he can do which an unordained person can not do: "This is my body," "I absolve you," and so on. Don't disregard these; get behind them! Get behind Church function

to Church office. Not office in the sense of bureaucratic structure; not a mere division of jurisdictional authority. No, Church office here is a relationship of responsibility. The essence of presbyteral priesthood is a new relationship to the mission of the Church. "The ordination of a priest is that solemn sacramental celebration by which a person is received into the order of presbyters, assumes public office in the Church, and is enabled to act in the name of Christ and of the Christian community with the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit" (Report, op. cit., p. 37).

The point is, priesthood is a social reality, an institutional reality, an ecclesiastical reality. Its heart is a stable relationship, a ratified relationship, between the Church and the individual. By the act of ordination the Christian community at large commits itself to the ordinand and he commits himself to it. Through its responsible officers, in some approved fashion, the community declares that, having observed in him the basic competences and spiritual gifts desirable for the Church's mission at a given moment in history, it trusts him as its representative leader in its official actions. And he engages himself publicly to a life of dedicated service in an official capacity, professes his willingness to shape his life to the needs of the gospel as the Church sees them. He is now

= entrusted with role of leader
in official functions.
= officeholder

a public servant, in a sense in which the layman can never be.

Understand me: when I say "officeholder," when I say "representative," I am not saying "one who parrots the party line." The priest may have to stand over against the community, over against bishop or pope. Not outside the community, not outside bishop or pope, but conceivably over against them, even as public servant, precisely as public servant.

But what is it that office demands of the priest? What public service does it qualify him for? One service, one responsibility, before all else. Since the mission of the Church is to reconcile all men with God and with one another through the one mediator Christ, the priest's primary office is to be a personal, living, effective sign, witness, agent of the reconciling Christ who works through him.

All well and good: the priest is the Church's officeholder, and his primary office is to represent, to re-present, the reconciling Christ. But this office is not static; it must express itself in, flow into, functions. Even if we dare not identify priesthood with some single function or several, in isolation from history and historical evolution, still the Church has come to a point in development where certain functions are regarded as special responsibilities of the ordained priest. I shall mention four in generic terms, to distinguish them from

a much more arguable area: the specific means priests may take to implement these roles.

First, a priest is ordained to proclaim the word of God. Not simply by formal preaching. The model of proclamation may be dialogue; it may be priestly presence; it may be prophetic speech and action in the tradition of Isaiah and Jesus.

Second, a priest is ordained to build up the Christian community. Here lies his responsibility for leadership. But a leader in our time is not one who commands; a leader is one who can move the hearts and minds of men. His is the office which looks not merely to the care of individuals but primarily, as Vatican II put it, to "the formation of a genuine Christian community" (Decree on Priests, no. 6).

Third, a priest is ordained to serve mankind. Here Vatican II opened up new vistas: "Because the human race today is joining more and more into a civic, economic, and social unity, it is that much more necessary that priests. . .wipe out every kind of division, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God" (Constitution on the Church, no. 8). A priest's parish is indeed the world; for the Church's mission is simply. . .man.

Fourth, a priest is ordained to preside at worship, especially the Eucharist. Here is the cultic role of the priest at its

most proper. Here he effects the Church's most powerful expression of unity--the unity of the worshiping congregation within itself, with the diocese, with the universal Church, and with all mankind. Here is foreshadowed and promised the Christian hope: that the earth and all who bleed and joy thereon will be transformed into the kingdom of God and His Christ.

To proclaim God's word, to build up the Christian community, to serve mankind, to preside at community worship--these four generic functions of a priest are based on ceaseless, universal needs of God's people; they flow from the gospel dynamic. Not to be involved somehow in these functions is to be a less than responsible representative of Christ and the community.

III

This concept of ordained ministry leads to my third main point: Catholicism's ecumenical ecclesiology will move with fruitful method if its first question is not, Are non-Roman ministries valid? but, Are non-Roman ministries effective? Why not begin with validity? Several reasons: (1) Validity is too narrow a base for discussion of ministry. (2) Validity tends to be aprioristic: I decide what validity means, and then I apply my definition univocally to all cases. (3) Historically, the word "valid" has meant different things, even within the Catholic tradition. (4) Whether a ministry is "valid," or should be

recognized as "valid," may well depend on a more existential question: Is that ministry effective, and if so, in what sense? Hence this third point.

