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CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND MINISTRIES

Surely there is no more complicated task in the repertoire of contemporary theological needs than that of accounting for the traditions of ordained ministries in the churches and the effects these have had on the ministry of the church over the past two thousand years. Should you doubt this, I am confident that all such doubt will be removed during these next two days. I am less confident that my colleagues and I will leave you with any greater clarity than when we started. Should this nonetheless occur, it will be due to their efforts more than to mine. And should it seem to you that I am occasionally clear in my own presentation, then you will doubtless have misunderstood me. For I can think of no one fundamental statement about Christian ministry or ministries that can be made without fear of or need for qualification. Christians, it seems, have been nowhere more creative than in what they have made of their ministries.

To take only the ministries for a moment. Raymond Brown, in a recent essay, *Episkopē and Episkopos: The New Testament Evidence*,¹ concludes that the manner and exercise of intra-church supervision reported in allusory ways within the first century varied greatly in different places and different periods. He writes:

Only at the end of the century and under various pressures was a more uniform structure of church office developing. The death of the great leaders of the early period in the 60's left a vacuum; doctrinal divisions became sharper; and there was a greater separation from Judaism and its

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structures. By the 80's-90's the presbyter-bishop model was becoming widespread, and with the adjustment supplied by the emergence of the single bishop that model was to dominate in the second century until it became exclusive in the ancient churches...²

This can, of course, be seen in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. But it must not be thought that the single bishop with his elders and deacons springs suddenly into existence from nowhere: the structure seems compatible with that of Syrian synagogues, and it may also reflect that of some Jewish ascetical groups whose community order passes into that of early Judaeo-Christian churches in Palestine and Egypt, there to be retained in primitive Christian ascetical communities as the *abba* (abbot), *seniores* (elders), and *neoterói* (juniors or "youngers"). Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius' Anatolian colleague, knew this latter category of *neoterói*, and told them to be subject to both presbyters and deacons (Philippians 5:3). And while that Syrian document, the *Didache*, which is contemporary with both Polycarp and Ignatius, recognizes prophets and teachers as church offices still, with prophets able to "eucharistise as they see fit," the document nonetheless urges the local church to "...appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons...for they are your honorable men together with prophets and teachers" (*Didache* 10, 15:1-2).

The trajectory of ministerial development in these late first and early second century sources is also compatible with that seen in the latter New Testament books. The New Testament's presbyter-bishop has been clarified; deacons are becoming a more formal ministry, and itinerant prophets are fading. Bishops, presbyters, deacons, and a congeries of "youngers" are settling in as the internal church ministries from the end of the first century onward. Furthermore, these early sources demonstrate a relationship of close mutuality between these ministries and the local churches within which they originate and in which they exist to serve. Not until the third century and, notably, in Latin North Africa, will the first symptoms of ideological cleavage between ministers and local church begin to appear, and then, it seems, due to a need for tight internal discipline caused by persecution and by heresies now grouped under the general designation of gnosticism, which was in part an assault on emerging notions of where, indeed, authority was located in the churches. Cyprian (+258) begins to

enhance the clerical office, especially that of the bishop, with appeals to Old Testament imagery; and Tertullian will invoke old Roman social distinctions of rank between the people and the aristocracy, between *plebs* and *ordo*, to distinguish cleric from laity. Cyprian's Old Testament moralism concerning the Aaronic priesthood, it seems, was picked up by the Donatists, who made unsullied moral character a necessity for valid ministry in the church, and emphasized this to the point of occluding the "transcendent action of Christ the sole true priest and only mediator."³ The resulting debate had the effect of spreading the notion of authoritative sacerdotality beyond the church as Christ's body, and the bishop who presides within that body, to the presbyterate as well. By Augustine's time in North Africa, presbyters are clearly becoming sacerdotal beings along with the bishop -- *sacerdotes secundi ordinis*, according to Leo the Great. By the ninth century, *sacerdos* refers as much to presbyter as bishop. By the eleventh century, the British and Gallican custom of anointing a presbyter's hands with messianic chrism at ordination had become general in Europe, and the term *sacerdos* normally referred to the presbyter. And with the politicization of *sacerdotality* and *ordo* as an independent counter-balance to the secular *imperium*, ordained ministry became entwined with theories of sovereignty and functioned as a major component in the medieval cultural settlement which produced modern western civilization --in which we still speak of civil functionaries as "ministers," and the president of Yale University, while now a layperson (and no matter what his faith or lack thereof), still delivers the Baccalaureate sermon to the university on the day before commencement, "For God, for Country, and for Yale."

