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A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY

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The theological problem of ministerial authority arises from a fundamental dilemma. Authority, in its etymological sense of 'authorship' (*auctor-itas*) and its ensuing responsibility, belongs to God alone and to his Messiah, the Lord Incarnate; in the concrete, however, God never speaks to man directly just as, according to Exodus 33:20, he is never seen face to face in this life. In the Old Testament God spoke through Moses and the Prophets. These were thus endowed with a divinely authenticated authority, which has survived in the truncated form of written documents in the Jewish Scriptures. Likewise, God spoke through his Son, Jesus of Nazareth; he also spoke through the Apostles in the Spirit. At the very beginning, remembrance of what had been said and openness to the present Spirit served as criteria for the Christian interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures. Soon, however, this no longer sufficed to regulate the daily life of the Churches, and the faithful still needed specific guidance for the concrete conduct of their lives. For a short period one could rely on the lingering memory of the apostolic times: the New Testament writings embody some attempts at reconstructing, in the light of changing situations, the memory of words of the Lord and his immediate disciples. Then, in the face of newly arising needs, the officers in the communities took on various functions in which they assumed authority for the good order of the Church. The early evidence suggests that this was not planned, that the growth of authority, if it was, at one level, led by the Spirit, was, at another, haphazard. At any rate, the lists of officers that may be found, for instance, in the letters of Paul, such as apostles, prophets, teachers, overseers (*episcopoi*), presbyters, deacons, pastors, widows, healers, miracle-workers, speakers in tongues, evangelists, administra-

tors, are eventually reduced to the threefold ministry of *diaconoi*, *presbyteroi*, *episcopoi*.

Interpretation of the origin of the Christian ministry is complicated by two problems. The first concerns *presbyteroi* and *episcopoi*. All the evidence suggests that these fulfilled, at first, identical or at least similar offices, to which different names were assigned in different places. Through the last decades of the first century and the first decades of the second, the monarchic *episcopus* emerged as the chief ruler of a local Church, assisted by a number of *presbyteroi* subordinate to him. Thus theology has been left with the alternative that monarchic episcopacy has ascended from the presbyterate, or the presbyterate has descended from the episcopate. No later canonical decisions about the authority of bishops or the sacramental nature of their consecration can clarify the historical ambiguity of the beginnings and the ensuing theological dilemma. For my part, I hold that history favors the fundamental identity of priesthood and episcopacy, rather than the theory of an intrinsic difference between them.

The second problem arises from the fact that *presbyteroi* and *episcopoi*, named from terms denoting the wisdom of age and experience (*presbyteroi*) and administrative abilities (*episcopoi*), were later conceived to be also hierarchs, that is, priests in the recent, sacred meaning of the term, connoting *ιερέυμα* or *sacerdotium*. The resulting problem should be pinpointed carefully, for some recent literature does not posit it correctly. For instance, the "Report of the Subcommittee on the Systematic Theology of the Priesthood," prepared for the Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, dated September 15, 1971, suggests that the New Testament applies the Greek term *iereus* to Christ himself (Epistle to the Hebrews) and eventually to the whole People of God (1 Peter 2:5; Apoc. 1:6, 5:10; 20:6). Accordingly, the attribution of this title to presbyters and bishops is thought to have derived from the contamination of pagan conceptions of priesthood as a sacred order in society. Some theological conclusions follow: all the people are priests by virtue of their baptism; whatever sacred function (*sacerdotium*) belongs to the Christian ministry is derivative and secondary; and ministry should therefore be defined by other than sacral functions. How-