Fresh research into this question was triggered by two expressions in Vatican II. First, in speaking of the Christian bodies separate from Rome which have come to exist in the West since the Reformation, the Council referred to them as "churches and/or ecclesial communities" (cf. Constitution on the Church, no. 15; Decree on Ecumenism, no. 19). Now, Vatican II did not clarify which of these bodies are churches and which are ecclesial communities. Nor did it affirm that any of these bodies is a church in the full theological sense. Indeed, it would seem that the Council was in large measure partial to the view which holds that, to be a church in the full theological sense, a Christian body must adhere to the orthodox faith as defined in the councils of the first five centuries, must administer the seven sacraments recognized in East and West during the Middle Ages, must possess an apostolic ministry transmitted through an unbroken series of episcopal ordinations.

And still the expression is, from a Roman perspective, eye-opening and mind-blowing. For the official relatio on Lumen gentium makes it clear that the expression "within their own churches or ecclesial communities" was included for a specific

reason: to reveal the Council's conviction that the bonds of union which unite these bodies with the Roman Catholic Church, the elements held in common (belief in God the Father and in Christ the Saviour, Scripture, baptism and other sacraments, graces of the Spirit, and so on), look not only to individual non-Catholic Christians but to the communities of non-Roman Christians precisely as communities.

A nuance, yes; but a historic nuance. It gives a magisterial coup de grâce to a stance that has consistently characterized Catholic thinking on Protestants and Protestantism. Put simply, the position came down to this. The grace of God is undeniably operative outside the visible structure of Roman Catholicism. It is there for any perceptive person to see. There are Protestants who put Catholics to shame: in their total commitment to Christ, in their love for God's word and God's children, in their anguished quest for peace on earth and justice for all, in their willingness to starve and burn and die for the gospel. God's grace is there; but it touches these Christians as individuals, not in any sense because they are living members of a Christian community, of the Lutheran Church, of the Presbyterian Church, of the Methodist Church. Quite the contrary: the striking thing is that God's grace is operative in these good people, in these love-laden Christians, despite their adherence to

heresy, despite the fact that they have in good faith become part of a community whose existence objectively contradicts God's saving will, His redemptive design for His people.

Given this basic premise--Protestant churches exist contrary to the will of God--the conclusion seemed to many a Catholic rigorous and inevitable: Protestantism as an institution and Protestantism as a ministry is rather a hindrance than a help to the salvific activity of God's Spirit. Not that Protestants have not played a genuinely prophetic role while remaining Protestants; not that a Protestant is only peccator and not simul iustus. But all this could be explained on an individualistic level, in isolation from the errant community: God's Spirit whispers where it is His will to whisper. Grace-filled individuals? Of course; any other conclusion would defy everyday experience, would put proud limits to a God who will not be circumscribed by men. But grace-filled communities? Such pluralism would seem to contradict the divine design for salvation, the one community to which the saving Christ has committed His saving word and His saving sacraments.

This attitude within Catholicism, not altogether universal but devastatingly widespread, this attitude in its naked, unrefined form is incompatible with Vatican II. The grace of Christ is at work, richly and incessantly, not only within Prot-

estants but within Protestantism, not only within Lutherans but within Lutheranism, not only within Presbyterians but within Presbyterianism, not only within Methodists but within Methodism. It is the communities that we Catholics must take seriously. I mean the various communities in the totality of their ecclesial existence: the graced word from the pulpit and the graced faith in the pews, the graced life of the housewife and the graced mind of the theologian--and all these as vital facets that fashion and are fashioned by a community of grace, a community of salvation.

A "valid" ministry here? I'm not sure, because I'm not quite sure what "valid" means. But an "effective" ministry? Beyond reasonable doubt.

Now for the second revolutionary expression. Vatican II did not claim that the Church of Christ is without qualification identical with the Roman Catholic Church. In an earlier draft of the Constitution on the Church we read that the Church of Christ here on earth "is" the Catholic Church: identity without qualification. The definitive text, however, affirms that the Church of Christ "subsists in" the Catholic Church (no. 8). The term "subsists" is not pellucid. Probably it means that the Church founded by Christ as a visible institution (societas) survives in Roman Catholicism in such a way that it lacks

nothing essential to its constitution. In any event, the substitution of "subsistit" for "est" is heavy in its implications. It implies that, despite the teaching of Pius XII (Mystici corporis and Humani generis) that the Church of Christ is co-extensive with the visibly organized Roman Catholic communion, the magisterium now sees the Church of Christ as transcending Roman Catholicism.

