

ECCLESIOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF LAY MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

When referring to the role and function of the laity in the Church, the real problems are not primarily to be found in the area of theoretical ecclesiology. While there is still much room for further in-depth study and theological development here, the foundations on which to build a new understanding are already present. The problem appears to me to be in the area of practical ecclesiology. Not

even the decisive steps taken by Vatican II and the theology that followed upon the Council have been able to change the images, relationships, structures, forms of participation, and sense of responsibility which belong to the old reductionist images of the laity in the Church. The road leading from theological reflection, or even from recent official church documents, to a practical realization in the day to day life of the Church is long and strewn with many obstacles.

Perhaps, then, what we need to do at this point is not to continue to explore new horizons for future development, but rather to look back critically at whatever has happened in this area in the past two decades and invoke our Christian imagination in a revision that will help us move towards the kind of structures and changes which will bring meaningful theory into concrete and dynamic practice.

THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The Term "Laity"

Laity is a term which in spite of its Greek roots (laos: people) still evokes certain negative connotations (lay equals ignorant, non-professional); or, by having to bear the burden of a dualistic understanding of the Church, the word is set in opposition to clergy (lay equals non-clerical, equals non-religious).

The new meaning given by Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law to the term goes far beyond the limited or prejudiced reductions of the past (LG. 31ss; CIC n. 225,1). Here the definition of a lay person is practically identical - and rightly so - with the definition of a Christian. The logical conclusion would argue for the abolition of the laity-clergy duality, and, consequently, doing away with the term "laity" itself. There is, without doubt, a certain awkwardness in trying to speak theologically or canonically about those who constitute the practical totality of the Christian community as if they were members of a group among other groups. Under such circumstances, every area of life or ministry attributed to them as specifically theirs can be justified as such only with great

difficulty and not without leaving many practical as well as theological loopholes. It is indeed unfortunate that the term has been kept; it obscures the very reality that it is supposed to define.

And yet the problem is not merely to exchange one term for another, as this would still leave us in our present situation. The question is how can we move forward with new perspectives and with a more adequate terminology that respond to the self-understanding of the Church and the life of the Church. The inadequacy of the old term becomes even more evident when we take a look at its history.

The History of the Laity: a Brief Sketch

In the beginning there were no laity, only Christians. These disciples of Christ formed themselves into communities in which all not only were equal but they felt equal, praying together, sharing their spiritual gifts and even their material possessions. The Apostles, their successors, the faithful - all of whom had gifts of the Spirit to offer the community - worked together in a variety of ways to help the community and to build up the Church. The important distinction was that which existed between them and the world, between the community of love and the Spirit and the world of sin and the flesh. Among themselves distinctions were only of a pastoral character, of a functional nature, secondary distinctions arising from their commitment to service in its many forms. There was order and leadership. And while there was none of the confusion of a purely disorganized sectarianism, neither was there a separation into groups as if it were possible to have two kinds of Christians.

The times of persecution and martyrdom keep this Church alive. There is now a growing need for further development and even organization, but it is always integrated within a wider sense of community. The community pole of this tension takes the upper hand. People, the faithful, continue to participate fully in all sectors of christian life both within and outside the community structures: liturgy, decision making, ministry...

Enter the Emperor Constantine and with him a totally new age for the Church. The masses convert though at times it is impossible to evaluate the quality and basic core experience of such conversions; with numbers come new demands on the organization of the communities. Church and State initiate new systems of communication and their relationship reaches high levels of intimacy. (Some authors go so far as to speak of assimilation). Soon leadership in the Church is taken by and develops from among those who have higher social status within the society; it is the minority-elite who have access to culture, education, thought... Before long we find these people sharing knowledge, influence, leadership, culture, and becoming a "group apart": the clergy. High Clergy assimilate themselves to High Society. The ordinary Christian now shares the lot of the oppressed, uneducated folk: the plebs (quite different from the Greek laos). Legal developments canonize the distinction: clergy-laity. The community pole of the past gives way to the "hierarchical" pole of the new age.

But such distinctions are not only social and canonical, there is also a religious separation that takes effect. The laity are separated from the altar at worship (even the architecture of the churches changes). Theologians begin to speak of two kinds of Christians (duo genera christianorum) and in the descriptions that follow, the clergy are assigned the "spiritual" while the laity are given the "lower, the material" (spirituales et carnales). In due time a third class (tertium genus) will appear: the monks.

It is during this time that the diaconate is practically abolished as an independent order; the catechumenate disappears; most Christians are baptized as infants and have hardly any opportunity to receive a true initiation into their own faith and Christian commitment. They form the low folk: the plebeian folk. The Church is identified more and more with the "others", the clergy, who assume responsibility for all sacred things. The former sense of charisms and gifts of the Spirit is almost lost and the clergy absorbs practically all functions in the Church, even the most material ones such as financial control.

As the Church in Europe passes through the Middle Ages, this vertical authority structure is consolidated.

The two levels of Christians lead very different lives. Structures become more and more canonical and juridical, and the pyramid image of the Church takes hold of the popular imagination. With the conversion of the barbarians, the Church also becomes more and more feudal, the theological thought continues to move away from ordinary life experience towards a more rational and systematic methodology.

The confrontations of the papacy with the feudal lords bring the above tendencies to a crisis point. Gregory the Great, in order to protect the freedom of the Church, is forced to strengthen the power of the clergy vis-a-vis the laity (in this case the feudal and powerful laity - the ruling minority). The consequences are good for its own time, but the effects on the wider community of non-clerical Christians serve only to reinforce the previous alienation.