ever, this reasoning is vitiated by two basic omissions. In the first place, the terms *ἱερεὺς* and *ἱεράτευμα* are always used in the New Testament in an eschatological context. Thus, the Epistle to the Hebrews never says that Jesus was *ἱερεὺς* in his earthly life; but that he is high priest now, having entered the Holy of Holies in heaven. Likewise, 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the texts of the Apocalypse refer respectively to the spiritual temple built in heaven and the spiritual sacrifices offered in it (1 Peter) and to the destiny of the faithful to be kings and priests in heaven (Apoc. 20:6, where it is most clear). In other words, the New Testament *ἱεράτευμα* is a celestial model for the *Ecclesia*: it is that which the Church is in heaven. In these conditions, the transposition of terms which eventually took place needs no appeal to pagan contamination: the *ἱεράτευμα* was brought from heaven to earth by the trauma of the indefinite delay of the parousia. As soon as it became clear that the expected parousia was not taking place, a reinterpretation of structures, a redefinition of goals, a re-assessment of values were necessary. The Churches needed priests on earth when they understood that, even though the total parousia was delayed, possibly for a long time, they already participated here below in the life of the heavenly Church. To the *ἀρχιερεῖς* in heaven there correspond *ἱερεῖς* in the Church on earth. Whence the designation of the one who had already become monarchic bishop as *ἀρχιερεὺς* in the community, and of the members of the presbyterium as *ἱερεῖς*. This phenomenon was caused by the delay of the parousia, not by a paganization of the Church. It was not an aberrant happening, but a theological necessity. The alternative was not a functional ministry rather than a cultic priesthood; it was despair of the eschatological Kingdom. The cultic priesthood is required now by the eschatological dimension of the Church's life. Its identification with the ministry of wisdom (presbyterate) and administration (episcopate) was perhaps not necessary, but it was hardly avoidable. By the same token, priests and bishops, as the Catholic Church has known them since at least the second half of the second century, do not descend directly from the Apostles, whatever typological relationships may obtain between them and the missionary Apostles of the New Testament or even, more remotely, with the Twelve. They succeed the second century

bishops and priests who, besides their functions of pastoral care, preaching, and oversight, accepted also the task of mediating for their concrete, historical community, the eschatological *ἐπάρευνα* or *sacerdotium* of the heavenly People of God. The priestly and kingly People was never the community as a whole in its earthly condition. Rather, its future, parousiac kingship and *sacerdotium* became, by anticipation and participation, embodied in the persons of the *presbyteroi* and *episcopoi* now promoted to the eschatological rank and function of *ιερείς*, *sacerdotes*.

I have explained this point at some length because our reconstruction of the origins of the Christian priesthood clearly affects our theological understanding of its meaning. This theological understanding I find deficient in a number of contemporary assessments, in conjunction with a historical reconstruction that seems to me highly problematic. At this point, I ought to state a preliminary conclusion on the origins of the Christian ministry: it derives from the convergence of the care and administration of the Churches with the eschatological function of *sacerdotium* upon one type of officer. Whereas the historical, horizontal necessity of the former can determine the form of authority, only the vertical, eschatological charisms of the latter can determine the value and binding-force of authority. Or, to say it differently, historically-determined power becomes spiritual authority only from its eschatological reference.

This leads us to the next problem: In what form of ministry may this spiritual authority be institutionally endowed and recognized?

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The answer to this question amounts to adopting what may be called a principle of determination (or, as the case may be, non-determination) of ministry. Has the ministry been determined once for all, either in the Scriptures or later?

It would seem that five different positions may be adopted on the principle of determination. The nature and the extent of the authority recognized to the ministers of the Church depend upon our conception of the origin of their ministry. If, for in-

stance, ministers are entirely created by the Church, then the Church can change the form of ministry according to its wisdom. If, on the contrary, ministers are clearly created by Christ as the founder of the Church, then their authority depends exclusively on what Christ has made known in the matter. Now on the question of the Church's freedom to alter the forms of ministry and the authority of the ministers, five positions are possible:

1. The institutional structure of the Church's ministry was fully determined by the very words of Jesus himself as recorded in the New Testament. This corresponds to the popular Catholic view of priesthood, episcopacy, and papacy. One may read it between the lines of the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican Council I and in the third chapter of the Constitution *Lumen gentium* of Vatican Council II. I consider this exegesis of the New Testament to be totally indefensible.

