

A RESPONSE TO JOHN F. BALDOVIN

First of all I want to thank Professor Baldovin for a very challenging and well-organized presentation. He began by asking three questions: the first one looked at symbol and sacrament, the second focused on the ministerial leader, and the third reviewed some implications for ministerial leadership in the Eucharist from historical and critical theology. From the outset, Professor Baldovin stated that he is interested in a broader understanding of ministerial leadership which includes several persons and where each one has a function to perform in service of the community. This is a clear directive from Vatican II when all the faithful were urged to have "an active, meaningful and full participation" in the liturgy.

In reference to symbols and rituals which "operate at a level far deeper and more complex than rational arguments," Professor Baldovin affirmed that, although all peoples use them in their daily life, symbolic expression is culturally bound and the same symbol may have different, even opposite, meanings. Today, more than ever, we are called to inculturate our liturgical celebrations, therefore we must look at the symbols used to see if they really help the worshipping community to go beyond them and experience the transcendent, for example: a procession may be meaningless to a culture that is settled and participates rather passively by merely watching an event, while the same procession is full of meaning for peoples who are in reality "pilgrims" on earth and are still searching for a place to live peacefully and securely. Are all ministerial leaders conscious of the characteristics of the communities they served?

Professor Baldovin then reflected on "sacrament" in its more fluid meaning according to several theologians and Vatican II documents. In several cultural traditions, the presence of God is truly omnipresent and the whole of creation is a revelation of God's love and care. St. John of the Cross said, "todo el mundo está endiosado" (the whole world reflects God), and even more, encounters and relations between and among human beings are many times clear revelation of God; Jesus told us, "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do it to me." If the purpose of ministerial leadership in the Eucharist is to help the assembly to pray, and if in the Eucharist we receive the nourishment we need for our daily life, then human relationships and works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, are true revelations of God's presence and action. All the baptized who live fully and consciously their baptismal promises exercise ministerial leadership one to another.

These reflections follow Professor Baldovin's suggestion to approach "High Sacramentality from Below," looking at the experience of the faithful who believe that God is "always and already operating in human affairs." Jesus' parables and examples start from below, from observing God's action in nature

and in daily, simple lives: birds, sheep, lilies of the field, going to the well for water, celebrating a wedding, etc. Definitely, "God's gracious activity is already to be found in the world." For me, personally, as a Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word, this is a very meaningful way of looking at theology since it is inculturated, incarnated, in our life, as the Son of God became human, the Incarnate Word, to reveal His Father's love. Leonardo Boff, in his small book *Sacramentos de la Vida Diaria*, tells us about the "sacrament" of a cigarette butt, since it had been the last cigarette his father smoked. The presence of his recently dead father was obvious to him in color and smell. In this type of sacrament and symbol, who exercises ministerial leadership?

I found a particular richness in this presentation when "blessing" was presented as it is found in Jewish tradition of prayer: God "is blessed or acknowledged for that which already is, releasing it for human enjoyment or use." Blessings for Hispanics and other peoples are particularly powerful and often we ask a blessing from our parents, grandparents, priests, sisters, and collaborators, who by giving their blessing make things and human actions part of God's plan through which God is glorified. These people are the ministerial leaders in this form of blessing, "it is a tradition of piety and prayer that recognizes the world as fundamentally graced." Professor Baldovin clarifies here the word "*benedixit*—saying a blessing" in the institution narrative, not as translated in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: "blessed it [the bread, the wine]" but blessing God for this food and drink we are going to use. If we understand blessing this way, Professor Baldovin encouraged us to "look to the life of the community for the development of roles of leadership and to rethink what has traditionally been called consecration." Could we also consider participation by the community in the Eucharistic prayer with acclamations, gestures, etc.?

The second question dealt with the characteristics of the ministerial leader. After some thoughts on the theology of sacerdotal character, on the bridegroom imagery for Christ and on ritual purity (when sexual action was considered impure) with regard to liturgical presidency, Professor Baldovin concluded that "the idea that there is a *natural* resemblance between the minister and Christ has yet to be demonstrated persuasively" for the celebration of the Eucharist. He believes that "leadership of the Eucharist has been tied to leadership of the community," and "The charismatic ability of someone to pray may be precisely what led that person into eucharistic presidency and the leadership of the community." We need ministerial leaders who lead a deep prayer life.

Vatican II emphasized the function of *all* liturgical ministries as "helping the assembly to pray." For example, the music ministers do not fulfill their ministry if they play and sing as in a concert; instead, they must help and support the assembly as the whole community prays and sings. Likewise, the role of the presider is to lead the assembly in prayer. In order to do this, Professor Baldovin proposed that presbyteral ministry should be characterized by two sets of

affirmations: by the individual person who desires to follow a call from God to service of the Church and by the members of the community who perceive this person as having the ability "to lead the community in service . . . to articulate the community's faith in preaching and witness to the Gospel . . . to voice the community's faith by public prayer . . . to lead an exemplary public life of witness to the Gospel . . . and to share leadership." I would like to add another ability: to be sensitive and to know from within the culture or cultures of the community. I also believe that this approach to ministerial leadership will be very beneficial for all the faithful and will renew their faith and spirituality. This approach will also demand some important changes in the formation and election of presbyteral candidates. Again, looking "from below" at ministerial leadership, it seems that this is what people expect particularly of their spiritual leaders. Can we imagine a community that truly participates with such a leader and is able to bring their daily lives and the Eucharist together?

In the third and final part of his presentation, Professor Baldovin dealt with the Eucharist as action particularly when he considers the role of the presider. The Eucharist proper is a "communal *action* of the whole assembled Church" that offers a blessing/thanksgiving over bread and wine and shares of these eucharistized elements. Therefore, the whole Christ, head and members, must be the agent. Professor Baldovin briefly presented the history of the Eucharistic Prayer and concluded that "the whole assembly offers the eucharistic sacrifice in union with Christ by identifying itself with his life of praise and thanksgiving and by invocation of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of such self-offering is communion in the life of God." How can we help the members of a community to realize their deep participation in the Eucharist? This would transform their lives and give deep meaning to their daily experiences. Prayer, Eucharist, and life will become one with Christ in the Spirit for the glory of the Father.

In his conclusion, Professor Baldovin stated that at the Eucharist the ordained presbyter or bishop acts as the local community's representative of unity with the wider Church and with tradition and leads the assembly in prayer and action by articulating the Church's thanksgiving, memorial and invocation on the basis of the qualities enumerated [above]."

If we agree with this statement, there are some consequences pointed out by Professor Baldovin: (1) ministerial activity is of its nature communal, based upon the varied gifts shared by members of the assembly; (2) the wisdom of celebrating Holy Communion on Sundays in the absence of a priest is questioned, because it emphasizes presence over action (I do not agree, since, as we celebrate this ritual, we are united to a larger community in the action); (3) the posture of the assembly and the gestures of the priest need to be reexamined, to express more clearly communal, ministerial leadership; (4) presbyteral concelebration must be criticized as it detracts from the role of the whole community; and (5) the time is opportune to open the question of shared presidency in

liturgical leadership, although this is already being done in some circumstances and places.

Professor Baldovin's presentation leaves us with challenges, questions, and hopes. Once again, "theologizing from below," we, the "pilgrim" People of God, are filled with hope at the possibility of having true leaders in prayer that allow us to take our rightful place, to participate fully and meaningfully, and to unite our whole life to the Eucharistic Sacrifice as members of the whole Christ. We are grateful to Professor Baldovin for his thoughtful and challenging presentation.

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