The latter part of the Middle Ages consolidates this process. The mendicant orders begin a different process, but soon they, too, are clericalized. The dualism lays hold of common sense. The priest is now the "other Christ" (alter Christus); the laity are only "second class Christians" who live and work on the lower levels of the secular world. (Etienne de Tournai: "Duo populi, duo ordines clericorum et laicorum, duo vitae spiritualis et carnalis").

The Protestant Reformation brings a new impetus to the whole question. Their emphasis on the role of the laity and the priesthood of all Christians radically challenges and even denies the position and role of the clergy. The Catholic response seeks to safeguard important points of christian ministry, but in so doing only serves to underline the dualistic tendencies of the past. Both sides suffer from diminution of imagination and are unable to find a meaningful integration that is both biblical and historical.

The end result of this process can be found in the history of the Church in Europe during the last two centuries. Thought and culture move away from clerical control, and a number of movements develop which share an anticlerical strain. Old tendencies are reinforced and grow stronger; the world of science, politics and culture, the workers as a class, all feel ill at ease within the worldview and clerical language of the times. The consequences were bound to be negative for they had risen from a long history of conflicting events and misunderstandings. It is indeed unfortunate that the times of transition lacked historical perspective and that these developments which had only a limited meaning and significance in one age were accepted as normative in the age that followed. Within the Church, the negative effects are - far-reaching:

- the laity have been separated from the liturgy. The priest offers, the laity are passive on-lookers...
- they are separated from any serious responsibilities in Church matters...
- they are separated from theology and theological teaching...
- they are subordinated to the clergy even in the practical areas of life, including political choices and thinking...
- very often they are treated as minors, ignorant in matters of faith and morals...
- the theology of baptism - consecration, participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ - shifts its attention to religious consecration or ministerial priesthood...
- consequently, theologians and liturgists know very little of world affairs, and secular realities disappear from the christian reflection and spirituality of the communities...
- in ecclesiology we reach a point of excessive concern for the hierarchy ("hierarchology", is Congar's term).

It is in such a fashion that we enter the 20th Century, wherein things begin to move in a different direction. We can summarize these changes in three stages (Provencher). Stage 1, 1920 to 1945: Catholic Action emerges as a response to the increasing lack of clerics. The lay person is invited

to cooperate with the hierarchy. But talk about "promotion of the laity" is still cast in clearly paternalistic and clerical terms.

Stage 2, 1945 to Vatican II: the growth and maturation of important movements - biblical, liturgical, ecumenical... the emergence of the JOC expresses a new reality and new understanding: the Christian call to all. A new theology develops (Y. Congar's) and baptism is put at the center of this new awareness. The Incarnation takes on a new and deeper meaning in this context, but the perspective is still clerical and the clergy-laity tension is still the central issue of ecclesiology.

Stage 3, Vatican II to the present: a new perspective comes into prominence at the time of the Council and continues to develop since then. This is the perspective we will deal with in the next section.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRESENT

It is impossible to do justice in this limited space to the whole field of ecclesiology in relationship to the laity, but we shall try to deal with the major factors affecting our theme under four main headings. In each of these we shall indicate core shifts that have taken place and how they relate to our basic problem.

Change in the global framework

The Second Vatican Council has, without doubt, affected theological reflection in many ways. It is not an exaggeration to say that the most radical change of perspectives has taken place in the area of the Church's self-understanding. It is enough to glance through any of the old textbooks on ecclesiology and compare them with the ecclesiology of Vatican II to see the differences.

We have moved away from an ecclesiology that was self-contained, one mainly concerned with its own existence, its structures, its own mystery. Most of the space in past textbooks was given to either apologetics - a justification

of the Church's present system - or to dogmatic reflections within the framework of very limited perspectives, often determined by historical and scholastic presuppositions. Thus the accent fell heavily on the hierarchy, its justification, its biblical foundations, etc. The mission of the Church suffered from a form of reductionism which ended up in a concentration on the 'spiritual' dimensions of life. This mission was considered to be the proper realm of the clergy, and it was to be carried out "with the help of the laity". Concern for the growth of the Church was important, and "mission" was understood in terms of the conversion of outsiders, best expressed in "foreign missions". Missiology never found a meaningful integration in this ecclesiology, and it was handled as a special discipline. Christian charity, social concern, political involvement and the like, were taken as "overflow", consequences of christian conversion and christian values.

The vision of Vatican II is, happily, wider and richer. It has managed to recover much older traditions and has drawn from such basic sources as the New Testament and the greater history of the Church. In this vision, the mission of the Church is God's plan over the whole world: his Kingdom, a new humanity of justice and love, the restoration of the human person in culture, economics, political realities, work, peace, etc. (LG. 1; 5; GS 1; 11ss; 43ss; 53ss; 63ss; 73ss; 77ss; AA 2; 5; 8; 10). The main concern, therefore, is not the Church itself - important as it may be - but God's Kingdom. The questions that we are expected to confront are not centered in the ecclesiastical structures, but rather in our global mission. The real tensions are not those that arise from the interaction of clergy and laity, but rather those that come from the evangelizing relationship of Church and World. Mission is, then, essential and constitutive of the life of the Church and it is concerned with the whole of human affairs: its sufferings, fears and hopes (GS 1). It is a mission carried out by all Christians (LG 9; 17; 33; 38; GS 1; 11; 43... AA1;2; 5). We can even say that the mission of the Church is the responsibility of the whole christian community - with the help of the clergy, and not the other way around. And it is aimed not at foreign missions alone but at the ongoing conversion of all, inside and outside. Charity, social concern, involvement in the earthly affairs of

humanity to effect a more just and peaceful society in the world are not the "overflow" of christian life, but its bread and butter, the essence of concrete and historical christian existence in faith.

