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Father Robert Schwartz

## The Priest Today

*A discussion of four "pivotal qualities" of a distinctive presbyteral spirituality is included in a paper titled "The Priest Today" by Father Robert M. Schwartz, spiritual director and dean of formation at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity in St. Paul, Minn. Prepared at the request of Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis and endorsed by him, it was distributed to priests of the archdiocese as part of the background materials for a Nov. 22 meeting of the presbyterate on vocations. The paper provides an overview of the history of the priesthood. "History testifies to the interaction of the Holy Spirit and the human situation in shaping church order," Schwartz writes. He examines the role of the priest as a leader as well as the close relationship of the priest with all the people of God and the priest's distinctive role. Public ministers "lead by presence, that is, by participation in the life of those they seek to serve as much as by their words," he writes. In his discussion of presbyteral spirituality, he examines the pivotal qualities of prayerfulness, leadership, participation and service. Holiness, he writes, is much more than "a desirable addition" to ordination. And for the parish priest, he says, the way to holiness lies in "participation in the parish community, not in isolation from it." The text of his paper follows.*

Since the close of the council more than 25 years ago, we have come

a long way on a journey which has been both our joy and our sorrow. The whole church has been involved in the mystery of dying and rising in the intervening years — and rightly so, for we believe that "unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit." Two post-conciliar phenomena remind us of the power Vatican II unleashed in its wake: Bishops are undergoing a pastoral renaissance and lay people have become an indispensable well-spring of ministerial activity.

The council challenged bishops to be shepherds, and they have made strides in that direction. We have seen our bishops become powerful teachers both nationally and internationally — in fact, we now expect them to join us in the trenches to address our common moral and pastoral challenges. Yet their new prominence has sometimes caused confusion for priests seeking to find their own role. While Vatican II envisioned the bishop as the key pastoral leader of the diocese, is being delegate of the bishop a sufficient identity for the priest or is there something more?

Closer to home, the council gave new importance and enhanced

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# origins

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responsibilities to the laity, teaching that all are called to holiness and all share in the mission of Christ. As priests have encouraged lay people to live out their baptismal call, parish councils, committees, pastoral staffs and lay ministries have flourished. The result has been an explosion of energy and good will seldom seen in the history of the church. Lay people seem to be doing everything. In 25 years we have moved from a priest-centered church to a situation in which the need for priests is sometimes questioned in all seriousness.

Perhaps no one dreamt that a church in which priests played so prominent a role could undergo so profound a crisis around the identity and mission of the presbyter. Twenty-twenty hindsight suggests that Vatican II gave attention to areas of pressing need — bishops, laity, liturgy and the church in the world — while other areas were given a less-insightful treatment. Most would agree that the successful implementation of the council and its positive effects on the life of the church have led us to ask further questions about the role of the ordained priest.

The insistence of the council that the church itself is the primary sacrament of Christ makes it clear that ordained ministry must be seen as an expression of ecclesial life. Through ordination priests are related distinctively both to Christ and to the church which mediates his presence; thus as public ministers they are to act in the name of Christ and the church in a way which manifests the unity of head and members. Ordination, consequently, far from separating priests from the church, placing them above it or positioning them over and against the common experience of the faithful, deepens their involvement in the life of the ecclesial community. Through ordination priests are oriented more radically toward that which all are called to be, becoming servants of the mystery of the church in others while seeking to be examples of ecclesial life themselves.

Thus, at the very beginning we must emphasize that the principal and enduring sacrament of Christ is the church itself. The total church, with all its modes of holiness, varieties of ministry and wealth of charisms, is the necessary vehicle or instrument of Christ's presence and activity in the world. Within the sacramentality of the church, there are seven unique sacraments or signs which manifest a particular aspect of the life of the church. While each "sacrament" participates in the reality of the whole and has meaning only in reference to it, each also makes the saving action of Christ and the church concrete in a particular manner. Each sacrament is essential to the life of the church in its own way, and together — along with other charisms, gifts and expressions of holiness — they make up the great sacrament of the church.

In this context, the Catholic tradition affirms that the sacrament of orders is an essential sign of Christ, the servant leader of the church. Ordained ministry, then, is a constitutive

element of the church. The ordained priest is a sacrament of the church, within the church and for service to it. Ordained ministry attains its purpose in serving the mission of the total community just as the community realizes its mission through a necessary relationship to its ordained pastors.

The ordained are members of the church entrusted with a distinctive relationship to Christ which enables their service to the total community. Yet Vatican II reminds presbyters that they belong to the community of the baptized and as such are more like the laity than different from them. What is different and unique orients priests toward the service of the laity in the name of Christ. The very act of ordination binds priests to the people of God as leaders in a common mission and a common call to holiness. Like all the faithful, the ordained must meet Christ in others, since they too depend on the ministry of church.

In all that follows it will be helpful to distinguish between an authentic theology of ordained ministry and the church's decision about who should be ordained. While the two concerns are related to one another, they are not identical as the current discipline of the Eastern church indicates. Questions about qualifications for ordination need not impede a discussion of the importance of ordained ministry in the mission of the church.

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In attributing a special leadership role to the clergy, we may have to work against a justified fear of clericalism, on the one hand, and a simplistic slide toward fundamentalism, on the other. While the ordained have an essential role to play in the leadership of the church, they are not the only way that Christ guides the faithful. Even though God speaks to the community in a normative way through the Scriptures, his voice is not confined to the sacred texts for God also touches us through a myriad of other books and experiences; so too ordained ministry is foundational to the way the Lord leads the church, but not the total story of Christian leadership. In the Catholic tradition it is assumed that God speaks and leads in a variety of ways without minimizing the significance of either the Scriptures or ordained ministry.

It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of holiness for effective priestly ministry; nonetheless, being ordained is not essential to the quest for holiness. At least three times Vatican II reminds us that Mary personifies the perfection of the Christian life. Because she

**QUOTE FROM A PAST  
TEXT OF CURRENT  
INTEREST:**

*"If priests could open up their hearts and tell you of their priesthood, they would speak of joy and consolations. At times the responsibility to minister in the name of Jesus is awesome, but what a source of happiness. The longer we are priests, the more convinced we are that our lives make a difference. Through our ministry of word and sacrament, we are the instruments Jesus uses to nourish his people spiritually and to build them up as a community of faith and love.*

*"This awesome responsibility is not without concerns. Today's world does not always appreciate the values which give our lives meaning. In such a climate we must struggle to model our lives after that of Jesus, as we promised we would do when we were ordained. Those of us who give retreats to priests are edified to find in them such a deep longing, thirst and hunger for a life of prayer. But we ask how we can develop that inner life when daily pressures and demands claim so much of our time and energy. Priests identify easily with the scene in Mark when the Lord goes off by himself to pray and his disciples find him to say, 'Everyone is looking for you.' We also ask how we can maintain our identity and spirituality precisely as priests, while walking the journey with our people and sharing life's challenges with them....*

*"If priests could open up their hearts and tell you of their priesthood, they would speak of God's people. We are eyewitnesses to wonderful things which do not get officially recorded: their enthusiasm, their spirit, their remarkable generosity and especially their genuine love for priests. They understand our humanness, they forgive our failings and they are a constant source of joy. And, with all this, they constantly challenge us to be holy.*

◀ "On our part, we identify readily with the words of Ambrose to another bishop that 'the most important thing is the people entrusted to our care.' We recall our ordination day when we were urged to 'always remember the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve and to seek out and rescue those who were lost.' Because priests take that charge so seriously, there are some serious concerns about our ministry."

