

PRIEST, PROPHET, KING

Priest-prophet-king

The ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the Shepherd-King, Prophet and Priest

Some members of the Body of Christ are chosen to receive the Sacrament of Orders. As baptized Christians they continue to share in the priestly-prophetic-kingly life and ministry of Jesus as outlined in the previous meditation. Just as the sacrament of marriage bestows on certain baptized men and women a special grace related to their state in life, so the sacrament of orders bestows on certain baptized members of the church a special grace and a special sharing in the Christ's priestly-prophetic-kingly life and ministry.

Individual ordained ministers belong to a 'sacramental brotherhood' (PO, n. 8) of the ordained presbyterate, and they are consecrated and minister as members of that 'brotherhood'. This male language is changing in those churches that ordain women. However, the Catholic Church in communion with Rome is among those churches that continue the custom of restricting ordination to men.

The Second Vatican Council speaks of those who exercise the sacrament of orders:

'Christ, whom the Father hallowed and sent into the world has, through his apostles, made their successors the bishops sharers in his consecration and mission; and these in their turn duly entrusted in varying degrees members of the church with the office of ministry. Thus the divinely instituted office of ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who have from ancient times been called bishops, presbyters and deacons' (LG, n. 28).

This statement intentionally leaves open the complex historical question of the origin of the three ministries of bishop, presbyter and deacon, and is content to remind us of their ancient standing. In declaring that the office of ministry is of divine institution, no equivalent claim is being made of the ways in which this ministry has found historical expression.

Among the many gifts poured out on the community by Christ, Paul speaks of those that are central to the founding and maintaining of the Church as the Body of Christ:

'The gifts that he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The apostles are those who have seen the Lord (Acts 1:22; 1Corinthians 9:1) and who have received a personal commission from him (Galatians 1:1,12). As such, the ministry of apostle is unrepeatable. The prophets are those who receive revelation from the Spirit concerning the mysteries of God and are commissioned to communicate this revelation to the community. Their gift lies outside the organisational structure of the community, for 'the Spirit breathes where he wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes' (John 3:8). The ministries of apostle and prophet are foundational to the Church (Ephesians 5:20). Paul speaks also of 'evangelists'. Having learned the Gospel from the apostles, these in their turn go out as missionaries and preach the word to others. 'Pastors and teachers' remain in the community once formed to guide, instruct, nurture, protect, conserve and build it up. Those exercising organisational leadership have the responsibility of unifying and coordinating the various gifts,

ministries, and powers of the members of the community for the better functioning of the body.

As church order developed, the task of organisational leadership fell to the bishops, assisted by presbyters and deacons. The bishops are successors of the apostles, not individually, but by being constituted members of the episcopal body (CD, n.4). This body carries on certain aspects of the apostolic ministry. Presbyters, to a lesser degree, share in this. The explanatory note from the Commission, appended to *Lumen Gentium* and published along with it in the official Latin text, states that this ‘does not imply the transmission of the extraordinary power of the apostles to their successors’. We must conclude that what is said of the apostles can be applied to bishops and presbyters only with necessary adjustments.

The ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the shepherd-king.

The evidence of the New Testament and historical studies of the first and second centuries of the Christian era indicate that Christian communities were, from the beginning, structured and organised in a variety of ways. However, influenced by the organisation of the Roman state and by the needs of the times, some time in the second century the system of mono-episcopacy emerged as the universal pattern of government. According to this system, the local Christian community was under the leadership of one bishop who was assisted by a number of presbyters and deacons. This system still prevails in the Catholic Church in communion with Rome, in the various Orthodox churches, and in a number of other Christian churches.