The moral of this little tale is that during the high middle ages ordained Christian ministries had begun to function over a wide strategic front rather independently of the church, i.e., as a cultural *ordo* distinct from, if nonetheless still rooted in, the *plebs Dei*. To talk about ministry or priesthood during that period was to talk politics, law, and culture in the main. When one came to talk about ministry or priesthood in purely theological terms, as often as not the only language available for such talk was that

of rather low Old Testament allegory. High medieval concerns about ministry were less theological than they were jurisprudential. Canon lawyers, spurred by the dilemmas attending the great western schism, were concerned to distinguish the "power of orders" and the "power of jurisdiction" as one way of determining what and how much obedience was due to which rival claimant to the papal office. Valuable though this distinction was, it was further used to suggest that the episcopacy was nothing more than the presbyterate with added jurisdiction. The episcopacy ceased being referred to as a distinct *ordo*, and the fundamental *ordo* of ministry was perceived to be the presbyterate. Thus episcopal ministry was effectively diminished in the western churches quite before the main churches of the sixteenth-century reform for the most part rejected it -- except in England where, indeed, Thomas Cranmer saw the office as being more similar to that of a civil official like the Lord Mayor of London, i.e., one more of "jurisdiction" than of sacramental "order." With few exceptions, what Reformation churches retained of the traditional ministries was the presbyterate. And Counter-Reformation Catholicism was not too different: its bishops were "super-priests" only a bit less pastorally vestigial than its temporary deacons, who functioned only in seminaries, and there briefly.

The upshot of all this is that the western churches in the first half of this present and perhaps most egalitarian of centuries found themselves with a highly undiversified ministerial structure focused on a "learned," and thus ineluctably hieratic and thus elite group of people who were now regarded by many as "first-class Christians", a church of the chosen *within* a far larger church of the unchosen -- a baptized proletariat of Christians of the second, third, or even fourth kind. The effects of this are presently all around us. The other Christian ministries, where they survived, have been presbyteralized, and the rest of the church has been de-ministerialized. Charisms have not been restricted by this situation, for the Spirit persists in blowing, disconcertingly, where it will. But there can be no doubt that this constricted ministerial situation has made it all the more difficult to discern service charisms when they occur, and made it all but impossible to recognize them publicly and employ them effectively to the churches' good.

Furthermore, constricting both ministries and ministry to one order has had demonstrably ill effects on that order, the presbyterate (whether it is called the pastorate or the "priesthood" in this context makes little difference). For one thing, the constriction gives that order perhaps too high a visibility, especially for well-meaning scientific positivists who would analyse the *ordo sociologically* as the leadership-class and role-model for-effective-social-action sort of thing; or *anthropologically* as a nest of religio-cultural shamans surviving into the technological culture of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that such studies can and, indeed, have been made. There is equally no doubt that the present constricted state of the presbyterate gives off symptoms that lead analysts to regard it under various sociological or anthropological categories. But while such studies may yield conclusions which appear useful, and may be to some extent admittedly valid, they may equally produce data that is vastly misleading concerning the nature and future of the *ordo* for what it is and must become for the church.