What follows are some important corollaries that can be drawn from this Vatican shift:

- (1) A meaningful theology of the laity has to begin with a reframing of the theology of the Church in global terms. We have to resuscitate what Congar has called a "total ecclesiology". This ecclesiology has as its starting point the Church as the community of ALL Christians. It is they who are the subject of the mission of the Church. Consequently, the final point, the aim of this mission, is the Kingdom of God, of which the Church is a seed and a beginning, a presence and a prophecy. And the middle point is precisely the total ministeriality of Christians. (J.M. de Mesa deals insightfully with this subject in his The Participation of Lay Men and Women in the Decisions of the Church; Diwa 5:1980)
- (2) The place of being, the existential ground for the Church, is the world. The world is "the primary field" of the Church's mission.
- (3) The concrete expression of the mission of the Church is the proclamation and execution of the Word of God and His plan of salvation in this concrete world. It refers the Church to the transformation of hearts, minds, communities, peoples, cultures, and all other human realms of life and conviviality.
- (4) The main agents of this mission are the baptized Christians - all the believers in Christ without exception (LG 39-42). The christian vocation has given all believers a common task and a full participation in the Church's mission. It is essential to the life of the Church that all become part of the apostolate (AA 1).

- (5) It is in this context that all other distinctions within the Church have to be viewed - clergy, hierarchy, special ministries, etc. These distinctions are absolutely necessary and unavoidable, but they always have to be considered as "ulterior" "secondary", "pastoral", "functional", "subordinated to the good of the Church and the Kingdom of God". (It should be noted here that while theological treatises and even Canon Law often give more space and attention to these subsidiary distinctions, it does not mean that they are more important, but rather that they need to be protected and justified, precisely because of their derivative nature and secondary position).
- (6) This means that there is nothing really specific to the "laity" since they do not comprise a special group within the Christian community. It is also inadequate to assign to them "the temporal order".

From Vatican II's statements on the Church and the World (Gaudium et Spes) and the Mission of the Church (Lumen Gentium: Apostolica Actuositatem ...) it is clear that the living and evangelical concern for the world and its realities belongs to the whole community. It is at a different level of life and reflection that specific roles, vocations, and services will develop. The concrete experience, the living environment, the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit, and the needs of the community are just some of the factors that will determine differences, rather than theoretical considerations that do not respond to reality.

- (7) In this sense we can say that all areas of Christian life and expression, from liturgy to political involvement, belong to the "laity". The question will be what roles, within this Christian life and involvement, will be assigned to those special ministers that historically have come to be called "clergy". It was from within the community and as a service to its needs that these roles originally developed, and it is in this context that they should continue to develop.

A Change of Images

We have seen that global perspectives can be more far-reaching than particular ideas, no matter how new these ideas may be. Something similar can be said about the power of images. Images and symbols have the power to relate a community to the core experience of their faith in a much more direct and effective way than can ideas or doctrines (unless we are dealing with those doctrines that are basically "image-evoking" rather than conceptual). We will never find in the sacred books of any religion philosophical or theological definitions of their deeper realities. We will more often than not be confronted with the use of images and symbols in order to reach those realities. Images and symbols are able to affect the deeper perception of faith as they engage the religious feelings of a person and direct it accordingly. The reality of the Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus is never arrived at with conceptual precision; rather, it reveals itself through the richness of image, drama, symbol and commitment; it takes the form of parable, of miracles, of poetry, and song.

The history of ecclesiology supports the general observation that different times and ages in the Church have produced different images to carry and support, communicate and strengthen the theological conceptions of the moment. The variety of images taken from the Old Testament have always been a rich resource for pastoral preaching and even for papal documents. The fact that symbols and images are themselves contingent and ambiguous has made it also evident that no one single image can encapsulate the full meaning of ecclesiology. One has only to glance at the variety of symbols



and the fluctuations to be found in their use throughout history to illustrate this point. And yet we find at different times and places "dominant" images which support particular accents in the self-understanding of the Church.

Vatican II follows this history of image-awareness, specifically in the Constitution on the Church where it deals with these images of the Church explicitly and at some length. Number 6 of the Constitution recounts some of those images taken from very old traditions, while number 7 develops further the more recently developed image of the Church as the Body of Christ. It is not my purpose to dwell on these images here, but rather to draw attention to those images (at times presented as concepts but to my mind having great "imagining" power) which indicate certain changes in emphasis and which, subsequently, theology has developed with particular interest both for their theological import and their inspirational value for the christian life.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The entire second chapter of the Constitution is dedicated to the image of the Church as the People of God. The history of its insertion at this point is in itself an indication of the importance of such a decision. It offers a global orientation to the whole ecclesiology of the council. Nor is it a decorative image; rather, it is a normative choice, and it precedes significantly all concrete reflections on the hierarchy and other distinctions.

The image of the People of God replaces other images that were taken as almost normative before the Council. One such image was that of the Perfect Society, which had such an influence on the ecclesiology found in older textbooks. Needless to say new images do not destroy or even drive into exile older ones, but they do modify the accents and complement certain dimensions that previously were not so well integrated. In the old Perfect Society image, structure and organization were primary; it summed up a hierarchial ecclesiology. Order and continuity, authority and leadership, direction and obedience, were its common subjects. The laity were easily assimilated into the masses of ordinary citizens of a secular state: not much to say,

not much to do, just invited over and over again to "pray and obey"(a Vatican formula at the beginning of this century to which popular irony added "and pay").

