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## Introduction

Among the many signs of change in church life since Vatican II, one of the most evident and most praised has been the emergence of what is now called "ecclesial lay ministry"; that is, the important role played by the many lay men and women in full and part time work within church institutions. This issue of *New Theology Review* explores not so much the facts of that development but the many questions which we as a Church are only beginning to address as the welcome change occurs. Our authors are individuals who have been deeply involved in the emergence of ecclesial lay ministry.

In our opening article Zeni Fox, who has been tracking and commenting upon this exciting trend in ministry for years, offers us her thoughts on one important dimension of lay men and women in ministry, their sense of vocation. Dr. Fox gives us a positive view of the trend even as she raises up a number of unresolved questions for the future.

Brid Long, another scholar who has been deeply involved in the expanding category of ecclesial ministry, gives us an informed reflection on the impact that the new ministers are having on parish life. After surveying the landscape of parish life today she discusses the formation processes for training ecclesial lay ministers and suggests a useful agenda for securing the future advancement of the new generation of ministers. Our third major article on the theme by Audrey Brosnan examines the often difficult discernment process which lay people undergo in deciding about the commitment to ecclesial lay ministry. The practical problems which many people face in making their choice is an important topic for future personnel issues with the Church.

Two shorter but insightful essays wrap up our treatment of the theme. Margaret Costello and Ana Villamil discuss the matter of formal commissioning or recognition of the new ministers within the life of the community. Robert Evans reflects upon the importance of developing a style and structure for a spirituality to support ecclesial lay ministers. The voice of experience which comes through these brief essays provokes deeper thought than we as a religious community have given to these questions.

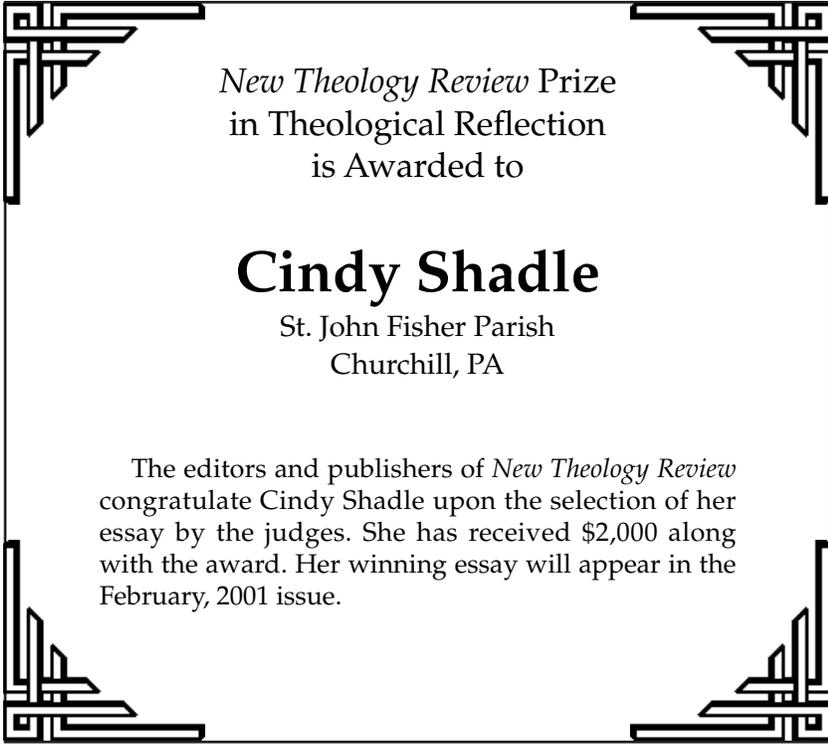
In his encyclical *Ut unum sint* John Paul II acknowledged that the Petrine ministry was itself one of the obstacles to fuller communion with other churches. He invited greater scholarly and ecumenical conversation on the role of the papacy in the Church. Since then a number of fine studies by Catholics and Protestants have taken up the invitation. Our readers will recall that in the August issue John Linnan provided one assessment of the papacy and in this issue Richard Gaillardetz offers

#### 4 *Introduction*

a second analysis of the topic with specific reference to how John Paul II has exercised his ministry.

Our columns and book reviews fill out this issue with news of interesting ideas, trends, and books which affect our ministries, lay or clerical. May the coming season of Advent be a new beginning for us all as we strive to renew a Church which welcomes the coming of our God.

With this fourth issue of volume 13 our associate editor Edward Foley completes his time on the editorial board of the journal. We thank Ed for his dedicated service, creative ideas and hard work in producing the last twenty issues of *New Theology Review*. And we wish him well in his role on the faculty of the Catholic Theological Union and in all his future endeavors.



*New Theology Review* Prize  
in Theological Reflection  
is Awarded to

**Cindy Shadle**

St. John Fisher Parish  
Churchill, PA

The editors and publishers of *New Theology Review* congratulate Cindy Shadle upon the selection of her essay by the judges. She has received \$2,000 along with the award. Her winning essay will appear in the February, 2001 issue.

## *Call for Submissions!*

### **THE NEW THEOLOGY REVIEW PRIZE IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

ENCOURAGING NEW IDEAS, NEW VOICES, AND SKILLFUL MINISTRY

#### *The Prize*

The publisher and editors of *New Theology Review* have instituted the **NTR Prize in Theological Reflection** to honor the best new article in theology on pastoral ministry. Each year the winning essay is published in *New Theology Review* and along with the award the author will receive \$2,000.

#### *The Criteria*

All submitted articles should focus on some aspect of pastoral ministry relevant to the audience of *New Theology Review*, i.e., Catholics of the United States and Canada. Submissions must be original work, not previously published, accessible to professional pastoral ministers, lay and ordained, provide new insight or synthesis of a pressing pastoral issue, and contribute to the ongoing theological reflection of pastoral ministers.

#### *The Judges*

Submissions will be evaluated by a panel of distinguished authors who are expert in theological reflection on ministry. Thomas Groome of Boston College, Robert Kinast of the Center for Theological Reflection and Evelyn Whitehead of Whitehead Associates will serve as judges for the prize.

*The Rules*

All entries are due by May 1, 2001. The winner will be announced September 15, 2001.

Essays should be submitted in English, accompanied by a cover page with author information (name, mailing address, phone number[s], institutional affiliation [if any], etc.) and statement of intent that the essay is submitted in the contest. Essays should be no longer than 4,000 words in length and written according to the style sheet of *New Theology Review* (see following pages). No author identification should be on the pages of the manuscript. Judges will not be informed as to the identity of the author until after they determine the winning essay.

Please submit two copies of the printed text along with a copy on disk using a standard program (preferably Microsoft Word) in either PC or Macintosh format.

Send all entries to:

The Editors  
*New Theology Review*  
6896 Laurel Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20012

Decision of the judges is final. Submissions will not be returned. Faculty and staff of Washington Theological Union and Catholic Theological Union are not eligible.

*New Theology Review* is a journal of Catholic theology that informs men and women in ministry of contemporary developments in Roman Catholic thought and its pastoral import for the Church.