(From the address given in Miami, Fla., by Father Frank J. McNulty to Pope John Paul II during the pope's September 1987 U.S. visit. In *Origins*, vol. 17, quoted material on pp. 232f.)

is held up not only as a unique example of holiness, but as a model for the community, it is precisely as lay person and woman that she can help us maintain a sense of perspective in talking about the importance of ordained ministry in the church. Priests are servants of the holiness which comes to fullness in Mary, the model of ecclesial life.

Finally, like all of us, priests are sinners; thus everything they do is an imperfect embodiment of the Christ they represent.

### History

History testifies to the interaction of the Holy Spirit and the human situation in shaping church order. While the first 150 years of Christian history are both crucial and cloudy, there is a discernible substratum of personalities, practices and structures on which a theology of ordained ministry can be built. Undeniably, the history of ordained ministry is complex and much influenced by secular realities and Old Testament images. Yet it is as simplistic to dismiss post-apostolic developments as hopelessly contaminated by the Roman Empire as it is to ignore that our own social-political needs both enlighten and prejudice our present reading of the historical data. It is difficult to read history without an agenda.

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"While the first 150 years of Christian history are both crucial and cloudy, there is a discernible substratum of personalities, practices and structures on which a theology of ordained ministry can be built."

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The Catholic tradition associates the distinctive prerogatives and authority of ordained ministry with the Twelve chosen by Jesus. This association is often made without much historical or theological sophistication. The fact that it is made, though, is both ancient and constant in the tradition. The Twelve had a complex relationship to the evolving self-understanding of the church. Inasmuch as they were the core of the initial community of the faithful, the total church may be called *apostolic* — inheritors of the faith "that comes to us from the apostles." In another sense, the apostles had no successors since they remain the permanent symbolic foundation stones of the new Israel.

Most important for this discussion, the Twelve are the source of a distinctive mission of pastoral leadership and care which does not belong to the baptized as such, but to delegated servants of the baptismal community. This distinctive "apostolic mission" is the source of the sacrament of orders. The institution of the seven "deacons" gives us some indication of the way the author of the Acts of the Apostles saw the ministry of the Twelve. As recognized community leaders, the apostles inaugurated a new

ministerial expression by the laying on of hands. In the process, they kept for themselves the ministry of the word and prayer. Very early, then, church leadership was associated with the functions of shepherding, proclaiming the Word and leading prayer.

The "apostle" Paul claimed a distinctive authority for himself, which he would not allow to be minimized. Under the umbrella of his "apostolic witness," a wide variety of ministries flourished with a great measure of diversity and freedom. Christians evangelized by Paul experienced themselves as gifted and empowered for ministry by the very fact of their initiation into Christ. Charisms were something that everyone possessed for the benefit of all.

"To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the power to express knowledge. Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one; to another power to distinguish one spirit from another. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues. But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:7-11).

Forms of ministry varied from community to community. The value of each ministry was judged by the way it edified, building up the community in faith and love. While ministries were spontaneous and numerous, they were subject to the common good and to the ministry of the apostolic witness who authenticated the community.

As the church moved into the period of the pastoral letters — probably written after Paul's death around 67 A.D. — eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus were seldom available to the community as a source of authentic teaching, authority and good order. At the same time, the break with the doctrinal and structural security of Judaism was finalized, the diversity of backgrounds within the Christian community grew and external pressures from gnosticism and other foreign ideologies made an appearance.

In the earlier period there had been less need to designate authentic teachers and to install community leaders. In a conflict situation recourse was made to an acknowledged leader with a direct relationship to the ministry of Jesus or at least a personal experience of Jesus, through vision in the case of Paul. While conflicts happened, communities found a measure of security in the eyewitness who authenticated their community by exercising leadership and pastoral care. The waning of the apostolic age led to a pressing need to provide structure for the community. More defined ways of appointing community leaders appeared, and concern about ordination and apostolic succession intensified.

At some point laying on of hands became the normative vehicle for transmitting the unique apostolic mission of pastoral leadership; when isn't clear. More important, it is clear that there were recognized successors to the distinc-

tive apostolic role embodied in Paul in the communities he founded — even if not in the exact manner in which Paul embodied it. The pastoral letters build on the fact that there were recognized people who took up Paul's ministry. Thus the fact that we do not know when the ritual of ordination was developed or the division of ministers into bishops, priests and deacons was initiated does not minimize the fact that there was a unique ministry of apostolic leadership in the life of the primitive church which has continued to our day as the sacrament of orders.

During this same period there was growing concern about the canon of Scripture and creeds as basic statements of orthodox belief. Communities of new converts with highly energized, spontaneous and charismatically based ministries gradually gave way to a more structured way of life, which defined ministries. By the end of the apostolic period (about 100 A.D.) the offices of bishop, presbyter and deacon appear in most of the major strains of the New Testament tradition (the pastoral letters, the Acts of the Apostles, 3 John, 1 Peter and James). A process began which, over the course of several centuries, led to the absorption of most publicly recognized charismatic ministries into the ordained ministries of the community. For example, the prophet, or free-floating charismatic preacher, who appears to have been allowed to preside at the eucharist at one point was eventually phased out in favor of the ordained leadership of the church.

As pastoral leadership was more clearly identified with a stable role in a definite community, attention was directed toward institutional charisms — those appropriate to an office meant to serve the common good. Since public propriety was important, some of the more esoteric charismatic attributes which had previously been a creative force were no longer seen as suitable in the resident pastor. The result was a taming of the charismatic endowment of ministry. Soon additional requirements for the pastoral office began to be urged (around marriage, control of one's own family, being a new convert, etc.). Suitability for leadership was not seen as a matter of personal qualities or even spiritual endowment alone. There was a growing consciousness that public propriety made an important contribution to one's ability to lead.

### The Early Patristic Witness

In the closing moments of the apostolic age, Clement of Rome attested to the origin of ordained ministry:

"So Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ.... As they preached from country to country and from city to city, they appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of the future believers.... They appointed those mentioned above and afterward added the stipulation that if these should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (Letter of Clement, 42, 44; about 96 A.D.).

Ignatius of Antioch affirmed the central-

ty of the bishop with great abandon: "You have only to acknowledge God and the bishop, and all is well; for one who honors his bishop is himself honored by God" (Letter to the Smyrneans, about 110 A.D.).