In contrast to this, the image of the People of God brings out other points of emphasis. It evokes the life of a whole community as a first horizon of awareness and self-understanding. It is an image of participation and sharing in a common dignity and responsibility, of an identity rooted in a common history and call. It means flow, growth, history, creativity, development. The whole emerges as primary and it gives a framework for the meaningful and consistent integration of ministry, leadership and all other necessary functions. Order and organization are present but secondary to the life of the whole people. The change of images does not destroy or reduce the reality of the Church, it re-orders it according to a new perspective (LG 10-17; 32-33).

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION

The image of the Church as a Communion is not treated by the Council as explicitly as that of the People of God; rather, it accompanies other images and is always present to qualify and modify different statements of the Council. It expresses the long overdue resuscitation of the community dimension so essential to the Church and which filled the imagination of the early christian communities. It serves also to compensate for a certain onesidedness in images of the Church-as-hierarchy that were so strong in previous decades.

In an hierarchical Church image one could find many essential and necessary elements of the christian tradition, but its emphasis on order and submission made integration rather difficult. The community as flock tended to be taken too literally. (The original accent of the gospel image of the Good Shepherd, a christological image, shifted to the flock, a flock of unthinking, submissive, gregarious sheep). The laity were viewed as second class citizens in need of promotion to a higher status; they could become "cooperators with the hierarchy", to use a phrase made popular during the early stages of the Catholic Action movement. The distinction between the "teaching Church"

(ecclesia docens) and the "listening Church" (ecclesia discens) was pushed to the extreme and even, at times, to the ludicrous.

The Church as Communion is an image that restores the centrality of the community united and incorporated in Christ directly and without mediators. The laity have full membership status and participate completely and without reservation in the mission of Christ, which is the mission of the whole Church. In a Church that is a communion, all learn, all share, all teach. There are various responsibilities and differing ministries which are, naturally enough, structured according to hierarchical patterns. But this structuring is to be done in a spirit of communion rather than one of domination. Leadership and subsidiarity, specific ministries and co-responsibility go hand in hand. (LG 18-26; 37; GS 23ss; AA 3)

THE CHURCH AS SACRAMENT OF SALVATION

The present stress in ecclesiology is on the sacramentality of the Church, and this concept-image of Church as Sacrament of Salvation can be considered as one of the most theologically inspiring and productive images of pre- and post-Vatican II theology. By taking it to itself and making it its very own, the Council has enriched its ecclesiology and offered us another image-key to our renewed understanding of the Church.

We are all familiar with that much used and abused old aphorism: extra Ecclesiam nulla salus. Leaving aside for the moment the original context from which it emerged and how most of the time it has been misused by being quoted in contexts far removed from the original, we still must acknowledge the effect it has had on the image of the Church. It has reinforced an image of the Church as the place (ship-ark - house...) of salvation. This place was often represented, at least in popular literature, as exclusive, limited, and guaranteed. Allowing some opening for exceptions, as in the case of baptism of desire, salvation was very much linked to church-belonging in simple and straightforward terms. The Kingdom of God and the Church were one and the same reality, although the Kingdom did retain its

eschatological dimension, invisible in its fullness. The life of this Church was rightfully expressed in Word and Sacrament; however, the understanding of the sacraments was rather reductionist, and the sacraments were almost entirely in the hands of the clergy. In the course of history the relationship of the sacraments to life, to the world, to growth, had become blurred and lost much of their power to contribute to the depth experiences and life possibilities which they possess by their very nature.

To speak of the Church as Sacrament is to bring a totally new world of meaning and a new depth of understanding to the mystery of the Church. The Kingdom of God once again assumes the widest of possible horizons, and the Church is thereby more enriched. The resurrected, cosmic Christ returns to reclaim the centre of the community's faith awareness, and "belonging" is again made part of God's mysterious ways, beyond all possibility of human control or guarantees given on purely human terms. The Kingdom is greater than the reality of the Church; rather, in its eschatological dimension, the Kingdom is a constant challenge to the Church to grow and become more authentic as it moves through history. It is the whole life of individual Christians and christian communities that is now expressed as "sacramental", as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. The reduction of christian existence to one or other of its many dimensions - faith or deeds, orthodoxy or moral behaviour - is no longer possible where life is taken in as a whole. The sacramentality of the Church offers new possibilities for the total integration of christian life (far removed from the earlier distinctions of clergy-religious and laity), and, as we shall see later, it gives new width and breadth to the theology and reality of the sacraments.

THE SERVANT CHURCH

We cannot claim that the image of the Servant Church is something new or a product of Vatican II for it is in fact one of the oldest and deepest images to be found in biblical literature. What is new, however, is the central place the image now holds in the present self-awareness of the Church. Vatican II spends little time on developing it. In the Constitution on the Church it appears as self-

evident, obvious, and as natural as following the Servant Messiah in poverty and persecution (LG 8). And yet this image well may be the crucial one for the renewal of the whole Church, and the one that takes us deepest into the mystery of the Church as the historical mirror of the mystery of Christ himself.

We are not quite used to viewing ourselves as a "Servant Church". While we all know a good number of Christians who are truly servants of their fellow human beings, these individuals hardly reflect the more common patterns of Church life. This is why when a Mother Teresa emerges, we hail her as a Saint - one not like the rest of us. We on the other hand (in good post-Constantinian fashion) are assimilated to the powerful, the scholarly, the educated elite, or at least to the middle class... We are in the habit of projecting images of power and leadership, of unilateral teaching and command (it is secondary as to whether this takes place at the highest or the lowest levels of Church life). In our preaching and teaching we have insisted on our possession of the Truth, and we have offered images of self-sufficiency with regard to salvation, seeming to imply that there was little we could learn from other traditions, cultures, religions... or ideologies.

