





STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS



**Priesthood Today  
and the Jesuit Vocation**

Studies by

J. William Harmless, S.J.

and

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, laity, men and/or women. Hence the *Studies*, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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PRIESTHOOD TODAY  
AND THE JESUIT VOCATION

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*Jesuits as Priests: Crisis and Charism*

Donald L. Gelpi, S.J.

*Theological Reflections on the Priestly  
Character of Our Jesuit Vocation*

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## For your information . . .

Serendipity and summertime, surveys of readership and the Spiritual Exercises all enter into my remarks here.

The nearly simultaneous submission to the Seminar of two essays on priesthood and the Jesuits, the one complementing the other, the one basically historical and the other theological, the one from outside the Seminar, the other from a member, was agreeable, valuable and unexpected, and that all adds up to something being serendipitous. Equally so is the opportunity, after the usual Seminar process of discussion and approval, to publish them together. The two essays make for this unusually large May issue of *Studies* and that is where summertime enters in; it will provide the opportunity to read and ponder them in a leisurely way.

What does our readership think of *Studies*? The Seminar has asked the questions of itself before. Soon it will ask that and other questions in a survey of readership. Why are we doing this survey? Briefly put, to serve you as best we can. We want to know something of what our readers are like, what you have found helpful and interesting in *Studies*, what subjects you would like to see treated in the future. We know that there are differences of opinion. (What group of Jesuits especially, who make up our primary audience, would be without them?) The survey has been professionally prepared at the Department of Communications at Santa Clara University. It is being sent to a randomly selected sample of recipients of *Studies*. Their responses will be kept completely confidential. The completed surveys will be professionally scored and the aggregate data will be prepared for us. We shall report the results of that data in a future issue of *Studies*. If you receive one of our questionnaires in the mail, we ask you, please, to respond to it fully and quickly.

Lastly, our next issue of *Studies* will be an essay in interpretation. It seeks to inculturate certain Ignatian principles and axioms, especially as they appear in the Spiritual Exercises, into a current or at least modern philosophical and theological framework. The essay is by Roger Haight, S.J., and is entitled "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality." Look for it in the September issue of *Studies*.

**John W. Padberg, S.J.**

**Editor**

*Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*

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# JESUITS AS PRIESTS: CRISIS AND CHARISM

J. William Harmless, S.J.\*

## PART I. INTRODUCTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF CRISIS

On the eve of Vatican Council II, Fulton Sheen extolled the high dignity of the priesthood:

Every priest knows himself, by Divine election, to be mediator between God and man, bringing God to man and man to God. As such the priest continues the Incarnation of Jesus Christ Who was both God and Man.<sup>1</sup>

Such sentiments were common in the decades before the council. For instance, Pius XI in a 1935 encyclical proclaimed that "[the priest's] office is not for human things, and things that pass away, however lofty and valuable these may seem; but for things divine and endur-

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1 This paper was originally written for a seminar on "Mission, Ministry, and Priesthood in the Society of Jesus" led by Fr. John O'Malley, S.J., at Weston School of Theology in the spring, 1986. The seminar focused on a critical reading of the foundational documents of the early Society as well as the documents of Vatican II and General Congregations 31 and 32 to see what these had to say about Jesuit priesthood. I am indebted to John and the members of the seminar for a number of the perspectives argued for here. The original paper has been thoroughly revised with the aid of the suggestions, challenges, and provocative thinking of the members of the American Assistency Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. The passage quoted here appears in Fulton J. Sheen, *The Priest is Not His Own* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963), p. 23.

ing." <sup>2</sup> One popular spiritual writer put it even more bluntly: "The priest is the most perfect image of Jesus upon the earth." <sup>3</sup>

From our postconciliar perspective, passages such as these seem embarrassing. Their exaggerated claims for the priesthood seem to run roughshod over the rightful dignity of the laity. Our discomfort with views once so commonplace reveals how profoundly we have absorbed the change in sensibility wrought by Vatican II. The council unintentionally but effectively shattered an earlier sense of Catholic identity, of self-definition.<sup>4</sup> Its aim, of course, had been renewal, a fresh appropriation of the past and an *aggiornamento*. In pursuing this renewal, the council legislated, or simply created the context for, a number of striking changes. These generally excellent and even necessary changes had, however, an unusual side effect: they tended to disconnect us from our immediate past.

Over the last ten years, different groups within the Church have begun to shore up a new Catholic identity. For instance, after a decade of experiment and study, Jesuits began in the mid-seventies to arrive at a new consensus on mission and charism. Symbolic of that new self-understanding was the document *Jesuits Today* passed by

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2 Pius XI, "Ad Catholici Sacerdotii: December 20, 1935," in *Official Catholic Teachings: Clergy & Laity* (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing Co, 1978), p. 36. To see how this passage influenced the view of popular spirituality, see the work of Wilhelm Stockums, *Spirituality in the Priesthood* (London: Herder Book Co., 1943). Stockums, after quoting Pius, goes on to note that "in the economy of salvation which almighty God has devised, He needs the cooperation of His priests to mediate to men the graces of the redemption. And mankind needs this priestly mediation if it desires to attain the proper relationship toward God. . . . The priest as mediator between God and man lives and breathes, toils and labors, in an atmosphere far removed from that of every-day earthly life" (pp. 40-41).

3 Quoted in Bede Frost, *Priesthood and Prayer* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1933), p. 29.

4 John O'Malley, "On Continuity and Change: A Symposium," in George E. Ganss et al., *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Oct. 1972), p. 134: "Sudden and frequent changes in form, no matter how convincingly justified on a rational basis, can be destructive for the organization because they break the sense of continuity within it. They break the sense of identity and self-definition. Ignatius' instinct for this psychological truth emerges simply from the fact that he imposed on the Society a constitutional form. Nevertheless, at times external forms must be changed unless the organization is to suffer great harm or even die."

the 32nd General Congregation. In recent years a host of Catholic institutions--parishes and dioceses, universities and hospitals--have set about the hard process of writing mission statements. Also, because of the bishops' recent letters on nuclear war and the economy, American Catholics have begun to discover anew the public meaning and cost of faith. While many aspects of Catholic identity have come together, there are still some elements very much in turmoil. One of those elements still in crisis, both in the United States and worldwide, both in the Society and in the larger Church, is the priesthood. Symptomatic of this crisis is the continuing decline in the number of candidates for the priesthood and the continuing departures among those already ordained.

For Jesuits, the *felt* sense of crisis concerning priesthood comes surprisingly late in the course of one's formation. After several hectic years as a regent, the average Jesuit scholastic comes to theology expecting to settle smoothly into the familiar routine of school. Often without much warning, he can find himself in a crisis of identity, one which revolves around the meaning of priesthood. This might seem odd. One would think that the issue of priesthood would have come to the fore earlier. After all, ordination tends to serve as the real climax of formation, and the majority of Jesuits are obviously priests. Yet the focus through most of formation is elsewhere: on community life and the vows, on prayer and the experience of the Exercises, on the Society's mission and apostolic works. Still, there is something peculiar about the fact that we Jesuits wait so long to face the meaning of priesthood. As we shall see later in the essay, the peculiarity of this says something, I believe, about the unusual place that priesthood exercises in the Jesuit charism.

In any case, when a Jesuit scholastic comes to theology, he comes face to face with his own imminent ordination and thus faces the crisis that swirls around the meaning of priesthood in the larger Church. And that larger crisis of identity often creates a personal one. That crisis, at least as I experienced it, came, first of all, as a vague sense that things were out of sorts, that I was under fire,

that I had hard questions about this or that aspect of life in the Church, that earlier ministerial hopes and dreams were suddenly cloudy or strangely problematic. Only after a fair amount of reflection did the focus of that crisis become clear: the ambiguity of priestly identity, an identity rendered all the more problematic by tensions within the contemporary Church.

What do I mean by ambiguity? Certainly, priesthood means that one is ordained to preside over the Church's sacramental worship. But that is not particularly helpful to the majority of Jesuits who work primarily in high schools and universities and retreat houses. Sacramental ministry has generally not held the same prominence for the Jesuit that it has for the diocesan priest. But priesthood, whether Jesuit or diocesan, is and always has been much more than this. Sacramental leadership is simply the tip of the iceberg. And it is what lies under the surface--the daily lived reality of priesthood--that has shifted so greatly. In other words, while ordination clearly involves a public change of status and is in some way irrevocable, the *what* one is being ordained for seems anything but clear. One feels that one is making a life decision for something that is generally muddled, possibly unimportant, and certainly unpopular.

But the problem goes beyond an ambiguous job description. As priest, one serves as a public and permanent representative of the Church. And our Church has a most ambivalent character. Such ambivalence is certainly nothing new, but it increases the tensions for many who face the decision for priesthood. First of all, our Church on the one hand puts forward very prophetic and forcefully argued positions on social justice and on the other hand disallows any critique concerning the justice of its own leadership structure. Its a priori exclusion of women and married men from eucharistic leadership seems, in the eyes of many, to be unjust and hypocritical. Second, the Church seems unable to find a place for the American tradition of loyal dissent and of due process. Moreover, in a Church which accords reason great weight in shaping the life of faith, one hears inordinate appeals to authority. In a Church which claims to affirm the dignity of human sexuality, one encounters an official

sexual ethic framed all too often in hard and fast negatives. These tensions within the larger, public Church come very much into view when one is immersed in the study of theology and no longer enjoys the rewards of serving some local parish or school community on a daily basis.

What brought me through the crisis was grace and discernment. It involved a response to a call that came from beyond me. And that response was ultimately a matter of love, of choosing how best to love. It meant saying *yes* to my love of Christ and of the Society of Jesus, saying *yes* to my love for the Church in all its messy goodness and sinfulness, its wisdom and painful shortsightedness. But critical theological analysis, too, helped me through the crisis. In that analysis I sought to situate the priesthood in its larger historical development and to uncover the more immediate historical and cultural forces within the Church which helped shape the current state of affairs. It was, in essence, an attempt to name the problem, to examine the crisis as crisis. One of the difficulties was simply finding a language or perspective to name what is going on. So often those elements which are in fact clear seemed either irrelevant or inadequate. Despite this sense, however, I sifted out some elements of the problem. Two in particular seem to have significantly contributed to the current sense of crisis: (1) the collapse of the received view on priesthood and (2) the failure of Vatican II to catalyze a renewal of priestly ministry. We will look at these two elements in some detail in the next section.

But it was not enough to name the problem. I sought some understanding of Jesuit priesthood that would at least serve as a personal response to the question. I meditated on the lived tradition of the Society, observing the way Jesuits have lived out their priesthood day in, day out. I realized that that lived reality might hold an implicit wisdom far richer and more adequate to the Jesuit way of proceeding than many theologies of priesthood. This led me to reexamine the foundational documents of the Society and to see what place priesthood played in Ignatius's fashioning of the Jesuit charism.

In that investigation, one which I will retrace in the third section of this essay, I came to see that priesthood is not so much constitutive of the Society's charism as it is instrumental to that charism. The central, the constitutive element of the Society's charism is its mission, its apostolic life. And priesthood flows from and is subservient to that larger commitment and availability for mission. Admittedly, for some Jesuits priesthood--at least as it is conventionally understood--plays a major role in their apostolic life; but for many others it may be rather secondary or privatized, even peripheral. What shapes its prominence, whether that be great or small, is the mission or series of missions that one receives over the course of one's life.

And this instrumental character of Jesuit priesthood is rooted in the pattern of life that Ignatius set forth for the Society. Ignatius shaped his vision of the Society not by the sixteenth-century understanding of priesthood, but by his and the early companions' experiments in preaching, teaching, and spiritual direction. These experiments attempted to respond to the needs of the sixteenth-century Church, but they also flowed from Ignatius's and the early companions' meditation on particular New Testament images of discipleship: for example, Luke's description of the apostles going in pairs to proclaim the Kingdom, Paul's thirst to go to the ends of the earth to announce the Good News. It was that *vita apostolica* that fired Ignatius's imagination and led him to reconfigure the praxis of priesthood. In this sense, priesthood became for Ignatius simply the best at-hand vehicle for implementing his vision of the apostolic life, a life in which mission was central.

## PART II. ELEMENTS OF THE CRISIS

### The collapse of the received view

*The received view and the experience of priests.* - In the 1950s, the immigrant Church in America came of age. Catholics began to enjoy a greater integration into American culture during the postwar

economic boom. Nevertheless, they maintained a clear sense of their distinctive religious identity.<sup>5</sup> They did so in a variety of ways: supporting Catholic institutions such as the vast network of schools and hospitals; keeping up such distinctive practices as faithfully attending Mass on Sundays and holy days and abstaining from eating meat on Fridays; engaging in the vast array of pious practices such as lighting devotional candles, attending novenas and parish missions; employing such distinctively Catholic paraphernalia as rosaries and holycards. Despite their integration into American culture in terms of work and language, Catholics still were able to hold onto their ethnic identity and culture--often because of the structure of neighborhoods.

In this era priests were held in high regard. People esteemed them as models of good education and holiness, and admired them for their selfless devotion to God and to the community. Their self-esteem was further enhanced by an understanding of priesthood which, as we saw in the opening quotations from Sheen and Pius XI, proclaimed its high dignity. This exaggerated view of priesthood and of priestly powers I have labeled the "received view." It was a theology commonly held by priests and laity alike. One finds it promoted in official and unofficial documents in varying degrees, and its tenets were reinforced by a complex set of social patterns which included dress, architecture, outward demeanor, sacramental rituals as well as everyday social ones. For example, because of clerical dress, priests and religious maintained a high visibility in the larger community, yet because of rules of cloister and the general influence of monasticism, they often lived lives quite removed from the people they served. Books on priestly spirituality supported such separation by stressing values such as otherworldliness and self-denial. The rhetoric of these books had a decidedly monastic cast. For example, Bede Frost in his 1936 manual on priestly life claimed that "foremost in the day [of the priest] stand the Divine Office, Mass, and Mental

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5 See Philip Murnion, "The Parish That Shaped Us," and Jay Dolan, "Parish in the American Past," in Mark Searle, *Parish: A Place for Worship* (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1981).

Prayer." <sup>6</sup> Such manuals gave the day-to-day ministry of priests, whether counseling or visiting the sick or fundraising for the parish school, short shrift.

The received view of priesthood found in such manuals only partially, or even dimly, reflected the lived experience of men who were priests in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s. Many to whom I have spoken point to the rich experience of guiding the immigrant communities into the mainstream of American life. These men spent themselves serving communities faced with the difficult process of Americanization, a process which often included learning a new language and culture, fending off poverty, enduring harsh working conditions. In this era priests often served as spokesmen for their struggling communities. For example, some figured prominently as advocates of the labor movement. In addition, the Catholic community undertook enormous building efforts creating a huge network of churches, schools, and hospitals; priests played critical roles as fundraisers and administrators. Yet this rich experience of priests as community builders and as community spokesmen did not enter into the spirituality and self-description of priests. As sociologists note, our rhetoric is frequently inadequate to cope with the complexity and richness of our lived experience, and one finds such inadequacy in the language used to describe priesthood during the period.<sup>7</sup> When the high view of priesthood came under fire in the years after the Council, priests and laity alike often lacked a language and self-understanding that would have enabled them to delineate the proper role of the priest in the life of the community. The received view simply did not give people the resources to cope with the changes that swept through the Church in the wake of Vatican II.

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6 Frost, p. 90.

7 I am indebted to Robert Bellah and his colleagues for this notion of the disjunction between the richness of our lived experience and the languages that we inadequately apply to that experience. Bellah applies this distinction to understand the nature of American individualism and the way that language hinders Americans from articulating questions of commitment and public values. See Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

*Liturgy and systematic theology.* - The received view of priesthood focused on the priest as a sacramental minister. Its emphasis on liturgy and on separation from lay life tended to surround the priest with an air of mystery. This air was further enhanced by the popular spirituality regarding Christ's presence in the eucharist. The eucharist was seen as a rite of epiphany, one in which God made himself quite suddenly present in the consecrated bread (interestingly, the wine--despite its centrality in the Last Supper story--played no part in popular devotion). Not only was it a rite of "epiphany," but it was a rite of "sacrifice" as well. In many ways, the central moment of the Tridentine mass was the elevation of the host, a moment accented by the ringing of bells. The elevation was at once an announcement of Christ's presence and a sacrificial gesture of lifting up, of offering. This gesture was the culmination of a stress on the sacrifice of offered gifts that began in the offertory and ran through the Roman canon in its many prayers to "accept this offering." Moreover the eucharist was in Latin and was accompanied by a panoply of ancient gestures and costumes. All this served to set it and the priest off from the immediate circumstance of the laity. The neo-Gothic church architecture of the period only further enhanced that separation.<sup>8</sup>

It would be incorrect to describe the post-Tridentine eucharist as noncommunitarian. Clearly a public event, it was seen as a sacrificial action and prayer enacted by the priest in the presence of the congregation and on the behalf of the whole world. However, it did lack one community dimension which we expect: ritual dialogue and interplay between the priest and the people gathered. In the pre-Vatican II eucharist, the community followed a different dynamic, one involving two simultaneous and sometimes overlapping liturgies: the highly structured official liturgy of the priest and the servers held in the sanctuary and the less structured liturgy of the people in the pews. In this latter "liturgy," people either followed the

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<sup>8</sup> For an excellent comparison of the pre-Vatican II liturgy with the post-Vatican II one, see Ralph Keifer, *Blessed and Broken: An Exploration of the Contemporary Experience of God in Eucharistic Celebration* (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1982), pp. 9-23.

priest with a bilingual missal or listened to the music or said the rosary.