While the language of sacrament had not evolved, more and more the apostolic ministry of leadership and pastoral care was perceived as sacramental — that is, as a concrete manifestation of the activity of God in the church:

"It is fitting for you not to take advantage of the bishop's youth.... (Y)ield to him — not to him but to the Father of Jesus Christ, to the bishop of all ... for a man does not deceive only this visible bishop but also cheats the invisible one.... Do everything in God's harmony, with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the presbytery in the place of the council of the apostles" (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians, 3, 4, 6).

"Wherever the bishop appears, the whole congregation is to be present, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the whole church" (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrneans, 8).

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"While the baptismal priesthood and that of the ordained are related to one another by their very nature, they are not distinguished by a difference of degree or intensity, but by the diverse way in which each participates in the priesthood of Christ."

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Although he lived much later, Augustine of Hippo shared the same sacramental understanding of pastoral leadership:

"Christ himself is the shepherd when they act as shepherds. 'I feed them,' he says, because his voice is in their voice, his love in their love. When he entrusted his sheep to Peter as one person to another, Christ chose to make Peter one with himself" (A Sermon on Pastors, 46:29-30).

### The Medieval Period

Pausing briefly here, we recognize two significant developments which have had a lasting influence on our understanding of pastoral leadership. Beginning with the apostolic fathers and continuing into the Middle Ages, the Old Testament was increasingly used to interpret Christian realities. The process had already begun in the New Testament itself as is evident in the Letter to the Hebrews, where the language of priesthood and sacrifice is used to explain the identity and ministry of Jesus. Although the Letter to the Hebrews used only a part of the Old Testament understanding of priest, it confirmed the Hebrew Scriptures as a resource in interpreting the new reality in Christ.

Since the tradition had already used the Old Testament to articulate its understanding of the mystery of Christ, it is not surprising that it

*For a recent text in Origins on the priesthood, see "The Mystery of the Priestly Vocation," by Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver. It appeared in the current volume, pp. 349ff. The Roman Catholic Church "does not choose between the universal priesthood and the ordained, it chooses both," Stafford wrote. He said that while the priest is called from among the members of the church and remains human and a sinner, he is nonetheless set apart for sacred duty and is permanently marked with a special character. Ordination "does not separate the priest from the rest of the church but indeed designates him in the midst of the church for a unique service to his brothers and sisters," said Stafford.*

*While examining what is distinctive about the priesthood, Stafford also discussed ways of relating the universal priesthood and the ordained. It is above all "in the eucharist that the two notions of priesthood come together," said Stafford. Again, for example, the notions of universal and ordained priesthood come together "in the increasingly common cooperation of pastors and laity in the work of the parish." Stafford notes that "in general, according to the Second Vatican Council, the relation between pastors and the laity within the church should be a familiar one." He said, "In learning an appropriate cooperation between pastors and laity, we must learn ever again the two-edged meaning of Paul's dictum, 'There are a variety of gifts but one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:4). Certainly there are more gifts than simply the ordained ministry in the church; there are many gifts — all ordered to the benefit of the whole. But neither do the many gifts obviate the church's eternal need for the unique gift of the apostles, first in rank among the gifts and likewise given for the benefit of the whole. Discord and contentiousness show an absence of the Spirit, a failure to*

◀ have learned the shared responsibility to which the Spirit is leading us. The Gospels are throughout a lesson in an ecclesiology of service and never more so than when speaking of authority. The followers of Christ do not exercise authority in the manner of princes, but as Christ did, who came 'not to be served by others, but to serve, to give his own life as a ransom for the many' (Mt. 20:28). Where this lesson is learned, the church's ministry is rendered more effective by the complementarity of gifts and by the mutual support of pastors and laity. The fruits of the Spirit will be abundant."

Priests themselves hold differing views of the church and may have different hopes, observes a recent paper titled "Reflections on the Morale of Priests," issued by the U.S. bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry. The text appeared in *Origins*, the current volume, pp. 497ff. Polarization takes a toll on priests' morale, the paper states. "Priests are often, by temperament and personality, anxious to establish harmony and to please. By theology and vocation they are concerned to be healers, reconcilers and builders of community. These characteristics make tension and outright hostility all the more disheartening and difficult to bear."

also used it to expand its understanding of ordained ministry. As appreciation for the sacrificial nature of the eucharist grew, the Old Testament language of sacrifice and priesthood was increasingly applied to ordained ministry. The usual New Testament word *presbyter* was gradually replaced by *priest* as a description of the self-understanding of the ordained minister. While Christ is the starting point in the discussion of Christian ministry and his image, not the Old Testament priesthood, the source of the identity of the ordained priest, the Hebrew Scriptures are a gift which the church has continued to use.

This development both enriched the tradition and narrowed it. On one hand, it allowed the community to penetrate the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ and its own sharing in that event through the eucharistic sacrifice; on the other hand, it constricted the church's appreciation of the breadth of Christ's ministry and manifested a diminished understanding of the role of the priest in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, a powerful language and theology of sacrifice and priesthood are a gift of the Middle Ages which continues to influence our understanding of the worship of the church and the ministry of the ordained within it.

During this same period, theological developments, the need for mobile preachers of reform and the rise of apostolic religious communities both justified and supported a break in the relationship between the ordained minister and the local community. While at the beginning of the period "absolute ordination," that is, ordination apart from attachment to a local church, was forbidden, by the end of it many priests had no regular connection with a diocese or parish. This development had both positive and negative consequences.

Positively, it allowed recognized teachers, preachers and sacramental ministers to travel from diocese to diocese in an effort to bolster the sagging efforts of the local clergy. The Dominicans and Franciscans were in the forefront of this reforming effort. It also promoted a higher standard of spirituality and ministry in priests by fostering community life among them. In some ways, this development brought priests closer to the missionary ideal embodied in the wandering apostle than it did to the more institutionalized style of ministry identified with the resident presbyter of the pastoral letters. The entire church benefited from the outpouring of zeal which often followed in the wake of religious communities, effectively challenging stagnation and the status quo.

This development had its down side as well. It tended to focus attention on the ordained minister and his self-contained "powers" with little reference to the essential role of the community in worship and ministry. As a result the ordained were often seen as the sole or universal ministers in the community, accompanied by a diminished sense of the ministerial nature of the Christian life itself. It also facilitated priests functioning apart from a concrete body of the

faithful not just occasionally, but as the regular expression of their priesthood. For some, priesthood became a status conferred to enhance another function rather than an empowering for pastoral leadership. Not only was the presbyter's relationship to the eucharistic assembly blurred, but the relationship between priests and bishops became less clear as many priests began to exercise a ministry "exempt" from episcopal supervision.