It strikes me, for example, that what an anthropologist might say about priests and priestesses in world religions or in certain pre-modern societies might apply in some part, perhaps, to Christ as seen in Hebrews, or to the church as his "body". But these data would apply by extension to members of a Christian presbyterate with telling effect only when such a ministerial order has absorbed the "priestliness" of the community of faith largely or wholly into itself. The paradox would then be that such scientific data would have been used upon an anomalous object. For a Christian presbyter, according to the deepest instincts of the tradition, does not function authentically in the same way as does a priest, priestess, or shaman in other world religions or human societies. The correlation between presbyter and "priest" in this sense presumes a presbyteral pathology which has for so long been a problem. Augustine perhaps stated in as theologically sharp a manner as anyone ever has the fundamental Christian tradition of priesthood, in commenting on Revelation 20:6 ("They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign [in the *eschatological* kingdom] with him a thousand years"), when he wrote:

This is spoken not only of bishops and presbyters, who are now properly called priests in the church; but just as we call all [Christians] 'christs' because of the mystical chrism [with which they are anointed in baptism], so all are priests, for they are members of one priest [Jesus Christ].⁴

Christians thus do not ordain to priesthood, they baptize to it. While the episcopacy and the presbyterate do come upon one for the first time at ordination, priesthood *per se* does not; it comes upon one in baptism, and thus *laos* is a priestly term for a priestly person. The vocabulary of priestliness, which literally soaks Christian tradition, denotes a *christic*, i.e., a messianic-sacerdotal-royal, quality which all the baptized share in the Anointed One himself in obedience to a vast variety of charisms, all of which originate from his own Spirit given for the life of the world. To lay this on the Procrustean bed of a single order of ministry, or even on that of two orders of ministry, and then analytically chop away, is to engage in a reductionism of so severe a kind that it comes close to invalidating the results of the process. Christians must not be led astray by it, especially Christian presbyters and bishops.

It also strikes me that what a sociologist might say about the "leadership" role of the traditional ministries in the social group known as the church would probably be helpful to some moderate extent in certain well-defined contexts. But here again, it is all too easy to take for granted that Christian ministries are in fact "leadership" roles according to the tradition of discourse about them as reflected in the church's ministerial sources -- the Christian bible and the liturgical texts. In the former, the nomenclature of ministry is thoroughly *diaconal*: it is a language soaked in the notion of slavery, of being literally in thrall to the common good of a community of faith in one who came to serve rather than to be served. Traditional liturgical texts of ordination have, I think, remained remarkably faithful to this diaconal vision, despite the ebb and flow of theological and popular opinion over the centuries which would turn the ordained slave into ecclesiastical prince, potentate, prophet, or socio-political leader. Yet the ordination texts have avoided such stampedes into illusory relevance. Even the new Roman ordination reforms,

done over the past fifteen years when the notion of Christian ministries as socio-political leadership functions has been much to the fore, have remained faithful to the much deeper tradition of ministry as service. The language of leadership is entirely absent from these texts, as it has been consistently absent from the tradition since the beginning. Augustine, once again, summed up this tradition in his own turbulent era as sharply as anyone ever has:

He who presides over the people must understand from the start that he is the servant of many. And let him never be ashamed to admit it. Let him never think it beneath his dignity to be the servant of many, for the Lord of lords did not disdain to serve.⁵

He applies this concern to himself in a homily he preached to his people on the anniversary of his own episcopal ordination, a statement of such warmth and candor that part of it deserves to be quoted in full.

When it dismays me [he said] that I am here for you, it consoles me that I am with you. For you I am a bishop, but with you I am a Christian. The first is an office accepted, the second a grace received; the one is a danger, the other a safety. We are tossed, it is true, as in a high sea, by the storms of our toil; but as we recall whose blood it was that bought us, we come, through the calm of that thought, safely into harbor. And as we labor at this task of ours, our response is in the benefit we all share. If, then, I am gladder by far to be redeemed with you than I am to be placed over you, I shall be more completely your servant as the Lord commanded, for fear of being ungrateful for the price that was paid to save me that I might be yours.⁶

I know of no more trenchant statement of the basic Christian instinct concerning ordained or, for that matter, even unordained ministry than this. And I contend that positivist scientific analyses of Christian ministries must finally be measured against such continuous attitudes before the results of those analyses are accepted as guides for the functioning of such ministries both now and in the future. My contention does not arise from fastidiousness. It arises from my conviction that analysis of whatever kind is helpful only to the extent that it respects the nature and integrity of the object analyzed. To put it baldly, Christian ministries may be perceived by some today as anthropological or sociological entities, no less than as objects for affirmative action or as equal opportunity endeavours. To some extent, these perceptions are accurate.