2. The structure of the ministry is determined in the New Testament, not by the words of Jesus, but by the apostolic Church as depicted by the authors. Thus, the threefold Order of ministry, deacons, priests, bishops, to which many add the primacy of Peter as handed on to the bishops of Rome, would be apostolic, if not dominical, in their origin. Although more substantial evidence favors this view, I do not think it can survive close exegetical and historical scrutiny. The evidence for a fluency of ministry or for a pluralistic approach to ministry in the New Testament Churches is too impressive.

3. The ministry as described in the New Testament admits of divergent structures. For instance, the Palestinian and the Pauline Churches may have followed diverse patterns of authority. Even if one does not see sharp variations here (on this point I am more skeptical than Hans Küng), one should recognize that the forms of ministry had not yet settled down, so that they cannot provide a norm to be applied later. The normative pattern was determined by the post-apostolic Church in an irreversible decision. The threefold order of ministry and the papacy are often understood in this perspective.

4. The form of ministry was never determined irreversibly, either in the New Testament or by the post-apostolic Church. However, some principles or general lines are irreversible. Several positions are conceivable here, according to what ele-

ments are labeled irreversible. The distinction between priest and layman, the threefold order of deacon, priest, bishop, the permanence of a Petrine function of apostolic primacy seem to be the chief candidates for such an irreversibility.

5. The structure of ministry has never been determined irreversibly, even in its basic principles or general lines. The Church keeps all freedom to adjust her structure to the needs of the times.

Whereas the fifth position may be identified with the standard Protestant understanding of the forms of ministry, I would venture the opinion that all the others are compatible with the Catholic tradition. The first two are commonly adduced to support ultramontane ecclesiologies. The third and fourth represent both an awareness of the contemporary problems of hermeneutics and a consciousness of the historical relativity of religious institutions, for which classical theology made little room. If we examine these positions closely, however, they appear to be more than hypotheses or models as to their content; they also betray different methodological options on authority.

I already pointed out that the most fundamental question of ministry concerns the relationship between the authority of the Word and that of the Church. "Who speaks for the Word of God?" is the hidden question behind the more obvious query about who is a minister of the Church. Whereas a first answer to the obvious query may be borrowed from history, according to one of the five positions just listed, an answer to the hidden question will depend on a methodological option concerning the chief source of faith and doctrine. Some choices seem possible:

- (a) The chief source that will determine the form of ministry is the New Testament. This principle is shared, strangely enough, by those who claim the New Testament for the Roman primacy and those who claim it for charismatic non-institutional ministries.
- (b) The chief source is the patristic model of the Church: it provides us with the threefold order of ministry and some vague indications of a Roman primacy.
- (c) The chief source is the fully developed model of the Church in later history: it provides us with the threefold order

of ministry and a Roman primacy which is completely developed both in its exercise and in its theology.

(d) The chief source is the concrete demand of the Gospel as focused on the actual needs of the Church in the light of the signs of the times.

We are thus faced with four methodological options. (a) and (d) have been espoused by different schools of thought within Protestantism, whereas (b) is the standard Orthodox method and (c) is the most frequent Catholic position. All of them rest on diverging conceptions of the best locus for the most normative tradition: the Scriptures and the primitive Church, the first centuries and the patristic councils, the nineteen centuries of the Church as reinterpreted in the most recent councils. If we compare this with the five positions listed on the principle of determination, we could theoretically imagine any combination of them two by two, each of the four methodological types possibly corresponding with any of the five interpretations of the principle of determination of ministry. In fact, however, the range of variations is narrower. (a) can support either the strictest or the loosest ministerial structures, depending on one's assessment of the contents of the New Testament. (b) and (c) favor the Catholic type of structure, although (b) sits loosely on the Roman primacy, which is fully asserted only by method (c). As to (d), it may justify any structure that would arise from the assessed needs of the times.

At this point, some critical questions as to priorities should be asked.