This experience of the eucharist as "epiphany" and "sacrifice" was accompanied by a theological understanding of priesthood framed primarily in terms of sacramental "powers." In its definition of priesthood, the manualist theology of the period cited that given by Thomas Aquinas (who, in turn, was citing Peter Damian):<sup>9</sup> "Now the power of orders is established for the dispensation of the sacraments . . . [and] is principally ordered to consecrating the body of Christ and dispensing it to the faithful, and to cleansing the faithful from their sin."<sup>10</sup> Thomas's explanation of Christian priesthood influenced the doctrinal formulations of Florence and Trent.<sup>11</sup> And because of this official endorsement, the principal post-Tridentine manualists based their treatments of priesthood largely on a point-

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9 Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order* (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1982), p. 245.

10 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 4, chap. 74, 75, trans. Charles O'Neil (New York: Image, 1957), pp. 287, 289. Thomas actually sees the sacrament of order, like all the sacraments, as oriented to the eucharist: "But among the sacraments that which is most noble and tends to complete the others is the sacrament of the Eucharist. . . . Therefore, the power of orders must be weighed chiefly by reference to this sacrament, for [quoting Aristotle] 'everything is dominated from its end.' . . . But a believer is made ready for the reception of this sacrament and in harmony with it by his freedom from sin; . . . Therefore, the power of orders must extend itself to the remission of sins by the dispensation of those sacraments which are ordered to the remission of sins; baptism and penance are of this kind" (p. 288).

11 The Council of Florence (1439), "Decree for the Armenians": "The sixth sacrament is that of Order. Its matter is that by the handing over (*traditio*) of which the Order is conferred: thus the presbyterate is conferred by handing over the chalice with wine and the paten with the bread. . . . The form of the presbyterate is this: "Receive the power of offering the Sacrifice in the Church for the living and the dead, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . . The effect is an increase of grace so that one may be a suitable minister of Christ," in J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1982), pp. 494-495.

The Council of Trent (1563), "Doctrine on the Sacrament of Order": "The Sacred Scriptures make it clear and the Tradition of the Catholic Church has always taught that this priesthood was instituted by the same Lord our Savior, and that the power of consecrating, offering, and administering His body and blood, and likewise of remitting and retaining sins, was given to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood," in Neuner, *The Christian Faith*, p. 496.

by-point exposition of Thomas's understanding. Such discussions focused primarily on the meaning of ordination and on the kind of causality exercised by the minister in sacramental actions. In these discussions the manualists sought to establish an ontological understanding of the grace of orders in order to ground the priest's special relationship to Christ and to the acts of Christian cult.<sup>12</sup>

Such a focus obviously ignores other crucial aspects of priestly ministry such as formation of the Christian community and preaching. Interestingly, Thomas discusses the ministries of preaching, hearing confessions, and study *not* in association with priesthood, but in relation to *religious life*.<sup>13</sup> As a result the manualists, following Thomas, failed to include such activities within ordained ministry. Moreover, Thomas's overall analysis of the sacraments, for all its brilliance, focused all subsequent discussion on them simply as a complex system of causality through which God bestows his grace.<sup>14</sup> Such a system misses some important elements: the dialogue between presider and congregation, the role of the proclaimed word, the variety of roles in any liturgical action, the rich ambiguity of symbolic objects and gestures. Because of the bias inherited from Thomas, the manualists emphasized a few discreet moments within the sacraments, ones seen as exercises of priestly power: the moment of consecration, the moment of ordination, the moment of absolution.

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12 For a summary of the post-Tridentine manualists, especially of the work of J. Franzelin who set the direction of many of the 20th-century textbooks, see Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 611-613 and 627-632.

13 Thomas treats the ministries of preaching and hearing confession and of study in consecutive articles in his analysis of religious life, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 188, 4 and 5. In this he is, of course, defending the practice of the mendicant orders, both their practice of the ministry of preaching and their work in the universities. He makes no mention of preaching in his scanty treatment of orders in the *Summa*. In III, 65, 2, he mentions in passing that "it is through the sacrament of order that an individual receives power to perform sacramental actions"; trans. David Bourke, vol. 56, "The Sacraments" (London: Blackfriars, 1975), p. 175.

14 For a good summary discussion of Thomas's analysis of the sacraments, see Alexandre Ganoczy, *An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 25-29.

The emphases of systematic theology found their way into the popular priestly spirituality of the decades preceding the Council. This spirituality strongly identified the priesthood of Christ with that of the presbyterate. For example, Ernest Graf says the following in his "historical, liturgical, and devotional explanation of the Mass":

There is a wondrous identity between the priesthood of the Catholic Church and the priesthood of our Lord. Since we offer the same sacrifice that Christ offered, though the manner of oblation be different, there must needs be identity of power in Him and in us. . . . In the discharge of his sacerdotal function, the priest, so to speak, sinks his personality in that of our Lord: Christ speaks and acts through him, and the priest speaks and acts as if he and the divine High-priest were but one person.<sup>15</sup>

In this popular priestly spirituality, the identification of the priest as another Christ (*alter Christus*) shifted from an ontological identification to a psychological one. Thus Van Zeller, writing in 1956, recommends the view of the Oratorian scholar Bourgoing: "In virtue of the priesthood of Christ, we priests are clothed with the very person of Christ: we speak, we act, we consecrate as though we were His very self."<sup>16</sup>

The widespread use of the private mass subtly reinforced this whole view of priestly identity. By its very nature the private mass highlighted a view of priesthood defined in terms of sacramental powers and promoted a view of eucharist focused on sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> Priests often experienced their private mass as an act of ministry, a prayer enacted on behalf of the world.<sup>18</sup> Thus it is not surprising

15 Dom Ernest Graf, *The Priest at the Altar* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1926), p. 38.

16 Quoted by Dom Hubert van Zeller, *The Gospel Priesthood* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), p. 9.

17 On the private mass, see Johannes Emminghaus, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration* (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1978), pp. 74-77.

18 For a sample of the sentiments associated with such spirituality, see Gaston Courtois, *Before His Face: Meditations for Priests and Religious* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), pp. 48-58: "The Mass is not only an act of devotion, it

that it played a critical role in priestly piety of the time, particularly among Jesuits and other religious who had no charge over some regular congregation. But from our perspective its prominence helped mask the communitarian and dialogical character of eucharistic action. It also subtly but powerfully obscured the role of priest as presider and covered over the plurality of roles inherent in liturgical action.

In this same period, richer sacramental theologies began to gain a hearing, and these were popularized here in the United States in such journals as *Orate, Fratres* (which later became *Worship*). There were, for example, the pioneering efforts of Odo Casel, whose work on the patristic period helped him to break out of the scholastic focus on ontological causality. Focusing on the practical conduct of liturgy, he did not stress only a few moments, as the manualists did, but tried to show the complex flow and dynamics of the whole action. In his view, the eucharist was a "ritual mystery," and so the knowledge of God that it offered came only through active participation. Currents such as these were often regarded with suspicion and said by conservatives to be tainted with modernism.<sup>19</sup> As a result, when Vatican II canonized the developments of Casel and others in the liturgical movement, there was no well-developed priestly spirituality accommodated to this renewed vision of the liturgy.

*Jesuit experience.* - Priests in the Society enjoyed the same high esteem accorded other priests during this era. In addition, Jesuits found their priesthood highlighted by the structuring of the Society's internal life according to grades. This structuring according to grades often meant a form of segregation affecting whom one ate with or recreated with or prayed with. Such segregation did much to reinforce an implicit sense of the dignity and distinctiveness of

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is also an act of oblation, in which we must become one with the host which is offered by our hands. . . . We will also reach a better understanding of our own role as priest and victim. The priest acts in the name of the whole Church. . . . The victim, uniting himself with the supreme Victim, must have in his heart the same disposition as the Sacred Heart" (pp. 49-50).

19 Cooke, p. 632, and Ganoczy, pp. 34-35.

priesthood. Yet most Jesuits, then as now, were not engaged full-time in parish ministry, and so their primary work was not explicitly sacramental. As a result, many Jesuits had a hard time locating their priesthood beyond the explicit actions of saying their daily mass and reading the Office. This often left men who worked primarily in the schools with the sense that their priesthood was rather privatized, for the received view had in large measure defined what actions did or did not constitute priesthood. This perception was particularly ironic since these same men led very public lives--teaching classes, administrating schools, meeting with extracurricular groups such as athletic teams or sodalities. A number of men who were active in this period have remarked to me that they always had the sense that these activities were somehow priestly, but just did not know quite how to express that priestly character. Such an inability to define themselves did not become acute until priesthood (along with much else) came under fire in the 1960s.

*Factors in the collapse.* - With Vatican II, the received view of the priesthood collapsed. Creating the conditions for such a collapse was, of course, the furthest thing from the minds of the council fathers. Their concern was simply to make some critical changes in the light of contemporary needs and of new historical and theological understandings, particularly biblical and liturgical ones. In the remainder of this section, we will look at the shape and context of this collapse; in the next section, we will look at the specific ways that the council dealt, or rather failed to deal, with the renewal of priestly ministry.

One of the crucial causes of the collapse of the received view was changes in the liturgy. As we have seen, the received view placed undue focus on the liturgical function of priests, often ignoring other critical elements in their life experience. And so the changes in the liturgy did more than reshape the liturgical role of the priest; they challenged deeper aspects of priestly self-understanding as well. These changes, while long prepared for by the experiments of the liturgical movement, had an immediate and powerful effect on people at the grass roots. The most prominent of them were (1) the

translation of the liturgy into the vernacular, (2) the repositioning of the altar, (3) the separation of the liturgy of the word from the altar, and (4) the use of lay readers and eucharistic ministers. The first two of these had a powerful effect on people's unconscious image of priests. As Ralph Keifer has noted, "for the priest to pray in our own language, facing us, radically changes his relationship to the people. It makes him a partner in dialogue with us before God. That position also imaginatively locates God in a very different place, and therefore . . . rearranges people's vision not only of who God is, but also of who they are in relation to God, and how God is communicated to them."<sup>20</sup> In the old rite, the priest had stood at the far end of the sanctuary with his back to the people and had spoken in a low voice in a language especially reserved for worship. All of this had strongly contributed to the image of the priest as the mediator between God and his people. In the new rite the priest was positioned in a such way that God was imaged as being in the people's midst. Because of this the sense of the priest as exclusive mediator seemed to vanish. With the presence of lay readers and eucharistic ministers, the priest became one minister among many, and so his exclusive position was further undermined.

Many other changes, too, shook the life patterns of the parish: the decline in the use of confession, the collapse of many popular devotions, the decline of such parish organizations as the Holy Name Society and the Legion of Mary. The gradual abandonment of distinctive priestly garb by many helped blur the distinction between clergy and laity; clergy, and religious too, had less visibility.

With the impetus of Vatican II, other cultural forces came into play. Even if Vatican II had not taken place, I think there still would have been some major shifts in the self-understanding of priests because of larger cultural shifts both in the United States and around the world. For instance, the early 1960s saw the end of colonialism, an event which by itself would have reshaped Catholic missiology. Moreover, such tumultuous events as the civil-rights

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20 Keifer, *Blessed and Broken*, p. 15.

movement, women's liberation, and the Vietnam War still would have shaken and shaped life in the U.S. Also, the 1960s marked the end of the "immigrant" church in the U.S. (or at least a phase of it--with recent Vietnamese and Hispanic immigrations, a new phase now seems to be underway). The end came with the full integration of Catholics into American life, an integration symbolized by the election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency. Now Catholics tended to look less to their religious leaders for a sense of identity and orientation, and more to various "professionals." Catholic institutions began to lose their distinctive character and became in large measure indistinguishable from their public counterparts; their administration frequently passed from priests and religious women to laypeople.<sup>21</sup>

With the collapse of the received view of priesthood came the sudden widespread crisis in vocations. Between 1966 and 1974 the Society of Jesus lost 1500 ordained men.<sup>22</sup> The reasons for this collapse are complex, and the explanations varied. According to Andrew Greeley and Richard Schoenherr, who headed a major study on the question, "the desire to marry [was] the main (though not the only) explanation of the inclination to leave the priesthood."<sup>23</sup> They noted that, contrary to their expectation, problems with authority were not a determining factor in the decision to resign; as Greeley notes, "whatever frustration and difficulties may have preceded the decision to leave, for most resignees it was the experience of an emotional relationship with a woman that tipped the scales in the direction of resignation."<sup>24</sup> In his claim that loneliness and the desire for marriage were the most significant reasons for men leaving, Greeley seems to be giving an accurate report of responses that he

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21 Joseph A. Tetlow, "The Jesuits' Mission to Higher Education: Perspectives and Contexts," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vols. 15 and 16, nos. 5 and 1 (Nov. 1983, Jan. 1984), pp. 4-5.

22 D. J. O'Brien, "The Jesuits and Catholic Higher Education," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 13, no. 5 (Nov. 1981), p. 8.

23 Quoted in Joseph M. Becker et al., "Changes in U.S. Jesuit Membership, 1958-1975: A Symposium," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 9, nos. 1 and 2 (Jan. and Mar. 1977), p. 65.

24 Quoted in Becker, p. 64.

received. However, he fails to ask the analytic question: Why did celibacy *suddenly* become so emotionally unbearable?

There seem to have been two reasons for the suddenness of the crisis. First of all, the ideology that had portrayed priesthood as the ideal of holiness collapsed against the new-found pluralism and egalitarianism implicit in sections of the Vatican II documents. David L. Fleming in the following passage notes how these latter themes became part of the atmosphere immediately after the council:

Whereas privilege and position had been a usual concomitant of the priesthood in the Catholic environment up through the 1950s, [in the 1960s] "equality" and "no difference," based on the leveling notion of personhood, became the bywords. The greatness of the more common sacraments for building up the Christian community, that is, baptism and marriage, received the attention. The sacrament of orders, which specialized the identity and role of a comparatively small group within the Church, was deliberately downplayed. This process of democratization within the sacramental system of the Church came as a shock to many priests or men in training to be priests--who consciously or unconsciously had a common expectation that priesthood would give them an increased assurance of personal value or a status acknowledged by the Catholic community.<sup>25</sup>

The crisis in the dignity and status of the priesthood formed part of a general crisis in the dignity and status of all forms of institutional authority, a crisis which rocked a number of institutions throughout the West. Priests, like educators and business leaders and politicians, were less and less seen as advocates of the public good and embodiments of the community's most dearly held virtues.

A second reason was the lifting of penalties--both canonical and societal ones--for leaving priesthood. Such a change in vocation ceased to be seen as "disgraceful." According to Joseph M. Becker, who did a detailed survey of changes in Jesuit membership in the U.S., the vocations crisis was part of a general "loosening up"

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25 David Fleming in Becker et al., p. 136.

process, comparable to that which occurs in psychoanalysis; in this case, "a whole generation was invited, with a new urgency, to overcome 'pluralistic ignorance' and to recognize the existence of other alternatives, or, even more shattering, the possibility that its construction of reality was but one of many options."<sup>26</sup>

### The failure of Vatican II in the renewal of priesthood

Vatican II was a massive success. The *aggiornamento* and renewal that it fostered have been astonishing. Nonetheless, the council had its weaknesses and blindspots, though no one, to the best of my knowledge, has pointed out one of its weakest areas: its failure to renew the priesthood. That is not to say that Vatican II did not change the shape and understanding of priesthood. It certainly did. But it failed to renew it, at least in the way that it renewed the ministries of the bishops and of the laity.

Of course, renewal has been a complex process. First of all, Vatican II did not simply initiate changes; much of its work was responding to movements and theologies that had been underway for decades. It rejected or ignored certain trends and canonized others. It made certain explicit changes (for example, encouraging ecumenism, resurrecting the diaconate), catalyzed others by the guidelines it formulated (allowing the use of the vernacular, multiplying the number of new dioceses), or simply provided a context for change (formulating a new ecclesiology which implicitly encouraged collaboration with laity in the management of Catholic schools and hospitals).

Earlier we saw that symptomatic of the collapse of the received view was the massive number of departures of priests and priest candidates. The telling sociological indicator of Vatican II's failure to renew the priesthood is the ongoing decline in the number of priest candidates. This decline implies that priesthood no longer captures the imagination and idealism of youth. Before we look directly at the inadequacy of Vatican II's renewal of priestly ministry,

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26 Becker, p. 28.

let us look first at the successful renewal of the roles of the bishops and the laity.

