

Holy Orders

n. 1554 'Christ, through his apostles, made their successors, the bishops, sharers in his consecration and mission; and these in their turn entrusted members of the Church in varying degrees with the office of ministry. Thus the divinely instituted office of ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who, from ancient times, have been called bishops, priests and deacons'(Vatican II LG 28).

Deacons

'Strengthened by the sacramental grace [received by the laying on of hands], deacons are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity. It pertains to the office of a deacon ... to administer Baptism solemnly, to be custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, in the name of the Church, to assist at and to bless marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the sacred scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful ... and to officiate at funeral and burial services'(LG 29).

1

Deacons

n. 1571 The Catechism repeats Vatican II teaching, noting that deacons exercise their ministry in

'the liturgical and pastoral life of the Church', and

'in its social and charitable works'.

- Deacons receive the ministry of service, not the ministry of ordained priesthood, though their service is a consecrated way of living their baptismal priesthood.
- They are consecrated in a permanent sacramental communion with Jesus in carrying on their ministry, which out of this special sacramental consecration.
- Celibacy is not required of men ordained as deacons.

2

Bishops

Bishops and priests have the ministry of ordained priesthood. Special to the bishop is the level of his teaching authority and organisational leadership. The Vatican Council Decree, *Christus Dominus*, on the Pastoral Office of Bishops for the Church, states that bishops are 'united in one college or body for the instruction and direction of the universal Church (CD n.3). Priests and deacons are dependent on bishops in the exercise of their ministry (CD n.15).

n. 895 'The bishops should not be thought of as vicars of the Pope.' (as though the Pope was a kind of general manager and the bishops regional managers).

n. 886 'The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches'(quoting LG 23).

n. 1560 'As Christ's vicar, each bishop has the pastoral care of the particular church entrusted to him, but at the same time he bears collegially with all his brothers in the episcopacy the solicitude for all the churches.'

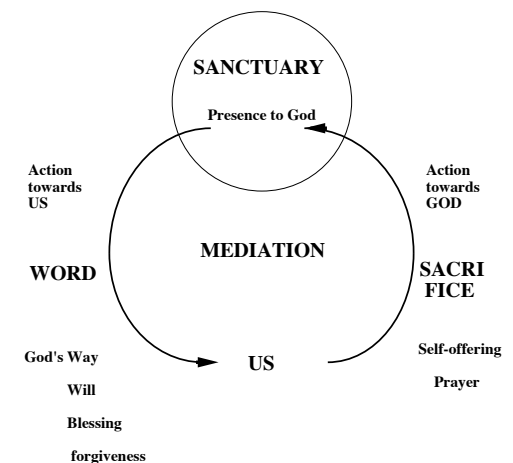
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Priesthood

In the Jewish cult, priests exercised their ministry from within the sanctuary. From God they mediated to the people the Torah (God's 'way'), God's will, God's blessing, and God's forgiveness.

They mediated back to God the people's response of sacrifice, essentially self-offering and prayer.

Priesthood is essentially about mediation.



4

The Letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is the fulfilment of the role of the priest, and that now there is only one priest, Jesus himself. His priesthood is not the priesthood exercised by the levitical priests of the Old Testament. That priesthood was not carried over into Christianity. His is the priesthood exercised by the king, the priesthood referred to in Psalm 110 where the king is proclaimed 'a priest according to the order of Melchizedek' (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6).

- It is this priesthood that Jesus the Messiah fulfilled, whose mission was to make the whole world holy by making it possible for everyone to live in communion with the Holy One.

'There is one God; there is also one mediator between God and mankind, Christ Jesus, himself a man' (1 Timothy 2:5).

Each of the baptised shares in Jesus' life and mission and so in his priesthood.

n. 1546 'Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:5).

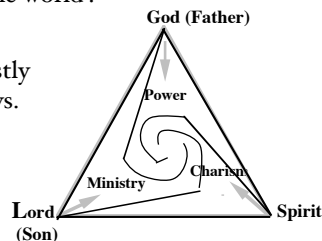
'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Peter 2:9 = Exodus 19:6).

Various priestly ministries of the faithful

The Church exercises the priestly mediation of Christ by

1. being a sanctuary of God's presence in the world
2. faithfully carrying out Christ's mission of revealing God to the world
3. compassionately drawing the world into communion with God = 'sanctifying/consecrating the world'.

Christians participate in the priestly mediation of Christ in various ways.



'There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord; there are varieties of ways of exercising power, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

Ordained Priests

One way of exercising baptismal priesthood is through the ministerial priesthood into which bishops and priests are ordained.

'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' (Vatican II LG 10).

The leadership exercised by the ordained priest is a leadership of order: organisational leadership, responsibility for unifying and coordinating the various gifts, ministries and power of the members of the community for the better functioning of the Body, and to ensure that the various ministries are exercised in such a way as to be faithful to Christ's will as expressed through the apostles and the prophets, for the continuing of Christ's mission to the world.

Through ordination the priest is in a sacramental consecration to Christ.

‘Through the sacrament presbyters, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head’(Vatican II PO 2).