It is already clear that much in this attitude has changed, even at the more visible levels of authority. Our present insistence on the poor and the weak, the needy and the voiceless, the oppressed and the refugee as the central concern of the Church indicates a new vision of self. With it comes a willingness to dialogue in order to learn, to grow, to discover hidden (heretofore ignored) treasures of humanity and even of Christ (as John Paul II has repeatedly stated). The fact that so many religious groups, both those of "consecrated persons" and of professionals, workers, youth, and others are making definite choices for poverty, simplicity, sharing, and service illustrates a new consciousness of what it means to be a Christian - it is a new imaging of ourselves as Church of Christ. The image was there to be found all along in the Gospels. Now the Church has taken it up to serve as a leading image for a whole new process of renewal, and at its heart we find great possibilities for a new positioning and integration of Christian life that can take us far beyond the

old relationships based on clergy-laity polarities. Service as a dominant image leads to mutuality, exchange, ministry in all areas of life...a new and broader basis for global participation in the life of the Church.

A number of corollaries flow from the above:

1. We need to reconsider christian life in light of those images underscored by Vatican II.
2. We have to learn how to bring out in our catechesis - this new awareness that accompanies such images, to search out those symbols, slogans, experiences, etc. that can bring these images to the attention of the believing imagination of the community.
3. In order to avoid the onesided interpretations which might once again create an imbalance in our ecclesiology, we need to keep the above four images of the Church (and other important images such as the Body of Christ) in a complementary relationship with each other.
4. We will have to keep searching the Scriptures for models, especially Christ-models, that will help us to explain and give content to these images in Gospel terms.
5. We need, finally, to reconsider Church structures in the same light. The implications of the changes in our images are concrete and far-reaching. We shall be required to apply them courageously if we are to respond to the challenge of the Council. For instance, we will have to develop structures that will provide for:
 - full participation in the Church of all its members
 - co-responsibility that parallels the Council's principle of collegiality
 - subsidiarity
 - dialogue on all levels
 - ministeriality
 - human rights within the Church

- the freedom and dignity for all
- the role and position of women

It is the Council itself that speaks in clear terms of this need and spells out in the concrete some of these necessary structural changes. (Lumen Gentium n.37).

THE RECOVERY OF A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY



In the pre-conciliar theology of the last few centuries, ecclesiology was predominantly christological. It developed dimensions of christology in historical and hierarchical terms. The Incarnation of the Son in history with theological attention on the life of Jesus kept alive a keen sense of the historical justifications for the Church's existence and its structures.

It gave to them a deep meaning and served an important purpose. The hierarchy was a visible historical continuation of the Body of Christ, who constituted its headship and fullness. This presence of Christ in special ministers was further underlined by the whole question of apostolic succession and its related issues. The theology and spirituality of the clergy absorbed much of the christological emphasis and certainly created for itself a very strong base.

The present Church has developed this christology and enriched it in the course of the last decades through continual research of extraordinary and ever deepening dimensions, into biblical studies, hermeneutics, the historical, liturgical and ecumenical sciences as well as in the development of new perspectives in spirituality. All of this has brought forth a renewal in which the Holy Trinity continues to emerge as the horizon for the deepest and most adequate perception of life and Church. A trinitarian ecclesiology is now in the making which alone is

capable of serving to bring about the much needed emergence of a total ecclesiology.

Come Holy Spirit

The reintegration of christian awareness within the life of the Holy Spirit has made great progress in our contemporary Church, and yet we have to acknowledge that it is still in its initial stages. Vatican II itself was clearly wanting in this respect and it is only recently that certain movements within the Church and a refocused theological literature have paid the Spirit the kind of indepth attention that is and will be necessary for a complete ecclesiology. It is unfortunate that because of certain historical situations which affected the way the church developed, we had all lost sight of that sense of the Spirit which dominated christian awareness for many centuries.

To acquire such an ecclesiology, we will have to recover a theology of christian life and community that is permeated by the Spirit. Vatican II in this respect reaffirms something which was heard (and soon forgotten) at the Council of Trent: that the Spirit lives in the Church and in the hearts of all of the faithful (LG 4). This is a theology which once again places the faithful at the center of the Church's life; all christians possess the Spirit and can be guided by Him. Not only are they guided by the Spirit but their whole relationship to reality and to God is His work.

This awareness of the Spirit, then, can bring back to christian life in the world that sense of spiritual discernment which has been the patrimony of the christian community for centuries. The spirituality of christian life in the midst of secular realities is one of a deep sense for and discernment of the life and the signs of the Spirit. (LG 4; 7; 9).

The Spirit, continues Vatican II, offers gifts of every kind to all christians and enables all to participate creatively and positively in the apostolic mission of the Church (LG 4; AA 3). This theology of gifts and charisms has also to become an integral part of any ecclesiology of the Spirit. Such a theology will help us to reach beyond

the limited enclosures in which we have de facto confined the sacraments and this will open up for us wider possibilities of present sacramental limitations. And quite possibly the sacrament which will gain most from this process will be the sacrament of Confirmation.

The prophetic mission of all Christians to which we made reference earlier will also be an important part of an ecclesiology of the Spirit.

This recovery of a theology of the Third Person of the Trinity can in time become the strongest of supports for the total ecclesiology hinted at above, as well as for those images underscored by contemporary theology. It will give new impulse to an urgently needed theological reflection on secular realities, which have remained for so long alien to the theological quest: politics, work, economics, the social order, etc.

A Pneumatic Christology

The present efforts to rewrite christology are well known. During the last decade we have seen some excellent christologies based on a reconsideration of original sources and traditional approaches. These christologies seek to reformulate the Christian mystery in new terms or categories. The Trinitarian perspective, however, has been comparatively slow in emerging, but it, too, has brought forth much fruit and will continue to bear more. One of these is the integration of pneumatology and christology. And this from two different perspectives.