*The renewal of the episcopacy.* - In its discussion of the role of the bishop, Vatican II clearly teaches that, together with the pope, "the episcopal order is the subject of the supreme and full power over the universal Church."<sup>27</sup> It thus draws away from the excessive concern with the papacy that characterized Vatican I and recovers the ancient view of the collegiality of bishops. No longer is the bishop described as a sort of local delegate of the pope and his curia--as earlier drafts of *Lumen Gentium* had tended to characterize him.<sup>28</sup> The bishops are "the proper, ordinary and immediate pastors"; each diocese is "one particular church in which the . . . Church of Christ is truly present and active."<sup>29</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, quoting the episcopal prayer of the Byzantine rite, describes the bishop as "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood."<sup>30</sup> The fact that the council would turn here and elsewhere to an Eastern understanding of the bishop flows in part from its renewed ecumenical perspective, but also from its concern to retrieve part of the rich patristic view of the bishop. That patristic view emphasized the equality and interdependence of the bishops. And that view provided progressives at the council with a theological foundation for counteracting a Tridentine theology used by curialists since the nineteenth century to justify Roman centralizing tendencies. The importance of the patristic model of the bishop can also be seen in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and in the General Instruction of the new Sacramentary, in which the bishop's mass is given as the paradigm of the eucharistic liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

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27 *Lumen Gentium, Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1975), no. 22.

28 Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Study Edition) (Winston Press, 1981), pp. 680-681.

29 *Christus Dominus*, no. 11.

30 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

31 "Every authentic celebration of the eucharist is directed by the bishop, either in person or through the presbyters, who are his helpers," "General Instruc-

All of this could have remained at the level of rhetoric had the bishops not institutionalized their role in a new (and very old) fashion, namely, through the use of synods and local bishops' conferences. For example, the episcopal synods of Medellin and Puebla have had tremendous influence not only in Latin America, but throughout the world. Moreover, during the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and in the recent ouster of Marcos in the Philippines, bishops' conferences played a dramatic role. Similarly, the U.S. bishops have raised a considerable stir over their letters on nuclear war and on the economy. In addition to such collective efforts, individual bishops have come to the fore through their prophetic stances: Oscar Romero in El Salvador, Jaime Sin in the Philippines, Helder Câmara in Brazil. One other factor has been the formation of an enormous number of new dioceses. As a result, many dioceses have become smaller, thus more manageable and less impersonal.

*Renewal of the laity.* - Vatican II accented the dignity of the baptismal call of the laity: "The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the church; through baptism and confirmation, all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself."<sup>32</sup> The council emphasized the role of the laity in the transformation of secular society:

It belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute

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tion of the Roman Missal," no. 59, in Ralph Keifer, *To Give Thanks and Praise* (Washington, DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1980). Also *Sacro-sanctum Concilium*, nos. 26 & 41-42.

<sup>32</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 33.

to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties.<sup>33</sup>

But what has occurred since the council has been a new-found emphasis on lay ministry, a ministry exercised not within secular society, as the council had envisioned, but within the Church. And this shift from lay action in the secular world to lay ministry within the Church has met with some official opposition. As David Power has pointed out, "in the mouth of one person, this can sound like an admonition to the laity to keep to their place; in another, it is a cry of anguish, lest Christ be absent from world affairs."<sup>34</sup>

Since the council, a swarm of new lay ministries has arisen: readers and eucharistic ministers, professional directors of religious education and of worship, lay catechists (particularly crucial in the Third World) and hospital chaplains, campus ministers and social activists. While we currently speak of these as "lay ministry," we need to recognize that we have lumped together an enormous diversity of uninstitutionalized ministries. The current flurry of lay ministry is, on the one hand, full of much excitement and energy and, on the other, fraught with ambiguity regarding proper roles. Because of the sensitivity of these ministries, lay people have begun seeking advanced training, including professional theological education. What is distinctive about this in the history of the tradition is that such ministers are tested academically, but undergo no process whereby their life and personality may be probed or formed. The education of lay ministers has followed the predominant model of education in the U.S., namely, that of the professional. As in previous cases of rapid expansion, the current movement in lay ministry represents a widespread response to deep-felt pastoral needs. Also as in previous cases, lay ministers, from the fact that their ministry has not yet been institutionalized, have opportunity for flexibility, for mobility, and for experimentation. Moreover, their commitment to such ministries can last a brief period or a lifetime. But this lack of institutionaliza-

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33 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

34 David N. Power, *Gifts That Differ: Lay Ministries, Established and Unestablished* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co, 1980), p. 54.

tion also entails lack of safeguards for insuring basic justice: reasonable job descriptions, written contracts, suitable wages, appropriate care for retirement, and so forth.

This movement of lay ministers into full-time professional ministry is especially striking when viewed historically. A generation ago, full-time ministry was the nearly exclusive preserve of priests and of religious orders. But with the rise of lay ministry, one can now do full-time ministry without the commitment to serve the Church for one's whole life and without the promise or vow of celibacy. In other words, lay ministry poses an unintentional yet very real challenge to permanent commitments embraced by priests and religious. And that challenge takes place in a culture whose ideology of individualism has rendered lifelong commitments problematic.<sup>35</sup>

*Inadequacy of the attempted renewal of the priesthood.* - In general, the council gave much less attention to the role of priests than it did to that of bishops and of the laity. In *Lumen Gentium*, for example, the role of the bishop receives some nine paragraphs (nos. 20-28) and the role of the laity also nine (nos. 30-38), the role of the priest only one (no. 28). Another indication is the citations or sources appealed to in each of the sections. In the section on bishops, there are many patristic citations. This recovery of patristic sources represents one of the great scholarly advances prior to the council and had a dramatic effect on the understanding of the role of the bishop and the understanding of the liturgy. In the section on the laity, there are almost no citations except of popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII; in other words, the material was all quite new. However, in the section on priesthood, the citations come almost exclusively from the Council of Trent; in other words, the passage on priesthood for the most part repeats the received view. This seems to indicate that the bishops did not sense that the priesthood as such required the degree of renewal needed elsewhere. It must have seemed to them that priesthood was in good condition, and to

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35 Bellah et al., pp. 142-163.

all appearances it was. They simply could not have foreseen that in shifting some things (the role of bishops or laity, the character of the liturgy, the relationship of the Church to the modern world) and in not shifting others (such as the role of priests), they would occasion a massive crisis.

Towards the end of the council, the bishops passed the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*). It attempted to make up for the previous neglect and sought to lay the groundwork for a more adequate theology of priesthood. But there was little in it that was truly new. As we shall see below, it broadened to some degree the liturgical view of priesthood and addressed some issues in pastoral care. Moreover, as the document notes in its preface, its directives, while meant for all priests, concern those "who are engaged in the care of souls," that is, diocesan clergy, and so members of religious orders have to adapt its principles to their particular circumstances.

Now let us look at Vatican II's treatment of priesthood and see more specifically the ways it failed to develop a renewed image of the priest. In *Lumen Gentium* the bishops repeat the standard view of "sacerdotal dignity," that priests are consecrated "after the image of the Christ, the supreme and eternal high priest."<sup>36</sup> However, in their treatment of the matter, they offer a more nuanced view, giving due care to the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood and the uniqueness of his role as mediator. They block out the possibility of the sort of crass identification that we saw earlier in the popular literature. In addition, Vatican II repeats the standard view that "it is in the eucharistic cult . . . that [priests] exercise in a supreme degree their sacred functions."<sup>37</sup> Once again, they nuance this in terms of the renewed understanding of liturgy put forward in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

One important shift is the recovery of the idea that the Church ordains men not simply to administer the sacraments, but also "to

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36 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28; see *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5.

37 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28; see *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5.

preach the Gospel." *Presbyterorum Ordinis* states that "it is the first task of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel to all men." It goes on to note that "the priest's preaching, often very difficult in present-day conditions, if it is to become more effective in moving the minds of his hearers, must expound the Word of God not merely in a general and abstract way but by an application of the eternal truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances of life."<sup>38</sup> While such a ministry of the word had long been part of the actual work of priests, it had received, as we have seen, little emphasis in theological reflection on priesthood.

This recovery of the ministry of the word could be a rich area for renewal. But since the council little seems to have been made of it. Admittedly priests preach at least on Sundays, but the homilies are frequently poor: overly abstract, hastily prepared, and blandly delivered. This is due in part to inadequate training. It is tragic that, while more and more Catholic clergy study under Protestant teachers and have Protestant colleagues in their classes, shared study has not generally included preaching. Few Catholic clergy have explored the rich traditions of Protestant preaching or have picked up something of the high expectation that many Protestant congregations have concerning preaching. Now that Catholics are exposed daily to dynamic TV and radio evangelists (whatever one thinks of their content), the lack of good Catholic preaching seems all the more obvious. Moreover, there seems to be less Catholic preaching than before the council because preaching has become limited to that done during the Sunday eucharist. Before the council, events such as parish missions or preached retreats served as important occasions for much Catholic preaching.

Ironically, now that the ministry of the word has become part and parcel of priestly self-understanding, one of the distinctive aspects of Jesuit priesthood has been obscured. Many fail to realize that while such ministry has always been a part of the Jesuit understanding of priestly ministry, its appropriation by the rest of the

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38 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4.

Church is quite recent. As Pedro Arrupe noted in a speech to the 32nd General Congregation, "Ignatius had a vision of the priestly ministry that is closer to Vatican II than to the Council of Trent."<sup>39</sup> Jesuits have traditionally brought several unique emphases to their ministry of the word. While diocesan clergy engage in a ministry of the word generally in some pre-established Christian community, Jesuit missionaries engage in one oriented to a "first hearing" of the Gospel and so must cope with the difficult task of inculturation. Other Jesuits, because of their professional commitments as lawyers or biologists or artists or administrators, bring a ministry of the word to parts of our culture that is "sociologically distant" from the Christian message.

Vatican II also recovered two important patristic views of priesthood, though neither has effected any real renewal. The first was the recovery of the patristic notion of the presbyterium and its close link to the bishop. Thus Vatican II describes priests as "prudent cooperators of the episcopal college and its support and mouthpiece."<sup>40</sup> Such a view obscures the fact that the average bishop of the fourth or fifth century generally had a congregation smaller than that of today's pastor, and that the fourth-century presbyterium more closely resembled the contemporary parish staff or parish council than the current diocese of several hundred priests. It also obscures the fact that it is the ordinary parish priest and not the bishop who maintains sustained and close contact with the Christian faithful.

Moreover, this emphasis on the presbyterium does little to illuminate the meaning of Jesuit priesthood. This can be vividly seen during Jesuit ordinations when the bishop asks the newly ordained to promise obedience to his ordinary. The one who in fact receives that obedience is not the ordaining bishop, as the rite presupposes, but the man's provincial.<sup>41</sup> The peculiarity of this ritual moment high-

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39 Pedro Arrupe, "Epilogue," *Justice with Faith Today* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), p. 318.

40 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28; see *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7.

41 "Ordination of a Priest," *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. II (New York: Pueblo, 1980), no. 16.

lights the uniqueness of Jesuit priesthood: our commitment to mission means mobility, and that mobility goes against a Church order built on territorial jurisdiction. Moreover, because of the exempt status of the Society, Jesuit priests tend to move outside the purview of the whole episcopal order. Michael Buckley, in his article "Jesuit Priesthood: Its Meaning and Commitments," has suggested that "the Society of Jesus is essentially a new form of the ancient presbyterium, a group of presbyters acting as a community precisely in assisting the bishop; but here, the presbyterium has a function which is primarily prophetic and the bishop whom we assist is the pope."<sup>42</sup> While this does help locate the meaning of the fourth vow, the Society is plainly not the pope's presbyterium. The patristic presbyterium served as counselors of the bishop, and clearly the Society does not play such a role. It might be more accurate to say that the Society with its special missions serves in a role closer to that of the ancient deacon. However, even this view fails since the Society generally tends to operate on its own initiatives and according to its own lights.

The second change that Vatican II drew from patristic sources was the sense of the priest as the leader of the local Christian community. Popular pastoral theology had long spoken of the pastor as the "shepherd" of his community, but there were, as we saw, elements in the received view which portrayed the priest as other-worldly and detached from community. Vatican II shifted the accent away from the ascetical and towards the pastoral. In *Presbyterorum Ordinis* the bishops stressed the solidarity of the priest with his community: "priests . . . live with the rest of men as brothers."<sup>43</sup> As community leader, the priest is to "assemble the family of God as a brotherhood fired with a single ideal."<sup>44</sup> Vatican II's emphasis on the priest as a leader in solidarity with his people was clearly an advance, but it failed to appreciate the full patristic view of the

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42 Michael Buckley, "Jesuit Priesthood: Its Meaning and Commitment," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 8, no. 5 (Dec. 1976), pp. 146-147.

43 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 3.

44 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28; see *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 9.

matter. As Nathan Mitchell has pointed out, in the early Church "anyone competent to serve the church in matters of public responsibility would *ipso facto* be competent to preside at the eucharist."<sup>45</sup> Vatican II's view was exactly the reverse: anyone designated by the Church as competent to preside at the eucharist would necessarily be competent to serve the church in matters of public responsibility. That is plainly not the case: many priests lack the gifts for such public leadership. In addition, as Schillebeeckx has pointed out, we currently have a situation that would have been impossible in the early Church: Christian communities which possess designated leaders (such as catechists), yet are unable to celebrate the eucharist.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, this patristic view of leadership and priesthood is of little use to Jesuits since we generally do not serve as leaders of a stable Christian community.

In the aftermath of Vatican II, priests sought to work out these new understandings. Often priests came to define themselves in terms of their diverse roles: counselor, administrator, teacher, facilitator, social worker, community organizer, social activist. In this way, priesthood ceased to be experienced as a single coherent state of life, one marked by some "indelible" character, one which differed from the laity "in essence and not only in degree," as Vatican II had claimed.<sup>47</sup> Rather, priesthood came to be viewed in terms of these diverse functions. Jesuits absorbed this functionalist view and began to speak of themselves as "hyphenated priests." David Fleming has pointed out that this view placed enormous stress on Jesuit self-understanding:

Many Jesuits . . . wondered whether the goal of Jesuit training reached its culmination in a secular professional degree or in ordination to the Catholic priesthood. If the secular goal was reached first, why bother with these further studies for the priesthood? Or if priesthood were only an adjunct to one's

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45 Mitchell, pp. 168-169.

46 Mitchell summarizes Schillebeeckx's argument on the right of the Christian community to the eucharist, pp. 289-295.

47 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

ordinary professional life, why not cast it aside if it gets in the way or drop it if it adds a burden? These kinds of questions . . . made for added anxiety and doubt in an age of personalism and personal fulfillment.<sup>48</sup>

Up to now we have focused on priesthood in the larger Church. We have seen both the demise of the older received view and the inadequacy of the newer view put forward by Vatican II. We have throughout touched on the way both of these have affected life in the Society. In particular, we noted that the recoveries of Vatican II offered Jesuits little help in understanding their priesthood: the ministry of the word had always been central to the Society's mission, and the relationship to the bishop and the leadership of a stable Christian community were both rather unimportant to the actual functioning of priesthood in the Society. In the next section, we will focus directly on the place of priesthood in the Jesuit charism and will explore its rather unique contours.

### PART III. THE PLACE OF PRIESTHOOD IN THE JESUIT CHARISM

In the course of the 32nd General Congregation, a most peculiar dispute took place, one which epitomizes the peculiar character of Jesuit priesthood. The congregation began to consider extending the fourth vow to the brothers. At this point Paul VI intervened, and in a letter addressed to Father Arrupe insisted that "no change can be introduced related to the fourth vow" in that the Society founded by Ignatius was fundamentally a "Society of *priests*."<sup>49</sup> The intervention of the pope seemed startling to the gathered Jesuits. While all the assembled recognized that, yes, being a Jesuit generally also meant being a priest, somehow being a "society of

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48 Fleming in Becker, p. 137.

49 "Autograph Letter of His Holiness Paul VI to Father General," *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), pp. 539, 540.

priests" did not seem a particularly apt characterization of the charism of the Society. In their view, priesthood, while critical, was simply one element among many in the apostolic life of the average Jesuit.

In this misunderstanding between the general congregation and the pope, the issue, at least in part, was determining the core of the Jesuit charism. To understand how priesthood works in the Jesuit scheme of things, let us turn to see both the ways in which priesthood was described and the ways in which it actually functioned in the early Society.

### Priesthood in the early documents of the Society

Vatican II in its Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life gave two principles for renewal: (1) "a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes" and (2) "their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time."<sup>50</sup> If we follow the advice of the council and consult the foundational documents and history of the early Society in order to see its "primitive inspiration," we discover--surprisingly--that explicit mention of priesthood is rare. The following is a summary culled from the early documents of the Society:

(1) In his *Autobiography* Ignatius makes only one reference to his exercise of priesthood: saying his daily *private* mass. That seems extraordinary for a man whose orientation was so profoundly apostolic. Yet that daily devotion served as an important time for his discernment over issues regarding the Constitutions, for as da Câmara notes, "the method he followed when writing the Constitutions was to celebrate Mass every day and present the point under consideration to God and to pray over it."<sup>51</sup>

(2) In the Formula of the Institute, the only two mentions of priesthood regard the permission to have the colleges function

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50 *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, no. 2.