# THE *NEW THEOLOGY REVIEW* PRIZE IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## STYLE SHEET

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- Spacing**      Begin the manuscript four double-spaces from the top of the page. Leave generous margins on the top, bottom and left sides. Double space everything, including any indented quotations, footnotes, and references.
- Citations**      NTR follows a modified version of the footnote and reference system of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, examples of which may be found in this issue. Footnotes should not be used, unless absolutely necessary. Endnotes may be included, if the author deems useful. They should be kept to a minimum, however, and every effort should be made to include reference material within the body of the text.
- Bible**            Abbreviations for books of the Bible, mode of verse citation, and transliterations of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets follow the system of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*.
- Headings**        Texts should be appropriately interspersed with subheadings. Keep these headings short and pointed.
- Language**        NTR follows a policy of using inclusive language. Plural forms are preferable to he/she or s/he.

## 8 *Style Sheet*

- Tone** Articles submitted to **NTR** should be based on sound scholarship in theological disciplines, but should try as far as possible to maintain a pastoral focus of interest to those in ministry.
- Length** The average length of an article should be 4,000 words, approximately 12–15 pages double-spaced, including any notes and references. Use a standard 12 pt. font.
- Biography** A short biographical note will appear in connection with your article. Please supply your name, position, institutional affiliation, and any pertinent data (publications, pastoral experience, etc.) that you wish included. Also indicate the mailing address to which future correspondence will be directed.
- Persons** Proper caution should be exercised in making, or reporting, negative judgments on individual persons. Such judgments should be omitted if a case is in litigation unless specific permission is granted by the editors.
- Foreign** Foreign terms (or phrases) should always include an English translation in parenthesis.
- Mailing** Please submit two copies of the printed text along with a copy on disk using a standard program (preferably Microsoft Word) in either PC or Macintosh format. Hard copies and disk will not be returned. All manuscripts are subject to editorial changes.



*Zeni Fox*

## **The Vocation of Today's Lay Minister: Perspectives of a Teacher and Researcher**

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a significant change has been unfolding in Catholic ministry circles. Many roles once filled almost exclusively by priests, sisters and brothers are now held by lay people. In parishes, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministers, and increasingly Directors of Liturgy are laity; in our Catholic institutional ministries, the leaders of schools and colleges, health care institutions, and charities agencies are largely lay. In addition, many other roles, such as prison minister, campus minister, and hospital chaplain are held by laity. In the past, we said that the individuals who shared in the mission of the Church in such special ways had a vocation, a call from God, affirmed by the Church, to a state of life dedicated to service in the Church. What can we say of the laywomen and laymen who serve in these ways today? In this article we will explore their self-understanding of their "vocation," and understandings of vocation, both as a religious and a secular concept, viewing those developments in the context of our culture today, in order to pose an answer to that question, albeit a tentative one.

### PERSPECTIVES OF A TEACHER

In the mid-1970s I was teaching a graduate course for parish ministers; a number of young lay men and women were in my class, as well as some vowed religious. As I came to know my students better, I learned more of what they were doing and what their hopes were. Some were already employed in church work, all planned to pursue such work for the indefinite future. They were idealistic, energetic, committed people. In one of those moments of insight I thought, "these are the young men and women who entered seminaries and convents when I was in school." This was a thought I would return to again.

A few years later I was teaching and supervising a number of young adults in a youth ministry internship program. Through classes, retreats and supervisory visits, I came to know these young men and women and their stories in some depth. From them I heard language stating, "I feel God wants me to do this" or "I am trying to discern whether God wants me to continue in ministry after the internship" or "my family does not understand that this is what I feel I must do" or "I see the needs of the youth so clearly and think as Church we must

respond.” Their articulation of vocation was clearer than that of the group a half-dozen years before. My original insight was strengthened.

In 1985, as part of doctoral work in theology I conducted a national study of lay people employed in parishes in a ministerial role at least twenty hours a week. (The survey said “employed in church work” because how people named what they did was part of the investigation.) A number of questions were designed based on my knowledge of the sense of vocation which informed the young adults I had known. The responses to the questions yield data which still today captures some of the ambivalence of lay ecclesial ministers when we speak of “vocation” (Fox).

One question asked what is the primary word they would use to describe their church work. Sixty percent chose the word ministry; 13 percent chose words associated with church mission—vocation, discipleship, apostolate. Ten percent chose profession, and 9 percent other words associated with secular work—position, job, role. Another question asked respondents to rank order seven choices, naming what gives them authority for their work in the Church. Baptism and confirmation ranked highest; 41 percent named it first, and 65 percent placed it among their top three choices. Professional training and competence ranked second, and vocation third. A similar question asked what gives a priest authority for his work in the Church. Here, vocation ranked highest; over one-third named it first, and 68 percent included it in their first three choices. Holy orders was ranked second, baptism and confirmation third, and seminary training fifth. We can conclude that vocation as a way of defining their own work was not primary for most respondents. And yet, in response to a similar question regarding priests, vocation was the defining factor—ranked higher even than Holy orders or baptism and confirmation.

Response to another question adds some interesting nuances to this. The survey asked, “if you plan to stay in professional salaried church work, what best states your reasons,” offering thirteen items to be rank ordered. The reasons ranked highest were: enjoy the work, feel called to this work and the work utilizes gifts God has given. Significantly lower than these reasons was the fourth reason which was to contribute to a need which must be addressed. All other reasons ranked much lower. These included items such as the challenge of the work, liking the people worked with, having been successful and needing the salary. Reflection on the reasons chosen calls attention to an implicit sense of vocation operative in why lay ministers do what they do. First, they enjoy it; joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and in discernment of vocation individuals are counseled to seek the way God speaks to their deepest desires. Second, though few say, “I have a vocation to ministry” most say “I feel called to this work.” Third, they affirm that the work uses

gifts they have. (Elsewhere in the questionnaire, when asked whether they had charisms or special gifts of grace for service in the Church 74 percent said yes, 20 percent unsure, and 6 percent no.) Finally, the perception of a need that must be addressed suggests a strong sense of *diakonia*, of service, a classic mark of vocation.

The responses to the survey suggest to me that lay ministers are able to say that they feel called to their ministry; as we listen to their motivations we can say that they exhibit signs of a valid call (joy, the gifts needed, and a sense of service). However, most do not say that they have a vocation.

#### PERSPECTIVES FROM RECENT RESEARCH

The most comprehensive studies of lay ecclesial ministers have been done by the National Pastoral Life Center, led by Philip Murnion. Although he did not look at the issue of vocation in his first study, some findings are relevant here. Ministers report that they feel quite close to God (1–2 on a scale of five), with nine out of ten saying this. Compared to five years before, they felt closer now. Furthermore, seven out of ten feel quite close to the Church, whereas somewhat fewer felt that way five years ago. While feeling close to God and the Church is not in itself a sign of vocation, the fact that the lay ecclesial ministers experience this closeness is a reasonable indication of living in congruence with God's call (Murnion, et. al., 29–30). A further sign is the general sense of happiness or satisfaction in their ministry. The study found strong evidence of this:

Probably the most important statement to make in this regard, however, is that the vast majority of these parish ministers find their ministry very satisfying. A few measures quickly tell this story:

Is the ministry satisfying? Yes—93.5 percent.