Christian ministries do indeed affect *anthropoi* and *societates*. The priesthood or pastorate may also often appear to be a clerical caste, an anachronistic club for aging males, or an aristocracy for first-class Christians bent on keeping everyone else, male and female, members of an ecclesiastical proletariat.

But I must maintain that the object about which these perceptions are accurate is an anomalous one -- one with a long history, no doubt, but one also with no real support in Christian tradition. The fact that something happened in time past does not, by itself, mean that what happened is "traditional", otherwise my last sentence would not be tradition, a claim not even I would wish to make. For me, tradition is that which can be ascertained as the constant reappropriation, in every succeeding present, of what was contained in, or implied by, the sources of an on-going community of discourse. Far from being the dead hand of mindless repetition, tradition as I see it is a cutting edge at the precise point where past becomes future. That precise point is the present. At this point, present discourse is always in mindful dialogue with the past, and the result of that mindful dialogue is a meaningful future. It is important for present discourse, therefore, to be sure that the past with which it is in mindful dialogue be accurately estimated rather than merely bowdlerized in favor of a phantasized future. The past as nostalgia, the future as fantasy, and the present as mindless dialogue will not give rise to a discourse that is worth the bother.

At the risk of foreshortening complex matters, and quite without prejudice to whatever my learned colleagues may have to say today and tomorrow, I think that any discourse on ministry and the ministries worth the bother must be grounded in and arise *not* from a restored ecclesiology of ministry, but from a restored ministerial ecclesiology. What is needed here, it seems to me, is *not* reductionism, but reintegration of dangling and often contradicting attitudes and functions; *not* a social anthropology of the presbyterate; *not* a new theology of ministry, but a reappropriated discourse concerning the ministerial essence of that society of faith in one who came to serve rather than to be served. Toward this end, I suggest we take very seriously indeed Paul's two vast and coordinated images of the church: the one

being the marital union between man and woman in which the spouses serve each other; the second being that of a corporate ministry or service of reconciliation. This mode of approach might give rise to the following sort of discourse, which can only be summarized here for lack of time.

First, *Christian faith is ecclesial faith*. Faith certainly results in concepts. But the faith which results in concepts is first of all a way of living together -- at peace with the whole of creation and its creator in the revealed incarnate Word who is now become a people. Such a faith knows nothing foreign to itself except sin, which by definition corrupts and disrupts that communion in peace with the Source of all that is. Church life is faithful life in Christ, who has become, in his trampling of death by his death, lifegiving Spirit for the life of the world. The life of service he began in the flesh and consummated in the flesh continues to be a life of service in the Spirit, whose home is amidst a faithful people and whose function therein is to gather them from the four winds and to sustain them in a dynamic and pacific union for the life of the world.

Second, *this people begins in the conversion of each of its members in faith, and that faith is sealed in initiation into the faithful assembly by water and oil, by bread and wine*. This faith is not some gnostic abstraction hatched in academe; it is not some monophysitic devotion fenced in by the exclusivity of the pious. It is an incarnately concrete set of sustained divine and human relationships which are as demanding as a marriage, and whose language is as diverse as it is artful, difficult, and many-splendored. It is less precise than it is richly ambiguous: it is less like a white paper than a wedding ring, less like a speech than an embrace. Like the union between two people, it requires frequent and regular access to intimacy. This is why Christian people frequently and regularly assemble to dine at a common table off common food, *there* to conduct the business of faith at its most profound level. And as a marriage is more than the wedding ceremony and more than an embrace in the night, so the church *is* more than the assembly and *does* more than assemble. But neither a marriage nor the church can sustain the

mutual relationships which make them what they are without constant recourse to coming together in intimacy, where the issues dealt with *always* transcend the act of intimacy itself. The church thus assembles not for a pious "fix", but for divine service in the myriad presence of the source of all things -- by grace, by faith, by sacrament, by word, by love, by creature, by every sense and faculty with which a human being as servant of creation has been endowed. The church assembles to do the world, as the world's source and the world's redeemer would have the world done.