51 Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985), p. 121.

as seminaries for the Society's candidates and the permission for those who are priests to say the Office privately. It also mentions that "in what pertains to food, clothing, and other external things, [Jesuits] will follow the common and approved usage of reputable priests."<sup>52</sup>

(3) In the *Constitutions* of the Society, a work of some 300 pages, one which represents the great achievement of Ignatius's final years, one which contains detailed legislation on the qualities of candidates to be admitted to the Society, ways of dismissing candidates, books to be read and subjects to be studied in the colleges, ministries to be undertaken, ways of financing the houses of formation and the colleges, *there is scarcely a mention of priesthood*. The most important mention Ignatius does make concerns the distinction between the professed, the spiritual coadjutors, and the temporal coadjutors. His concern is not priesthood as such, but *learning*. In other words, the professed are to be priests "conspicuous in the integrity of Christian life and learning"<sup>53</sup> (that is, they have an education), while the spiritual coadjutors are to be priests who "possess a sufficiency of learning to help in spiritual matters."<sup>54</sup> There are a few other passing references to priesthood: Jesuit priests should not postpone the celebration of the eucharist longer than eight days;<sup>55</sup> and once a year the rector and priests of the house should perform the duties "of those who serve" in order to give example.<sup>56</sup>

(4) Ignatius explicitly forbade the Society to take up tasks which were essential to priesthood in the sixteenth century: choral recitation of the Office, earning one's livelihood by saying

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52 Ignatius of Loyola, "Formula of the Institute," *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), [5 and 6].

53 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [6].

54 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [112].

55 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [584].

56 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [276].

masses for the dead, the direction of communities of women, the curacy of a parish.<sup>57</sup>

I should note one other peculiar fact: while nearly every aspect of the Society's life--the vows, discernment, the Exercises, education, missionary endeavors, authority--have received extensive scholarly attention, it is practically impossible to find anything written directly on the question of Jesuit priesthood.<sup>58</sup> This indicates that the question of Jesuit priesthood is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, one that derives in large measure from the crisis of priesthood that has occurred since Vatican II.

### The heart of the Jesuit charism

Up to this point we have observed that priesthood per se is not a central issue in the early documents of the Society. Now let us look at those same documents from the perspective of the central features of the Jesuit charism and see in what ways priesthood is and is not operative. The great summary of the Jesuit charism is found in the Formula of the Institute:

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#### 57 Ignatius, *Constitutions*:

On the question of the choir, [586]:

"Because the occupations which are undertaken for the aid of souls are of great importance, proper to our Institute, and very frequent; and because, on the other hand, our residence in one place or another is so highly uncertain, our members will not regularly hold choir for canonical hours or sing Masses or offices."

On masses for the dead, [589]:

"Neither should the members take on obligations of Masses which are to be celebrated perpetually in their churches, or similar burdens which are not compatible with the liberty that is necessary for our manner of proceeding in the Lord."

On curacy of souls and chaplaincy for women, [588]:

"Because the members of the Society ought to be ready at any hour to go to some or other parts of the world where they may be sent by the sovereign pontiff or their own superiors, they ought not to take a curacy of souls, and still less ought they to take charge of religious women or any other women whatever to be their confessors regularly or to direct them."

58 The paucity of sources is extraordinary. One of the few articles on the question is Michael Buckley's study cited earlier. According to John O'Malley, the only book-length study that seems to have treated the question directly is the monograph by Luis de Diego, *La Opción Sacerdotal de Ignacio de Loyola y sus Compañeros, 1515-1540* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum, 1975). Despite its title, Hugo Rahner's *Ignatius: the Man and the Priest* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum, 1982) only briefly examines Ignatius as a priest, focusing primarily on his concerns as a confessor.

[The] Society [was] founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments; moreover, this Society should show itself no less useful in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals, and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.<sup>59</sup>

This summary of activities is striking in a number of respects. First of all, it makes little reference to matters that are priestly: it singles out the "hearing of confessions" and makes a passing mention of "administering other sacraments." As we shall see, the emphasis on confession reveals some interesting features about priesthood and the Jesuit charism. The remaining activities in the list were not at the time necessarily associated with priesthood. In fact, Ignatius had engaged in most of them since his student days in Alcalá when he attracted attention for "explaining doctrine" and giving the Exercises.<sup>60</sup>

### The ministry of the word

As this list indicates, Ignatius and the early companions focused their efforts on preaching and teaching. In the *Autobiography*, Ignatius gives a colorful instance of their "public preaching." One day four of the early companions, while in Venice, "went to different squares in the city, and at the same hour of the same day . . . began their sermons by shouting loudly to the people and waving their birettas to call them together; these sermons caused much talk in

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59 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [3].

60 Ignatius, *Pilgrim's Journey*, p. 72.

the city and many persons were moved with devotion." <sup>61</sup> This was clearly a unique tactic, and gives some indication why the early Society attracted such public attention. But what of the content of such sermons? Ignatius gives us a glimmer in a letter which he sent Laínez and Salmerón, who were serving as the papal theologians at the Council of Trent:

In your sermons do not touch on subjects on which Catholics and Protestants are at variance, but simply exhort your hearers to virtue and devotion, devotions approved by the Church. Awaken in souls a thorough knowledge of themselves and a love of their Creator and Lord.<sup>62</sup>

Ignatius's concern here is "edification" and reconciliation of opposed parties. Over and over he encourages his men to avoid the polemics and wrangling over doctrine that characterized so much Reformation theologizing. In his essay "The Fourth Vow in its Ignatian Context," John O'Malley notes that the critical doctrines for Ignatius were those regarding "sin" and "virtue," and that "Ignatius conceived doctrine almost entirely with a view to pastoral effectiveness." <sup>63</sup>

In the section in the *Constitutions* which treats the studies of the scholastics, Ignatius sets out his bias toward practical concerns: the new preacher needs "to have considered in advance what pertains to the vices and leads to abhorrence of them and to their correction; and on the contrary, what pertains to the commandments, virtues, good works, and motives for esteeming them and means of acquiring them." <sup>64</sup> He also makes a series of recommendations for developing good habits of preaching: knowledge of the cycle of gospel readings; knowledge of the precepts of good preaching; seeking out and listening to good preachers; regular practice before one's scholastic peers; personal reflection on the experience of preaching; and enlisting

61 Ignatius, *Pilgrim's Journey*, p. 111.

62 Ignatius of Loyola, *The Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), p. 95.

63 John O'Malley, "The Fourth Vow in its Ignatian Context" *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1983), p. 11.

64 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [404].

someone to "point out defects either in the matter preached or in the voice, tones, gestures, and movements." <sup>65</sup>

Ignatius gives similar recommendations concerning teaching. He stresses that such teaching "is different from the scholastic manner," that is, the merely speculative examination of doctrine.<sup>66</sup> He also recommends that such teaching be done in the vernacular and focus on "matters helpful for habits of conduct and for Christian living." <sup>67</sup> In his letter to Laínez and Salmerón, Ignatius asks that they undertake the instruction of children and that they "begin with the first rudiments, and explain them in keeping with the needs of your hearers." This illustrates Ignatius's central concern with accommodation. This principle was not only part of Jesuit preaching and teaching, but played a part in all Jesuit apostolic efforts. Thus Ignatius insisted that Laínez and Salmerón should in their dealings in the council sessions at Trent speak "only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meanings, leanings, and desires of those who speak." <sup>68</sup>

Ignatius did not busy *himself* so much in a public ministry of the word. He was more adept in a ministry of the word done on a one-to-one basis: giving the Exercises, writing letters, engaging in spiritual conversation. Giving the Exercises was one of the crucial ways that Ignatius first formed the early *compañía*. In Italy he used them to win over important figures, especially some of the cardinals in the Curia. Ignatius saw the Exercises as a way to guide individuals through a fundamental experience of conversion. Thus he advises Laínez and Salmerón "that only the Exercises of the first week are to be given to all in general, unless you are dealing with very special persons who are prepared to dispose of their lives according

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65 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [404-405].

66 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [402].

67 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [402] and [403].

68 Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 94.

to the manner of the elections." <sup>69</sup> Ignatius also recommended that scholastics learn to give the Exercises:

After they have had experience of the Spiritual Exercises in their own selves, they should acquire experience in giving them to others. Each one should know how to give an explanation of them and how to employ this spiritual weapon, since it is obvious that God our Lord has made it so effective for His service.<sup>70</sup>

Writing letters became for Ignatius an important Jesuit ministry. His model was, of course, St. Paul, whose letters had served as a powerful instrument of evangelization for the early Church. Thus, Ignatius writes to Bobadilla "that there is a general agreement among us, that in the . . . letter there will be news of some edification, according to what God our Lord works in each for the spiritual good of souls." <sup>71</sup> We see once again Ignatius's concern for edification and encouraging others to virtue. Jesuits often used letters as a tool for evangelization. The most dramatic example of this was the dissemination of Xavier's letters from the Orient. His descriptions of thousands of baptisms captured the imagination of Europe and played an important role in stirring up Europe's missionary energies.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, engaging in spiritual conversation had long been one of Ignatius's most characteristic ministries. As Thomas Clancy has noted, "for him spiritual conversation was a privileged means of preaching the good news." <sup>73</sup> In his early days in Salamanca, Ignatius defended himself against some Dominicans, saying, "We do not preach but we do speak familiarly of spiritual things with some people, as one does

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69 Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 95.

70 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [408].

71 Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 74.

72 William V. Bangert, *A History of The Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), p. 33.

73 Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), p. 3.

after dinner, with those who invite us." <sup>74</sup> Later in a letter to James Cazador, Ignatius explained that "I make it a general rule to treat of the things of God when I enter into relations with anyone, even though he be a great sinner." <sup>75</sup> According to Nadal, the phrase "any other ministrations whatsoever of the word of God" in the Formula of the Institute refers primarily to this ministry of spiritual conversation. <sup>76</sup>

It would be tempting to see in Ignatius's and the early companions' work in the ministry of the word a form of priestly ministry, as Michael Buckley does when he says that "ordination did not begin this kind of work; it ratified it and caught it up within the public mission of the Church." <sup>77</sup> But Buckley is viewing the matter from a postconciliar perspective in which we again view the ministry of the word as essential to priesthood. As we saw above, the tradition up to Vatican II defined priesthood in terms of sacramental powers and mediatorship; and Aquinas, the one who set the terms of the discussion, associated preaching and hearing confessions and learning *not* with the charism of priesthood, but with the charism of religious life. Even granting that most today would see preaching and formal catechesis as priestly ministry, few would extend that to other equally important aspects of the ministry of the word that have been accented in the history of the Society: giving the Exercises, letter writing, teaching secular disciplines in the colleges.

While a ministry of the word was not seen at the time as *constitutive* of priesthood, ordination did give one greater access to this ministry. For example, in Alcalá Ignatius had found himself in periodic trouble with the authorities when he tried to engage in public teaching. They forced him to give up on "his helping souls" simply because "he had no formal studies." <sup>78</sup> This emphasis on

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74 Ignatius, *Pilgrim's Journey*, p. 76.

75 Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 16.

76 Clancy, p. 7.

77 Buckley, p. 145.

78 Ignatius, *Pilgrim's Journey*, p. 72.

learning here is critical. While priests at the time were frequently far from learned, being learned was inextricably linked with priesthood. And the early Jesuits were noteworthy because they were learned men. In the bull *Exposcit debitum* Pope Julius III stresses that the early companions are "Masters of Arts, graduates from the University of Paris, and trained in theological studies for many years."<sup>79</sup> Thus, the concern in Jesuit formation was not on priesthood as such, but on learning. As Outram Evennett in his classic study, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, has pointed out, "in origin, the institution of the scholasticate and the provision for Jesuit universities, primarily for Jesuits themselves, made in the constitutions have behind them a pastoral motive and are based on the conviction that the best work for souls could only be done by men thoroughly and appropriately trained not only in pure spirituality but also in the various sacred sciences."<sup>80</sup> In other words, for Ignatius, the focus was on possessing sufficient learning to be effective as a minister of the word. In some respects, priesthood functioned simply as a sort of "union card," a means by which Jesuits could move easily in the larger Church so as to do "what will seem expedient for the glory of God," as the Formula of the Institute puts it. Thus priesthood served as a sort of minimum condition that allowed the early companions access to the public forum. But it was learning that provided them the means to execute the mission which they saw as critical: teaching and preaching. In so doing, Jesuits reconfigured the meaning of priesthood and gave it a new emphasis.

### Ministries of reconciliation and of service

Up to this point we have focused on those ministries given in the Formula of the Institute which center on a ministry of the word. There are in that list two other forms of ministry: the ministry

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79 "Formula of the Institute," *Constitutions*, [2].

80 H. Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 79.

of reconciliation and the ministries to the poor, the suffering, and the alienated.

The first of these includes the explicitly priestly task of hearing confessions. This holds pride of place in the Jesuit tradition not because of Ignatius's concern for priesthood as such, but because of his deep concern with conversion. He saw in confession an instrument for changing hearts and changing lives. Confession certainly played an important role in his own conversion process at Montserrat and Manresa.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant's general confession serves as one of the crucial moments of the First Week.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the Exercises are full of suggestions to make this a freeing experience, one which would avoid creating the scruples that plagued Ignatius. Thus, for Ignatius, confession had an important part to play in evangelization efforts, and was to be one of the apostolic tasks of the spiritual coadjutor.<sup>83</sup> In the *Constitutions* he speaks of Jesuits working in pairs, one as preacher and the other as confessor: "If two set out, it seems that with a preacher or lecturer there could well go another who in confessions and spiritual exercises could gather in the harvest which the speaker prepares for him."<sup>84</sup>

Confession was also important because of Ignatius's devotion to frequent communion, a devotion that many of Ignatius's contemporaries viewed with suspicion. We need to remember that one generally went to confession each time before one received communion. Thus in the *Constitutions* Ignatius makes provisions both for weekly confession and communion.<sup>85</sup> Such pious practices were public acts that served as distinguishing marks of the "reformed" orders much as

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81 Ignatius, *Pilgrim's Journey*, pp. 26 & 32-34.

82 Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), [24-44].

83 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [113].

84 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [624].

85 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [584].

abstaining from meat on Fridays clearly distinguished pre-Vatican II Catholics from their Protestant confreres.<sup>86</sup>

In the *Constitutions* Ignatius outlined a number of directives for training scholastics to hear confessions. Not only were they to study cases of conscience, reserved cases and censures, questions of jurisdiction, and extraordinary formulas of absolution. Ignatius also recommended that the Jesuit confessor have at hand a list of sins and practical suggestions for overcoming them and that the beginning confessor reflect on his experience as an aid to improving his ministerial ability. Finally he suggested that an instruction be developed "helping toward the good and prudent exercise of this ministry in the Lord without harm to oneself and with profit to one's fellowmen."<sup>87</sup> In compliance with this final suggestion, Polanco published a directory for confessors in 1554.<sup>88</sup>

Jesuits brought a new style to the sacrament. Having imbibed the spirit of the Exercises, Jesuit confessors moved away from the medieval model of the priest as judge and towards a model of the priest as spiritual director. As a result, Jesuits earned a great reputation as confessors, so great that rigorists such as Pascal saw our leniency as undermining the holiness of the Church. Also this specialization in the art of reconciliation led Jesuits to develop a moral casuistry for complex cases of conscience.<sup>89</sup>

From the beginning, Jesuits gave special care to ministries directed toward the poor and suffering. For example, Ignatius, while in Rome, took up the care of Jewish converts and set up a home for prostitutes.<sup>90</sup> When he traveled he frequently stayed in hospitals, and when Salmerón and Laínez went to the Council of Trent, Ignatius insisted that they visit the hospitals.<sup>91</sup> In the nineteenth and twen-

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86 Evennett, p. 37.

87 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [406].

88 See Ganss's note no. 4, *Constitutions*, p. 202.

89 Evennett, p. 37.

90 Buckley, p. 145.

91 Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 96; *Pilgrim's Journey*, p. 101.

tieth centuries, such works of charity came to be seen as important forms of Christian ministry, but in Ignatius's time such activities, while certainly admired, would not have been seen as priestly ministries.

### Other traditional elements: mobility and collaboration

Up to this point we have focused on the famous summary paragraph from the Formula of the Institute as the basis for understanding the Jesuit charism and have observed the relationship of that charism to priesthood. There are two other important elements of the Jesuit charism that shape any understanding of Jesuit priesthood: mobility and collaboration. The concern for mobility flows out of the Ignatian emphasis on readiness for mission. The Formula of the Institute describes this aspect of the Jesuit charism as follows:

We are obliged by a special vow to carry out whatever the present or future Roman pontiffs may order which pertains to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith; and to go without subterfuge or excuse, as far as in us lies, to whatsoever provinces they may choose to send us--whether they are pleased to send us among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies, or among any heretics whatever, or schismatics, or any of the faithful.<sup>92</sup>

This concern for mission and mobility flew in the face of the Church's traditional understanding of priesthood. As we saw earlier, priesthood in the patristic period was conceived as lifelong leadership of a stable Christian community. The biblical model for this view had been the stable, wise "overseer" described in the Pastorals. This model had little influence on the actual shape of Jesuit priesthood.