Roman Catholic theologians, in consequence, feel justified in distinguishing within the one Church two aspects: the Church as institution and the Church as community. As a Catholic, I contend, in harmony with Vatican II, not that the Catholic Church is in every respect perfect, but that it possesses all the essential structures which should belong to the Church Christ founded, that under this aspect the Catholic Church realizes more perfectly than any other communion the constitutional elements Christ wanted and wants in His structured body. On the other hand, I must admit that the institutional aspect of Christ's Church (the authentic heritage of the doctrinal, sacramental, and hierarchical gifts preserved in a given community by the Spirit) is not the only, or even the principal, aspect of Christ's Church. The Church as institution must be complemented by the Church as communion, fellowship, koinonia. "This second aspect," as Gregory Baum once pointed out, "is

never static, canonically fixed and structurally solidified. It is always vulnerable to deformation by sin, and always subject to the saving and healing action of God in Christ as he shares his life with others in Word and sacrament" ("The Ecclesial Reality of the Other Churches," Concilium 4 [New York: Paulist Press, 1965] p. 81).

From Vatican II, therefore, I may indeed conclude that only the Catholic Church preserves all the essential institutional elements of Christ's Church. But (still in line with Vatican II) I must also conclude that a Christian community is more genuinely Church the more it is transformed into God's people, into a spiritual brotherhood of faith and love. Today's Catholic must be sobered by this searing insight: in the divine mystery that is the Church, in this complex reality that is at once institution and communion, a God who is both merciful and sovereign, who uses institutional elements but is never enslaved by them, may choose to create an equal or even greater ecclesial reality in churches which, precisely as institutions, we see as less perfect realizations of Christ's will than our own (cf. Baum, art. cit., p. 83).

Grace-filled communities of salvation outside the visible Catholic structure, and non-Roman bodies which may at times be more authentically Church than my own communion because so faith-filled and so love-laden--is this possible without an effective

ministry? Without ministers somehow called by God, genuinely inspired by His Spirit? Given a ministry so effective for Christian living, so effective for salvation, must we not bend low in thanksgiving and murmur "The hand of God is here"?

IV

Which raises my fourth point. Given the effectiveness of non-Roman ministries, the issue of validity does not indeed disappear, but it can no longer be limited to narrow legalistic definitions: validity must take its place within a broader theological complex, the so-called "recognition of ministries." In this final point alone do I offer an overview; and here I can do no more than sketch some of the primary problems that call for continuing research.

To simplify somewhat, let me put the neuralgic issue in a single question: Is it possible for the Roman Catholic Church to recognize the ministry of those churches or ecclesial bodies whose ministers are not ordained by a bishop who stands in the apostolic succession? On the whole, by and large, Catholic theology presents three types of answer. (Cf. George H. Tavard, "Roman Catholic Theology and 'Recognition of Ministry,'" in Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 4: Eucharist and Ministry [New York and Washington, D.C., 1970] pp. 301-5. Actually I have modified Tavard's presentation, retaining his broad outline.)

1) The Catholic Church cannot recognize such ministry, and the basic reason is that the Church has committed itself irrevocably to this position. At Trent (Session 23, canon 7) the Church declared that "those who have not been ordained or commissioned by ecclesiastical and canonical power" are not "legitimate ministers of the word and sacraments" (DS 1777 [967]). The canon was directed against the Reformers, and to assert the contrary is to be "anathema."

2) The past, specifically Trent and Counter Reformation theology, must be re-examined. Take Trent: we can no longer assert with confidence that Trent was primarily concerned with passing judgment on the orders of the Reformed communities; and there is a respectable thesis that Trent was asserting canonical or juridical illiciteity, not invalidity in our contemporary sense. Take the Counter Reformation theologians: their chief argument against Reform orders was defect of form (lack of episcopal consecration and ordination in Continental Protestantism, break of continuity in England); an additional argument was lack of intention (i.e., re perpetuation of the priesthood). In the face of these two arguments, contemporary Catholic theology can adopt any one of four attitudes:

- a) We can endorse the arguments and the conclusion, both for the sixteenth century and for today.