### The Council of Trent

As the forces of reform and fragmentation marched across Europe, the Council of Trent responded by issuing decrees affirming Catholic doctrine and renewing and strengthening church life. Worship and ministry were concerns of Catholics and Protestants alike. It is not surprising, then, that the nature of ordained ministry was caught in the cross fire. Thus, a challenge to the long-accepted understanding of the eucharist as sacrifice had repercussions on the way ordained ministry was defined by the council:

"Since the Catholic Church has received the holy and visible sacrifice of the eucharist according to the institution of the Lord, it is likewise necessary to acknowledge that there is in the church a new, visible and external priesthood into which the old (testament) priesthood was changed" (Canon 957).

The permanence of this ministry was also a concern of the council, since the reformers insisted that a non-functioning ordained minister, by that very fact, returned to the lay state.

"In the sacrament of holy orders, just as in baptism and confirmation, a character is imprinted which can neither be blotted out nor taken away" (Canon 960).

In the polemic which followed, attention was focused on the permanence of orders — the matter under dispute — not on the significance of baptism and confirmation. Such is the power of controversy to isolate and emphasize a part, in detriment to an understanding of the whole. Insistence on the distinctive character of the ordained tended to focus attention on the hierarchy, giving little incentive to further develop Trent's teaching that baptism and confirmation are also sacraments imprinting a "character."

The Council of Trent made an immense contribution to the welfare of the church in affirming traditional doctrine and in establishing structures for a better educated, morally respectable clergy. There is no doubt that the situation after Trent was a far cry from what went before. Yet renewing church life in turbulent times is bound to leave a somewhat distorted mark on the age which follows. While the council was anxious to reform parish life through a restored emphasis on preaching and the ministry of the pastor, the need to affirm the presbyter as *priest* often overshadowed a more balanced understanding of this office. In fact, *preacher* and *pastor* took on a Protestant connotation, while affirmation that the ordained minister is *priest* became a sign of Catholic orthodoxy.

The release of new spiritual energies which accompanied the council helped restore major parts of Europe to the Catholic tradition. Often these providential movements created a parallel system of devotional practices and mystical ventures which enriched church life, but were only minimally rooted in the liturgy, ecclesial relationships and the experience of ministry. The temptation to split spirituality from liturgy and doctrine from ministerial practice is a snare that the church has struggled with to our own day. Consequently, it is not surprising that many priests see spirituality as a program of laudable solitary additions to one's schedule — largely apart from pastoral activity and outside the normal course of daily events, although meant to have an effect on them.

### The Second Vatican Council

In discussing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on ordained ministry, it is important to see the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church as the context. The very structure of this document makes it clear that Christ and the church are the overriding concerns. The conscious decision to refrain from focusing on the hierarchical element in the church until Chapter 3 and the document's insistence on placing ordained ministers clearly within the community of the "faithful" was a crucial step in articulating a more balanced approach to ecclesial life. The clear intention of the council is to paint a picture of a church united in one saving mission to the world based on baptism. The result has been a recovery of the role of the whole church in bringing Christ to the world and a renewed emphasis on the relationship between the laity and the clergy in fulfilling this mission.

While the baptismal priesthood and that of the ordained are related to one another by their very nature, they are not distinguished by a difference of degree or intensity, but by the diverse way in which each participates in the priesthood of Christ. Vatican II teaches not only that a different function is given to the ordained, but also a new relationship to Christ, the head of the church, allowing them to be present to the community and to serve it as a sacrament of Christ specifically in his role as leader and head of the church. Lay people are also called to be servants and leaders in the sphere of influence pivotal to properly understanding the role of the laity — the renewal of the social, political and economic order. Together, laity and clergy embody complementary aspects of the way the whole church participates in Christ's priesthood and saving mission to the world.

With the mission of the total church clearly in mind, we can turn our attention to the council's understanding of ordained ministry. In doing this, we notice that the phrase *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ) or *in persona Christi caput ecclesiae* (in the person of Christ, the head of the church) has special significance. This phrase or a near equivalent appears five times in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, three times in the Decree on the Ministry

and Life of Priests and once in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Vatican II uses this phrase only in conjunction with ordained ministry. Identification with Christ specifically as head of the church is predicated only on the sacrament of orders. The explanation offered by the council's committee on doctrine makes it clear that this "technical" usage was intentional.

The mission of the ordained is to mediate — that is, to make present — the leadership which Christ gives to the church as such. The tradition has sometimes used the phrase "other Christ" to describe this role. This usage may confuse the issue since, in common parlance, all Christians are called to be other Christs, making him truly present in word, worship and service. In another sense, no Christian is "another Christ," because there is only one. Christians are a manifestation of the saving power of the one Christ in the world.

### A Sacramental Approach to Ordained Ministry

Sacramental language best expresses the faith of the church, for the ordained are not other Christs, but persons through whom the one Christ acts for the benefit of his church. The problem we encounter here is similar to the one we meet in explaining the way in which the eucharist is a sacrifice. The eucharist is not another sacrifice, as if there were many, but a sacramental reality which makes the one sacrifice of Christ present so that the church can participate in it, here and now.

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"The first service which Jesus offered to those he came to save was to become one of them."

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In an analogous way, the ordained do not multiply Christ, but they are empowered to make the one Christ present as the one leader of the church. In a startling statement the Constitution on the Church says:

"Aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the people of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (of the magisterium) and obeying it, receives not the mere word of human beings, but truly the word of God" (No. 12).

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy pursues the same theme, saying that Christ is present in the Mass "in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross'" (No. 7). It goes on to affirm that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. Thus, sacraments make Christ truly present and active in his church. This is as true of orders as it is of the other sacraments. In the eucharistic assembly, Christ is present in a "substantial way" in the consecrated bread and wine. He is also present, in a real way — sacramentally — in the ordained minister and sacramentally, in a real way, in the community of the baptized. All these ways complement one another.

Father M. Edward Hussey analyzed the ways in which Vatican Council II altered understandings of the ordained priesthood, especially in its relationship to the bishop and to the people, in an address he gave last year to a conference on the future of U.S. seminaries (see *Origins*, vol. 17, pp. 577ff).

Hussey said the recent decline in the number of priests is a natural result of certain emphases in the council documents. He said he believes the conciliar statements "are theologically sound and are valuable corrections to some off-balance views which have prevailed for centuries," but the fact remains "that they have raised important questions not only for priests but for the entire church, questions that I believe have not as yet been able to be addressed sufficiently and satisfactorily."

"There is no question that the priestly office and the priest's own understanding of his office are in a period of great transition," he said.

Hussey offered two theological principles and five characteristics of the priesthood "as we actually live it":

"My first theological principle concerns the relationship between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful. In order to avoid a simplistic identification of the priesthood of the baptized and the priesthood of the ordained, church documents ... frequently appeal to 'Lumen Gentium' (No. 10) to affirm that they differ from one another not only in degree but also in essence. But I want to point out to you that the sentence ... cited to support this essential difference actually affirms a close connection between the two and merely presumes the essential difference....