During the early years of the Society, the Jesuit stress on mobility met with opposition. To counter such opposition, Nadal attempted to define the Ignatian charism and defend the Society against its detractors. He insisted that the mobility of the Society flowed from its attempt to imitate the "vita apostolica." We need to

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92 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [4].

recognize how innovative this claim of his was. Medieval reformers had envisioned that "apostolic life" in a quite different manner: the monasticism of Cluny or the mendicant poverty of the Franciscans or the hermit life of Giles of Viterbo had each been put forward as "apostolic." Nadal, by contrast, stressed the mobile and activist style of the Society as a more perfect imitation of the early Church. To justify this view he appealed to the missionary wanderings of Paul. Thus for Nadal the Society is most itself when on the move, so that "the whole world becomes its house."<sup>93</sup> Cardinal Newman captured this aspect of Jesuit life well when he remarked in a comparison between the vocations of the Oratorians and the Jesuits that "Jesuits do not know the word 'home.'"<sup>94</sup>

Another critical element of the Jesuit charism is apostolic collaboration. Among the early companions, this sharing in apostolic labors flowed naturally from their genuine and profound friendship. They saw in the title "Compañía de Jesús" a summary of their unique style: a strong bond of friendship tied to an impassioned commitment to ministry. Frequently their apostolic work was done in pairs. The biblical precedent for such ministry in pairs is, of course, the incident in Luke's gospel in which Jesus sends out the seventy in pairs to announce the coming of the Reign of God (Lk 10:1-17). Imitation of this biblical precedent proved to have a number of practical advantages. Thus in the section of the *Constitutions* on missions undertaken by the Society, Ignatius notes the following:

It would be wise when possible that one member should be not alone. At least two should be sent, that thus they may be more helpful to one another in spiritual and bodily matters and also, by distributing among themselves the labors in the service of their neighbor.<sup>95</sup>

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93 John O'Malley, "To Travel to Any Part of the World: Jerónimo Nadal and the Jesuit Vocation," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Mar. 1984), p. 7.

94 Quoted in Buckley, p. 149.

95 Ignatius, *Constitutions*, [624].

As we saw earlier, he suggests that one of the members of the apostolic team serve as the preacher while the other hears confessions and engages in spiritual conversation. He also notes that one should help balance the virtue of the other (for example, a daring man with a cautious one) and suggests that an experienced Jesuit accompany an inexperienced one so to serve as apostolic and spiritual mentor. With the rise of the colleges, most Jesuits came to exercise their priesthood in a setting which demanded a shared ministry. In other words, the ordinary manner in which Jesuits have shepherded communities under their care (schools, for example) is not as individual pastors but as a collaborative team. Since the 31st General Congregation, Jesuits have consciously sought to broaden that collaborative style so as to include their lay colleagues as vital members of the apostolic team.<sup>96</sup>

### **The modern element: the promotion of justice**

Up to now we have seen the traditional elements of the Jesuit charism and observed in what ways that charism includes, transforms, or simply ignores priesthood. But there is one last element that we need to examine regarding priesthood and the Jesuit charism: the promotion of justice. At the 32nd General Congregation, the Society decided upon this as a critical new orientation for its apostolic mission: "The mission of the Society today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement."<sup>97</sup> In this reorientation, GC 32 insisted that "the promotion of justice is not one apostolic area among others, the 'social apostolate'; rather it should be the concern of our whole life and a dimension of *all* our apostolic endeavors."<sup>98</sup> This reorientation means entering "into solidarity with the the voiceless and the powerless."<sup>99</sup>

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96 Decree 21: The Better Choice and Promotion of Ministries, *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations*, paragraph 9.

97 Decree 4: Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice, paragraph 2.

98 Decree 4, paragraph 47.

99 Decree 4, paragraph 42.

This preferential option for the poor, while certainly in accord with the impulses in the Society from the beginning, represents a clear shift. To appreciate such a shift, we need to note the contemporary experience of Jesus. As Jaroslav Pelikan has noted in his study of different images of Jesus in the Christian tradition, the distinctive image of Jesus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that of Christ the liberator.<sup>100</sup> It is not surprising that the Society, which sees itself as "companions" of Jesus, should be attuned to this and so orient its style of discipleship in this direction. The problem is that this orientation is not so much "priestly" as it is "prophetic."

Yet interestingly, Father Arrupe, in an intervention during the congregation, sought to link priesthood with this promotion of justice:

The problem lies precisely in this, that the equilibrium and integration must be kept: thus it happens that activities that seem most distant from the priesthood, because they seem more secular or material, are assumed, integrated, directed and vivified by the very priestly character of the apostolic man.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, for Father Arrupe it is the priestly character of the individual Jesuit that transforms any activity, however secular seeming, into a priestly one. This statement by Father Arrupe is one of the finest contemporary descriptions of the distinctive Jesuit view of priesthood. Such a view makes intelligible how Jesuits who work as university professors or lawyers or playwrights or research scientists are in fact exercising a priestly ministry. In an earlier age Jesuit missionaries went to the ends of the earth to establish new churches, and that church-founding activity came to be seen as priestly. What Father Arrupe suggests here is that, when Jesuits venture into certain unusual cultural or intellectual environments, they are exercising a similar missionary enterprise and are doing so as part of their priestly activity. While such a view sounds quite clear in theory, its

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100 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 206-219.

101 Arrupe, p. 318.

practice is one fraught with ambiguity. Too often Jesuits can slip into being "hyphenated priests," men simply with two distinct and separable professions. That is clearly not the integrated priestly identity that Father Arrupe envisions as characteristic of Jesuits.

In this section we have explored the place of priesthood in the Society's charism. We have seen that being a Jesuit changes the meaning of being a priest. We are not leaders of stable Christian communities permanently presiding over their life and worship. We are not "helpers" or counselors of the bishops as the fourth-century presbyterium was. We are activists and border-crossers always looking where in the world Christ needs to be preached. We possess a missionary self-understanding, a spirituality characterized by "companionship with Jesus," and an orientation to the ministry of the word and of reconciliation and of the promotion of justice--and these elements infuse the way we live out our priesthood.

#### **PART IV. CONCLUSION: A SOCIETY OF APOSTLES**

At the outset we saw that Jesuits often experience a crisis when they come to theology because they come face to face with the crisis in priesthood that afflicts the larger Church. Scholastics' experience of crisis is in some measure determined by how much weight they give to priesthood as it is understood in the larger Church and to what extent they see it shaping their own identity as Jesuits. We also saw that Jesuit scholastics do not tend to experience that crisis prior to coming to theology because formation up through regency focuses on more critical elements of being a Jesuit: the experience of the Exercises, the life of the vows and of community, the ministries of teaching, of work among the poor, and of study. Only in coming to theology do they confront the problematic character of priesthood in the contemporary Church, and so must integrate something into their identity as Jesuits that remains rather ambiguous and to a large degree unpopular.

As we saw earlier, with the collapse of the received view, priesthood ceased to be extolled as a high cultural ideal and lost its ideological support in the face of a more egalitarian theology since the council. In addition, priesthood failed to enjoy the same sort of renewal that occurred in the ministries of the bishops and the laity. Moreover, we saw that the current emphasis on priesthood as leadership of a stable Christian community, while indeed more faithful to the patristic model, is peculiarly inappropriate to the sort of ministries central to the Jesuit charism. Thus, we heighten the crisis for ourselves when we tend to conceive our priesthood in the same terms as the larger Church, and fail to reflect both on the peculiar way that Jesuits have lived out their priesthood and the fact that most aspects of priesthood, at least as it is conventionally conceived, are often secondary to our charism.

In the previous section we looked in considerable detail at elements that make up the Jesuit charism. We noted that while Jesuits have been and will continue to be priests, the way that they in fact live out that priesthood is largely shaped by the peculiar circumstances of the Jesuit charism. And the shaping of that charism did not depend on the sixteenth-century image of the priest with its stress on curacy of souls and choral recitation of the Office and saying masses for the dead. Rather, it flowed directly from Ignatius's and the early companions' experiments in apostolic work. The first Jesuits arrived at their choice of ministries by a method Vatican II would later commend: "reading the signs of the times" and "interpreting them in the light of the Gospel." In particular, Ignatius and the early Society appealed not to images of priesthood, but to certain New Testament images of being an apostle: going in pairs from town to town, like the disciples in Luke's gospel; venturing out, like Paul, to those areas of the world that had not yet heard the proclamation of the Good News. In a world where the imitation of Christ meant having a contemplative focus, Ignatius and the early companions imbued that imitation with an activist orientation. In so doing they reconfigured the shape of priesthood by giving it an apostolic focus.

And we Jesuits today share that same focus. In some respects priesthood functions for us simply as a way to move easily in the larger Church. It provides us access to the public forum and enables us to serve in a public capacity on behalf of the Church. But as Michael Buckley has suggested, "priesthood in the Society has its own unique contours and constellations of emphases which give it uniqueness, focus, and identity."<sup>102</sup> As a result, we Jesuits concern ourselves primarily with a ministry of the word. We are apostolic and that means being mobile, crossing boundaries, whether they be between dioceses or between nations. We give a strong emphasis to ministries devoted to the poor and disenfranchised, and in the modern context that has come to mean that the promotion of justice serves as a central orientation for all Jesuit ministries. Finally, because our concern is the "greater glory of God," we ultimately do not have predetermined ministries but go wherever we are most needed and can do the greatest good.

All of these aspects are not what most people mean by priesthood, yet they are central to what it means to be a Jesuit. In a sense, traditionally and even currently, Jesuits have given priority to ministries characteristic of the Society rather than to those traditionally conceived of as priestly. Priesthood--narrowly conceived--is necessary for some Jesuit ministries: certainly for hearing confessions, and usually for preaching. But it is mission and not sacramental leadership which remains the focus.

In this sense, then, priesthood is not so much *constitutive* of being a Jesuit as it is *instrumental* to being one. The majority of Jesuits become priests because they seek to be available for mission. And while certain missions may only rarely involve conventional priestly functions, we Jesuits, in accord with our commitment to availability, know that we are liable to be reassigned and so know that those traditional functions may again come into play. In view of this, I should also note that the brothers share fully in the Jesuit charism which is that apostolic orientation to mission. The brothers

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102 Buckley, p. 139.

simply rely on other important instruments (for example, artistic and technical abilities, service to critical needs of the Jesuit community) in their commitment to the Society's mission.

To arrive at an understanding of Jesuit priesthood, we need to reappropriate the wisdom of our lived tradition and to be wary of defining Jesuit priesthood too much in the terms that priesthood has within the larger Church. I fear that, because of the current crisis in priestly identity, we may abandon that inherited wisdom. If we do not reclaim our Jesuit tradition, we may lose sight of why we work together in educational institutions or why we possess a missionary concern or why we are an international body or why we are so highly mobile. Ultimately, our priesthood is to serve our apostolicity. Thus we are not so much a "Society of priests" as we are a "Society of apostles." And that means giving priority to going where the need is greatest, whether that be establishing a refugee service or a soup kitchen, publishing a national magazine or acting as advisor to a national conference of bishops. Thus the shape of Jesuit priesthood, while informed by the wisdom of traditional ways of proceeding, needs to remain radically open-ended.



# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PRIESTLY CHARACTER OF OUR JESUIT VOCATION

Donald L. Gelpi, S.J.\*

Within living memory two popes, Paul VI and John Paul II, have reminded Jesuits of the priestly character of our vocation.<sup>1</sup> The question which these two pontiffs have raised engages every member of the Society of Jesus: the ordained, those aspiring to ordination, and Jesuit brothers. A correct theological answer to that question imposes serious obligations on the ordained, for it defines the scope of their priestly ministry. It shapes the training of those who aspire to ordination. Moreover, a sound understanding of the priestly character of our vocation also engages Jesuit brothers, who also participate in the priesthood of Christ as baptized Christians and vowed religious. Indeed, what we mean by the priestly character of our vocation shapes in important ways our shared self-understanding as Jesuits.

In the course of this essay I would like to propose some reflections that will, I hope, offer some insight into what we mean when we speak of our vocation as priestly. I have deliberately chosen not

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1 *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), pp. 525-526; *Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), p. 82.

to focus narrowly on Jesuit sources. Instead, I would like to suggest a broader theological context for discussing Jesuit priesthood; for if as Jesuits we need to think with the church on this as on other topics, we must situate our self-understanding as a priestly order within the context of the church's own evolving insight into the scope and purpose of priestly ministry.

In the course of what follows I shall attempt to argue the following three major theses. (1) A sound contemporary theological understanding of the priestly character of our Jesuit vocation demands that we interpret it in the light of shifting theological perceptions of the meaning of priestly ministry. (2) A sound contemporary theological interpretation of the priestly character of our vocation demands that Jesuits understand their vocation in a way that reconciles a Catholic interpretation of priestly ministry with a New Testament theology of priesthood. (3) Religious priests exercise their ministry in apostolic communities whose shared life and work is informed by a distinctive spirituality. What do these three theses mean and who do they imply?

## **PART I. THE SHIFTING THEOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS OF PRIESTHOOD**

My first major thesis states: *A sound theological understanding of the priestly character of our Jesuit vocation demands that we interpret it in the light of shifting theological perceptions of the meaning of priesthood.* Before I begin to develop the first of my three theses, let me, however, say a word about method. I cannot in the course of a brief essay such as this even begin to recapitulate in detail the way the theological understanding of Christian priesthood evolved. Instead, I would like to focus on influential moments within that evolution.

More specifically, I would like to call attention to five significant speculative shifts in the understanding of priestly ministry. I regard the shifts in question as speculatively significant because they seem

to me to continue to color contemporary reflections about priesthood in a variety of ways. Others may read the history of ordained ministry differently; but I offer my own interpretation of what history for whatever light it may contain.

My reflections on shifting theological perceptions of the meaning of priesthood divide, then, into five sections. The first section examines the shift from a Hebrew theology of priesthood to a New Testament portrayal of priestly ministry. The second traces the shift from a New Testament theology of priesthood to a sacerdotalist interpretation. This second shift begins shortly after the apostolic era ends and culminates in a fourth-century theology of priesthood. Section three reflects on the shift in the sixth century from a sacerdotalist to a hierarchical understanding of priesthood. Section four reflects on the shift from medieval perceptions of priestly ministry to a polemic understanding of priesthood. This fourth shift occurred at the time of the Protestant reformation. The fifth and final section of this Part will describe the shift from a polemic to an ecumenical understanding of priesthood which occurred at Vatican II.

Having reflected on these five moments in the development of the theology of priestly ministry, I will then attempt in the two theses which follow to point the way toward an updated theological understanding of the priestly character of our Jesuit vocation.

### **The first shift: from the Old Testament to the New**

The New Testament shows relatively little concern with a theology of priesthood. Only one of its documents, the letter to the Hebrews, discusses the notion at any length. We shall consider below in some detail the important contributions which Hebrews makes to a theology of Christian priesthood. Here it suffices to note that a New Testament perception of priestly ministry builds on the Hebrew tradition even though it develops in sharp counterpoint to that tradition.

*Priestly ministry in Israel.* - In Israel the levitical priesthood comprised an elite professional caste which one joined by virtue of

ancestry, not by virtue of personal charismatic giftedness. The levitical priest functioned primarily as a man of the sanctuary. There he led cult, interpreted the law, and delivered oracles from God. The sons of Levi enabled the Hebrews to communicate with a distant Deity and experience his presence. During the postexilic period the high priesthood underwent increasing politicization and finally degenerated into a pure political appointment.<sup>2</sup>

How then did the Hebrews perceive their priests? As a man of the sanctuary, levitical priests performed a variety of liturgical functions. They performed rites of consecration and purification. They anointed the king (1 K 1:39; 2 K 11:12). They purified lepers after their healing and mothers after childbirth (Lv 14, 12:6ff).

Among the levitical priest's liturgical roles, however, sacrifice took first place. In this fundamental act of worship, the levitical priest mediated between God and his people (Ex 29:38-42; Dt 33:8-11). On the Day of Atonement the high priest officiated as the supreme mediator whose sacrifice pardoned the people's sins (Lv 15; Si 50:5-21).

Priests of Mesopotamia and Egypt practiced divination. In ancient Israel priests performed an analogous function through the use of the Urim and Thummim (1 S 14:36-42; Dt 33:8), two objects kept in the ephod (1 S 30:7ff), an apron-like vestment which covered the priest's breast. By drawing these objects forth the priest gave positive or negative responses to questions posed to him. After David we find no further reference to this practice in the Old Testament.

Levitical priests, however, also interpreted the Law to God's people. On Feast days they recounted the narratives on which the faith of Israel rested (Ex 1-15). At covenant renewals they proclaimed the Torah (Ex 24:7, Dt 27, Ne 8). Levitical priests also answered questions posed to them about the sacred books of Israel (Dt 33:10,

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<sup>2</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York: Paulist, 1970), pp. 5-13; Elizabeth Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament: Called to Serve* (New York: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 30-45.

Jr 18:18, Ez 44:23, Hg 2:11ff). They supervised redactions of the Law (Lv 17-26) and the final compilation of the Pentateuch (Ezr 7:14-26).

Multiplication of synagogues during the intertestamental period of Jewish history cast rabbis in the role of teachers and interpreters of the law. By Jesus' time the priestly caste concentrated principally on the conduct of cult.

*Priesthood in the New Testament.* - The gospels all suggest that the high-priestly casts in Jerusalem bore principal responsibility for Jesus' murder. Understandably, then, the first leaders of the Christian community did not in the exercise of their office emulate the sons of Levi. They looked instead to Jesus and to his unique ministry

Jesus did not belong to the tribe of Levi. He functioned, therefore, within the Judaism of his day as a layman. He exercised a ministry of teaching and was called "Rabbi"; but he taught like no other rabbi. He spoke from a profound personal experience of God as "Papa" which the Spirit of God inspired within him. He worked miracles to validate the divine origin of his teaching.