The members of the Christian community who receive the sacrament of Orders are consecrated by a special grace to be in the Church a sacrament of Christ precisely as Head of the Body. When Paul speaks of the Christian community as the body of Christ (eg Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:23; 5:23), he is focusing on the profound truth that the life of the community is an expression of Jesus’ own Spirit. Christ is the head of the body because he is its inspirer. He wills to draw everyone to himself (John 12:32) in order that we may ‘live and live to the full’ (John 10:10), by sharing in the communion of love which he has in God. He also shares with his disciples his mission and the power to carry it out, for God wants ‘everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:4). The ordained ministers are a sacrament of Christ-as-Head, incarnating in their ministry the grace with which Christ the head of the body inspires and directs it.

An ordained minister, while sharing membership in the Body of Christ with his brothers and sisters, is consecrated in a special relationship to Christ: he is a sacrament of Christ who, as head, mediates between God and the community.

The ministry of the ordained is a ministry of leadership. From the outset it is important to underline the obvious truth that one can be a leader in any number of ways, including teaching, healing, and serving. The most important leadership within the Christian community is given by those men and women who are recognised as models of holiness, and the most important quality here is that of love. It can, therefore, be rightly claimed that the most important leadership in the Church is leadership in love, and anyone can

Priest-prophet-king

exercise this leadership. In referring to the presbyter as a leader we are speaking only of organisational leadership – leadership in the ‘ordering’ of the community. Of course, with this ministry as with all the other ministries, the one entrusted with it carries it out best when he does so in love. We refer back to the earlier meditation in which we outlined the characteristics of Jesus’ exercise of the role of Shepherd-King in his life and ministry, culminating in his self-giving on the cross. The ordained minister is to carry out his ministry of leadership of the community with the mind and heart of Jesus, as a service to Christ’s Body the Church.

The ordained minister is to help make the faithful aware of their role, as baptized Christians, to be sacraments of Christ the King, allowing the Spirit of the risen Christ to inspire them to contribute to bringing about the reign of God in the world.

Sharing in the life and ministry of Christ the Prophet

Prophecy cannot be institutionalized, There is nothing especially prophetic in the life and ministry of the ordained. God can use any instrument to reveal his surprising word. The ordained do have a special role in preaching and teaching, but these are expressions of his priesthood, not of any particular prophetic charism. Let us now turn to reflect on the ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the Priest.

The ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the Priest

The organisational position of the presbyter derived from Jewish synagogue practice in which the local community was under the leadership of a group of older men, the presbyters. Though the English ‘priest’ derives from the word ‘presbyter’, the Jewish presbyter (Hebrew: zâkên; Greek: presbyteros; Latin presbyter) was not a priest (Hebrew: kohên; Greek: hiercus; Latin: sacerdos). By the third century, however, Christian presbyters, as well as the overseers of the community, the ‘bishops’, were being referred to as ‘priests’.

In its Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7th December 1965) the Second Vatican Council generally uses the word presbyter to speak of those exercising the ordained ministry. However, in the following texts, it uses the word ‘priest’(Latin ‘sacerdos’). In the opening paragraph the Decree speaks of presbyters being ‘in the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King’. It goes on to speak of the ‘priestly office’ exercised by the presbyters (n.2). It speaks of ‘priestly preaching’, and states that the faithful seek for God’s word ‘from the mouth of priests’(n.4). The Decree declares that presbyters ‘share in the priesthood of Christ’(n.5, n.10). It speaks of the ‘priestly function’ of ministering the sacraments (n.5), and states that ‘priests’ have the ministry of instructing the people in the faith (n.6). A senate of ‘priests’ should be set up (n.7). It speaks of ‘priestly obedience’(n.7), ‘priestly ministry’(n.8, n.10, n.11, n.15), ‘priestly mission’(n.11), ‘priestly celibacy’(n.16), and of ‘priests’ exercising leadership (n.9). It speaks of the ‘mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice ... in which priests fulfil their principal function’(n.13). It speaks of ‘priests’ who have lain down their lives (n.13); of ‘the mission of the priest’(n.16); of ‘priests whose portion is the Lord’(n.17); of ‘priests’ managing ecclesiastical property (n.17), and supporting the setting up of funds for the care of ‘priests’(n.21).