"Consequently, although we must not deny the essential difference ... it may be that the difference ought not to be overemphasized and used as the starting point for developing a theology of the priesthood. In fact, I believe that a search for

◀ the essential difference between the two as a starting point for understanding the ordained priesthood may complicate the issue unnecessarily. I would suggest that the principal affirmation of that sentence in 'Lumen Gentium,' the inter-relatedness of the priesthood of the faithful and the hierarchical priesthood, might be a better starting point. It might then be easier to see that the ordained priesthood does not intrude between God and the priesthood common to all the faithful, but rather enables the priesthood of the faithful to be fulfilled and effective.

"My second theological principle concerns the relationship between the priest and the bishop. And it is somewhat similar.... Just as an overemphasis on the essential difference between the priesthood of the faithful and the priesthood of the ordained creates unnecessary difficulties, so also I believe that an overstated attempt to separate the bishop and the priest will create other unnecessary difficulties.... The priesthood is not radically separate from the episcopacy."

Hussey's five characteristics of today's priesthood included:

—The presidential role of the priest: "We preside at the gatherings, the assemblies of the church, and we are presidents of local churches in a very real sense, especially if we are pastors of parishes.... The parish is the real local church for most Catholics, for the parish is where they gather to celebrate the eucharist, where they are baptized and married, and where their funeral liturgies are celebrated."

—The importance of the priest's sacramental and cultic role.

—Priests are "ecclesial persons, that is, authorized to act in the name of the church.... While some other persons are authorized to do some of these same things, yet, except for the bishop, the priest has the most comprehensive and unqualified ▶

## Sacrament of Christ, Servant Head of the Church

The principal model for ordained ministry offered by Vatican II is sacrament of Christ, servant head of the church. In explaining the "headship" model, the council takes great care to distinguish it from worldly patterns of leadership. Clericalism, in both its ordained and lay varieties, is anti-Christian because it witnesses to values which are nowhere found in Christ. This is especially true of a spirit of superiority which sets the public minister outside and above ordinary human experience. To discredit the perennial temptation to domination encountered by those vested with authority, Vatican II points to Christ in his incarnation and in his servant role.

The first service which Jesus offered to those he came to save was to become one of them. In fact, he was quite radical about this. He not only shared the lot of the poor, associating himself with outcasts and sinners, but also died the most tragic of deaths in solidarity with the misery of the human condition. Jesus led by being a part of the human race, attaining the height of his role as leader by associating himself with the depth of human confusion and pain. He emptied himself taking on the form of a slave, and he emptied himself still more, enduring death on the cross. Thus incarnation was a lifelong project for Jesus, his last moment finding him most deeply involved in the human dilemma.

Anyone who would lead *in persona Christi* must make a spirituality of incarnation a lifelong goal. A life apart, directing people from afar, or one of special privilege untouched by the concerns of ordinary mortals not only militates against true leadership, but attacks the sign value of ordained ministry. Thus public ministers who follow the example of Jesus lead by inserting themselves into the human family, sharing with the most needy both care and fellowship. They lead by presence, that is, by participation in the life of those they seek to serve as much as by their words. Accordingly, when people see the ordained they should see what is good in themselves, for their leaders belong to them, challenging them to be what is possible for one like themselves. In a sacramental church people hear the word of God in their own language and experience the healing and forgiveness of God in familiar gestures, because Christ is present and active through a member of the community.

When the mother of James and John asked for seats on the right and left hand of Jesus in his kingdom, Jesus responded not only with words about his chalice of suffering, but also by speaking about the world's use of power:

"Among the gentiles, rulers make their authority felt; it must never be that way with you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant; and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all, for the son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:42-45).

Not only was Christ a member of the people he came to save, but his whole existence was oriented toward the welfare of the human family. The Vatican Council gives special attention to Christ, the servant:

"The miracles of Jesus also demonstrate that the kingdom has already come on earth ... but principally the kingdom is revealed in the person of Christ himself, son of God and son of man, who came 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many'" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 5).

The church understands the paschal mystery — self-giving love even to death on the cross — as the act of service which is the source of its risen life. This is underlined in the choice of the Gospel for the Mass at the beginning of the triduum. After the supper Jesus girded himself with a towel and proceeded to wash his disciples' feet, stressing that he was giving them an example. The eucharist, then, and all that follows, is understood through the image of God kneeling to wash the feet of sinful humanity.

The way that Jesus is perceived and contemplated has a strong impact on the identity and activity of those who follow him. The fact that the self-giving love of community servant is emphasized by the council is important in appreciating the sacramental reality which the ordained are to make concrete in their ministry.

## Ordained Ministry as Sacrament of the Unifying Spirit

While the Western church prefers Christological images like "body of Christ," the theology and liturgy of the Eastern church show a greater appreciation for the role of the Holy Spirit. The documents of Vatican II incorporate a growing consciousness of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. In an ecclesiology steeped in the teaching of the fathers, ecclesial relationships mirror the life of the Trinity and manifest grace as an experienced participation in the mystery of God.

Viewed from this perspective, the interaction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the starting point in understanding the church and its ministry. The Trinity demonstrates the collaboration of equal persons in diverse ways in a common mission. Collaboration involves both equality and subsidiarity. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" and "The one who sees me sees the Father." He also said, "The Father is greater than I." On one hand, Jesus was receptive, being empowered by the same Spirit in his ministry. On the other hand, Jesus was active in sending the Holy Spirit upon the church.

It is clear that the great sacrament of the church is a collaborative work of the Trinity. Vatican II teaches that the whole church is caught up in the collaborative mission which gave it birth.

"The Lord Jesus 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (Jn. 10:36) makes his whole mystical body sharer in the anointing of the Spirit wherewith he has been anointed.... Therefore there is no such thing as

a member that has not a share in the mission of the whole body" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 2).

Since the entire church is empowered for a common saving mission, the Spirit operates through the whole body — and not only through the mediation of ordained ministry.

In the wake of the council there have been many attempts to clarify the seminal ideas expressed in its documents. Emerging parish structures point to three modes of church ministry empowered by the Spirit. First of all, the laity in general are consecrated as priest, prophet and shepherd in baptism and blessed with charisms too numerous to mention, which are expressed in daily life. This is lay ministry in the most fundamental sense, since through the activity of the laity the church seeks to accomplish an essential part of its mission: the transformation of the social, economic and political order.

The church also treasures charisms of lay leadership derived from baptism and exercised for the common good in a specific area of ministry within the ecclesial community. Sometimes these leadership roles flow from an official act or ritual of commissioning, as is the case with installed lectors and acolytes, eucharistic ministers or chancellors and tribunal officials. At other times they result from implicit recognition that these people indeed represent the community. Catechists, pastoral ministers and members of the parish pastoral council may fit into this grouping.