In the first place, one may wonder about the proper order to be followed in determining the norm of ministerial authority. In theory, of course, the methodological premises, (a) to (d), should always precede and support the conclusions 1 to 5. For the principle of determination of ministry cannot be a first principle; it should be the conclusion of a recognizable process of reasoning. Yet one may wonder if the methodological options (a) to (d) do not function in fact as ideologies for the support of previously espoused positions disguised as conclusions. Has not the Church found in society, not only pre-comprehensions, but even pre-determinations, of her structure of authority? This was certainly the assumption of Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea and Canon 28 of Chalcedon, the latter

being rejected by Pope Leo, not because he denied all pre-determination of the authoritative pattern that he claimed for his own see, but because he could foresee the consequences of extending such a pre-determination to the emerging and developing capital of the Eastern Empire, while the political importance of his own city was decaying under his own eyes. The elaborate theology of Pope Leo on the primacy of Peter was a beautiful ideology, whatever else it may also have been in terms of doctrinal development.

In the second place, the standard Roman Catholic model of the structure of authority, corresponding to positions 1, 2 or 3 and to method (c), presents the peculiarity that the scriptural data and the incomplete evidence of the patristic period are not only interpreted by more recent theologies (e.g., Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas in the thirteenth century), but also officially determined by still more recent councils (Vatican I and II). In other words, the authority of the ministry has been decided by itself. The magisterium has functioned as source and determination of its own worth. Vatican I and Vatican II, especially in chapter III of *Lumen gentium*, determined the structure of authority to which they themselves appealed. Pope Pius IX proclaimed the infallibility of the pope, which proclamation itself rested on papal infallibility. The same may be said of the authority of councils, whenever it is considered to be without appeal. If not the content, at least the form, of this determination is highly unsatisfactory. Such a recourse to recent history implies evidently the assumption that, if the Scriptures and the early Church are not clearer than they are on the ministry, its forms, and its authority, we are justified in appealing to the later tradition and the more recent Church for a final determination of the structures of ministerial authority. However, there still remains the problem of escaping the circle of structures of authority being determined by themselves.

There is no escape from this circle unless, to the two paradigms already studied, the authoritative source, (a) to (d), and the principle of determination (positions 1 to 5), a third one is added: a functional analysis of ministry ought to provide a point of reference outside the circle, and so to enable us to opt for an authoritative structure which is not based upon itself.

Several analytic schemes have been proposed.

One of them was included in the Constitutions and Decrees of Vatican Council II: the division of ministerial tasks according to the threefold ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. This may be found in *Lumen gentium*, n. 25-28, where the schema subsumes the ministry of bishops and of priests; in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, where it is used for priests; in *Christus Dominus*, where it refers to the functions of bishops. The Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 34-36, also applies it to the ministry of the faithful, which flows from the general priesthood of all believers. As is well known, this approach was eloquently illustrated at the second session of the Vatican Council in an address by Emile de Smedt, Bishop of Bruges,¹ who subsequently developed this theme in a long pastoral letter to his diocese issued in 1961.² I find puzzling the recent success of this threefold typification of ministry. The oldest use of this theme is in Eusebius's *Church History*, book I, ch. III; but the popularization of it comes from Calvin, who, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book II, ch. XV, described the functions of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. Calvin himself was reinterpreting a vaguer notion of the threefold ministry of Christ in medieval theology. Thus, Bonaventure had referred to the *triplex officium* of Christ, in his action, his passion, and his death, with which he connected the three indelible sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and orders.³ Behind this *triplex officium* there lies an allegorical meditation of the *tria munera* offered to the child by the magi. The remote origin of this threefold analysis suggests that it results from a considerable oversimplification of the tasks of Christ as described in the Scriptures. Jesus is not only priest, prophet, and king, he is also Son of man, lamb of God, servant of Yahweh, friend, shepherd, healer, fire-bringer, preacher, rabbi. The early Church saw him as fish, pedagogue, angel, fighter, judge. Later he was called friend of man, pantocrator. Thus, the Christology in which a theology of ministry should be grounded is much richer than the threefold schema indicates.

¹ *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, 1964, pp. 39-43.

² *Le Sacerdoce des Fideles* (Desclee de Brouwer, 1961).

³ C.S., D. XXIV, p. 2, a.1, q. 1, ad 2.