Third, *the church is the locale of ordered ministries*. These ministries function precisely in service to the church both outside and inside its time of assembly. They serve the church's need to assemble, and they serve the church assembled. They do nothing outside the assembly they cannot be seen to do inside the assembly. They do not serve the world in spite of or instead of the church. They serve the world because of and through the church, which is in Christ the corporate minister of reconciliation in the world. God's call to persons to serve in the ordered ministries is, therefore, never an unmediated call; it comes to one only through the church in its being aware of its own needs in faith. The church is thus governor of its ministers' behavior in office. Nothing could be farther from the instinct of historic Christianity than the notion that one's ordained ministry is a matter only between the ordained one and God; or that ordination unleashes one upon unsuspecting congregations; or that ordination sets one apart from the church instead of apart from other possibilities (like business or marriage) within it; or that ordination is some sort of ecclesiastical award; or that ordination is somehow a right due one in justice or an elevation to first-class citizenship in an ecclesiastical aristocracy set over a baptized proletariat; or that ordination gives the ordained power with which to flail the congregation, and against which the community of faith is supine; or that ordination frees one from being in service to anything or anyone. When one encounters such notions, and I have encountered them all, one must realize that they arise when the ecclesial frame of ordained ministry has begun to dissolve, and ordained ministry has begun to be perceived either as its own end or, more ominously, as the locale of the "true" church. In the latter case,

ordination functions as a baptismal surrogate, and the seminary then becomes in turn a surrogate of the early Christian catechumenate. Our seminaries are full of students who are in this condition: they are seeking ordination for motives similar to those of earlier catechumens who sought baptism, i.e., "faith." But the sort of "faith" such seminarians are "baptized" into at ordination is often not altogether that held by the church: it is, rather, academic theology which becomes for them a faith-surrogate, and which frequently makes them unintelligible to congregations at best, or puts them at odds with congregations at worst. This is why, I suspect, so many seminarians drift off into other engagements such as social work, psychological counseling, politics, the local golf course, or Planned Parenthood. This is but one of the effects the lapse of baptism in the churches has spawned. The absence in many modern churches of a significant and deeply rooted orthodoxy in baptismal theology and practice turns seminaries into catechumenates, ordination into baptism, and clergy into "first-class" ecclesiastical citizens freed of obligations to the tradition and to proletarian communities of the merely baptized. Mrs. Murphy's pastor no longer serves her. His ordination has given him "born again" status which her own baptism has, somehow, not conferred on her. She ends by serving him.

At this point, something has gone vastly amiss in the church's own awareness of itself. Instead of the church itself being "minister of reconciliation" in Christ to the world, the church shrinks to a sort of support group for its ordained clergy, who are *the* "ministers of reconciliation" to the world in a variety of stances and for a variety of motives whose origins are only arguably rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This occludes not only the ministry of Jesus Christ in his church: it also reduces the church either to a clergy support group or to a passive patient upon which well-meaning ordained incompetents can try out their latest cures. It also confuses, fatally, the perception of the ordained about themselves. As a Yale seminarian said to me recently, "I have finally decided what my ministry will be. Can you suggest a church in which I can do it?"

If, indeed, Christian faith is ecclesial faith; if the society of faithful people is born constantly in conversion consummated by sacramental initiation of members into itself; and if this *ecclesia* is the locale, summoner, and governor of the ordained ministries; then the ancient tradition on ministerial ordination, east and west, becomes rather clear and, at least for me, compellingly cogent. As I am able to distill that tradition, worked out over generations by trial and error -- the criteria for which judgments seem to rest continuously in the gospel -- it seems to stand on a modest quadrilateral of significant points, which follow.

First, the ordained must be a member of the faithful community by baptism. Baptism simply presumes that the baptized live their faith ecclesially, and that this lived faith is carried on not primarily by conceptual tinkering in academe, but by living and participating in the concrete life of a real local community populated by actual people living similar lives. The absence of baptism and its inevitable consequences therefore constitutes a direct impediment to ordination; i.e., the attempted ordination of such a one is radically and irredeemably void.