Does it give a sense of accomplishment? Yes—92 percent.

Is it spiritually rewarding? Yes—91.5 percent.

(Ibid., 97–98)

In another study conducted five years later, several findings bear more directly on our question. Half of the respondents (slightly more among the full-timers) affirm that they have experienced a call by God to a lifetime ministry in the Church. Almost three-quarters of the parish ministers believe that they are pursuing such a lifetime commitment. And, among those not pursuing a lifetime ministry, even a quarter of them felt a call by God. Furthermore, this more recent study found the measures of satisfaction in their ministry roles even a little more positive than was found five years earlier (Murnion and DeLambo, 39–40). "Parish ministry can clearly be called a wonderful experience for the

parish ministers. As we have noted, in their own lives they have grown closer to God, to the Church, and to the parish" (Ibid., 61). An additional indication of their satisfaction is their readiness or desire to continue in ministry. Four out of five of the parish ministers envision remaining in it for the foreseeable future (Ibid., 63).

In reflecting on the results of this study, the authors draw various conclusions. One bears directly on our topic:

There appear to be emerging not only new positions of ministry but also new commitments to ministry that will need to be formalized in new ways. Just as there once were eight orders in the church—bishop, priest, deacon, sub-deacon, acolyte, lector, porter and exorcist—developments in ministry now appear to require acknowledgment of new offices, or ministries. A further issue that arises is the apparent lack of symmetry between office and ministry in the present situation: certain men have the status of ordination as deacons even though their commitment to church ministry is limited and, for the most part, their involvement is part-time, while other ministers who are giving their full lives and time to ministry, and even serving in some instances as surrogates for pastors, are not in any order or office of ministry (Ibid., 69).

#### PERSPECTIVES OF LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS

National studies provide a profile of the group of ministers we are considering. In *Why We Serve: Personal Stories of Catholic Lay Ministers* we hear some of their personal reflections on vocation. Joyce Stewart, a laywoman, had worked for fifteen years as a director of religious education when she wrote:

I chose a career in ministry which I come to know as both my right and responsibility flowing from the gift of my baptism and my full membership in the Church. . . . The best place I can live out all this and respond to what I have come to know in so many ways as my vocation is by a full-time career of ministry in the Church. The community on its side . . . validates my ministry . . .

(T)here are some strong parallels between this experience and that of vocation as sacramentalized in holy orders. The major difference is, of course, the lack of explicit recognition by the Church of this ministry other than compensation. . . . Lay ministry is one of those functions which, for the most part, has had to name itself (40–41).

Rick McCord traced his story through parish work as a D.R.E. to a diocesan staff position and eventually to a role as director of diocesan educational services. He said:

I have been a professional or career lay minister for more than ten years. I came to it, not unlike many of my contemporaries, almost directly from a seminary where I was close to concluding my studies for the priesthood. Due at least partly to these circumstances, I am aware of a certain continuous ministerial journey in my adult life. . . . I chose to minister in and for the institutional Church as a layman (51).

And sometimes the path traveled goes beyond intra-church ministry. David Ramey directs a large ministerial staff at a religious conference center.

I came to believe that a career commitment to lay ministry is a commitment to the development of human community beyond parochial and established parish settings. . . . My own understanding of why one may choose a lay ministry career has shifted to include a mission to a world of market places in need of some "good news." My current questions about lay ministry focus more on its symbolic power to serve as a reminder to others that they can and do make a difference by their part in the human community. This has challenged me to a vision and intentionality of lay ministry as a service to the world, through the Church perhaps, but not only in and for the Church (79).

#### PERSPECTIVES OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LAY MINISTRY

In 1994 the NCCB Committee on the Laity established the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry; in 1995 the subcommittee began the Leadership for Lay Ecclesial Ministry Project. A total of ten bishops served on the committee. Their work is described in the article by Sr. Bríd Long in this journal; here, I wish to focus on one aspect of that work.

The Subcommittee convened various groups so as to grow in their understanding of lay ecclesial ministry and ministers. Two gatherings of representatives of various lay organizations and associations were particularly relevant to our topic. At these, the bishops listened to lay ecclesial ministers describe their experience of feeling called to do what they do, of believing that their ministry was what God invited them to, of experiencing themselves as ministers doing what God intended them to do. Their personal witness, in their words, out of their lived commitment, was powerful. In light of these conversations, the bishops on the committee began to realize that the lay ecclesial ministers have an experience of "vocation" and they explored how this could be understood within our existing categories of thought. Should this be seen as a new state of life in the Church, a new form of vocation? At one point they pondered whether to speak of a fourth vocation (in addition to those to priesthood, religious life, married life). At another point

they spoke simply of a call to discipleship. Over the course of a few meetings, members struggled with this issue. In the 1999 report concluding the work of the first subcommittee, *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions*, this is addressed in a number of ways:

Some, whom we are naming lay ecclesial ministers, are called to a ministry within the Church as a further specification and application of what all laity are called and equipped to do. This group of laity can be distinguished from the general body of all the lay faithful, not by reason of merit or rank, but by reason of a call to service made possible by certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, by the generous response of the person, and by an act of authorizing and sending by the proper ecclesiastical authority (cf. Luke 10:1) (16).

Lay ecclesial ministry can be understood as a response to a call from God to work alongside ordained ministers in the service of and within the ecclesial community (17).

Lay ecclesial ministry is experienced by many to be a call to ministry, a vocation. It is the role and responsibility of the entire Church (including the bishop and the local parish community) to foster, nurture, encourage, and help discern all vocations to ministry (20).

Special charisms of the Holy Spirit, which flow from the sacraments of initiation, equip lay ecclesial ministers for their special tasks within the Church (cf. LG, no. 12; AA, no. 3; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:7-13) (15).

The bishops' report affirms that lay ecclesial ministers have a vocation; this vocation is carefully linked to the vocation of all laity ("a further specification and application of what all laity are called and equipped to do") and yet is a particular call to service for which charisms are given "for their special tasks."

## VOCATIONS AND VOCATION

The word "vocation" in Catholic circles often has the meaning "a vocation to priesthood or religious life." However, it is used in various other ways as well, which influences the question we are exploring here. Some of these variations have emerged recently in Catholic circles. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, published in 1912, has an entry "Vocation, Ecclesiastical and Religious." There is no other entry on the topic. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, published in 1967, has three headings: "Vocation, Religious and Clerical," "Vocation to Supernatural Life" and "Vocational Psychology." Surveying the literature from 1912 to 1967, one notes that it is in the 1940s that the secular categories of vocational education, vocational guidance and vocational psychology begin to occur in Catholic writing, and that it is in the 1950s that the idea of

“vocation” not specified as religious or clerical begins to be treated. Articles such as “Vocation of Work” and “Everybody Has a Vocation” appear. For the second half of the century, each of these three ways of understanding vocation continues to be explored, even until today.