As translated in terms of ministry, the threefold pattern further truncates the wealth at our disposal: priesthood, prophecy, kingship become sanctification, teaching, government.⁴ Other patterns are possible. In his famous pastoral letter of 1949, *Priest among Men*, Cardinal Suhard did not use the threefold ministry model. He made a more existential analysis of the priest as mediator, man of God or prophet, witness of the Most High, sign of contradiction; in relation to the faithful, the archbishop of Paris described the priest as their father, their apostle, their pastor, the instrument of Christ for the 'recapitulation' of the universe in the eucharistic worship, the minister of prayer.

The "Report of the Subcommittee on the Systemic Theology of the Priesthood" mentions "the triad prophet-priest-king" when it explains the ministry of Jesus according to Vatican II, and correctly points out that the triad is incomplete. In its own description of ministry, the report adopts a fourfold pattern. Under the heading of "generic functions" it defines the priest as the one who has "to proclaim the Word of God" (which, in context, includes *kerygma*, *didache*, and *magisterium*), "to lead in building up the Christian community," "to serve mankind," "to preside at worship, especially at the eucharist." The report goes on record as having voluntarily ascribed the last place to the presidency of worship:

This function of priestly office is deliberately considered last in order to highlight its synthetizing nature, and also because in actual Christian life one builds up toward a moment of liturgical celebration by acts of faith and witness. In this sense, Vatican II terms the eucharist "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life."⁵

This explanation is notably self-contradictory. For the quotation from Vatican II does not only see the eucharist as "the apex," which indeed sums up all acts of faith and witness. It also calls it "the fount." Likewise the *Constitution on Liturgy*, n. 10, speaks of the liturgy as "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed . . . the fountain from which all her powers flow." This can only mean that the eucharist stands at the beginning no less than at the end; all acts

⁴ E.g., *Christus Dominus*, n. 12-16.

⁵ *Constitution on the Church*, n. 11.

of faith and witness flow from it before they lead to it. Thus, the polemic suggested in this document against a predominantly cultic conception of priesthood betrays a misunderstanding of the full meaning of eucharistic worship. One could easily show that the four functions designated as the chief tasks of priests do not belong to the same level of ministry. To preach the Word and to preside at worship should indeed be distinguished, although the Word is preached also through worship and there is no true worship without the intervention of the Word. Yet they should be distinguished within one paradigm: initiation into the mystery of Christ. The other two functions, to lead in building up the Christian community and to serve mankind, may also be distinguished, but they belong to another paradigm than the first and the fourth functions of the Report; they remain secondary and subsequent. The difficulty of a functional analysis of ministry is well illustrated here: to draw up a list of functions is not enough. One should also discover the taxinomy where they fit relatively to one another. It is in fact from this taxinomy that each function and, consequently, each holder of a function, acquires legitimate authority.

I have myself used another typification, where ministry fulfills the four functions of proclamation, worship, education, and service. I need not make this analysis once more here. But I should face more systematically the problem of their authority.

A first look at these four functions is enough to suggest that the value or authority accruing to them is not the same in each case. Education brings up the people (believers and unbelievers alike) to the point where they can understand, intellectually and emotionally, the importance and meaning of the Gospel that is proclaimed and of the adoration in which they are called to share. The authority of such a function derives from knowledge and pedagogy in the instructor, not from the specific assignment he or she has received from the Church. Competence is the only way to authority here. Magisterium, law, obedience would be entirely at sea trying to impose the authority of one who has no competence in education. An incompetent teacher may be given power; he will never wield authority. The same holds true of service: by this term I desig-

nate the tasks that fall in the lap of a minister who tries to be all things to all men. He should be administrator, spiritual counselor, visitor of the sick and prisoners, helper of widows, protector of orphans. Here again, authority must flow from capacity. Good will, eagerness to serve, congeniality, easiness of approach are useful adjuncts to service. Indeed, they are required of a good servant of the people. But they provide no authority to those who have not acquired the necessary competence.