Ordained ministry, the third category, flows from baptism and the distinctive empowerment of sacramental ordination. Its specific focus is the pastoral leadership of the ecclesial community as a whole. Under the unifying umbrella of the proclamation, care and authority of ordained ministers, the total community is gathered and ordered toward the one mission of the one church. Seen in this way, the sacrament of orders is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the "holy ordering" of the church according to the saving purposes of God.

As a concrete manifestation of the work of the Spirit, the pastoral activity of the ordained is to epitomize the unifying gift proclaimed in the Preface for Christian Unity:

"How wonderful are the works of the Spirit, revealed in so many gifts! Yet how marvelous is the unity the Spirit creates from their diversity, as he dwells in the hearts of your children, filling the whole church with his presence and guiding it with his wisdom!"

This understanding of ordained ministry emphasizes the relationship of all members of the faithful to the Spirit through baptism and the resulting empowerment of all for the common good. It draws attention to the ordained as sacrament of the unifying Spirit, by whom the church is knit together, and away from a too-constricted interpretation of the image of the ordained as sacrament of Christ, the head, through whom all gifts are mediated. In balancing its emphasis on the image of Christ, the head, Vatican II offers some powerful texts for our consideration:

"It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills ... he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church, as it is written, 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Cor. 12:7)... Those who have charge over the church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, through their office, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 12).

"While trying the spirits if they be of God, they (priests) must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster with diligence the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind.... Priests have been placed in the midst of the laity so that they may lead them all to the unity of charity.... Theirs is the task, then, of bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody may feel a stranger in the Christian community. They are to be defenders of the common good" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 9).

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"Although an ordained priest in serious sin, heresy or with minimal preparation can validly preside at baptism or eucharist, who would deny that the effectiveness of the celebration is greatly influenced by the quality of the life of the minister."

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The two models for ordained ministry offered by the council are not options, but inter-related aspects of a unified vision of the presbyteral mission. In offering both, Vatican II reclaims the richness of the Catholic tradition, thereby opening the way for the explosion of lay ministries and recognizing the aspirations of many for a less structured and more relational church.

### **A Threefold Ministry: Shepherd, Prophet and Priest**

*Shepherd:* Ordination, by its very nature, identifies the recipient with pastoral leadership in the church. The presbyterate — that is, the presbyters of a diocese under the leadership of their bishop — share the shepherding role in the local church. While the bishop is the primary expression and hub of pastoral leadership, presbyters exist not only because the bishop cannot be every place, but also as a part of the "fullness" of the bishop. Since no one, not even the bishop, is an adequate sacrament of Christ by himself, ordained leadership is communal by

*authorization and delegation to act in the name of the church. And our exercise of this delegation is more familiar and frequent than the bishop's in the daily life of the church."*

*—"Because we are priests, other members of the church feel that we belong to them in a special way, that we have a commitment to be interested in them and care for them ... and we feel this relationship exists not only with our own parishioners, but also with Catholics wherever we go."*

*—"We are symbolic centers of the church, ... a sort of embodiment of the faith and the values and the traditions of the church.... When people meet us, they do feel that they meet the church and all that it stands for.... This is a very precious and valuable asset.... It also carries a great risk."*



definition. The bishop and the presbyterate are the full sacrament of Christ's servant leadership in a diocese.

In a certain sense, the office of pastor is the ordinary expression of pastoral leadership for a presbyter, but not the only one. Parochial vicars are usually on their way to becoming the pastoral leaders of parish communities. As such, they are closely associated with the office of pastor and are being initiated into that role. Therefore, it is important that parochial vicars experience the various ministries of the parish community as well as the overarching ministry of pastor, which brings them together.

Non-parish presbyters augment the total ministry of the presbyterate through a variety of pastoral activities in the local church. They witness to the fact that parishes are served by an entire presbyterate — most obviously present in a resident pastor. Vatican II encourages a renewed consciousness of the presbyterate, seeing it as a source of support for priests and of diverse gifts for the local church.

*Prophet:* Vatican II teaches that the first duty of the priest is to preach the word of God to all. This is a profound statement in an immediate historical context which identified the presbyter primarily with sacrifice. At the heart of the renewed emphasis on preaching — and the revitalization of the sacraments as well — lies a renewed appreciation of the Sacred Scriptures. Besides the document on the church, the only other "dogmatic constitution" produced by the council is on divine revelation. Shortly after the council, every sacramental ritual was revised so that it would flow from the proclamation of the word and a homily or words of exhortation spoken by the one who presides.

The words of the council on the importance of Scripture and preaching in the ministry of the priest are strong and clear:

"All clerics, particularly priests of Christ ... should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study. For it must not happen that anyone becomes 'an empty preacher of the word of God to others, not being a hearer of the word in his own heart,' when he ought to be sharing the boundless riches of the divine word with the faithful committed to his care, especially in the sacred liturgy.... 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'" (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 25 with quotations from St. Augustine and St. Jerome).

The Christian community is to be formed by the Gospel in the light of existing conditions in the social order. Isolation from society or naivete about the cultural environment is an obstacle to effective preaching. Although the or-

daind are usually not called to direct action in the political arena, they have a prophetic role in the lives of those who must exercise political responsibility.

*Priest:* Leadership in worship is the culmination of presbyteral ministry, its high point, and that toward which all of its efforts are directed. The unique service which the presbyter offers the community reaches its zenith in the eucharistic sacrifice and meal. There the Christian people enter into communion with Christ and surrender themselves to becoming the great gift which they receive — the body of Christ.

The eucharist makes the person and sacrifice of Christ present in the pilgrim community in a way which allows the earthly church to already participate in the glorious fulfillment of the cross. It is precisely because the assembled community is nourished on the glorified Christ that the power of the kingdom breaks into the earthly realm, transforming the human family in the Lord's image. Through the liturgy the Spirit of Christ joins the pilgrim church to the heavenly community, associating it with the worship and fellowship of the eschatological kingdom and configuring it to its way of life.

Thus, the Christian community itself is the primary consequence of the eucharist. As a result, the future kingdom is already seen in the rhythm of worship and charity which are the primary activities of the church on earth. Through the eucharist, the Spirit empowers the faithful to witness to the kingdom by the way in which they live in the human community.

As servants of the eucharistic assembly, priests wed heaven to earth in a way which empowers the church's ministry of charity and justice in this world and guides its pilgrimage to a heavenly fulfillment yet to come. It is no wonder that Vatican II sees the Mass as the source and summit of the presbyter's ministry:

"By adopting the role of the good shepherd, they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity. Now this pastoral charity flows especially from the eucharist" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 14).

### The Eucharistic Assembly

In the eucharistic assembly the church is most visible, celebrating the summit and source of its life. There too the role of the presbyter is most evident as he presides in the threefold ministry for which he was ordained. Within the eucharistic assembly all three ministries are essential — shepherd, prophet and priest. Vatican II challenges priests to take up the discipline necessary to implement a fuller understanding of their role. To focus on one aspect to the detriment of the others is to fall short of the

council's mandate. While the word *priest* describes the summit of presbyteral activity, it is not broad enough to encompass the total ministry committed to the ordained priest. Thus the word *presbyter* is often used today.