Second, a member of the baptized faithful is, if ordained, always ordained to the service of a particular faith community. It is always *this* specific church which summons one to its service, consents to one's acceptance of this call, and then concelebrates the induction of such a one into an order of service in and to that local church. To ordain one to some sort of general ministry, or some sort of ministry-at-large, goes so against the instinct of Christian tradition as to be a contradiction in terms. A Christian minister's ministry never sits, so to speak, on its own bottom. It is a transitive verb which must always take an object. Induction into the church's "ministry of reconciliation" to the world in Christ happens in baptism. Ordination inducts one into service to this ministry as it is carried on in all its existential concreteness in a church particular. Ordination is not a sacrament of Christian initiation nor is it necessary for salvation; it is a sacrament of ordering a member of a church in service to that church. A Victorian might have said

that the ordained ministries are not an "Upstairs" but a "Below Stairs" reality in the House of God. Nothing more, but nothing less.

Third, one's vocation to ordained ministry is always a mediated call. One is summoned to ministerial orders always by Christ *in* his Spirit-filled church. Ordained ministers can never forget that their authority and power are never a direct gift to them personally from God. The gift first began to stir in them when they were baptized by and into Christ's body, the church. The same gift was specified for service to that body when they were ordained in and by that same body. What they receive has come to them only from God in Christ *through* his church. Ministries which come upon one in any other way are thus not subject to being "ordered" in the church. This is why the church has never presumed to ordain prophets and healers; their charisms speak for themselves and speak to the church, but are not bespoken by the church. For it is the Spirit, not the church, which "bloweth where it listeth", not the diaconate, presbyterate, or episcopacy. Nor do unspeakable yearnings for ordination constitute, by themselves, grounds for ordination. Only ecclesial summons and the consent of the summoned do so.

Fourth, one who accepts the summons of a church to its ministries does so in the understanding that ordination commits one to service in obedience to that church in all its aspects. For as Christ was not free but constrained by his Father's implacable will, and as the church his body is not free but constrained by his gospel, so too ordained ministry is not free but constrained by the faith community which summons the ordained to its service. The ordained, no matter what their rank, are *servi servorum Dei*, servants of the servants of God; nothing more than living "sacraments" of Christ's own servanthood. But nothing less.

This will, perhaps, be enough to give some idea of how my own mind has been tending on the matter of Christian ministry and ministries. I conclude with only a few words on what I think some of this might imply for the future.

For one thing, I think we must strive to diversify our ordained ministries. The presbyteral hegemony on ministry which has afflicted us for centuries must be broken open. That hegemony has tended to deministerialize everyone else in the church. It has also presbyteralized the deacon (a "sub-priest") and the bishop (a "superpriest"). It has led us to think of all ministry in terms of exclusively presbyteral abilities and duties. Our seminaries are set up to turn out nothing *but* presbyters, in which we are awash, and really not much else. Having expected presbyters to do *everything*, they often end by doing not much of *anything*, especially the things that are truly appropriate to the ministry of being an "elder" in the church. The presbyterate is an order out of control and suffering from an identity crisis.

For another thing, since the presbyterate has absorbed many things the baptized, consecrated laity did in the church for almost the first half of Christian history, these same things could and should be returned to lay responsibility. It is arguable that ordination equips presbyters and bishops with charisms crucial to the conduct of financial affairs or the administration of real estate. It is even more arguable that churches today really need a formal system of clerical sacerdotalism to balance and offset the presumptions of state sacralism which the medieval churches had to combat. But it is not arguable at all that, while a Christian layperson is not a presbyter or a bishop, that same layperson, thanks to his or her baptism, is a priestly being. *Laos* is a priestly name for a priestly person. Failure to recognize and act on this fact is tantamount to denying that baptism initiates one into the corporate body of him who is, because of his own incarnation, baptism, and self-offering on the cross, highpriest of all creation. On the practical level, moreover, restoring an equilibrium of functions between clergy and laity in the church seems the only way of freeing bishops to return to their basic service of being *par excellence* the main spiritual masters and pastoral theologians of their churches; the only way of freeing presbyters to return to their basic service of being *par*

excellence the source of wise and mature counsel to their bishop; the only way of freeing deacons to rediscover and return to their basic service of being *par excellence* the executors of episcopal and presbyteral wisdom in matters pastoral for the good of the churches which all three orders serve. Failing all this, it is difficult to see how the peace and harmonic unity of the churches of God, which is the final end of all the ordered ministries in the church, can be achieved.