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Thus I am led to the idea that the principle regulating the authority of ministry and ministers must be intrinsic to a taxonomy of their functions. It belongs to the order within ministry and to the place of ministry in the context of the Church. Here, however, we are faced again with the possibility of a choice. For order—I am not speaking at this moment of the sacrament of orders, but of all orders or *taxes* within any system of relationships—necessarily follows two dimensions. There is an order of succession, linked with time and history, corresponding, in the contemporary scientific vocabulary, to diachrony. There is also an order of coefficientcy, linked with the state of a structure at a given moment of its existence and corresponding to synchrony. The diachrony unfolds successively and gradually; it may be embraced at a glance only after a succession of events are seen to possess the characteristics of a series linked together by continuity. The synchrony exists all at once and may be seen at a glance at any moment, even though many structural analyses may be required for a full knowledge of it. A scientific knowledge of diachronic developments is always retroactive, whereas the scientific knowledge of a synchrony usually includes a prospective tension, since the present moment enables us to know with a great deal of accuracy the characteristics of the next moment. The coming movements of a *Gestalt* may usually be foreseen, since they are not without causes which may themselves be perceived before their eventual outcome is entirely outlined.

This remark about the twofold dimension of taxonomy throws light on the Catholic conception of ministry, where these di-

mensions have effectively been present and investigated. Perhaps we ought to say that the diachronic dimension has prevailed. For the legitimacy of authority has been tied to the continued succession of ministers in office from the primitive Church to the present. This continued succession has been symbolized by ordination and carefully protected in the episcopate, bishops being consecrated by bishops in regulated order; and priests being, in normal circumstances, ordained by lawfully consecrated bishops. If, however, this well-known requirement of the Catholic view of the episcopate and the priesthood is compared with the foregoing functional analysis of ministry, it becomes clear that the purpose of ordination and consecration has never been to give anyone the type of authority which is needed for the ministrations of education and service. Rather, the diachronic transmission of ministerial authority has been commensurate with the other two functions: proclamation of the Word and presidency of worship. Thus, the history of ministry helps us to uncover its interior hierarchy, dominated by the functions traditionally depending on ordination. If therefore, structurally speaking, ministry implies proclamation, liturgical presidency, education, service, it should be identified, formally speaking, with the first two. Where a purely functional analysis could not determine the proper relationships of four distinct, though interrelated, tasks, the diachronic analysis establishes the basic principle of authority: the formal authority of the ministry derives from ordination. As I need not discuss the problem of identity between episcopal and sacerdotal ordination, I will simplify matters by putting these two liturgical actions together under the generic word, ordination.

The Catholic concern with succession has gone hand in hand with an attempt to find an inner, synchronic structure of ministry. Here, however, I must again disagree with the Theological Report on the Priesthood, where the priesthood is defined essentially by entrance into the order of presbyters, as the episcopate may be defined by entrance into the episcopal college. In the case of bishops, indeed, the episcopal college has always been paramount, bishop being associated with bishop in council after council at various levels of universality. In contrast with this, the presbyterium has seldom been an operative unit.

Granted that a synodal diocesan structure did develop in Europe, largely in application of the reforms of the Council of Trent, it would be quite erroneous to believe that this has ever constituted the heart of the priesthood. Despite the dislike manifested in this Report for a predominantly cultic priesthood, the only point which has consistently stood at the center of the priestly function and life has been the eucharist. A synchronic study of ministry today or, for that matter, at any time in the past, has, in my opinion, no choice whatsoever: the priesthood is centered on the eucharist, not only as the "apex," but first of all as the "fount," of all its functions. Structurally, this is the foundation as well as the keystone of the ministry. Spiritually, it is the origin and end of all adoration of the Father in Spirit and in Truth. The proclamation of the Word itself is focused on the good news of the presence of the Lord in the midst of his people; it is therefore eucharistic. All sacraments also have a eucharistic orientation. Education and service, in the context of the Christian ministry, have no other purpose than bringing the people to higher levels of participation in the Incarnate Lord. Admittedly, I am prepared, as I have expressed it elsewhere, to favor an official recognition of the ministry of some Protestant Churches, where the eucharist does not enjoy the centrality which I consider desirable and traditional. However, such a recognition can be extended only where we can discern a structural analogy or equivalence between the Catholic ministry, focused on the eucharist, and the ministry in the Church in question. I am not prepared, even for ecumenical purposes, to jettison the centrality of the eucharist in the proper synchrony of ministerial tasks.