In Chapter Two we saw that every baptised Christian shares in the priesthood of Christ. How Jesus the priest mediates grace through those whom he calls to exercise organisational leadership in the Church is the subject of the rest of this book. Here we touch on the essence of what it is that makes the priesthood of the ordained ‘special’ (AA, n. 6), what it is that makes their priesthood ‘essentially different’ (LG, n. 2) from other ways in which Jesus’ mediatory priesthood is exercised, while being essentially linked to the priesthood of the baptised?

‘Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ’ (LG, n.10).

A person does not cease to be a member of the baptised faithful when he is ordained a priest. He will continue to exercise many ministries according to the personal consecration he has to Christ and the gifts with which he has been endowed. What concerns us here is precisely the ministry he exercises when he functions as an ordained priest.

What specifies their way of exercising Christ’s priesthood is that members of the priestly order are consecrated by a special grace to be in the Church a sacrament of Christ the priest precisely as Head of the Body.

When Paul speaks of the Christian community as the body of Christ (eg Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:23; 5:23), he is focusing on the profound truth that the life of the community is an expression of Jesus’ own Spirit. Christ is the head of the body because he is its inspirer. He wills to draw everyone to himself (John 12:32) in order that we may ‘live and live to the full’ (John 10:10), by sharing in the communion of love which he has in God. He also shares with his disciples his mission and the power to carry it out, for God wants ‘everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:4). The presbyters are a sacrament of Christ-as-Head, incarnating in their ministry the grace with which Christ the head of the body inspires and directs it.

An ordained priest, while sharing membership in the Body of Christ with his brothers and sisters, is consecrated in a special relationship to Christ: he is a sacrament of Christ the priest who, as head, mediates between God and the community.

Those called to the life of a hermit remind us all not to neglect the call to be alone with God. Those called to the contemplative life remind us all not to neglect contemplation. Those called to the consecration of marriage remind us all to be faithful to the ways in which we love each other. In a similar way, those called to the sacrament of priesthood remind us all of the priestly dimension of our Christian life.

The following texts speak of a threefold mediatory role that the presbyter, as a priest, carries out from within the sanctuary.

By divine institution some among the Christian faithful are constituted sacred ministers through the sacrament of orders by means of the indelible character with which they are marked; accordingly they are consecrated and deputed to shepherd the people of God, each in accord with his own grade of orders, by fulfilling in the person of Christ the head the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing (Canon 1008)..

Priest-prophet-king

'Ordained priests ... are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful, as well as to celebrate divine worship, as true priests of the new covenant'(LG, n.28).

'Students for the ordained priesthood should be 'trained for the ministry of the word ... for the ministry of worship and sanctification ... for the ministry of the shepherd'(OT, n.4).

Pope John-Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation 'I will give you shepherds' speaks of:

'the priest's threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity'(PDV, n.26).

'Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd - authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock' (PDV, n.15).

'Christ calls priests to lead your holy people in love, to nourish them by your word, and to strengthen them through the sacraments'(PDV, n.15, from the Preface of the Chrism Mass).

It is appropriate that something as fundamental as our dependence on Christ should find sacramental expression in the Church. This is the place of the sacrament of Orders. The ordained minister is a sacrament in the Church of Christ the Shepherd-King, the Prophet, and the Priest in relation to his body, the Church.

Just as Jesus carried out his ministry as Shepherd-King, Prophet and Priest through his total gift of himself, so it is to be for the ordained minister who is called and graced to be for the Church a sacramental sign of the presence in their midst of Jesus, the Shepherd-King, the Prophet and the Priest. We will examine each of these dimensions in later chapters. I conclude this opening reflection with the words of Pope John-Paul II (PDV n.15):

'In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are as a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd

- authoritatively proclaiming his word
- repeating his acts of forgiveness and offer of salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist
- showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit.'