For a final thing, it seems that in view of all this we must do a lot of hard and very bold thinking about our seminaries and about what we expect of them. I think we must recognize that seminaries often function as catechumenates for many students, who enter them not so much to prepare for the ordained ministry as to seek meaning for their lives. This turns ordination into a surrogate for baptism, an ominous mutation which reenforces grave warps in ecclesiology and often turns faith into academic theology. And while I have the deepest respect for catechumens, I daily become more and more convinced that a seminary is not the place for such people. The catechumenate, about which I have written extensively elsewhere, *is*. We must get catechumens out of seminaries and into catechumenates. The seminary's business lies in preparing people of firm faith for ministry to people of faith. The catechumenate's business lies in forming those of initial conversion in faith for initiation into communities of firm faith. Conflating the two processes weakens both and is ultimately damaging both to individuals and churches.

But even where we do have a seminary functioning with the clarity of intent I have suggested, we should be aware that the people they graduate are not at all prepared to be ordained *presbyteroi* or "elders" in the churches. A seminary, even the best one, produces *neoteroi*, "youngers." It is not a question of age alone. It is a question of ministerial experience and maturity, and of what both these ministerial qualities do in "setting" one's own faith over a period of time. Because sacraments attain their greatest effect when the reality they bespeak is already robustly present, I suggest that the reality present in the seminary graduate be sacramentalized, realistically, by ordination to some minor order at most, with advancement to the diaconate within a year or so thereafter. The diaconate, indeed, might well be thought of as the basic and usual and permanent order of Christian

ministry for all the ordained, and the only order for which a seminary education can feasibly prepare one. Thereafter, but not before the age of, say, thirty, this or that deacon might be chosen for the presbyterate -- not primarily in view of the candidate's seminary career, but in view of the splendor of the candidate's diaconal ministry in Christ, and in view of the needs of the local church.

This would be a reform which, I think, would cut close to the heart of our ministerial problems today and would, in effect, help give the ordained ministries back to the church in which they exist to serve. I view such a reform as far more radical to the good of the church than reforms touching the sex of the minister alone. For granted the present system, it is just as possible, perhaps probable, to have adolescent female presbyters as male, female catechumens joining their male colleagues in lining up for ordination instead of baptism.

My sense is that, at present, we have more programs than we have policy. We turn out seminary graduates, ordain them right and left, and then cannot think what to do with them beyond setting them adrift to look for "jobs", or beyond unleashing them on unsuspecting congregations. This will not do. And nothing but a restored and refurbished ministerial ecclesiology arising from baptism as the premiere sacrament of faith can, I think, serve as foundation for new policy. Such a policy will be hard on many of our present programs and unexamined assumptions. But so was the cross of Christ, and so has been every preacher in Christian history who has made bold, like Paul, to preach him and him crucified. In view of this heart of Christian faith, perhaps these days will help us to reappropriate the ancient discourse concerning the ministerial essence of that society of faith in him who came not to be served, but to serve.

NOTES

- 1 *Theological Studies*, 41 (1980) 322-338.
- 2 *Art. cit.*, 338.
- 3 P.M. Gy, "Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood," in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders* (Aquin Press, London 1962) 110-111.
- 4 *De Civ. Dei* 20:10. See Gy, *art. cit.*, 110-111.
- 5 *Sermo Guelferb.* 32:1 (PL Suppl. 2:637). See also his commentary on John 12:12-26, *Tract. in Joann. Evang.* 51 (PL 35:1764-1769). Also, Emilien Lamirande, "The Priesthood at the Service of the People of God According to St. Augustine," *The Furrow* 15 (1964) 501-517.
- 6 *Sermo* 340 (PL 38:1483).