The practical consequence of this is that ministerial authority is no less and no more than that of the Lord as present in the eucharistic mystery. It is from the sacrament of the eucharist, as its final cause (to speak in Aristotelian terms) or as its normative future (to speak in more contemporary language), that ordination derives its purpose and, thereby, its intrinsic meaning and its spiritual authority. As the officer of a local Church in its universal dimension, the ordaining bishop conveys to the ordinand the eucharistic authority needed for the functions he is expected to fulfill. This authority derives from the ordinand's future eucharistic action itself which, be-

cause it will be the act of the Lord coming among his people, assuming the Church into his Kingdom, elevating the baptized into the eschatological banquet, can effectively prepare for itself an adequate minister. To identify the meaning of ordination as a sharing of spiritual authority by the bishop with those who will be his associates would be largely incorrect, since in many cases the ordinands, as members of religious orders or as incardinated in other dioceses, will have no special association with their ordaining bishop. Yet, correct or not, this expresses symbolically the task of the bishop as the gatherer of the Church into its unity: he is empowered to select, commission, and endow with the necessary spiritual authority those who will unite local congregations into the unity of the Kingdom through the eucharistic action. Theological discussions about the existence and the nature of an indelible character impressed upon the priest by his ordination have in fact not been very helpful. For they have dealt with secondary questions relating to the ontology of priesthood. In the light of the primary question, which is that of the relation between priesthood and eucharistic action, the character may be identified with the orientation of the priest toward the eucharist. This is not constituted by his private piety, the forms of his devotion, his sanctity, his theological understanding, or his ability to preach the Gospel: it derives from the eucharist itself which, waiting for him in the eschatological future, attracts him infallibly. This is its indelibility.

Thus I have arrived at an estimate of the ministerial authority as it is effective in three functions: education and service, where I identify it with professional competence; worship, where I identify it with the eucharist itself. It remains to speak of proclamation. In a way, this function presents the features of the other three. It is closely intertwined with the eucharistic-eschatological-cultic function: it often takes place in a liturgical setting; all sacraments as such are also proclamation, insofar as they emerge when the Word joins the symbolic action; all proclamation of the Gospel is addressed to what is actually or potentially the eucharistic community. The Word is spoken to the Church as the communion (*koinonia*) which subsists ecclesially insofar as it is eucharistic. The Word spoken to those who are not yet the Church, as in mission or

even in apologetics, is addressed to a world that is called to become the Church and is therefore already, in anticipation and hope, eucharistic. It follows that the authority of proclamation flows, in its principle, from the cultic function of the priesthood. Yet the evidence of this authority, as attached to its concrete exercise in given situations, is no higher than its intrinsic credibility, which is itself inseparable from the theological and doctrinal knowledge and the faith-commitment of the speaker. This is a case where the sacramental *opus operatum* may indeed be negated or mitigated by the *opere operantis ministri*.

This mixture of types in the proclamation of the Gospel has great practical and pastoral importance, since this is the realm of the strictly canonical authority of those who, as bishops, have been entrusted with the task of government. In the perspective which I am following, government does not, as in the *triplex munus* typology, constitute a distinctive function. The laws of the Church, the pastoral advice given by bishops, the doctrinal reflections of papal encyclicals, the spiritual directives offered by the clergy to the generality of the people in their care are forms of the proclaimed Word. As such, they cannot carry the strength of the sacramental *opus operatum* any more than a parish sermon can. Their binding force derives from their intrinsic persuasiveness in the context of Christian faith and charity. Here the problem of the irreformability of dogma and of the *ex sese* in the definition of papal infallibility by Vatican I amounts to this: in what circumstances and concerning what aspects of the Gospel can the proclamation of doctrine participate in the *opere operato* of the eucharistic action? I will not examine this question here, except to note that Hans Küng's proposal of replacing historical infallibility by eschatological indefectibility amounts to renouncing the *opus operatum*, the recognizable effectiveness of the proclamation of the Gospel. In any case, an infallible definition of faith, understood in the context of the proclamation of the Gospel for the spiritual benefit of the eucharistic community should be prepared, celebrated, and received, not as the imposition of the views of a few persons on all others, but as an act of the whole Church freeing itself from misconceptions and obtaining better access thereby to the freedom of the