He also gave rudimentary institutional shape to the movement he headed. He called twelve men to share his ministry and promised them that they would judge the new Israel he was in process of founding (Mk 3:13-19, 10:28-31; Mt 10:1-4, 19:27-29; Lk 6:12-16, 18:24-27).

The twelve seemed to resonate with the apocalyptic Judaism of their day, dreaming of the time when God through Jesus would give his people political hegemony over all the nations of the earth. Jesus told them to abandon their dreams of power and warned them that, if they followed him, he could only promise them suffering. He insisted that leadership in the new Israel demands the willingness to serve as the least of all in imitation of a messiah foredoomed to suffer and die. He forbade them the arrogance of pagan princes and insisted that they prefer the path of powerlessness (Mk 9:33-37, 10:35-45; Mt 20:22-28; Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13:1-20). Leaders in the new Israel, the twelve could expect in their turn to experience the same kind of rejection and humiliation as Jesus himself (Mt 10:17-20).

Then on the night Jesus was betrayed he gathered with his disciples at supper, gave them bread and wine as his body and blood. By that efficacious prophetic gesture he assured them that in dying he would give himself to them totally as the source of their life and that the blood he would shed would seal a new covenant (Mk 14:22-25, Mt 26:26-29, Lk 22:15-20, 1 Co 11:13-25).

In invoking the image of the blood of the covenant, Jesus described his impending death as a sacrificial act; and throughout the New Testament we find his final agony described in sacrificial imagery: as a passover sacrifice of liberation (1 Co 5:7; 1Pt 1:18), as a sacrifice of atonement (Rm 3:25, Ga 2:20, Eph 5:2).

The letter to the Hebrews, however, transformed these vague and scattered references into a revolutionary theology of Christian priesthood. Written for Jewish Christians who hankered for the richness and splendor of Jewish temple worship, Hebrews argues, polemically at times, for the transcendent character of the Christian sacrifice. With breathtaking boldness the author proclaims Jesus the great high priest of the new covenant and insists that by his incarnation, death, and glorification he put an end forever to the need for a levitical priesthood. The theology of Christian priesthood which the author of Hebrews develops roots itself ultimately in Jesus' death that also expresses the Easter faith of the church.

The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus' priestly ministry utterly transcends that of a levitical high priest and differs from it profoundly. Unlike the levitical priest, Jesus did not join some clerical elite set apart from the people. Instead, he became a priest by entering totally into the human condition in all of its misery, suffering, and vulnerability. Something else separated the levitical priest from God's people, the priest's own sins. Jesus, however, in virtue of his sinlessness confronts us as completely accessible, as having broken the barrier of sin that separates us from God and from one another (Hb 4:12-14).

Moreover, at every point the priesthood of Jesus transcends the levitical priesthood utterly. The levitical high priest served as a

human mediator between God and the people; Jesus mediates between God and humanity in virtue of being God's incarnate Son. The levitical high priest spoke with divine authority; Jesus the high priest speaks as God incarnate. His death reveals the perfection of his sinless obedience to god; his glorification reveals the perfection of his high-priestly authority and intercessory power (Hb 5:1--6:20).

The eternal high priesthood of Jesus replaces the ephemeral levitical priesthood (Hb 7:1-19). The eternity of Christ's priesthood also guarantees its efficacy; for he abides forever in heaven, interceding for those for whom he died (Hb 7:1-28). The levitical high priest offered animal sacrifices again and again. Jesus offered a sacrifice more precious than the blood of sheep and goats; for he offered his very life. Moreover, he offered it once and for all in a perfect oblation that puts an end to the need for the ritual sacrifices of the old law. Jesus' sacrificial death also begins a new future. It seals the new covenant and begins the last age of salvation, as the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the risen Christ cleanses the hearts of those who believe in him and leads them toward the heavenly sanctuary which he has entered and where he awaits his followers (Hb 8:1--10:18).

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the leaders of the apostolic church portrayed as the quasi-levitical priests of the new covenant. Instead, we find a church of disciples which promotes a variety of ministries supervised by the apostles and by those they appointed to succeed them.

The first Christians did, however, look upon themselves collectively as God's priestly people offering "spiritual sacrifices" made acceptable to god through the death and glorification of Jesus (1 Pt 2:4-11), even though the New Testament nowhere asserts that all Christians share equally in the priesthood of the new covenant.

In calling the Christian community "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart," the first letter of Peter alludes to Exodus 19:5-6. The latter text proclaims Israel holy through its association with priestly cult. The thought of the first letter of Peter moves, however, in a different direction. It

portrays the Christian community itself as the temple of God whose "living stones" make a "spiritual house" dedicated to the praise of God.

### **The second shift: from the New Testament to sacerdotalism**

One can trace the roots of the theological movement called sacerdotalism all the way back to patristic writings of the first century. As bishops evolved into cult leaders, the Fathers of the church with increasing frequency referred to them, and on occasion to presbyters, as the priests of the new covenant. In the fourth century, however, sacerdotalism transformed these occasional references into a systematic restatement of the scope of ordained ministry.<sup>3</sup> Basil of Caesarea helped launch the movement. He did so in response to important events in the life of the church.

In the fourth century the clergy joined the Roman empire. The emperor Constantine, desirous of using the leaders of the Christian church in order to reform a corrupt imperial bureaucracy, first recognized Christianity as one of the official religions of the empire and then, five years later, appointed the Christian clergy imperial judges. Moreover, in 325 this same pagan emperor summoned the Council of Nicea to deal with the Arian heresy.

Alert bishops began to fear that in accepting imperial patronage they might have taken a tiger by the tail; and the smartest among them began building strong theological barriers against imperial meddling in the internal affairs of the church. Their efforts gave rise to sacerdotalism.

Basil argued that both the emperor and the church's bishops participate in divine authority. The emperor has authority from God to govern the church without imperial interference. The emperor, moreover, governs the state under God. As an image of heavenly authority in secular matters, he must live as a paragon of virtue and

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3 James Mohler, S.J., *The Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood* (New York: Alba House, 1970); Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 525-573.

should never claim the right to be worshiped idolatrously.

Having drawn an analogy between civil and ecclesiastical authority in a way that assimilated them to one another while confining their exercise to the essentially different spheres of the secular and the sacred, Basil found that the comparison allowed him to read the letter to the Hebrews with new eyes. Bishops in governing the church participate, he insisted, in the divine authority of Jesus, the great high priest. They bring healing, direction, and guidance to the Christian community.

Basil portrayed the church's relationship to the state as a collaborative one. As priests of the new covenant, bishops should assist civil authority in promoting the common good. They should support good civil leaders and intercede for them before God. They should also see to it that church leaders enjoy pastoral competence to serve the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

As sacerdotalism developed, however, it began to conceive of the priestly authority of the clergy in ways that contrasted sharply with the letter to the Hebrews. As we have seen, the author of Hebrews argued that Jesus, the high priest of the new covenant, by the unique sacrifice he offered on Calvary and by his glorification, had put an end forever to the levitical priesthood. Sacerdotalist theologians, however, began portraying the ordained leaders of the Christian community as the quasi-levitical priests of the new covenant.

Official leadership in the apostolic church had differed from the levitical priesthood in four of five characteristics: (1) The levitical priest belonged to an elite professional caste set apart from the rest of the people; the official leaders of the church saw themselves as following a servant messiah who entered totally into the human condition. Christian leaders had to regard themselves as the least of all, the servants of all. Their "elite" status required of them humility, self-effacement, and identification with the poor, the marginal, and the outcast (Mk 20:24-28, Mt 10:41-45, Lk 22:24-27, Jn

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4 See Gerard F. Reilly, C.S.S.R., *Imperium and Sacerdotium According to Basil the Great* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1945).

13-116). (2) The levitical priesthood depended on ancestry; ordained Christian leadership depended on tested, charismatic competence to lead the Christian community (2 Tm 1:6). (3) The levitical priesthood transformed one into a man of the sanctuary; the first leaders of the Christian community supervised cult but did not necessarily function as the only cult leaders.<sup>5</sup> (4) The levitical priest sought through cult and oracular pronouncements to make an invisible, distant God present to his people; the first Christians experienced the immediate presence of God in the charismatic transformation of all the members of the Christian community into a priestly people.<sup>6</sup> (5) Indeed, the official leaders of the apostolic church described in the New Testament resembled levitical priests unambiguously in only one respect: namely, both exercised a ministry of teaching.

Fourth-century sacerdotalism, by contrast, encouraged the clergy to look upon themselves as a moral and spiritual elite that patterned itself consciously on the levitical priesthood. Aware that they were being co-opted into a corrupt secular bureaucracy, the Christian clergy feared that its bishops might yield to the same bribery and favoritism as had corrupted the secular courts. Accordingly sacerdotalist theology held up to bishops and, by association, to priests the highest religious and moral standards that set them apart from "this world." If levitical priests were required to abstain from sex prior to exercising important cultic functions, the levites of the new law should observe a quasi-angelic celibacy. The cult of ritual purity in pagan religions also influenced the impulse to impose

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5 We have some evidence which indicates that in some places in the early church prophets presided at the eucharist and that in the absence of a local church's ordained leader lay Christians presided at the eucharist. For a discussion of these points see Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 528-530, 532; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 48-52.

6 The first letter of Peter speaks of the priestly community as offering spiritual sacrifices to God in Christ and as the spiritual stones of a spiritual house (1 Pt 2:4-10). The letter also acknowledges the presence within the Petrine community of ministries inspired by the Spirit (1 Pt 4:7-11). The letter's portrayal of the priestly people of God as a "spiritual house" echoes, then, a Pauline theology of the mystical body built up by the Spirit's charismatic inspirations.

celibacy on the clergy.<sup>7</sup>

The new perceptions of Christian priesthood which sacerdotalism popularized, emerged in no small measure from the attempt of the episcopacy to defend its authority from the encroachment of secular power. That struggle and the theology it engendered was not, however, completely devoid of paradox. The reflections of St. John Chrysostom on the priesthood illustrate the tensions which sacerdotalism introduced into a Christian theology of the priesthood.

Chrysostom endorses a sacerdotalist interpretation of episcopal ministry. Christian priests minister in ways that imitate but transcend the ministry of the levitical priesthood. Nevertheless, he saw that the transformation of bishops into the high priests of the Roman empire had brought with it severe risks and disadvantages. As high priests the ordained exercise a public office too easily coveted not from love but from sinful ambition. Indeed, Chrysostom warns, such are the temptations and pressures experienced by the high priests of the new covenant that the person who undertakes the office puts the salvation of his own soul in serious jeopardy.<sup>8</sup>

By sacerdotalism, then, I mean the attempt to pattern the ministry of official church leaders on that of the levitical priesthood. Although this movement reflected in understandable ways the church's changed political status in the fourth century, it began the transformation of the clergy from a service "elite" into a power elite. In other words, it began their systematic clericalization.

### **The third shift: from sacerdotalism to hierarchicalism**

If the fourth century saw the transformation of the Christian clergy into the levitical priests of the new covenant, the sixth

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7 Although the impulse toward legislated celibacy for the clergy began in the fourth century, celibacy was not effectively imposed by canon law until the twelfth. See Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1972); Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* 41 (1972): 149-167.

8 See John Chrysostom, *The Priesthood*, translated by W. A. Jurgens (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

century saw them transformed into hierarchs. This second transformation was reflected in the works of the Syrian author who wrote under the pseudonymous name of Dionysius the Areopagite. Paul the apostle had converted the real Dionysus to Christianity in the first century (Ac 17:34). As a consequence, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were destined to enjoy enormous authority in the medieval church, which took his ecclesiology as a description of first-century church order.

Pseudo-Dionysius combined biblical angelology with Neo-Platonic metaphysics in order to construct a vision of the church which contemporary theology calls into question.<sup>9</sup> He organized the nine choirs of angels mentioned in the Bible into three hierarchies and subdivided each hierarchy into three tiers. By a hierarchy Pseudo-Dionysius meant "an eternal, divinely established principle of order which gives unchanging, intelligible structure to the universe" (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, iii, 1).

Following his fantasy, this sixth-century Syrian imagined that the angels' capacity for grace and enlightenment decreases as one descends the hierarchical ladder. Moreover, good Platonist that he was, he imagined that the church on earth had been immutably structured by God to imitate the angelic hierarchies (*ibid.*, i, 3; v, 1--ix, 2).

Pseudo-Dionysius divided the church on earth into two hierarchies: the clerical and the lay. The bishop stands on the top rung of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He confronts the church as "a deified and divine person, instructed in all holy knowledge, in whom the entire hierarchy which depends on him finds the pure means of perfecting and expressing itself" (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, i., 3). Priests stand below bishops, deacons rank below priests. In the lay hierarchy, religious stand on the top rung of the

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9 I cannot in the space of a short essay such as this do full justice to the theological vision of Pseudo-Dionysius. For a sympathetic reading of his theology see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (2 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1984), 2:144-210.

hierarchical ladder, the laity on the middle rung, and catechumens on the bottom.

By patterning the ecclesiastical hierarchy on the angelic, Pseudo-Dionysius successfully elaborated a trickle-down theory of divine grace. Graced enlightenment travels initially down the three angelic hierarchies and then down the two ecclesiastical hierarchies. Graced enlightenment passes from the angelic hierarchies first to the bishop, from the bishop to priests, from priests to deacons, from the clerical hierarchy to the lay, from religious to secular lay folk, and from the laity to catechumens (*ibid.*, v, 1ff).

By the time Pseudo-Dionysius wrote, the catechumenate had disappeared. Effectively, then, lay people stood on the bottom of the hierarchical ladder in passive dependence upon the clergy and religious for whatever grace and religious understanding they might possess.

By the term "hierarchicalism" I mean, then, a vision of church order which reduces the laity to passive dependence on the clergy for access to divine grace.

#### **The fourth shift: from a medieval theology of priesthood to the polemics of the Reformation**

During his own day, Pseudo-Dionysius exerted some influence; but he really came into his own during the high middle ages. As we have seen, medieval theologians took his writings with sober seriousness, partly because they erroneously accepted his ecclesiology as a portrait of apostolic church order, partly because it made sense enough out of medieval church polity, partly because it fitted the Platonic caste of much medieval theology.

In the fourth century the transformation of the clergy first into imperial judges and then into the high priests of the Roman empire began their historical change from a service "elite" to a power elite. The collapse of the Roman empire in the West accelerated the process of transformation. With the disintegration of the political order, bishops assumed more and more secular responsibilities. The pope on acquiring the papal states became a secular prince. The

multiplication of benefices swelled episcopal coffers, made bishops into absentee pastors, and allowed them to desport themselves like "princes of the church."

In the meantime, medieval theologians were moving toward a consensus concerning the purpose of ordination. That consensus was certainly colored by theological debate over the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It reflected, too, medieval church polity. The Schoolmen taught that ordination confers the power to govern the church and power to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (Albert the Great, *De Sacramentis*, Tr. viii, q. 4, a. 3; Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Book of Sentences*, iv, d. xxiv, p. 2, a. 1, qq. 1-3; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, lxiii, 1-6).

However else they differed, Protestants and Catholics at the time of the Reformation agreed that the church in general and the clergy in particular needed reform; but they undertook different strategies in effecting that reform.

*Luther and Calvin on ordained ministry.* - Martin Luther laid the foundations for a Protestant understanding of ordained ministry. He decided quite correctly that the New Testament offered no justification for a sacerdotalist interpretation of ordained ministry. Instead of portraying the ordained as quasi-levitical priests of the new covenant, he placed the proclamation of the gospel at the heart of ordained ministry (Luther, *Works*, 36:113). The Augsburg Confession, however, also assigned cultic responsibilities to the Lutheran clergy (*Augsburg Confession*, 5)

Luther also proposed his own interpretation of a New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He denied any qualitative difference between the priesthood of the ordained and that of the baptized (Luther, *Works*, 36:116).

Calvin, too, ranked the proclamation of the gospel as the chief responsibility of the ordained, although like Luther he recognized that the ordained also exercise a sacramental ministry. He, however, denied the sacrificial character of the eucharist and refused to call the ordained men priests (John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xix, 22-23).

*Tridentine reforms.* - Trent legislated major reforms of clerical life. The council abolished the benefice system and mandated the orderly training of priests.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the council also attempted to defend the medieval synthesis it sought to reform. Without endorsing the details of Pseudo-Dionysius's ecclesiology, it insisted on the hierarchical structure of official church leadership. Against Luther it held for a qualitative difference between the priesthood of the ordained and that of the baptized. Trent also laid heavy emphasis on the cultic responsibilities of the ordained. The council's decrees deny that ordination merely commissions one to preach the gospel and insist that it confers as well the power both to consecrate and offer the eucharist and to forgive sins (Denzinger-Schoenmetzer [DS], *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1767-1769, 1771, 1774).<sup>11</sup>

In the decrees of the Council of Trent, the seeds of sacerdotalism planted in the fourth century came to full flower. The first sacerdotalists focused upon the episcopacy, portraying bishops as the high priests of the new covenant. Trent extended sacerdotalism to the presbyterate as well and laid heavy emphasis on the cultic responsibilities of the ordained.