On the one hand, we have a return to the Jesus of history, to the work of the Spirit in Jesus of Nazareth as He went about doing good and preaching the advent of the Kingdom of God. This approach searches for the ways in which the Spirit directed the life, the heart, the words of Jesus. It educates the christian community to an ongoing contemplation of Jesus, with the same Spirit molding us in the pattern of the Master. It is a christology of Christ as Sacrament of the Father, of the Spirit of God alive in Jesus as living and loving compassion for the sick, the poor, the little ones, the oppressed, and voiceless. It is a christology of discipleship in its concern for

others - the christology of Luke-Acts, in its care for the least of society. It is a christology that touches christian life in its day to day secular realities as well as in its deepest spiritual recesses. It is a christology that happens now in the discernment process to achieve a better society and better human relationships, to work for peace and justice. It is the christology of a Church in the World.

On the other hand, the pneumatic dimension of Christ moves us in the direction of the whole universe. The resurrected Christ, who has been transformed into the Christ of cosmic dimensions and who lives as Spirit in the heart of reality, is the Christ that is present to the Church and all its members. In this sense pneumatic christology is universalistic, a christology of the nations, of cultures, and of histories. It transcends all and yet is present in all. The pneumatic dimension of Christ is that goal which the whole of creation strives for with unceasing groaning (Rom. 8). This is the kind of Christology that can support and give depth to the above images and perspectives.

The Wider Horizons of God the Father

The First Person of the Holy Trinity, the ever present Source and Origin of life and love, the Father of Jesus and the Sender of the Spirit, is possibly the easiest to mention and the most difficult to grasp. The Father is the Mystery, the God that "no one has ever seen" (John 1; 1 Jn 4), the "Beginning and the End", out of reach, beyond all human capacity. And yet He is the Source of the Church, which is born as part of his eternal plan of salvation for the whole world. Both the Constitution of the Church and the Decree on Missionary Activity begin with God the Father and His Mystery (LG 2; AG 2). And yet our ecclesiology has not been very explicit about its relationship to the Father.

It is not difficult to guess why. The Father is Mystery itself. His Kingdom cannot be described; his Plans are inscrutable; his Name is a Name to be pronounced with fear and reverence; there is no definition of the Father.

We refer to Him as do the Scriptures in symbol and silence, in prayer and hope. And it is because of this that the Father cannot be easily integrated into an ecclesiology. He is the Source and Fountain of the Church and all we confess in the Church; and yet, in his Mystery, He is the one to challenge continuously the being of the Church and all claims that would set limits to reality or faith. The hermeneutics of faith and conversion in the face of the Father's Mystery necessarily affect the self-understanding of the Church and the meaning of belonging to it. He sustains the institutions of the Church and at the same time softens all our claims at absolute and definitive structures. Jesus showed the way of relativization in the name of God's life: the Sabbath, Fasting, the Law, the Temple...

Ecclesiology has to restore to new vigour this eschatological depth and height of the Father: a radical surrender to the Mysterious at the heart of faith and at the heart of the common journey in Christ. This surrender makes us humble believers, invites us to enter willingly into all meaningful dialogue with others, and challenges us to ongoing conversion. The Mystery of the Father is the most radical support of our human freedom, the most acceptable justification of pluralism, and the final insight into Silence. Even the Church has to keep silence in His Presence. Perhaps it is just this integration of silence into ecclesiology that may give a fuller voice to the majority of believers. The Mystery of the Father brings forth most poignantly our radical equality.

The importance of a Trinitarian ecclesiology cannot be exaggerated. It is in the depth of the Christian Mystery that our own self-understanding can take on new meaning and life.

Thus, the Trinity can offer the best and broadest basis for the integration of all the dimensions that affect Christian life in the Church: involvement in the world and its transformation, ongoing discernment in society and secular affairs, ministeriality of life and faith, sense of mystery and respect for persons, dialogue and pluralism, and the radical equality of all christians in the Church.

The Trinity can also be the best support for the images received from and developed around Vatican II: the people of God that walk in the Spirit, the communion of believers who model their life on the very reality of Trinitarian relationships, the sacramental presence of a living mystery in the concrete life of people, the self-emptying of God Himself in Christ as the model for all forms of servant life in the Church.

The Trinity finally offers us the broadest perspectives for a radical reconsideration of the mission of the Church. This is exactly what Vatican II does in the Decree Ad Gentes. It is God Himself in His Trinitarian mystery that offers us the framework for the Church and everything in it.

RENEWAL IN SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

General Considerations

Since we cannot hope to do justice here to the whole of sacramental theology as it is now developing in the Church, we shall limit ourselves to mentioning some of the major principles that, to my mind, are of special importance for an ecclesiology consonant with our discussion. We start with some corollaries, which will have to await another occasion for a more detailed analysis.

The first is that all sacraments are communal expressions and celebrations of the christian mystery. The reality contained in this mystery is always greater, deeper, and wider than that which the sacrament is capable of expressing. No sacrament, therefore, can totally absorb or exhaust the possibilities inherent in the fullness of christian life. Neither can any sacramental ministry monopolize the content of the sacrament itself nor the wider mission that every sacrament expresses in symbol and prayer.

It will help us to recall here the three levels of sacramental reality. First, we have the very reality to which the sacrament points and which is made present in its celebration: the mystery of God in Christ, the new life that is always expressed and communicated, the personal,

transforming process beyond ourselves that the sacrament provokes and produces. This reality is wider, deeper, more extensive and more durable than the sacrament itself. It is God's action and work in faith and in people, and this can never be reduced or abbreviated. It precedes and follows all sacramental expression.