- b) We can recognize the value of these arguments for the sixteenth century, but challenge or deny it for today, on two possible grounds:
- a- Reform thought has evolved, has become more Catholic;
 - b- Catholic theology has evolved, is now able to see as valid what sixteenth-century theologians could not so see.
- c) We can suspend judgment on the value of the arguments in question:
- a- their value for the sixteenth century, on the ground that the theological situation was then too confused to admit of clear solutions to the sacramental problems raised by the Reformation;
 - b- their value for today, on the grounds of theological evolution within both camps, plus the ecumenical consideration that our problem is not to judge the past but to prepare the future by opening new theological avenues.
- d) We can deny the value of these arguments even for the sixteenth century, on the ground that the Catholic position was then based on inadequate theological con-

conceptions, and/or on insufficient evidence and on misunderstanding of Protestant intentions and conceptions.

3) We need not examine the past, specifically Trent and the Counter Reformation theologians; for in such a matter of fact as the validity of Protestant orders and Eucharists, the past cannot be a determining norm for today. We may simply examine Protestant doctrines and ministries today, and evaluate them in the light of contemporary Catholic theology. The problem then becomes: In the light of what Catholic theological principles could Protestant orders and Eucharists be recognized as valid? Here are some that have been proposed as sufficient grounds for recognizing a nonepiscopally ordained ministry:

- a) Our traditional concept of extraordinary minister of a sacrament could be applied to the Protestant minister and the Eucharist.
- b) The plurality of ministries in the New Testament can justify seeing in Roman Catholicism the preservation of the institutional ministry, in Protestantism the revival of the charismatic ministry.
- c) Our growing realization, since Vatican II, that non-Roman communions participate authentically in

the reality of Christ's Church must open us to the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that the ministries within these ecclesial communities are God-approved ministries.

d) Attempts have been made to apply to Protestant orders the principle ecclesia supplet:

a- In some of these theological efforts, it would seem that the Catholic Church has to recognize officially that the principle applies, if what is missing in Protestant orders and Eucharists is actually to be supplied.

b- In Tvard's position, the principle applies and is operative, regardless of official recognition, as soon as some conditions are fulfilled: either a recognizable continuity of Eucharistic faith between the pre-Reform tradition and the Reformation positions, or a recognizable analogy (strict proportional correspondence) between the Catholic and the Protestant Eucharistic faiths.

e) Since there is some evidence that in the Church's history priests (i.e., presbyters, nonbishops)

ordained other priests, and that the Church accepted the ministry of priests so ordained, we may be compelled to confess that episcopal succession is not absolutely required for valid ordination.

This is not the time or place to evaluate these theological efforts. But if only to indicate what high ecumenical promise stems from current theological reflection on ministry, let me reproduce the boldface paragraph of sacramental dynamite which we Catholic participants in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue presented in print after years of research and discussion, on the basis of historical and theological reflections (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 4, 31-32):

As Roman Catholic theologians, we acknowledge in the spirit of Vatican II that the Lutheran communities with which we have been in dialogue are truly Christian churches, possessing the elements of holiness and truth that mark them as organs of grace and salvation. Furthermore, in our study we have found serious defects in the arguments customarily used against the validity of the eucharistic Ministry of the Lutheran churches. In fact, we see no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic church recognizing the validity of this Ministry. Accordingly we ask the authorities of the Roman Catholic church whether the ecumenical

urgency flowing from Christ's will for unity may not dictate that the Roman Catholic church recognize the validity of the Lutheran Ministry and, correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic celebrations of the Lutheran churches.

Not to be misunderstood, we added several clarifications. (1) Despite the implications of this statement for Lutheran orders in the past, we did not think it necessary to solve that problem in order to make the present statement. Nor did we attempt to decide whether such recognition would be constitutive of validity or merely confirmatory of existing validity. (2) The appeal for Church action stressed our conviction that the problem should not be resolved on the level of private action by ministers and priests. (3) We insisted that, while recommending recognition of a ministry not conferred by bishops, we saw the apostolic ministry retained in a pre-eminent way in the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate. (4) We did not see our statement applicable to other than Lutheran communities without further and careful consideration. (5) We were not in a position to affirm that a recognition of Lutheran ministry must or should lead to intercommunion or Eucharistic sharing.

The issues that still call for theological research and reflection, for dialogue and discussion, are discouragingly vast:

a richer understanding of apostolic succession; a more profound grasp on ius divinum; the meaning of "validity" in its various historical manifestations; the relationship between effective ministry and valid ministry; the hypothesis that perhaps validity is not ours to determine save for our own communion--these and a score more problems will continue to haunt and to humble the theological fraternity through the 70's and beyond. But the burden cannot be refused, under peril of rejecting the gospel itself; for, if you can believe our Lord, it is in our oneness that the world will know that Christ has come and that God loves (Jn 17:23).