*Jesuit priests.* - Ignatius of Loyola certainly saw in sacramental ministry, especially in frequent confession and communion, one of the chief means of "helping souls" which Jesuits could employ. Profound devotion to the holy sacrifice of the Mass informed his personal spirituality. He valued sound theological training for his priests and missioned Jesuits to undertake the reform of the Catholic clergy. He personally abhorred the corrupting influence of clerical ambition and obliged his followers to forswear all episcopal aspirations.

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10 For a lucid summary of Trent's reform of ordained ministry, see Alexandre Ganoczy, "The 'Splendors and Miseries' of the Tridentine Doctrine of Ministries," in *Office and Ministry in the Church (Concilium*, vol. 80), edited by Bas van Iersel and Roland Murphy (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 75-86.

11 At the time of the Reformation, Catholics and Protestants also split, of course, on the issue of the sacramentality of orders. Any detailed assessment of that debate would, however, take us far afield. The present essay focuses exclusively on the scope and purpose of priestly ministry.

His Jesuits read the Divine Office instead of chanting it. They cultivated a simple liturgical style, content to complete an ordinary low Mass in a half an hour. In their direct apostolic work they used the Spiritual Exercises to summon people to conversion and apostolic commitment; and they laid great emphasis on a ministry of teaching and proclamation. Especially by integrating cultic ministry into a ministry of teaching and proclamation, a Jesuit approach to priestly service might be said to have anticipated some of the best theological insights of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>12</sup>

### **The fifth shift: from a polemic to an ecumenical understanding of priesthood**

Unfortunately, Reformation debates about priestly ministry largely ignored the historical development of Christian sacramental worship. I say "unfortunately," because a more detailed knowledge of that history might have muted somewhat the contrasts between a Protestant and Catholic theology of the sacraments.

*The council and the Protestants.* - Three movements enabled Vatican II to approach the question of priestly ministry with much more ecumenical openness than had the Council of Trent: the liturgical movement, the renewal of Catholic biblical scholarship, and the ecumenical movement. The liturgical movement enabled the bishops at Vatican II to recognize the inadequacy of Trent's liturgical reforms for the needs of contemporary worship and to put Trent's sacramental theology in historical perspective. The renewal of biblical scholarship enabled the council to reinterpret the scope of priestly ministry in categories derived from the New Testament. The ecumenical movement and the presence of Protestant observers at the council itself enabled Vatican II to react less defensively than Trent had to the legitimate insights of the Protestant reformers into the purpose

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12 I endorse the interpretation of Jesuit priesthood which William Harmless develops in the companion essay to this one: namely, that in a Jesuit vision of priesthood, the option for ordination serves apostolic ends. I am myself trying to address a different problem: namely, granted the instrumental character of Jesuit priesthood, what do we mean when we characterize our vocation as priestly?

of ordained ministry. Instead of narrowly emphasizing the cultic responsibilities of the ordained, Vatican II situated the sacramental ministry of the ordained within the context of a ministry of proclamation. This council reappropriated and developed a New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of the faithful. It taught that through baptism the laity participate in Jesus' priestly and prophetic ministry. As lay apostles they also seek to extend the kingdom of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, 10, 12, 33-38).

Vatican II, however, continued to take issue with one important aspect of Luther's account of the priesthood of the faithful. The council held for a qualitative difference between the priesthood of the ordained and that of the baptized. Moreover, in contrast to the Calvinist tradition, Vatican II also insisted that the ordained exercise a genuinely sacerdotal ministry.<sup>13</sup>

*Beyond hierarchicalism.* - Moreover, although Vatican II continued to use the term "hierarchical" in describing ordained ministry, it denied the substance of hierarchicalism when it rejected the position of a very small minority of the bishops who wanted to deprive the laity of any spontaneous initiative in the exercise of their apostolate. Lay apostles, the minority argued, should do what the hierarchy told them to do, nothing more, nothing less. While the hierarchicalists at Vatican II did not espouse the Platonism of Pseudo-Dionysius, like him they imagined the laity in a position of passivity before the graced initiatives of the hierarchy.

The vast majority of bishops at the council espoused a very different position. Instead of portraying the hierarchy as standing over the church, Vatican II situated them within the people of God. Instead of viewing the hierarchy, in the manner of Pseudo-Dionysius, as providing the laity with their only access to divine grace and enlightenment, Vatican II vindicated the immediate charismatic inspiration of the lay apostolate. The Holy Spirit dispenses the charisms with sovereign freedom. The hierarchy by their ministry

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13 See Thomas J. Thottumkal, *Priesthood and Apostleship* (Ontario: Publication Services, 1973).

seek to evoke and coordinate the gifts of the laity; but they have no right to suppress the Spirit's charismatic inspirations. Nor must the laity wait for the hierarchy to tell them how to go about the exercise of their apostolate; instead they should rely on the Spirit to do that (*Lumen Gentium*, 10; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3, 30).

*The pastoral responsibilities of priests.* - In describing the apostolic responsibilities of priests, Vatican II, in contrast to Trent, ranked the proclamation of the gospel as their first responsibility (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4). Priests, however, also proclaim the gospel when they administer the sacraments. Indeed, they should look upon the eucharist as the source and apex of their ministry of proclamation (*ibid.*, 5).

Priests seek to advance the central mission of the church: namely, the conversion of all people to Christ. In describing the ministry of priests, however, Vatican II preferred to speak of it in biblical categories as service of the community in the image of Christ rather than as an exercise of power. Like Jesus, priests need to enter totally into the human condition. Their ministry requires of them goodness and sincerity of heart, strength and constancy of character, a passion for justice, civility and gentleness, and an openness to all good things (*ibid.*, 3; *Optatam Totius*, 13-14).

Vatican II also insisted on the charismatic inspiration of priestly ministry and summoned priests to respect the Spirit's charismatic activity in the church as a whole. Not only should they encourage the lay apostolate, but they should regard the formation of communities of mutual ministry as one of their principal responsibilities. The members of such communities, both clergy and laity, share freely with one another the gifts of the Spirit and minister to one another in the Lord (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5-6).

Priests, in the vision of Vatican II, minister in solidarity with the bishop, with one another, and with the laity. Priests represent the bishop. Priests' senates, like the first priestly elders, advise the bishop in the conduct of his ministry. In contributing their personal gifts to the apostolate, priests serve the church in solidarity with

one another. By encouraging the lay apostolate, they minister in solidarity with lay apostles as well (ibid., 7-10).

Finally, Vatican II insisted on the responsibility of priests to grow in holiness and Christlike love through ongoing conversion, self-examination, prayer, meditation on the Bible, and the cultivation of discernment (ibid., 12, 17-18).

*Sacerdotalist influences in Vatican II.* - In describing the ministry of priests, then, Vatican II replaced hierarchicalism with a richly biblical understanding of ordained ministry. Nevertheless, in its description of ordained ministry, Vatican II sometimes spoke in a biblical idiom, sometimes in the idiom of sacerdotalism. For example, in asserting the sacramental character of episcopal ordination, the council stated:

This sacred synod teaches that by episcopal consecration is conferred the fullness which in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the holy Fathers of the church is undoubtedly called the high priesthood, the apex of the sacred ministry (*Lumen Gentium*, 21).

I shall reflect on this aspect of the council's teaching in greater detail below.

I have been arguing that any contemporary attempt to understand the priestly character of our Jesuit vocation must take into account the different, sometimes contradictory, interpretations which Christian teachers have placed on the purpose of priestly ministry. That history leaves one faced with some thorny theological questions: Can one reconcile finally a sacerdotalist understanding of priestly ministry with a New Testament theology of priesthood? At two points these two theologies stand in serious tension. The New Testament asserts that Jesus ended once and for all any need for a levitical priesthood. Sacerdotalism by contrast portrays priests and bishops as a Christian version of the levitical priesthood. The letter to the Hebrews insists that Jesus alone enjoys the fullness of the high priestly office. A sacerdotalist theology discovers the fullness of the priesthood in the episcopacy.

From the standpoint of a traditional Catholic theology, however, one can well understand the reluctance at Vatican II to abandon the language of sacerdotalism altogether; for if one does so, can one continue thereafter to defend traditional Catholic teaching about the priesthood of the ordained? Can one, for example, continue to assert, as official church teaching has done, that the priesthood of the ordained differs qualitatively from the priesthood of the laity or that priests exercise a genuinely sacerdotal ministry in the church? On the other hand, if one holds for a qualitative difference between the priesthood of the laity and that of the ordained (and orthodoxy would seem to require it), can one also explain that qualitative difference in a manner compatible with a New Testament theology of priesthood? Or is one driven to a Lutheran position? Clearly, if contemporary Jesuits hope to make sense of the priestly character of their vocation, they must face and answer these vexing questions.

The preceding survey of shifts in theological perception of the priesthood makes no claim to deal adequately with all the issues which the history of priestly ministry raises. It does, however, allow us to put contemporary perceptions of the priesthood into some kind of historical context. Prior to Vatican II, Catholics acquiesced by and large in a Tridentine interpretation of priestly ministry. That interpretation reflected the medieval synthesis which Trent both defended and sought to reform. At Trent the bishops recognized the evils in medieval clericalism and tried to reform them. As in the case of their reform of the liturgy, however, the Tridentine assault on clericalism succeeded only partially. Nevertheless, even though Vatican II acknowledged a theological imbalance in Trent's interpretation of priestly ministry, the actual ministry of the ordained prior to Vatican II often transcended that imbalance at a practical, pastoral level. In Reality ordained ministry after Trent embraced much more than cultic leadership. As they do today, priests served the church in a variety of pastoral contexts. Moreover, the Spirit does not abandon the church even though its theologians fall victim to oversight. Indeed, one wonders how subsequent generations will assess the oversights of the theologians of our own time.

## PART II. CATHOLIC PRIESTLY MINISTRY AND A NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

My second major thesis states: *A sound theological interpretation of the priestly character of our vocation demands that Jesuits understand their vocation in a way that reconciles a Catholic interpretation of priestly ministry with a New Testament theology of priesthood.* In the course of arguing this second thesis, I would like to begin to lay some foundations for a contemporary theological understanding of the priestly character of Jesuit ministry.

My argument advances in four steps. I shall first attempt to lay a biblical foundation for a theology of priestly ministry by arguing the following subordinate theses: (1) Only by acknowledging that Jesus and Jesus alone enjoys the fullness of the high priesthood can we lay a solid biblical foundation for understanding the scope and purpose of priestly ministry in the church.

Having argued this first point I shall then attempt to prove that (2) anyone who patterns the ministry of Christian priests on the levitical priesthood seriously misinterprets its fundamental scope and purpose. In effect I shall try to prove that, having with Vatican II rejected the substance of hierarchicalism as an adequate interpretation of the ministry of the ordained, we also need to abandon the untenable aspects of sacerdotalism as well.

Having cleared the ground by arguing these first two points I shall attempt to show that (3) a theological retrieval of the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers provides the correct theological foundation for understanding the scope and purpose of ordained priestly ministry. In arguing this third subordinate thesis I shall, however, attempt to show that Luther erred in denying any qualitative difference between the priestly ministry of the baptized and that of the ordained. These two forms of priestly ministry do differ qualitatively because they express different charismatic calls to serve within the church; for charisms, as we shall see,

differ in character from one another.

I shall close this second section of my essay by trying to argue a fourth and final thesis: namely, that (4) a sound insight into the dynamics of Christian conversion demands that ordained priests, Jesuits included, take Jesus and Jesus alone as the model for their ministry. Let us, then, reflect on each of these theses in turn.

### **Jesus alone enjoys the fullness of priesthood**

*Only by acknowledging that Jesus and Jesus alone enjoys the fullness of the high priesthood can we lay a sound biblical foundation for understanding the scope and purpose of priestly ministry in the church.* As I survey the historical development of the theology of Christian priesthood, I find the arguments put forth by the author of the letter to the Hebrews utterly convincing and irrefutable. Although Jesus functioned as a laymen in the Judaism of his day, his incarnation, death, and glorification transform him into the great high priest of the new covenant. Moreover, the uniqueness and utter transcendence of his priestly ministry require that Christians look to him and to him alone as the model of Christian priesthood.

No other priestly minister whether of the old or the new covenant can claim a priesthood rooted in his own essential divinity. Jesus confronts us as the great high priest of the new covenant because he and he alone possesses simultaneously divinity and humanity. All priestly ministers speak with divine authority; but Jesus alone speaks with the authority of God incarnate.

No priestly minister of the old or new covenant exercises a priestly ministry more efficacious than Jesus. The letter to the Hebrews correctly contrasts the repeated animal sacrifices of the old law with the incarnate Son of God's single act of self-sacrifice on the cross. That single act of self-immolation atones for all sin. It inaugurates the last age of salvation in which the reality of God and the scope of human salvation stand definitively and fully revealed. It begins the new creation by conferring on those who believe access to risen life in Christ. It reshapes the future by opening the gates of heaven to a sinful humanity. It effects the salvation it promises

through the gift of the Spirit to those who believe. Priestly ministers of the new covenant act as the Spirit's instruments in mediating to sinners access to the triune God in faith.

The infinite efficacy of Jesus' high priesthood implies its eternity. The glorified Christ abides forever in the presence of the Father and Spirit interceding on behalf of those for whom he died once and for all.

Unique because of its foundation in the incarnation, infinite in its efficacy, utterly transcendent in its origin and effects, Jesus' high priesthood surpasses utterly the priestly ministry of any sinful child of Adam, bishops included.

What, then, shall we make of the assertion in Vatican II that bishops enjoy the fullness of the sacrament of orders and therefore function as supreme high priests of the new covenant?

First of all, we should not endow this statement with more authority than it itself claims. It occurs in *Lumen Gentium*, the only document of all the decrees of Vatican II especially signaled out by the council itself for its fallibility. Fallible statements can be revised. Indeed, the addendum to *Lumen Gentium* issued during the council by Cardinal Felici insisted on the document's revisability in the hope of placating those few bishops who bitterly opposed the idea of collegiality which *Lumen Gentium* endorsed.

Moreover, we would misinterpret the intent of Vatican II's teaching concerning the sacramentality of episcopal orders were we to imagine that the council fathers intended to place the priesthood of bishops on a par with that of Jesus. In asserting the sacramentality of episcopal consecration, Vatican II sought instead to resolve an old debate in Catholic sacramental theology.

Before Vatican II some theologians questioned the sacramentality of episcopal consecration. They argued episcopal consecration could not confer a priesthood which ordination to the presbyterate already had. Hence, while episcopal consecration gave one new jurisdiction over the church, it should not count as a sacramental ordination.

*Lumen Gentium* responded by distinguishing the priesthood

exercised by ordinary priests from that exercised by bishops. The council taught that episcopal consecration confers the fullness of priestly orders within the church. Even if one concede the point, however, what bishops do as priests within the church cannot even begin to compare with Jesus' unique, utterly transcendent, and infinitely efficacious priestly ministry. Vatican II taught, then, that episcopal consecration qualifies as a sacrament because it confers a fuller participation in the priesthood of Christ than does ordination to the presbyterate.

One may, however, defend the sacramentality of episcopal consecration and still question whether it finally makes theological sense to speak as though this sacrament confers "more" of the priesthood than other forms of ordination. If, for example, we think of bishops alone as exercising the fullness of the priesthood within the church, does that imply that priests possess a quantitatively smaller share in Jesus' priesthood, deacons even less, and the laity least of all?

I myself find such thinking theologically strange and misleading. One does not parcel out the priesthood of Christ in larger and smaller pieces. In my own opinion, we would do better in differentiating kinds of priesthood in the church were we to speak qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Might one not hold that bishops through ritual consecration participate in a different manner in the priesthood of Christ from ordained priests, deacons, and lay Christians? Bishops do so in virtue of the unique ritual and pastoral responsibilities which episcopal consecration confers. Such a position would preserve the fundamental intent of the council's teaching concerning episcopal consecration while stating it in more theologically defensible terms than those employed by the council itself.

### **Levitical priests and Christian priests**

*Anyone who patterns the ministry of Christian priests on the levitical priesthood misinterprets its fundamental scope and purpose. As we saw, sacerdotalism and hierarchicalism strongly influenced medieval perceptions of the purpose of ordained ministry. As we*

have seen, Vatican II in speaking of ordained ministry invoked the term "hierarchical" but rejected the substance of hierarchicalism, in the sense in which I have defined that term. By that I mean that the council rejected a trickle-down theory of grace as false and insisted instead on the personal access of every Christian to the charismatic inspirations of the Holy Spirit. It also rejected the notion that the laity stand in a relationship of passive dependence on the hierarchy in the exercise of the lay apostolate.

In addition Vatican II reappropriated the language of the New Testament in order to describe the scope and purpose of ordained ministry. It presented the ordained as governing the church not by wielding power over the people of God but by standing with them and among them in an attitude of service that imitates the humble service of a suffering messiah.

Nevertheless, while Vatican II rejected the substance of a hierarchical interpretation of priestly ministry, it continued to employ the term "hierarchy." The council documents also juxtapose somewhat inconsistently a New Testament understanding of ordained ministry with the language of sacerdotalism. These linguistic inconsistencies in the council's teachings reflect the political tensions that shaped its deliberations. While most of the bishops favored a return to a biblical theology of priesthood, a small minority of bishops fought doggedly for a thoroughly hierarchical, sacerdotalist interpretation of ordained ministry.