On a second level, we have the celebrating community of faith. The life of the Church is the basic, fundamental Sacrament of God's grace. What the celebration expresses is first of all a reality of life. The whole Church is involved in living out the mystery of Christ. It is a form of a wider res et sacramentum: the community that makes the sacraments more credible. Here all Christians are active agents of grace. Even when the celebration cannot take place, grace is still active in the same direction and with the same power of the Spirit expressed in the sacrament. It is from the heart and life of this community that the sacraments emerge and where the work of Christ takes place. The Church-Sacrament expresses itself in all the sacraments. It is the Spirit of Christ in the Church that makes it creative and sacramental; and it is here again that life is prior to celebration. Turning to Christ and encountering Him in faith is the condition for all sacramental meaning.

The third level is the celebration itself: sacramentum tantum. There is no need to expand on this, for the importance and depth of sacramental celebration is more than obvious and not now in question. What I would like to underline is the fact that this celebration requires the integration of all three levels in order to be fully operative. While the ex opere operato principle does give us a valid, if minimal, basis, for it is Christ who responds to those who go to Him in faith, it is certainly not enough in itself to express the fullness of a sacrament. Sacraments are ecclesiological realities and they need the consistency of meaning and life.

It is this reconsideration of the fuller understanding of the sacraments that is affecting ecclesiology today. Sacramental ecclesiology is not the ecclesiology of conditions and ministers, of powers and administration; it is

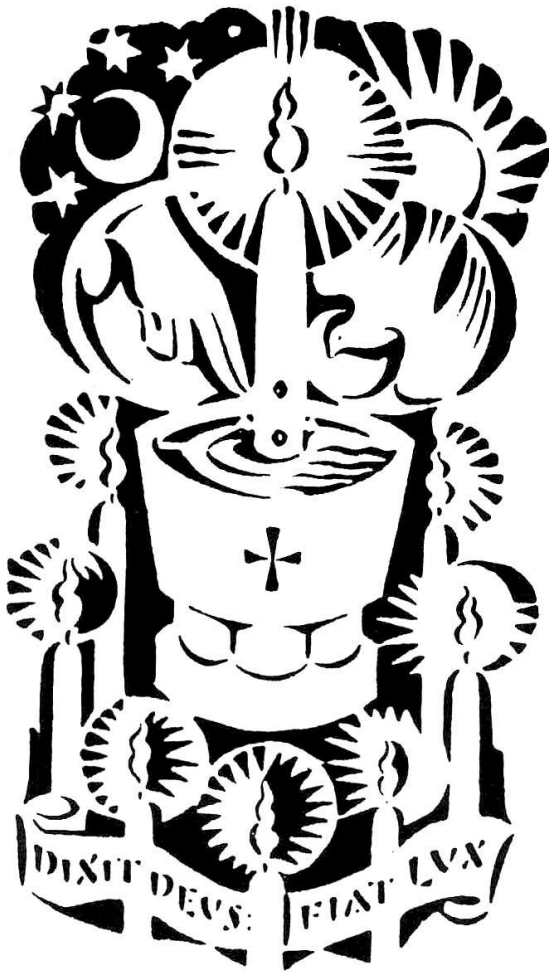
an ecclesiology of participation and life, where the priorities are the whole community and its growth in Christ, its service to the world, and its carrying out of mission.. nourished and developed in an ongoing sacramental celebration. (See LG 11; 33; SC 27; 48-49; 59...).

Some Particular Sacraments

In order not to remain on the level of generalities, it might be helpful to make a quick review of some theological reflections that are considered today to be almost common sense when dealing with the theology of the "laity" in the Church.

BAPTISM: The insistence of theologians on the importance of this sacrament and its theology, and the evidence we have from New Testament sources

is overwhelming. The fact that for many centuries in the West, baptism virtually meant infant baptism and practically everywhere the centrality of the adult catechumenate had been lost, blurred the central importance of this sacrament for the whole life of the Church. The reduction of meaning and of spirituality, which took place as a consequence, is still something for which we mourn and from which we have not yet recovered.



Moreover, most of the positive elements of the theology of baptism have been taken away and given over to the theology of religious life, to the spirituality of the priesthood, etc... Even some recent ecclesiastical documents reflect this practical depreciation of baptism

to the advantage of other expressions of christian life.

Present theology, following the inspiration of Vatican II (LG 7; 10...) is bringing to light the old Pauline concept of baptism as full participation and incorporation into Christ and His life; Baptism makes us His Body, invites us to take up his Mission, makes us members of his Church. Baptism is a consecration to Christ, a way of life, a new being. Through Baptism we are full participants in Christ's royal, prophetic and priestly life and ministry (LG 34-36). And all this before any consideration of special ministries, hierarchy, or other pastoral distinctions. The importance of this recovery of old theological traditions for the ministry of all Christian is obvious.

It is necessary to insert a word here about the priestly vocation of all Christians. Quite often we see it presented as a rather tame justification for lay participation in worship, especially the Eucharist. But the New Testament terms are far richer. Priesthood has to do with the transformation of the world. Whether conceived primarily in liturgical terms or in life terms, it is always part of a whole process of transformation, a transformation of people, of relationships, of the world, and of society. The "priest" can be understood in terms of three functions: mediation, consecration, and sacrifice. When considering these functions in the context of Christian life initiated in baptism, we can redefine them in the very terms in which christian life takes place and in the context in which it develops. The believer is a mediator in the transformation of the world, society, human and social relationships; it is in his so called "secular" tasks that he lives in a priestly manner; it is in the quality and direction of the transformation to which he contributes that the priestly quality of his life will be defined or considered wanting. Baptism itself is his consecration to Christ, to His Kingdom, to His values and vision. And it is in the offering of his life, his family, work, research, etc... that he offers continually real and spiritual sacrifices. For Paul the sacrifice does not happen in a moment of worship alone, it fills the whole of christian existence (Rom. 12...).