‘Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd’(John-Paul II I will give you shepherds n.15).

- The ordained priest is to be in God’s sanctuary, living a holy life in God’s presence. Only from within the sanctuary can a priest mediate
- He is to be faithful / trustworthy, witnessing that it is indeed God’s word that he is mediating to the community
- He is to be compassionate, witnessing that he is indeed in communion with the people whose self-offering he is mediating to God

9

The consecration is such that it cannot be repeated and is for life

Following Jewish practice, Christian priestly leadership was restricted to males. The place of women in the public life of the community has changed dramatically in recent centuries, and there are those today who would like to see ordained priesthood open to women.

- The discipline, however, which restricts ordination to males is still in place in the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

10

Joseph Bernardin speaks of priests as

‘bearers of the mystery’ ‘doctors of the soul’

‘We are not dispensable “functionaries” in the church; we are bridges to the very mystery of God and healers of the soul. When we claim this identity unapologetically, we not only find ourselves; we also provide the church and our culture with the sustenance they require. This is the vocation, the reality, to which we are called. It is not dependent on numbers, or structures, or chancery offices, or any of the things we thought so essential, so important, but are now completely changed or are no more. Rather, it is dependent on the Lord Jesus, who never changes, and to whom we are irrevocably united through ordination – the Lord Jesus (who is the mystery of God and the healer of the soul) whom we make present in a tangible and inviting way each day to the countless people whom we serve. To him be honour and glory, now and always.’

11

John Thornhill SM writes:

‘The church’s institutional structures exist to promote what is paramount in the church’s life: helping people find a life-giving relationship with God.’

Pastors who make this their overriding priority, consciously directing the pastoral guidance they exercise within their communities to this end, and sharing the truth of their own faith journey with their people, will find that their people respond positively.

Pastors, on the other hand, whose vision is little more than administering a well-disciplined system, will find that their well-intentioned efforts often meet with dissatisfaction – as their people instinctively recognise that, before all else, membership of the church should develop their life-giving relationship with God.’

John O’Donohue

‘One of the great joys of priesthood is to be a spiritual midwife, that is, to help a person give birth to the divine that stirs within.’

12

Priestly celibate love

- The priest is a sacrament of Christ the head.
- From the beginning there have been those ordained into leadership in the community who have aspired to love in the way Jesus loved: as celibates.
- For many centuries bishops have been instructed to select priests only from among those who have given evidence that they can love in a mature way as celibates. This has not always been a requirement, and many would like to see it as optional, arguing that it is dangerous to make a Spirit-given charism into a legal requirement.
- However, though some priests have failed to live celibacy well, there is plenty of experience to support the fact that celibate loving is fitting for ordained priests.

13

Priestly celibate love

- Mature persons are generative. That is, they are able to spend their life in creative communion which is life-giving both to themselves and to those to whom they relate.
- To be generative, a person must have experienced intimacy: the kind of loving and being loved which is experienced as being the fruit of being deeply known and accepted by another whom we intimately know and accept.
- To be truly intimate one must have a sense of one's personal identity: a sense of self that is experienced as being affirmed by another who is significant to us.
- A so-called celibacy which avoids these stages of maturing will never become generative, and so will never become a way of loving.

14

Priestly celibate love

'Priests have freely accepted consecrated celibacy after the example of Christ'(Vatican II PO 16).

'They want to share with Jesus his manner of living'(Paul VI Priestly Celibacy 23)

- When a celibate is truly a sacrament to others of Christ's love, this highlights for them how special they are for they are loved for themselves, free of any desire to possess

15

Priestly celibate love

John XXIII 1959 to Seminarians

'Purity of heart is an atmosphere of serenity ... an indispensable condition for disinterested service of one's neighbour in the sacerdotal ministry.

'It is purity of heart that prepares one for the incomparable joys of long colloquies at the foot of the altar, which feeds fervent thoughts of apostolic charity, which breathes unbroken serenity ...

'It attracts souls by the very charm of Jesus Christ.'

Teilhard de Chardin The Evolution of Chastity 1934

'Chastity is often presented to us as a fragile crystal, which will shatter unless it is protected from every shock and from the light. Rather, it is more like a flame that devours everything as it burns.'

16

Catechism 25. Holy Orders : Priesthood

'In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are 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'(John-Paul II I will give you shepherds n.15).

'I, Paul, remind you, Timothy, to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, love and control of self'(2Timothy 1:6).

'Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of presbyters laid their hands upon you.'
(1Timothy 4:14)

Catechism 25. Holy Orders : Priesthood

'The ministry of ordained priests is directed to the Eucharist and finds its consummation in it. For their ministration, which begins with the announcement of the Gospel, draws its force and power from the sacrifice of Christ and tends to this'(Vatican II PO n. 2).

n. 1566 'From this unique sacrifice the whole of the priestly ministry draws its strength.'

'Pastoral charity flows especially from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This sacrifice is therefore the centre and root of the whole life of the ordained priest, so that the priestly soul strives to make its own what is enacted on the altar of sacrifice'(Vatican II PO n. 14).