A recognition of these unresolved tensions within the council documents has led contemporary theologians to suggest, correctly I believe, that we need to complete the theological work the council began. The term "hierarchical" has such misleading theological connotations that we would, in my own opinion, be better advised to avoid it and to speak instead of subsidiarity within the church's ministry. Bishops enjoy ultimate responsibility for the official conduct of the church's affairs. Priests also exercise pastoral authority in the church, but in subsidiarity and subordination to the bishops. Deacons function in subsidiarity and subordination to priests. Lay apostles follow the Spirit's charismatic guidance in the exercise of their

apostolate; but they do so in solidarity with the ordained leaders of the church and in submission to their legitimate authority.

One can, I believe, defend the legitimacy of subsidiarity in the structures of church leadership and avoid the pitfall of hierarchicalism provided one interprets ordained ministry in the terms Vatican II suggests. By that I mean that the ordained do not function as the sole channel of grace to Christian laity. As servants of the community and proclaimers of the word, they seek to turn believers to the Spirit of Christ, who calls them to holiness and to a variety of ministries in the church. While the ordained assist in coordinating the ministry of lay Christians, the latter have the right and duty to follow the movement of the Spirit in their lives. Moreover, the ordained exceed the legitimate bounds of their authority when they suppress the Spirit by preventing those competent in faith from ministering to others.

Besides replacing the term "hierarchy" with language that better reflects the vision of Vatican II, we also need to set aside definitively the theologically untenable aspects of sacerdotalism; for if we attempt to patter priestly ministry in the church on the ministry of the levitical priesthood, we hold up to the ordained leaders of the church the wrong, or at best a seriously misleading, role model.

As we have seen, in defending the authority of the ordained against secular co-option, sacerdotalists tended to portray church leaders as functioning within the church in a way that parallels the role of civil rulers within the state. In sacerdotalist theology bishops and civil rulers enjoy a comparable authority but exercise it in two essentially distinct realms: civil rulers in the secular realm of the state and bishops in the sacred realm of the church. If, however, we portray church leaders as relating to the church in a manner analogous to the way secular leaders relate to their subjects, do we not depart from a fundamental teaching of Jesus?

You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be

great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:42-45).

I am not suggesting that everyone nurtured theologically on sacerdotalism fell victim to clericalism in the exercise of a priestly ministry. Nevertheless, sacerdotalist patterns of thought could easily betray one into so acting. By the same token, I do not intend to deny that the ordained confront the Christian community with divine authority. Quite the contrary, I am insisting that because the ordained confront others with the authority of Jesus Christ they must exercise it as he did in humility and self-sacrifice and not in the manner of an overbearing secular ruler.

Sacerdotalist theology poses other problems. It portrayed the ordained as participating directly in the priestly authority of Christ in ways that set them apart from a secular laity and endowed the clergy with a superior aura of holiness. In a New testament theology of priesthood, by contrast, the entire church participates immediately and directly in the priestly ministry of Jesus rather than any one elite group within the Church. Ordained ministry acquires its priestly character, not from a direct and privileged participation in Christ's priesthood, but from the fact that the ministry of ordained church leaders expresses and focuses the priestly ministry of the church as a whole. The New Testament, I would suggest, offers contemporary theology the sounder theological position on this point. (For purposes of clarity let me state that by the priestly ministry of the church as a whole I mean its mediation of Christ to the world in the power and anointing of his Spirit.)

Sacerdotalist theology also fosters unhealthy elitist tendencies to the extent that it encourages the ordained to imagine themselves superior to those they serve. From its beginning the church has tried to choose for its leaders charismatically competent people advanced in holiness and in the willingness to serve the community in the image of Christ. In that sense the ordained always function ideally as a service elite within the church. After all, one would

scarcely want the Christian community led by cretins and villains, although on occasion it has been. Think for starters of the clerical abuses in late medieval piety.

In thus transforming the self-understanding of church leaders, sacerdotalist theology made it more difficult, in my opinion, for them to exercise their priesthood in the way that Jesus had done, namely, by identifying in his passion totally with the poor, the outcast, and the suffering. The sacerdotalist priest saw himself more as set apart from the profane, secular laity rather than as identified with them. When, by contrast, the ordained pattern their ministry on that of Jesus and on him alone, they join and support lay apostles in a shared ministry that embodies the church's preferential option for the poor.

Thus conceived, ordained ministry possesses of necessity a prophetic character. Individual members of the clergy may in addition exercise a special prophetic ministry in virtue of a personal charismatic anointing. All of the ordained, however, as public church leaders have the double responsibility of summoning themselves and others to ongoing repentance and conversion and of challenging in God's name every form of institutional injustice.

### **Priesthood of all believers and ordained priestly ministry**

*A theological retrieval of the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers provides the correct theological foundation for understanding the scope and purpose of ordained priestly ministry.* In rejecting sacerdotalism as an adequate interpretation of the scope and purpose of ordained priestly ministry, I in no way deny that the ordained exercise a truly priestly ministry in the church or that the priesthood of the ordained differs qualitatively from that of a baptized Christian. I do, however, deny that sacerdotalism provides an adequate explanation of these traditional Catholic doctrines. The New Testament, however, points the way toward a better explanation.

The New Testament nowhere speaks of the ordained as a quasi-levitical priestly caste within the church. Instead, it describes the entire Christian community as the priestly people of God; and it

grounds the qualitative diversity of Christian ministry in the gifts, or charisms, which inspire that ministry.

As we have seen, Vatican II reappropriated both of these New Testament insights. Anyone inspired by the Spirit of Jesus to serve within the church exercises a truly priestly ministry by mediating in practical faith between a saving God and a sinful world. Christian priestly ministry cannot, then, be correctly understood as primarily or exclusively cultic, although it includes Christian cult.

Ordination to lead a worshiping community implies, of course, the right and responsibility to lead community worship as well. Church discipline regulates how worship ought to be conducted. The church's presbyters evolved over the centuries from copresiders at the eucharist into principal celebrants, although the history of sacramental worship suggests that the right of priests and bishops to preside at the eucharist need not be construed as exclusive.

In virtue of its priestly character, then, the Christian community as a whole mediates God to the world by actively serving others in Jesus' image. Cultic worship strengthens and nourishes the church's total priestly ministry, and every Christian through active insertion into a ministering community of faith shares in the priestly ministry of a church that prolongs in space and time the ministry of a servant messiah.

The ordained lead the priestly people of God in response to a charismatic call confirmed by the church as a whole acting through its leaders. One cannot lead a priestly community without exercising a truly priestly ministry. Moreover, the charismatic foundation of ordained ministry makes it qualitatively different from the ministry of the unordained because it expresses a charismatic calling different in kind from other ministerial vocations within the church. Ordained ministry brings with it specific public responsibilities, and therefore specific public rights, that go beyond the rights and responsibilities, and therefore specific public rights, that go beyond the rights and responsibilities of a baptized, confirmed Christian. As we have seen, the documents of Vatican II give a fairly detailed description of the chief pastoral responsibilities of ordained priests.

The ordained, then, exercise a truly priestly ministry qualitatively distinct from that of the laity, not by participating directly in the priesthood of Christ in a way that transforms them into quasi-levitical priests, but by exercising a sacramentally confirmed, charismatic ministry of leadership in the priestly people of God. In other words, the collective priestly ministry of the church as a whole mediates between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the ordained. In consequence of that mediation, the ordained do not stand over the church in a position of power but function within it in an attitude of Christlike service.

In what, then, does the ministry of the ordained priest consist? That question reminds me of a conversation I had shortly after joining the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley. I was speaking with one of the theologians who was approaching ordination with a certain amount of theological perplexity. A month or so before his own ordination he asked me: "What do you get when you get ordained?" Only half facetiously I replied: "A lot of headaches." Let me explain what I meant.

Catholic theology has traditionally and correctly taught that ordination marks the ordained permanently in a way that conforms them to Christ (DS 1773). The official pastoral magisterium has never fully explained in what this mysterious "character" of ordination consists. In my own opinion, we should not regard the matter as so mysterious. Every decision we take marks us permanently and irrevocably either by creating within us a new tendency to act in a certain manner or by reinforcing an old tendency. The sacraments which confer "characters" change us in the same minimal sense. They also, however, change us in another more public way; for they confer upon us the right and responsibility to share in the church's life and worship and to minister publicly within the Christian community in specific ways. That same sacramental commitment conforms us morally (not physically) to Christ, because in making it we commit ourselves to worship God and to serve others in his name and image. Through ordination, then, one joins the ranks of the official, public leaders of the church and acquires thereby specific public respon-

sibilities together with their corresponding rights. In other words, one understands the "essence" of the priesthood by grasping the way in which priests ought to function within the church.

Priests lead the Christian community in subordination to the bishop but in solidarity with him and with lay apostles. Priests need, then, to proclaim the word with power, that is, in ways that effect initial and ongoing conversion in those to whom they minister. Priests must embody the gospel they proclaim. They exercise a ministry of proclamation in both sacramental and nonsacramental contexts. In their sacramental proclamation of the word, they baptize new Christians, gather the eucharistic community in worship, reconcile sinners, and conduct a sacramental ministry of faith healing. They need the gifts to perform that ministry effectively: gifts of teaching, healing, discernment, and the capacity to make sound apostolic decisions.

In the course of their ministry, priests seek to evoke and coordinate the gifts of God's people. Instead of providing Christians with their only channel of grace, however, priests, like bishops and deacons, seek to open all Christians to the charismatic inspirations of the Spirit, to bring into existence self-ministering, apostolic communities. The success of one's priestly ministry, then, depends in no small measure on one's capacity to train and collaborate effectively with charismatically inspired lay apostles.

Priests also mediate between the episcopacy and the people of God. They function as the bishop's representatives and have the responsibility to explain the official teaching of the church clearly and accurately. Not that the teaching of the ordained limits itself to parroting and explaining official church documents. Priests minister as theologians, catechists, preachers, evangelists in the measure of their personal giftedness. Priests also advise bishops in the latter's pastoral conduct of his office. Priests perform this service both personally and collectively, through priests' senates. In other words, while the bishop leads the community, priests function as its "elders." Priests also function as community elders to the extent that they remind the community of its shared religious heritage and contribute

genuine wisdom and discernment to decisions that shape the shared life of the church.

In a sense, becoming a priest resembles getting married or parenting. Married people and parents assume a certain number of generic responsibilities, even though husbands and wives have no blueprint to tell them how to bring off marriage and parenting successfully. That they must figure out prayerfully for themselves. So, analogously, do priests when they take on the generic responsibilities of priesthood through ordination.

### **Jesus alone the model for priestly ministry**

*A sound insight into the dynamics of Christian conversion*<sup>14</sup> demands that ordained priests, Jesuits included, take Jesus and Jesus alone as the model for their ministry. Christian conversion begins in the heart with a repentant renunciation of ingrained attitudes, beliefs, and commitments that separate one from God. Christian conversion culminates in a commitment in faith to Jesus Christ as the normative historical revelation of who God is and of what we are called in God to become. The commitment of faith demands that one live in Jesus' image. In the case of the ordained, it demands the renunciation of clericalism. By clericalism I mean lording it over the faithful as members of a power elite instead of serving them humbly in the image of a servant messiah.

As we have seen, Vatican II succeeded better than the Council of Trent in extricating itself from a clericalized understanding of ordained ministry. It succeeded better, but not totally. It rejected the substance of hierarchicalism but still invoked sacerdotalist categories in explaining ordained ministry.

The ordained priest who would minister authentically to the people of God must, however, transcend clericalism altogether, abandon the uses of coercive power, and follow in the footsteps of a

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14 In these reflections I presuppose the same construct of conversion which I sketched in "The Converting Jesuit," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol. 18, no. 1 (January 1986).

servant messiah. Jesus tolerated many faults in the twelve, but, when it came to a choice between humble service and coercive power, he drew the line clearly and decisively. It remains a line that all priests must toe. Jesus himself became the high priest of the new covenant by identifying totally not only with the human condition but with the marginal, the outcast, the oppressed. Christian priests minister in the name and image of Jesus to the extent that they do the same.<sup>15</sup>

### PART III. RELIGIOUS PRIESTS: COMMUNITY, SPIRITUALITY, MINISTRY

My third major thesis states: *Religious priests exercise their ministry in apostolic communities whose shared life and work is informed by a distinctive tradition of spirituality.* As we have seen, Vatican II explicitly rejected the substance of a hierarchical interpretation of priestly ministry. It also rejected a hierarchicalist interpretation of religious life. In the ecclesiology of Pseudo-Dionysius, religious stand one rung lower than the clergy but one rung higher than the laity in the hierarchical ladder. Vatican II rejected this interpretation of religious life as false:

From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the clerical and lay states. Rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these latter states of life so that they may enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in his own way can forward the saving mission of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 43).

In other words, religious life offers both the clergy and the laity an alternative way of pursuing their respective apostolates; it does not offer a way of life distinct from the clerical and lay states or

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15 For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., *Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 187-228.

intermediate between them.

Religious priests assume, then, the same generic responsibilities as diocesan priests; but they go about the exercise of priestly ministry differently. Religious priests join apostolic communities that minister to the needs of God's people both personally and collectively. In other words, religious communities function as apostolic teams corporately dedicated to the apostolate.

Jesuit mobility, it seems to me, underscores an important dimension of priestly ministry which the ministry of parish priests expresses less visibly. The ordained succeed functionally to the duties and responsibilities of the church's first apostolic leaders. Parish priests consecrate themselves to one of the ministries traditionally performed by the ordained: namely, the creation and nurture of stable eucharistic communities that provide Christians with a permanent spiritual "home." Roving apostles, like ourselves, perpetuate a different dimension of apostolic ministry: namely, the missionary apostolate, like that exercised by the apostle Paul.

Moreover, if with Vatican II we take the formation of lay apostles as a fundamental responsibility of priests, then all of our traditional apostolates serve to advance this important priestly ministry. What else do our high schools, colleges, universities, retreat houses seek to accomplish? The fact that we experience a turnover in the people we serve does not make these traditional Jesuit apostolates any less priestly. Moreover, in training lay apostles we need not only to evangelize them but also to prepare them to function effectively in the secular world to which they are especially called to minister. Our schools, it seems to me, perform this latter service rather well.

In our last three general congregations we Jesuits have committed ourselves collectively to securing justice for the poor. In making that commitment, it seems to me that we have unconsciously reappropriated a fundamental New Testament insight into the meaning of priesthood. The letter to the Hebrews, as we have seen, puts at the heart of Jesus' priesthood his willingness to identify totally not only with humanity but with the poor, the victimized, and the outcast.

That same willingness must lie at the heart of our own priestly ministry.

Finally, as Jesuits we exercise our priesthood in communities whose ministry is informed by a particular spirituality, namely, that of Ignatius. Our approach to ministry is colored by the *Spiritual Exercises* and by the values which our *Constitutions* inculcate. Jesuit spirituality does not change what we do as priests, but it does color how we do it.

The preceding reflections also cast light on the priestly ministry of Jesuit brothers. Judged by the teachings of Vatican II, Jesuit brothers serve the church as vowed lay apostles. Their apostolate, therefore, expresses the scope and purpose of the lay apostolate as a whole: namely, the conversion of all people to Christ, ministry within the church, and the Christianization of secular society (*Lumen Gentium*, 2-3, 5, 7; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1-9). Jesuit brothers bring to the lay apostolate the charisms that make them competent to serve the church and humanity in the name and image of Jesus (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3, 34).

In the vision of Vatican II, the clergy and laity work together in the common apostolate of the church, ministering at the same time to one another (*ibid.*, 2; *Lumen Gentium*, 32, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9).

As vowed lay apostles, Jesuit brothers have the right and duty to cultivate and exercise their gifts for the good of humanity, the church, and the Society (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3). They have the right to participate in every apostolic undertaking of the church, including parish ministry (*ibid.*, 10). They have an ecclesial right to whatever training they need to function as effective lay apostles (*ibid.*, 28).

Moreover, as members of the clergy, Jesuit priests have the responsibility to foster and promote the lay apostolate of Jesuit brothers. Jesuit priests have the obligation to encourage Jesuit brothers to claim their gifts and to use them for the service of the kingdom (*ibid.*, 10).

Finally, the priestly character of the lay apostolate demands that we see the ministry of Jesuit brothers as priestly in its own right. I have argued that the priesthood of the church mediates between the priesthood of Christ and that of the ordained. The priesthood of the church also mediates between the priesthood of Christ and that of Jesuit brothers. Vowed lay apostles participate in the priesthood of Christ in consequence of their share in the common mission of God's priestly people (*Lumen Gentium*, 33).

Any attempt, therefore, to invoke the priestly character of our Jesuit vocation in order to exclude Jesuit brothers from the full participation in the shared life and apostolate of the Society of Jesus to which lay, religious apostles have a right invokes a clericalized and indefensible theology of priesthood. Every member of the Society participates in the priestly ministry of Christ. Jesuit priests do so in virtue of their charism of ordained leadership in the church. Jesuit brothers do so as vowed lay apostles.

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As a young Jesuit priest, Cándido de Dalmases became a member of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome in 1938, where he is still active. His chief work soon became the editing of critical editions of primary sources about St. Ignatius—notably the four volumes of *Fontes narrativi de Sancto Ignatio* (1943-1965), *Exercitia Spiritualia: Textus* (1969), and *Fontes Documentales* (1977). He has also published many other books and articles.

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