CONFIRMATION: We do not need here to repeat what

has been said above when speaking of the Holy Spirit. It suffices to recall that this is the sacrament which expresses the fullness of christian life - baptismal life - by the power of the Spirit. The sacrament of the gift of the Spirit is the basis and essence of life (LG 11), the origin of the christian vocation to the apostolate (AA 3). The priesthood we spoke about above can take place only with the power and guidance, in the discernment and light of the Spirit living within the heart of the believer and the community. Christian life is one of ongoing crisis and struggle. Decision making is part of growing in freedom and responsibility. Confirmation is the sacrament - grace and memory united - that gives direction to this faith-growth in Christ, and is the sacrament that will be the foundation for "lay" ministry, leadership, participation, corresponsibility, etc... in the Church.

EUCCHARIST: The sheer greatness and depth of this sacrament almost compels us to pass over it in awesome silence. There is no dimension of human life and faith existence that is not touched and nourished by it. Like all other sacraments, it is directly expressive of the life of Christ in the community, and it is the community's source of inspiration. Ecclesiology is the theology of the Eucharist. Christian life is, consequently, the unfolding of the Eucharistic mystery. The celebration becomes the mandala - the deposit of christian memories - for the living community: presence and transformation, reconciliation and hope, past and future, depth and thanksgiving, sacrifice and new life, conversion and sharing, prayer and social justice. And because of all this, we can continue to ask ourselves how the Eucharist can affect our understanding of the Church and how the real sacrificial eucharistic life of the faithful should be expressed more fully in structures, celebrations, and ministry.

THE OTHER SACRAMENTS: The other sacraments follow a similar pattern of reflection, which we need not spell out here. What matters is not the concrete details, but the basic relationship of sacrament

and life, of celebrations and ecclesiology, of participation in the mission of the Church and its expression in liturgy. In this area we still have a long way to go...a way open to all sorts of possibilities, a truly exciting and challenging road ahead.

At this point may we be allowed to draw from the above some tentative corollaries?

- 1) A new understanding of the sacraments which recovers our oldest and richest traditions helps us to put the global reality of the Church, its mission and the whole christian community of the faithful at the center of our ecclesiology and sacramental life. The mystery and reality expressed in the sacraments are greater than the sacramental expression itself. This reality affects all Christians and involves them actively and radically.
- 2) The question of leadership, both within and outside its liturgical expression, comes only as a secondary consideration, and it develops from the life of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit.
- 3) The choice of leadership (who is to be the leader) is, then, a secondary question, and the criteria for such a choice should follow the principles that christian tradition has traced: the gift of the Spirit, the discernment of the communities, the apostolic communion, etc...
- 4) One particular form of leadership will have liturgical connotations and functions, and that is absolutely necessary. But this does not mean that liturgical leadership also entails administrative roles or the final weight in decision making processes.
- 5) The restrictions and regulations that accompany all forms of community celebrations should be determined according to the needs of the community - local or universal - as each case requires. These restrictions in celebration do not imply similar restrictions in the reality of the Church

and God's mystery of grace, for these can never be restricted by human determination. In this context, the interaction between special ministers and the wider community always has to be reconsidered with a view towards a better integration and more creative corresponsibility.

CONCLUSION

The question of lay leadership has taken us beyond itself into a global reconsideration of our ecclesiology. In this reflection we have seen that a meaningful theology of the Church can re-emerge and bring light to bear on our questions. It is with such deeper insights and broader perspectives that present Church realities can be faced without fear of running down blind alleys or into a labyrinth of false or misleading dilemmas.

History teaches us to relativize structures and even terminology. A number of theologians and church people think that the time has come when the term "laity" should be abolished and replaced with terms that express, better the reality of the Church while at the same time avoid connotations of past dualism.

The change of perspectives of Vatican II have brought us face to face with the mission of the Church in its broadest New Testament terms. The old tensions between clergy and laity, which have only served to foster a spirit of alienation or mild paternalism, must dissolve before a new integration based on total participation and corresponsibility in mission with the world as mission's primary field.

The theology of the Trinity broadens and deepens this perspective to incredible dimensions and offers us new horizons of freedom, ministry, and fullness that cannot emerge from other limited perspectives.

The recovery of old christian images for the Church serves the important purpose of challenging our imagination and reorienting our ecclesiology towards new structures, relationships, and attitudes.

New sacramental perspectives can enrich this ecclesio-

logy and nourish our full commitment to mission, without the restrictions and limitations that past misunderstandings might have brought to faith, life, and worship.

Perhaps the tasks that lie ahead are too many to face all at once. How to make this understanding of the Church acceptable to the majority of christians, will be a crucial question. How to liberate ourselves from old, comfortable, "common sense" dualisms will be another. How to re-create all our relationships in the Church in terms of dialogue, respect, corresponsibility, etc, will be the acid test for our christian insights.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I ask the hospitality of your periodical to publicly dissent from the inappropriateness of the reference made to the Holy Family in the article of Fr. Louis Gendron, "The One-Child Family", TRIPOD #30.

Not only sound biblical exegesis but sheer common sense should have told Fr. Gendron that the perpetual virginity of Our Lady and the Only-Sonship of Our Lord do not lend the slightest support to his contentions.

Therefore, while I accept Fr. Gendron's freedom to support the one-child family as much as he likes, may I kindly ask him to leave the Holy Family out of it?

Thanking you in advance, I am

Your gratefully,

Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti