

## LAY PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

THE discussion of lay participation in the priesthood of Christ, led by the writer of this report, resulted in the expression of many views by a large number of those present. For the purposes of this analysis, the leader has asked for written statements from those who took the chief parts in the argumentation—Father Palmer of Woodstock, Father Haran of Weston and Father Fuerst of West Baden. A series of questions was submitted to each in order to bring out clear and exact statements of the points around which the discussion revolved in the course of the seminar itself. The following report is a summary of the responses received.

### 1. IS THE GENERAL PRIESTHOOD OF THE FAITHFUL A REALITY?

All participants in the discussion agreed that the common priesthood is not a reality in the same sense as the hierarchical priesthood. All agreed likewise that the participation of the faithful in the priesthood of Christ could be at most analogous to the participation of ordained priests. Father Palmer and Father Rea preferred to regard the analogy as intrinsic, while Father Haran and Father Fuerst held forth the possibility that it might be extrinsic. In the latter case the common priesthood would be more a metaphor than a reality.

### 2. IN WHAT PRECISE SENSE IS IT A REALITY?

In regard to this point, the discussion resolved itself into an attempt to discover the nature of the analogy between the layman's participation in Christ's priesthood and that of the ordained priest. Most of those who took part seemed to feel that this could be attained only by instituting a comparison between the diverse relationships of people and priest to the Eucharistic sacrifice as offerers thereof. All conceded that the faithful do offer the Eucharistic sacrifice, though in a limited and restricted sense, offering it through the priest and, to a certain extent, in union with him. The question,

however, arose as to whether this offering made by the faithful is truly analogous with that made by the priest or whether it is merely called an offering metaphorically.

Here Father Fuerst, Father Palmer and Father Rea emphasized the importance of the fact that, as priests are empowered to offer in the full and unrestricted sense by the sacramental character of Orders, so the faithful are empowered to offer in the limited way proper to them by the sacramental character of baptism. Since according to common teaching, all the sacramental characters give some participation in the one priesthood of Christ, it is because they participate in the priesthood of Christ through the character of baptism in a true though limited sense that, the faithful are empowered in their own way to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice. Again the question arose whether this similarity was sufficient to constitute a true analogy between the priesthood of the faithful and the priesthood of Orders.

Father Palmer proposed that this similarity does constitute a true analogy. He pointed out that through the baptismal character the layman is "consecrated by God to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice," even as the priest is consecrated by God to offer the same sacrifice through the character of Orders. He concluded, therefore, that the individual layman possesses a priesthood that bears a real analogy to the priesthood of Orders. Layman and priest are alike in that each is "consecrated by God to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice." They differ in that the layman can exercise his priesthood only mediately and dependently upon the ordained priest, while the latter exercises his priesthood immediately and dependent solely on Christ. According to Father Palmer, in order to save the reality of lay participation in the priesthood of Christ, it is necessary to define priesthood as a "divine consecration to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice."

Father Haran objected to this method of arriving at a definition of priesthood and to the definition itself. He insisted that there is what might properly be called a "classical" definition of priesthood contained in the theological materials of the past centuries. Only such a definition can serve as the norm for deciding who is a subject of priesthood and who is not and for determining in what

sense priesthood is to be affirmed of those of whom it is predicated. Father Haran gave it as his conviction that no decision can be reached as to the reality of lay participation in the priesthood of Christ until such a definition be worked out and agreed upon.

Father Rea also objected to Father Palmer's definition of priesthood as too broad. He agreed with Father Haran that the "classical" definition must be clarified before a thoroughly accurate statement as to the nature of the common priesthood can be attained. He noted, however, that in working out such a definition full cognizance would have to be taken of the commonly accepted teaching of lay participation in priesthood through the characters of baptism and confirmation as stated by St. Thomas. Returning to the question as to whether the priesthood of the faithful is truly analogous with that of the ordained, Father Rea preferred to emphasize the essentially social nature of the common priesthood. He held that the layman's participation in the priesthood of Christ is not such as to entitle him as an individual to be called a priest in any but a metaphorical sense. The baptismal character gives him merely what may be termed an "inchoative" priesthood. Directly and immediately this enables him as an individual to offer only spiritual "sacrifices." Although it enables him also to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice, it enables him to do so only indirectly and mediately, that is, in so far as he is united with his fellow members in the Mystical Body and is represented by the priest at the altar. It is only in these latter circumstances that the common priesthood becomes truly analogous with the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the ordained. It is not, therefore, the individual that is baptized who is a priest; rather the whole Body of the baptized is, in the words of Abogard of Lyons (*De Privilegio et Jure Sacerdotii*; PL 104, 127) "under the supreme Head, one Priest."

### 3. WHAT LIGHT IS THROWN UPON THIS PROBLEM BY THE ENCYCLICAL *Mediator Dei*?

In this regard Father Haran emphasized that His Holiness has made it clear that the faithful, whatever the meaning of their participation, do not possess the "priestly power." Both Father Haran

and Father Fuerst noted the importance given to "self-offering" in connection with the Eucharistic sacrifice. Father Fuerst felt that the *Mediator Dei* "firmly establishes the fact that the faithful do participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice and 'do offer the divine Victim, though in a different sense.'" He pointed out that the Holy Father to some extent even explains the sense in which the faithful may be said to "offer" the divine Victim, i.e., not that they "consecrate," but that they "offer the Eucharistic sacrifice through the priest and in union with him." Father Rea emphasized that the encyclical traces the ability of the faithful to offer in their own way, indirectly, by the participation in the priesthood of Christ, which is theirs through the baptismal character. All noted how careful the Holy Father was to exclude every possible heretical misinterpretation of the doctrine.

4. WHAT DIRECTION MUST THE DISCUSSION OF THIS QUESTION  
TAKE IN THE FUTURE?

There was general agreement that the question revolves about a clear determination of the nature of the analogy whereby we may speak of a common priesthood. In arriving at such a determination Father Haran proposed that the most important step in the clarification of the definition of priesthood is contained in traditional sources. The others who partook in the discussion, while admitting the importance of such a definition, insisted that it is at least as important to arrive at a clear analysis of the nature of sacramental character, particularly as a participation in the priesthood of Christ, and also to study the meanings traditionally given to the word "offer" as applied to the laity in theological tradition. For unless these two latter points are taken into consideration, it will be impossible to arrive at a definition of priesthood as "contained in traditional sources." All agreed that if study progressed along these lines a fully satisfactory statement of the doctrine could be attained.

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