As shepherd, the presbyter is to gather and welcome the community, binding it into one, and ordering and guiding its ministries as he sends it forth in mission.

As prophet, the presbyter is to proclaim the word of God and apply it to the particular situation of the community.

As priest, the presbyter is to lead the community in worship, bringing it to sanctification and transformation in Christ.

### Pastoral Leadership as the Point of Integration

The starting point is important in integrating the threefold ministry of the presbyter. For example, the recent Catholic tradition usually began with *priest*, but then what happened to preaching! Many Protestant traditions start with *prophet*, but then what happens to eucharistic worship?

Shepherding or pastoral leadership appears to be the integrating category for many presbyters today. This choice is confirmed by a number of factors. First of all, the early historical data presents the bishop as "overseer" and the presbyter as a member of a council of elders exercising leadership responsibilities in the community. Preaching and leadership in worship were not committed to presbyters in the earliest period, but only to the bishop. Yet presbyters shared in the leadership of the community, and eventually this was logically extended to the eucharistic assembly when the bishop was not able to be present.

In the discipline of the first several centuries, leadership in the ecclesial community was a necessary prerequisite for leadership in the eucharistic assembly. While historical evolution has justified another practice, the unique role of the pastor in the eucharistic assembly is undeniable, as the obligation of the *missa pro populo* still suggests.

Practically speaking, the shepherd of the community preaches and leads prayer in a way different from those who neither know the parish nor have responsibility for it. The fact that he is "their shepherd" makes a presbyter "their preacher" and "their priest" in a uniquely powerful way. Jesus himself said, "I know mine and mine know me ... and they listen to my voice." In an age of mobile preachers and priests, the value of pastoral leadership by a resident presbyter who is involved in the community needs to be emphasized. So important is the "sacrament of the resident pastor" that a parish community without a resident

pastor is a theological anomaly in the Catholic tradition.

### The Parish

The consecration implicit in ordination does not suggest a separation from the world, but a dedication to a specific mission. This mission necessitates a separation from worldliness. By the very nature of his vocation, the diocesan priest is called to live in the world in the midst of ordinary human realities and as a servant to those whose mission is the transformation of society. The parish priest must be a student of humanity, society and culture if he is to effectively aid the laity in a vocation which is secular by definition.

In many ways the context of the spirituality of the diocesan or parish priest is more like that of the laity than that of many religious; it must respond to the rhythm of secular life, not to a set rule which organizes life apart from secular realities and the ordinary patterns of human existence. The parish priest's way to holiness lies in his participation in the parish community, not in isolation from it. It is precisely to the graced potential contained in ministry itself to which the council draws attention in speaking about the call of priests to holiness:

"Since every priest in his own way assumes the person of Christ, he is endowed with a special grace. By this grace the priest, through his service of the people committed to his care and all the people of God, is able the better to pursue the perfection of Christ, whose place he takes" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 12).

### Religious Priests

Religious life is rooted in a renewed public dedication to pursue the holiness flowing from baptism. It seeks both to witness to the meaning of the Christian life and to provide an intensified and focused way of living discipleship. As members of the faithful, religious share a way of life which is common to the whole people of God. Yet concentration on three distinctive concerns gives focus to their way of life. First, religious aspire to transformation in Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels, usually enumerated as poverty, chastity and obedience. Second, they express their relationship to the church publicly through witness and ministry. Most recent religious communities see apostolic activity as integral to the vocation to a particular community. Finally, the Gospel way of life they lead is ordered according to the insight or charism of a particular religious founder or tradition.

The church has ordained religious to provide for the pastoral and sacramental needs of religious communities and to serve the broader

church. Needless to say, the coupling of priesthood and religious life has enriched the Christian community. Yet religious face unique challenges and opportunities in understanding a way of life which flows both from religious charism and presbyteral mission.

In describing the mission of the priest, Vatican II focuses on the bishop, the parish and the liturgy. Again and again, it returns to the image of pastoral leadership in a concrete community of the faithful. Often the first challenge facing religious priests is belonging to an alternate church order, that is, one that is not episcopal, diocesan and parish-based in structure.

Because the context of presbyteral ministry provided by the council often conflicts with the experience of religious priests, it raises a number of questions: How does the church authenticate expressions of presbyteral ministry not based on parish life? How does the ministry many religious priests are involved in express the identity and mission of the presbyter? Or, is it valid for some religious to question the relationship between their ministry and ordination to the presbyterate? The presence of religious priests keeps presbyters from being totally domesticated by parish life. Yet, in a church which connects ordination with leadership, sacraments and preaching in a parish community, a theologically congruent explanation for the ordination of non-parochially based religious must be articulated which is clearly more than the imparting of clerical status as authority for another task.

Since they are not tied to the concreteness of a local church, religious are free to exercise their ministry where needed and in areas of the church that have not yet developed a diocesan structure. As already suggested, religious presbyters may bear a closer resemblance to the ministry of the earlier wandering apostle than to the more institutionalized presbyter of the pastoral letters. Because religious live in an interdiocesan structure, cooperation with the episcopal college in its care for the well-being of the total church may be a more fruitful expression of the relationship of religious priests to the episcopate than an overemphasis on their membership in the diocesan presbyterate where they reside — but often don't seem to fit.

### A Sacramental Spirituality for Today's Priest

The presbyter is not only called to be holy, but to be holy in a specific way for the good of the church. To simply identify goodness or prayerfulness with a vocation to the priesthood is to misunderstand both the sacred character of the laity and the leadership role committed to the presbyter. The

spirituality of the priest has a very specific goal: the total growth of the presbyter so that he might be an effective sacrament of Christ, the head of the church.

This approach to spirituality presupposes an appreciation of the significance of sacraments in the Catholic tradition and the importance of quality sacramental experiences in influencing the faith response of the faithful. For example, we believe that a thimble full of water is sufficient for a valid baptism; but in attaining its purpose, baptism is enhanced by preparation, celebration with a meaningful amount of water and support from a living community of faith. Similarly, we believe that a "private Mass" is certainly valid. Yet a Mass which is prepared and celebrated with song and the full participation of the faithful better serves the unity of the body of Christ, which Thomas Aquinas says is the principal effect of the eucharist.

Although an ordained priest in serious sin, heresy or with minimal preparation can validly preside at baptism or eucharist, who would deny that the effectiveness of the celebration is greatly influenced by the quality of the life of the minister? Priestly spirituality is not a set of disciplines or devotions considered apart from ministry, but the specific disciplines or practices needed to become what one was ordained to be. This is just another way of echoing the council's affirmation that priests grow in holiness through the exercise of presbyteral ministry itself. Seen in this way, holiness is much more than a desirable addition to the ordination. If we want the faithful to encounter Christ as servant head of the church through the ordained priest, it is an essential part of the structure of the priesthood.

On the most basic level, the spirituality of the people of God is one. Even though presbyters have a special role, they are followers of the Lord along with all the faithful and are part-takers of the same grace and called to the same kingdom.

"Priests, in common with all who have been reborn in the font of baptism, are brothers among brothers (and sisters) as members of the same body of Christ which all are commanded to build up" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 9).

Therefore the spirituality of priests is more like that of the laity than different from it. If this were not true, how could a pastor use his own spiritual experience to enrich the community he serves and vice versa?

Having said this, it is important to recognize that the presbyteral mission does shape the spirituality of the priest in a special way. Four pivotal qualities allow us to delineate a distinctive presbyteral spirituality: prayerfulness,

leadership, participation and service.

**Prayerfulness:** It would be sheer nonsense to claim that priests are the most prayerful people in the church. It is not that they are to be better at prayer, but their prayer is to be focused by their role in the community. The effectiveness of the ministry priests offer the church depends on their prayerfulness — on people's sense that their priests are indeed "servants of God." If presbyters are to be a source of spiritual vision for the community, they must know the ways of God and be able to articulate them in a ministry of preaching, teaching and personal guidance. A parish without a prayerful pastor experiences much more than just another member who doesn't pray. Since the pastor's prayer is intimately linked to the welfare of the community, it is deprived, as a parish, of spiritual insight, discernment and intercession. A pastor's prayer rises from the midst of the community and is a service to it — that is what makes it unique.

**Leadership:** It is hard to conceive of the presbyterate apart from a ministry of leadership. Acquiring and developing the skills necessary to carry out a ministry of leadership demands discipline of the first magnitude. Being a pastor in today's church can be a real headache; perhaps that is why the council recommends to priests the asceticism which is proper to the pastor!

Because the typical American parish encompasses many skilled and educated people conscious of their baptismal mission, the presbyter often functions most effectively as one who empowers the community, facilitates and coordinates the ministry of others, and supports individual and communal growth. This demands availability to the needs of others and accountability to the local community and universal church. As public persons, priests are often caught in the middle. They must be faithful to the people they serve, the principles they have learned and the broader church they represent — all at the same time. Yet they are not to be jugglers in a pastoral circus, but proficient leaders in a perilous journey. Vatican II states the idea quite simply:

"Exercising the office of Christ, the shepherd and head, within the limits of the authority which is theirs, they (presbyters) assemble the family of God as a brotherhood fired with a single ideal, and through Christ in the Spirit they lead it to God, the Father" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 28).

An authentic spirituality will empower this mission.

**Participation:** Earlier we discussed the importance of a spirituality of "incarnation" or participation in mirroring the stance which Jesus assumed in his own ministry. Post-conciliar tensions in the church underline the importance of a spirit of participation in shaping an appropriate spirituality. Vatican II insists that priests are uniquely empowered leaders in a

hierarchical community at the same time that it recognizes the fundamental equality of all the people of God. This apparent inconsistency has led many parishes to develop along either hierarchical or congregational lines, or to split into conservative and liberal factions. In more conservative parishes the pastor acts on divine authority alone, at least in theory. In the more liberal, the pastor acts as the representative of the community.

While the council documents may be a source of the dilemma, they also propose a solution. A spirituality which flows from an understanding of the incarnation balances and correlates the liberal and conservative tendencies by orienting presbyters ever more fully toward membership and participation in the life of the community, while affirming their unique identity within it. A good leader is a good member. The more deeply a priest enters into authentic membership in the community, the more effectively will he act *in persona Christi* as servant leader. Just as we must maintain a balance between the divine and human in Christ to profit from his saving presence among us, so we must balance our appreciation of the priest as one who acts "in the person of Christ, the head" and one who acts as a representative of the segment of the church he serves. Even though the analogy limps, the priest who is nourished spiritually by both his sacramental configuration to Christ and his wholehearted insertion into the community he serves will find himself doubly blessed.

A spirituality which takes participation seriously will challenge priests to enter more deeply into the struggle of humanity, both internationally and closer to home. It will influence the way they view society, culture and friendship. It will help them see the relationship between human fellowship and intimacy with the divine. The spirituality proposed by the council teaches priests that they are set apart "in a certain way" in the midst of the people of God, "but this is not in order that they should be separated from that people or from any human being, but that they should be completely consecrated to the task for which God chooses them" (Decree on Ministry and Life of Priests, 3).

**Service:** As noted, servant is a key image for Christ in the Constitution on the Church. This image coupled with the council's insistence on the dynamic involvement of the church in combating the ills of humanity has generated a second tension in contemporary spirituality — Is the spiritual life about this world or the next? Again, parish communities divide along more or less liberal and conservative lines. Some prefer a church centered on this world, radically committed to the needy, the oppressed and human progress. Others prefer to focus on a future world and the interior disciplines of prayer and meditation which point toward heaven.

An authentic spirituality sees social action as a manifestation of the kingdom

already present — therefore empowered even now by union with God. On the other hand, it sees heavenly fulfillment as the flowering of present activity on behalf of those in need. Contact with the transcendent in prayer demands action in time; and action calls the Christian back to prayer. The eucharist is the bridge which unites the future reign of God with activity here and now. In the eucharist God and humanity are joined in the embrace of the One who died in solidarity with the poor, promising to judge the world on the basis of activity in their behalf.

An appropriate spirituality will enable priests to seek a servant role, rather than a special status. Embracing both service to present human need and service to future heavenly fulfillment in one pastoral mission, this spirituality will stand against every temptation to separate them.

**Other essential qualities:** Many other qualities are needed to round out an authentic spirituality. Singleness of heart, the orientation of the total person toward the kingdom of God, is chief among them. The celibate commitment has been an important sign of single-hearted dedication to the kingdom in the Western church. Attention needs to be given to a persuasive articulation of the meaning of celibacy and sexuality, and to a spirituality and way of life which support this charism.

Self-transcendence, that is, fulfillment through nurturing others and in seeking the glory of God, witnesses to a person's trust in the paschal mystery: It is by death to self that one comes to life.

Mutuality in relationships, flowing from participation in the relational life of the Trinity and the communal life of the church, illustrates "grace" and supports a vision of the church as a complex body of many gifts and a communion of saints.

Certainly the great marks of Christian discipleship must permeate a priest's spirituality, love, compassion, forgiveness and hopefulness among them. These qualities mirror the face of God to the world. Without them no one could effectively reflect the image of Christ in the church.

### The Final Goal

The goal of the spirituality flowing from the mission of the presbyter lies outside of the ordained person and is centered on the mission of Christ and the church. It is aimed at a time when the ministry of word and sacraments will cease and the purpose of pastoral guidance will be fulfilled in the kingdom, where the church will come to perfection in Christ. A self-centered or narrowly conceived presbyteral spirituality is a theological contradiction, since a mature priestly identity transcends self and claims Christ and the church as its present preoccupation and its boast at the Lord's coming. ■