children of God. The words of Martin Luther should be applied here: "A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁶ Any minister of the Word, whatever his rank in the institutions of the Church, should always remember this basic axiom of the Gospel. His proclamation should aim at helping the faithful to realize both their total freedom through Christ and their total indebtedness to him. But the Christ in question is Christ in the Church. Here again, its connection with the eucharistic action is determinant for the value of a doctrine, whether simply proclaimed or solemnly defined. The principle of the "hierarchy of truths" as contained in the decree of Vatican II on Ecumenism finds one of its applications here.

The objection may be formulated that my insistence on the eucharistic center, even for church government, really minimizes the power of the hierarchy to pass laws in areas of discipline, relating, for instance, to fasting and penance, to the frequency of reception of the sacraments, to the celibacy of the clergy. I accept this consequence only insofar as such decisions may be arbitrary. I deny it insofar as the eucharistic community must itself be institutionally structured in order to meet a highly structured world. Then the proclamation of the Word through forms and decisions of government becomes necessary. But I cannot identify any special area where, as it were, government would be self-explanatory. Discipline as discipline we should cheerfully abandon; discipline as developing receptivity to the Gospel, unanimity in the Body of Christ, obedience in the Spirit, we must cling fast to. Indeed, I want to do away with ministerial authority insofar as this is purely human. I want to restore and stress it in its dimension of grace. To give a topical example, I find it quite insufficient to state, as has been done often lately, that keeping or abolishing the law of clerical celibacy is only a disciplinary question to be decided in keeping with pastoral wisdom. For there is no area of pastoral wisdom which is not primarily theological: the range of pastoral options and the eventual choice of one of them as the standard discipline are delimited and must be

⁶ *On the Freedom of a Christian Man.*

guided by theological thought according to theological consistency. This is not a matter of discovering what is good or what is best for the subjective needs of people, but of acknowledging and expressing the freedoms and the demands of the Gospel. In particular, the eschatological meaning of *sacerdotium*, as outlined at the beginning, favors the discipline of clerical celibacy.

Let me now summarize briefly what I have done in this paper.

The first moment of our reflection has examined the origin of Christian ministry and dispelled a frequent contemporary misunderstanding of its sacerdotality: ministry is constituted by conjunction of the leadership of the eucharistic community with the effective presidency of the eucharistic action.

The second moment has examined several conceptions of the principle of determination, in answer to the question: what determines the structure of ministry? These conceptions have been related to methodological options. The authority of the ministry has thus been seen to depend on two variables. I have been led to assert the primacy of method and the necessity to escape the circular situation in which the minister as *magister* decides the structure and the authority of his own *magisterium*.

The third moment has sought to identify through a functional analysis of ministry a third variable or referent, without which one cannot establish satisfactorily the authority of ministry. I have selected as the most accurate a fourfold analysis of ministry as proclamation, worship, education, and service. I have found that ordination confers authority to the minister as president of the eucharistic assembly, whereas the authority of education and service derives only from competence, and that of preaching partakes of both.

A fourth moment has analyzed the taxonomy of ministerial functions in its diachronic and its synchronic dimensions. This has led me to identify further the source of ministerial authority. I have proposed a theory of ordination as flowing from the eucharistic action itself through the bishop. I have drawn the conclusion that disciplinary authority does not stand by itself, but only in subordination to the eucharistic ac-

tion and in subservience to the principle of Christian freedom for all members of the Church.

I certainly would not dare to suggest that I have solved all practical problems relating to authority. Yet I would maintain that all theoretical problems may be resolved on the principles which have been stated.