Certainly, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and the pre-Council work of the theologians who influenced those teachings (for example, Congar and Chenu) gave rise to the broader conceptualizations of vocation. The decision by the Council Fathers to reject the original schema for the Constitution on the Church, and to move instead to an articulation which started not with hierarchy but with the whole people of God, gave us a renewed understanding of the role of all Christians in the community. The centrality of baptism, the call of all to holiness, the beginning development of a theology of the laity, a positive valuation of the world, all have bearing on our present understanding of vocation as a broader category than only vocation to priesthood and religious life. It is helpful to look at the way various writers in the post-Council years reflect on vocation in this sense of the term.

#### *The Human Vocation*

One approach taken is to look at the nature of men and women as created to be in relationship with God. Representative of this view is Peter Riga who understands the human person as essentially called by God because of our very nature as transcendent beings, oriented at our root, so to speak, toward God. “Thus the being of man is inextricably involved and intertwined in the very being of God, who *calls* man to himself in myriad ways” (143). Christian life is founded on this possibility of being able to be called by God; God’s call, as the Bible shows, is continuous and dynamic.

Analysis of scriptural accounts of vocation provides another way of exploring the meaning of vocation. The call of God to the Israelite people, to enter into a covenant relationship, and the call of individuals—Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, the prophets—suggest the communal and personal dimensions of vocation. The New Testament further enriches our understanding of call. For example, Paul Lamarche uses the scriptural account of the call of Levi to explore the particular and general vocation of every Christian which, in its essence, is a call to a life in union with Christ the Savior. “What is demanded of every Christian is immediate, total absolute adherence. Christ must be preferred to everything else, loved more than anything else” (307). The fundamental vocation is to salvation through faith; particular vocations must be envisaged in relation to this. All Christians are called to be disciples of the Master, to follow in his footsteps, to learn his ways, to imitate his life.

*Vocation: A Calling*

The third approach to vocation is by way of focus on work; this is articulated in many ways, all of which can be seen as related to Luther's re-formulation of the concept vocation as connected to our calling in life. Einar Billing, a Lutheran writer explains: "When it began to dawn on Luther that just as certainly as the call to God's Kingdom seeks to lift us infinitely above everything that our everyday duties by themselves could give us, just that certainly the call does not take us away from these duties but more deeply into them, then work became calling, then the word calling took on its second meaning . . . 'calling' binds closely together the vocabulary of religion and everyday work" (2-3). Often it has been Protestant authors who have developed this understanding of vocation, inviting people to ponder the graced dimensions of their work. One volume of personal stories, *My Job and My Faith*, illustrates this relating of faith to daily work; the chapter titles are very telling. For example, a nurse—"To Walk with Each One," an architect—"That the World May be Fashioned Anew," a public relations representative—"Moral Dilemmas in the Wielding of Words" and a household helper—"Scrubbing Floors is Hard Work"—each understands his or her work as a calling with religious meaning.

Catholic teaching adds a dimension to Luther's thought, a valuation of work as "sharing in God's creative action, as imitating the life of Christ, and as building up the human and heavenly community of humanity" (Meyer, 93). The biblical understanding of the person as created in the image of God and in relationship with God through grace underlies this view, so that one can say "all that a Christian does is a collaborative work with God" (Ibid.). Work, then, is a concurrent human and divine activity, enabling us to act and work supernaturally. Meyer states, when persons strive "to work for love of God, by fulfilling God's divine will at work . . . (they sanctify themselves and their tasks) becoming more human and divine in the process" (106).

In this overview, the focus has been on the idea of vocation in general. It is worth noting that in the course of the last fifty years, there has been ongoing attention to this theme. In recent years, vocation as calling has received the greatest attention. Certainly, the teaching of The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (for example, lay people "do not separate their union with Christ from their ordinary life, but through the very performance of their tasks, which are God's will for them, actually promote the growth of their union with him," art. 4) and of Pope John II (especially his *Laborem exercens*) have contributed to the interest in this area. Often, the earlier more explicit attention to our fundamental vocation is implicit in explorations of vocation and our work. It is also notable that in recent years the more specified topic of ecclesiasti-

cal vocation has received the greatest amount of attention by far; and yet, by contrast, vocation to religious life has received modest attention.

*Vocation: Ecclesiastical and Religious*

One aspect of the reflection on ecclesiastical and religious vocation bears on our concerns here. The 1912 *Encyclopedia* states: "A vocation which is by many persons called exterior thus comes to be added to the interior vocation; and this exterior vocation is defined as the admission of a candidate in due form by competent authority." The 1967 *Encyclopedia* presents three theories of vocation. The first emphasizes external dimensions: "only those have vocations to the religious life or priesthood who are called by legitimate authority." The second emphasizes the internal aspect, recognizing vocation when "there exists a strong and permanent supernatural attraction or an impulse felt in the depths of the soul excluding doubt as to its authenticity." The third sees the inner movement or inclination as primary: "This grace would seem to be the formal element of vocation rather than the call of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, which, though required, is merely a confirmation of the genuineness of the interior call." The author concludes, "the last seems to be the most correct" (Schleck).

## CULTURAL FACTORS

*Fluidity of Work and Social Structure*

One of the truisms of our time is that young people growing up today will probably change the nature of their work—not the place of employment, but the work itself—seven times in the course of their adult lives. This is often contrasted with a picture of their grandparents' lives, where the grandfather worked for the same firm, or in the same industry, all of his adult life, retiring to receive his pension. Granted the limitations of each profile, they do portray the greater instability of today's work world.

Reaching further back in time, to the European world that has so influenced our Church, a further sense of stability is glimpsed. Societies were highly structured; members belonged to distinct, non-changing groups: peasants, landed gentry, nobility, for example. In this world, ecclesiastical and religious vocations were described as a state of life, a stable commitment, made forever. In the United States today, indeed, in industrialized societies, the social structure which was the context for such an understanding of states in life no longer exists.

*Differentiation of Tasks*

Another relevant dimension of United States society is the vast changes that have occurred in the past 150 years, as we moved from an

agricultural to an industrial to a service and increasingly to a technological culture. As fewer people were needed to provide for the sheer survival of families and the society itself, increasing numbers of service roles appeared. Tasks once performed by vowed religious—for example, care of the sick, service of the poor—increasingly were undertaken by state and government agencies, and now even for-profit groups. Concurrently, the numbers of service jobs were multiplying exponentially.

Furthermore, throughout the work world, greater and greater specialization has occurred. Whereas once a nurse and a doctor tended the sick, today practical nurses, technicians, social workers, dieticians and more serve in hospitals—with still other specializations involved in the myriad forms of out-of-hospital care. Within this context, a variety of new, specialized roles have arisen within the church community, for example, hospital chaplains and parish youth ministers. The roles call for varied gifts and diverse skills, and different educational requirements.

#### *Search for Meaningful Work*

As the variety of work has increased, there has been much interest in finding the *right* job, of discerning one's gifts and interests and matching them with work which is meaningful. Such bestsellers as *Do What You Love*, *The Money Will Follow* and *What Color Is Your Parachute?* are just two titles among the many to be found in the library or bookstore. It is interesting to peruse these volumes and note in them what we could call the language of discernment: what are your life goals, what are your gifts, what contribution do you want to make, what makes you happy? Writers counsel: take a voyage of self-discovery, break out of boxes, discover the Zen of the career search. Richard Bolles is explicit in his religious language:

(T)he job hunt offers a chance to make some fundamental changes in our whole life. . . . It gives us a chance to ponder and reflect, to extend our mental horizons, to go deeper into the sub-soil of our soul. It gives us a chance to wrestle with the question, 'Why am I here on Earth?'. . . . We want to find that special joy, 'that no one can take from us,' which comes from having a sense of Mission in our life. . . . the concept of Mission lands us inevitably in the lap of God. . . . (241–42).

Clearly, this approach to seeking work is the theme in Catholic literature, referred to above, of vocational education, guidance and psychology. One can see in it links to Luther's work, and to the Catholic premise that the glory of God is the human person fully alive.

## VOCATION AND THE LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTER

Do lay ecclesial ministers have a vocation to their ministry in the Church? Obviously, the answer depends on the definition of vocation. When viewed with the classical understanding focused on ecclesiastical and religious vocation, the answer would seem to be no. Although there is a sense of an inner call, as so many lay ecclesial ministers say, the call is not affirmed by legitimate authority. Some might say, as Joyce Stewart seems to, quoted above, that in hiring her the community validates her call. However, there is not an explicit, weighed decision about vocation in the hiring process.

When viewed from the standpoint of our human vocation, one would certainly say that lay ecclesial ministers have a call, and that, judging by classic signs for the discernment of spirits, they seem to have responded to God's initiative by directing their lives in a way congruent with God's desire for them, and for the good of others. Finally, when viewed from the perspective of vocation as calling, profession, a doing of meaningful work, in light of the great satisfaction in their ministry which these lay men and women report, one would surely say that they are following their call.

Are these answers sufficient as a way of responding to a new experience in the life of the Church? Or, do we need to seek new formulations to account for this reality? What are the values which must be guarded as we reflect on these questions?

Certainly, the broadening of the concept of vocation which has occurred in recent decades is valuable. It is a means for inviting deeper awareness by all Christians of their radical connection to God who invites each of us into relationship and into a sharing in God's creative action. It encourages a valuing of the contribution made by every person to the human community through the work each does, and motivation to seek one's calling, and to do good work. Many lay ecclesial ministers resist conceptualizations of their place in the Church which in any way separates them from other Christians. Perhaps this resistance reflects a desire to guard these understandings of vocation: all are called, all work is potentially holy, all callings are significant, and are to be valued by the community. The heightened awareness of vocation described by lay ecclesial ministers exists so as to model to many how their experience of God's call can be discerned more deeply. David Ramey, as quoted above, speaks of lay ministry's "symbolic power to serve as a reminder to others that they can and do make a difference by their part in the human community" (79).

But is there something in the classical understanding of vocation which should be applied to these new ministers in the Church? Is "the call of legitimate ecclesiastical authority" needed, or desirable, as

“a confirmation of the genuineness of the interior call?” Are these ministers called to a particular place in the Church? As noted above, the Bishops’ Subcommittee affirmed that it is the role of “the bishop and the local parish community to foster, nurture, encourage, and help discern all vocations to ministry.” How is this to be done? They also note that lay ecclesial ministers “can be distinguished from the general body of all the lay faithful . . . by an act of authorizing and sending by the proper ecclesiastical authority.” How is this being done? What is the relationship between authorization for ministry and discernment of vocation? In an age marked by great fluidity in regard to work and in the place of living and working, and by increasing differentiation of work tasks, can we understand lay ecclesial ministers as an adaptation in ministry relevant to our age, complementing more traditional forms of ministry? And how would authentication of vocation be structured in the face of the “instability” and variety of ministries?

Clearly, there is much collective discernment we must do as a community in order to begin to answer these questions. The task is especially important for our bishops who are charged with responsibility for discerning the genuineness and proper use of charisms, “not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good” (*Constitution on the Church*, #12).

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*Even if seminaries were once again filled to overflowing and convents packed with sisters, there would still remain the need for cultivating, developing and sustaining the full flourishing of ministries that we have witnessed in the church since the Second Vatican Council. In the wake of the council, we have arrived at a clearer recognition that it is in the nature of the church to be endowed with many gifts, and that these gifts are the basis for the vocation to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life as well as for the many ministries rooted in the call of baptism.*

—Roger Cardinal Mahony  
"As I Have Done for You"  
a pastoral letter on ministry

*Brid Long, S.S.L.*

## **The Evolving Role of Lay Ecclesial Ministers in Shaping the Parish of the Future**

The U.S. Church will celebrate Jubilee Day for Lay Ministers on November 26, 2000. The purpose of the day is to honor and celebrate the tens of thousands of lay ministers who serve the Church in a variety of ways and to invite all of us to reflect on the gifts these ministers bring to the fulfillment of the Church's mission. The theme for the day, "Together in God's Service," reflects the fact that ministry is a work of collaboration in building up the body of Christ. The day chosen for the celebration is not without significance. It is the Solemnity of Christ the King, the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, and it falls during the Jubilee Year World Congress of Catholic Laity, which will take place in Rome, November 24–30. This is a time to recognize the enormous contribution that lay ministers are making to ecclesial life in dioceses and parishes, as well as in health, education, and welfare institutions and services across the country.

Nowhere has the emergence of lay ministry and lay leadership been more dramatic or more evident than in parishes. In addition to the leadership exercised by active parishioners on a volunteer basis, there are now almost thirty thousand lay parish ministers employed for at least twenty hours per week. Prompted by ever increasing parish needs, a growing awareness of their own identity as baptized followers of Jesus Christ, and the declining number of priests, more and more lay persons are assuming ecclesial responsibilities and giving shape to parish life and ministry.

This article will examine the evolving role of lay ecclesial ministers in shaping the parish of the future. It will focus, in particular, on (1) the identity and role of these ministers within the parish setting, (2) the Church's response to the need for understanding and stabilization of lay ecclesial ministry in the parish, and (3) some questions which must be addressed as lay and ordained ministers collaborate in the service of God's people through parish leadership.

### **IDENTITY AND ROLE OF LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS**

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been an explosion of new ministries in the Church. The gifts of the Spirit are being poured out in

unprecedented and unforeseen ways and thousands of lay Christians are choosing new paths other than vows and orders to enter the ministry. As a result, many parishes today are served by a pastor, one or more lay pastoral associates, a permanent deacon, and a large staff of lay people in special ministries. While many lay ministers volunteer their service, more and more are paid on a part-time or full-time basis.

Recent studies show that the nature of parish ministry itself is changing. It is increasingly lay and predominantly feminine, though somewhat less so as women religious currently engaged in active ministry reach retirement age. Parish ministry has also a distinct local quality since its development is originating within parishes themselves around the ministries of education, liturgy and social justice, and is strongly influenced by the pastor. Increasingly, parish ministry is done by people who are designated by their certification such as director of religious education or director of liturgy rather than by a distinct category of person such as vowed religious, ordained minister, or indeed lay ecclesial minister. While the parish population is very diverse, Latinos, African Americans, Asians, and others are poorly represented among parish ministers. Studies note that lay parish ministers are, in general, very well educated and deeply involved in their faith, their Church, and their parish. While many spend years in the same parish, there is a growing pattern of lay parish ministers moving from one parish to another. It appears that some do this for career advancement, others for personal and family reasons, and still others because of employment conditions due especially to a change of pastor. The professionalization of lay ministry has led many parishes to begin to adopt personnel policies and practices to ensure just and adequate treatment of their lay ministers as well as for other staff members (Murnion and DeLambo, 1999).

#### *General Parish Ministries*

Parish life has become much more participative especially in the wake of the liturgical renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council and in response to the Council's renewed vision of Church as people of God and body of Christ. All Christians, according to the Council, are called to the apostolate or ministry which is a sharing in the saving mission of the Church. As stated in the Constitution on the Church, "Through baptism and confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself" (*Lumen gentium*, 33). It would be difficult to imagine a parish liturgy today without lay people who proclaim the word of God, lead the prayers of the faithful, serve as extraordinary ministers of communion, cantors and ministers of music, altar servers and ministers of hospitality. Lay people are active in their parish religious education program. They accompany candidates and catechumens

through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), lead programs for returning Catholics, and minister to bereavement groups. They prepare children for first Eucharist, first penance, and confirmation, participate in baptism and marriage preparation teams and bring communion to the sick, imprisoned and homebound. In addition, lay people are active in parish outreach and social justice programs, parish organizations, committees, service and prayer groups.

#### *Lay Ecclesial Ministries*

In addition to increased participation in all aspects of parish life, we have witnessed in recent years a host of lay men and women offering their gifts and talents in the service of the Church. Increasingly, these ministers are hired by parishes to fill staff positions and they have significant responsibility as, for example, pastoral associates, directors of religious education, directors of music, youth ministers, school principals, and ministers of social justice. In some instances, in the absence of a resident priest pastor, bishops have entrusted the daily pastoral leadership of a parish to a lay person. Such ministers are called lay pastoral coordinators, lay pastoral administrators or even resident pastoral ministers. At present, lay people exercise overall pastoral leadership in about 450 parishes and their number is increasing.

The bishops have chosen the term “lay ecclesial ministers” to refer to ministers who are hired or appointed by parishes and other church agencies to fill significant staff positions which had once been filled by priests. These ministers prepare themselves academically, pastorally and spiritually for work in the Church. When they perform parish ministry they do so under the supervision of, and in collaboration with, the ordained. Lay ecclesial ministers are first, foremost, and always members of the laity and what they do is a particular expression of the general vocation of all baptized persons in the Christian community. Their ministry is rooted in the charisms given by the Spirit in baptism: “There are many gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. The particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good” (1 Cor 12:4-7).

We cannot develop an exhaustive list of who belongs in the category of lay ecclesial minister since this may vary according to the needs of the local church and the perspective of the diocesan bishop. Nevertheless, there are several characteristics which mark such ministers, though not all apply in every case. In general, we describe a lay ecclesial minister in a parish as: (1) a fully initiated member of the Christian faithful who responds to a call or invitation to participate in ministry after adequate discernment; (2) one who has received the necessary formation,

education, and training to function competently in a particular ministry; (3) one who has personal competencies and gifts for ministry and uses them with community or parish recognition and support; (4) one to whom a formal and public role in parish ministry has been entrusted by a bishop or local pastor; (5) one who has been installed in a ministry through the authority of the bishop or his representative; (6) one who commits to performing the duties of a ministry in a stable manner for a certain length of time; (7) a paid full- or part-time member of the parish staff or a volunteer who has responsibility and the necessary authority for parish leadership in a particular area of ministry (*Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry*, 1999).

#### RESPONSE TO LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY IN THE PARISH

The changing patterns of parish life are evident not only in the new faces of ministry and ministers but also in the reorganization of parish structures. The possibility of having a priest pastor present in every parish is no longer assured. For that reason, deacons, women religious, and laypersons are being given pastoral responsibility. At the same time, dioceses are linking parishes in clusters and various other ways, often with a single pastor and/or sacramental minister serving several parishes. There are job descriptions for lay ecclesial ministers, and their ministries are generally clearly defined. Pastoral councils and finance councils offer input into parish decisions, and parishes are engaging in pastoral planning around an articulated mission statement. Parishes also engage in financial planning to support their own increasing ministerial needs and to help parishes which cannot be financially viable.

Many parishes are structured into basic units or small communities of faith in which people come to know one another, break open the word of God and express it in service and love for others. These groups often bring together people of similar careers, professions or interests. As parishes become increasingly multicultural, small communities of faith also enable people from different backgrounds to meet, to forge bonds of friendship and solidarity, to develop a commitment to ministry and to call forth and foster new vocations to ecclesial ministry. On Sunday, parishioners and pastoral ministers gather for liturgy as a communion of communities, enriched by the readings which they have already prayed together, and bonded by the life experiences which they have shared. Their participation in the liturgy is thus formed and informed by participation in the life of the community and, in turn, nourishes and sustains that life. There is a fresh sense of Christian solidarity within parishes due to a new interest in the Bible, a willingness to share faith with one another, the will to live and support one another as sister and brother, and the move to stand as a body in the face of needs and social issues (Power, 1980, 1985).

Lay ecclesial ministers, in collaboration with the ordained, are exercising an enormous role in parish life and leadership. As bishops, pastors, theologians, schools of theology for ministry, professional associations, and lay ecclesial ministers themselves recognize this, they are trying to develop a response in at least four different areas, namely, the articulation of a theology of lay ecclesial ministry, clarification of roles, preparation and formation for ministry, and questions of finances and human resources.

#### *Theology of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*

Following the Second Vatican Council there has been a rediscovery in Catholic theology of baptism as the foundational sacrament of ministry. The growth of lay ecclesial ministry has strengthened the sense that all in the parish are responsible—to varying degrees and in different ways—for being and for building the body of Christ. Membership in the body, given in baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and sustained at the eucharistic table, is at the root of both discipleship and ministry (Power, 1980, 1985).

Ministry has moved from being a vocation only for the few to being a gift and work of all the baptized in service of the mission of Christ and the Church. By definition, the Christian community is ministerial and all its members are called to share, according to their gifts, in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal office, or liturgy, preaching and community leadership or presidency. All are gifted with special charisms of the Spirit, which flow from the sacraments of initiation and are meant for the good of the entire community.

The image of concentric circles of ministry, rather than a pyramidal model, describes very well the rich diversity and inclusive nature of parish ministry today. The image moves from the leaders, now the bishop, pastor, or resident pastoral minister, to all full-time and professionally trained ministers, out through levels of part-time ministers to all the baptized (O'Meara, 1999). Such an understanding of ministry takes nothing from the identity of the ordained but locates them clearly among other diverse and parallel ministries within the Church. Leadership is central to the life of the parish community and both lay ecclesial ministers and the ordained are gradually learning to understand and exercise it collaboratively. As we continue to develop a renewed theology of ministry, we must return again and again to the key themes of communion, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

#### *Clarification of Roles*

Official parish ministries, which we describe as stable, public, authorized roles of leadership, may vary over time in response to changing

needs. Also, new ministries emerge while others cease to exist. Nevertheless, bishops, pastors, and lay ecclesial ministers themselves recognize the importance of clarifying titles, roles, and expectations since all of these affect collaboration in ministry, give a point of reference to parishioners, and help the ministers to develop the skills they need for their particular ministry, in addition to a strong sense of ministerial identity. Increasingly, lay ecclesial ministers are receiving or developing a clear job description for the ministry which they will exercise.

In many dioceses, lay ecclesial ministers are designated by the bishop or his representative to their ministerial assignment. Often, they are installed or commissioned in a public ceremony so that the community recognizes and welcomes them. On occasion, especially in the case of lay pastoral coordinators or resident pastoral ministers, the bishop himself participates in the liturgical ceremony of installation, publicly welcomes them into the body of the diocesan *ministerium*, presents them to the community and empowers them to carry out certain acts of ministry which may require the specific authorization of the diocesan bishop. Resident pastoral ministers employed by the Glenmary Home Missions in the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, for example, receive from their bishop a document of authorization based on the Code of Canon Law and covering three areas: preaching the word, sacramental and liturgical ministry, and administrative ministry.

Under preaching the word, the document lists the following authorization: to preach the word of God (c. 766) at daily Communion service or Liturgy of the Word; at a Sunday service when no priest is available for celebration of the Eucharist; at a funeral vigil, committal service, funeral outside of Mass; at the Liturgy of the Hours, at the baptism of a child under age seven. In the area of sacramental and liturgical ministry, the bishop grants the following authorization: to baptize children under the age of seven according to the approved rituals (c. 861§2; Rite of Baptism); to serve as an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and Viaticum (c. 910§2; 911§2); to serve as a minister of eucharistic exposition and reposition (c. 943); to administer sacramentals such as blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday, blessing of throats on the Feast of St. Blaise, blessing of a communicant (c. 1168); to present to the local ordinary names of those to be designated liturgical ministers (c. 230§3). The administrative functions which the bishop authorizes the resident pastoral minister to perform are: to preside over the parish pastoral council and finance councils in accord with diocesan norms (cc. 536, 537); to maintain parish sacramental records and issue authentic sacramental documents (c. 535§1-3); to preserve and maintain parish archives (c. 535§4,5); to serve as administrator of parish property and to make the annual reports requested by the diocese (cc. 1281–1288). The bishop grants the authorization for a specified time or duration of assignment.

*Preparation and Formation for Ministry*

The preparation, formation and certification of lay ecclesial ministers have received much attention in dioceses, parishes and schools of theology, which take seriously the words of canon 231 that “lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly.” Data collected by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University identified as many as 331 lay ministry formation programs in 1999–2000. Though the number seems rather high, the growth of ministry preparation and formation programs in dioceses and graduate schools testifies to the growth in the number of those wishing to prepare for lay ecclesial ministry.

There are four important elements to be included in any preparation for parish ministry: spiritual formation, theological training, supervised ministerial practice with theological reflection, and the acquisition of specialized knowledge and skills appropriate to the particular ministry for which one is preparing. While the content and processes of theological training, supervised ministry, and skill building are already fairly well established, especially in degree programs in graduate schools, the type of formation needed for lay ecclesial ministry is still being developed. Formation programs generally focus on developing a strong sense of discipleship of Jesus Christ and a sound prayer life as well as access to spiritual direction, retreats, and times of recollection. Spiritual formation builds an affinity between the charisms which serve parish life and the minister’s own inner possession of the gift of the Spirit. Beyond programs, it is the Spirit who gives a knowledge of the mystery of Christ, and teaches compassion as well as how to pray. It is on this basis that the minister learns how to speak the word, how to comfort the sorrowing, how to lead the community, or how to heal. Discipleship along with a rich liturgical and sacramental life are essential foundations for parish ministry. Pastoral ministry supposes the ability to relate the experiences of one’s own life to the mystery of Christ and see them in a new way in light of the unconditional love of God revealed in Christ. Moreover, it supposes the ability to enable others to do the same (Power, 1980, 1985).

A growing number of dioceses have developed their own standards and certification processes for different ministerial positions. The National Association for Lay Ministers (NALM) has published competency-based certification standards for pastoral ministers, pastoral associates, and parish life coordinators. The standards have been approved by the USCC Commission on Certification and Accreditation (CCA) and are being used by ministry preparation programs in the ar-

tication and adaptation of curricula to meet the new needs of parish ministry. The CCA has also approved certification standards for directors of religious education and youth ministers. These standards are written as statements of competencies or descriptions of demonstrated behaviors and are expressed as personal, theological and professional competencies. Norms and guidelines for the preparation of lay ecclesial ministers, similar to those for the preparation of priests and deacons, have yet to be developed and the process is rendered more complex by the fact that lay ecclesial ministers do not yet exist as a distinct group.

#### *Finances and Human Resources*

The professionalization of ministry follows the lines of professionalization in secular employment. Thus, many parishes have already put in place formal job descriptions and contracts, performance evaluations, and staff meetings. The concerns of lay ecclesial ministers center around salary, benefits and portability of pension benefits. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that lay ministers often pay for their own studies and are not always in a position to pay off the debt when they enter the ministry (*Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, 1999).

### SOME QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

The extraordinary way in which lay ecclesial ministry has flourished in parishes in recent decades has blessed parish life. More and more people are encouraged to respond to their baptismal call to full participation in the life of the Church, and to share in the mission of Christ in response to the outpouring of the Spirit's gifts. As the role of lay ecclesial ministers in parish life continues to evolve, we are faced with challenges in the following areas:

*Theology of ministry.* There is need to develop a common foundational theology of ministry which undergirds and supports the ministry of all, ordained and lay, while respecting distinct vocations and roles in parish life.

*Parish structures.* We must reshape the ministerial structures of our parishes so that parish ministry will become more collaborative and inclusive. This will require changes in patterns of reflection, behavior, and expectation among all ministers, as well as the development of an understanding of collaborative ministry, and the skills to work collaboratively.

*Inclusion in diocesan life.* There is need to continue to develop partnership at all levels. This will require continued diocesan involvement in recruitment, training, screening, certification, and commissioning of lay ecclesial ministers. It will also mean including lay ministers, especially

lay pastoral coordinators and resident pastoral ministers, in what have traditionally been gatherings of priests at the level of pastoral regions and deaneries, assemblies and convocations, so that the work of parish leadership becomes truly collaborative.

*Financial resources.* Dioceses and parishes need to commit resources to prepare lay ecclesial ministers to serve the parish in a variety of ways. This may mean “sponsoring” students at a graduate school for ministry, providing future lay ecclesial ministers with an education equal to that of priests but adapted to the ministry for which they are preparing, or making it possible for them to take advantage of opportunities for education and formation at diocesan level. Sharing financial resources also requires a greater effort to provide a living wage for lay ecclesial ministers and a sharing of resources among parishes so that no parish is deprived of ministry due to lack of financial resources.

*Diversity.* We must attend to the preparation of ministers for communities which are poor in economic resources or simply do not have access to programs for ministerial preparation. Schools of ministry are challenged to collaborate with underserved dioceses through distance education and other creative means. Finally, our parishes and dioceses and schools of ministry must continue to explore ways to find, train, and support ministers from and for the increasing number of new immigrant populations in our midst so that all may find an equal place at the Table and our parishes truly reflect the rich diversity that is the body of Christ.

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*Lay ecclesial ministry and the ministry of the ordained complement each other within the dynamic communio of the church. They are not in competition. While the phenomenon of lay ecclesial ministry arose during a time of decline in priestly vocations in certain parts of the world, it should not be seen simply as an emergency response. Each expression of ministry is needed in its full dignity and strength if the church is to be fully alive in its communion and mission.*

—National Conference of Catholic Bishops  
“Lay Ecclesial Ministry: State of the Questions”

*Audrey M. Brosnan*

## **Discerning Ministerial Transitions: An Experience of the Paschal Mystery**

Discerning a ministerial transition—whether to remain in or to leave a certain ministry—is one of the most common emotional and spiritual challenges a minister faces in his or her career. Such events can be opportunities to grow in faith and a commitment to discipleship. They can also be invitations to a deeper participation in the paschal mystery. In today's Church, professional lay ministers face special challenges as they discern and implement ministerial transitions.

### LAY MINISTERS IN TRANSITION

Susan, who had ministered as a D.R.E. in her home parish for several years, began to sense that God was urging her to tackle the formal study of theology. She decided to begin graduate school to work on a master of divinity and prepare for an entirely new ministry.

Lu had to reconsider her comfortable self-image as a youth minister after her mentor-pastor became ill and had to retire. When the new pastor arrived, she began to work through her grief. Reluctantly at first, she continued her ministry at the parish, but gradually found that her self-identity as a lay minister actually expanded.

Tom was taken by surprise at the news that his position as pastoral associate would no longer be continued upon the assignment of a new pastor in the next fiscal year. He found himself on an unexpected job-hunt while dealing with grief and a sense of rejection by the Church as he relinquished a ministry he loved.

When Angela's husband was transferred, she had to face immediate resignation from her position as music minister in a large suburban parish. She had no doubts that God wanted her to relinquish her ministry.

Despite many tensions and her frequent sense of frustration with the complicated bureaucracy, Marilyn recently agreed to continue her diocesan administrative position for at least another year because she wanted to complete the projects she had begun. When she prayed about her decision, she had a strong sense that God would provide her with the strength to find life and joy in her work.

John, a campus minister, encountered serious staff conflicts due to the drinking problem of one of his colleagues. This situation caused him great anxiety and often undermined his own projects and the effective ministry of the whole staff. He soon realized that his energies were depleted. He was burned out. He finally decided to take the tremendous risk of leaving this ministry without any job security. It took him some time to recover from this difficult transition.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCERNMENT IN TRANSITIONS

Transitions such as these are the stuff of ministry. For committed Christians, discernment should be a vital part of each and every transition whether it is a self-initiated decision to move on to a new position, an imposed termination, down-sizing, institutional closure, staff problem, other difficult circumstance, or an on-site adjustment to staff changes. Transitions can cause much emotional stress and demand much energy, time and attention. They impact our lives in both obvious and subtle ways. We grieve when we say good-bye, but saying hello also involves unforeseen adjustments. Even when a transition is clearly to our benefit, the personal adaptations can be enormously difficult.

Because transitions tend to bring to the surface a wide variety of emotions, they also bring new challenges to our self-understanding as disciples and our self-identity as ministers. However long-awaited or surprising a transition may be, however life-giving or paralyzing its effects, whether a change in ministry is eagerly embraced or stubbornly resisted, whether it is a moment for great self-discovery or destructive cynicism with the "system," we cannot grow spiritually through a transition without ongoing careful and prayerful discernment. Discernment empowers us to embrace everything involved in a transition, such as a radical change in ministry, minor adjustments in our responsibilities, or various degrees of refocusing our commitments.

We never discern in theoretical circumstances but only in real-life situations. The concrete questions often come down to these: "Should I stay or should I leave? If I stay or if I leave, why and how should I do so?" But during the discernment process the more fundamental and, finally, decisive questions are: "What may God be doing in my life? What may God be communicating to me about my life and my relationship with God and others? Where may God be leading me at this time through these circumstances?" Through discernment we come to sharper clarity about where and how God is inviting us to move forward. Only then can we discover what we should actually *do*.

In this way, discernment provides us with a rich process through which we can rediscover and redefine our vocation in ministry and, even more importantly, renew our encounter with God and restore our commitment to following Jesus. Discernment enables us to approach

not only our ministry but our whole life as a Christian disciple with greater intentionality and authenticity (Boroughs: 386). Discernment—before, during, and after each and every transition—becomes the instrument through which a life-transition can become a profound occasion for spiritual growth as we respond more fully to God’s grace in our lives.

In discussing discernment experiences with Susan, Lu, Tom, Angela, Marilyn, and John, I have noticed several recurring themes which correlate quite effectively with the guidelines for discernment taught and practiced by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus. Interestingly enough, I have discovered that lay ministers who have shared their stories with me are generally unfamiliar with the specific concepts of Ignatian discernment. Still, many have actually stumbled across this method without realizing the historical origin of its principles. This seeming “natural propensity” towards Ignatian discernment has been a fascinating discovery for me. Simply put, Ignatius discovered a method, first for himself and then for his friends and followers, which guides participants in a process of faith. Ignatian discernment involves a complex of activities: questioning, seeking, understanding, imagining, deliberating, experimenting, sorting, weighing evidence, judging, deciding, and acting. Ignatian discernment uses our personal experience as the starting point and brings together our head and our heart in a delicate but dynamic balance. In this article I will highlight a number of areas in the transition-experiences of these lay ministers where Ignatian principles can best be illustrated.

#### THE QUESTION OF GOD’S WILL

How we deal with the question “What is God’s will for me?” always involves our personal image of God. Do we expect God’s will to be delivered when the buzzer rings, as though discernment were a kind of quiz show in which we are the contestants and God has all the miraculous answers to a series of true-false and multiple-choice questions? Or do we think of God as an architect with a vast and hidden blueprint for which we must search until the moment when God’s will magically appears and we know exactly what to do? Or do we consider God as a mastermind expecting our passive submission so that we can earn some grand heavenly reward if we but submit to this amorphous, yet powerful framework planned eons ago? Each of these images of God’s will would lead to a misconstrued discernment process.

In fact, discernment cannot begin unless we are ready to experience God as the One whose very being is eternal Self-Gift, the One who loves us personally and unconditionally, the One who calls us to life in every moment of every day and who invites us to collaborate actively in creating our future. In Ignatian discernment, the first step is accept-

ing the idea that God's will means that God wants to love us and to be loved in return. God wills for us to choose freely all that leads to the fullest possible human life. God especially wants for us to appropriate more consciously our own unique history of faith, to find its fullest meaning, so that we may enter more fully the covenant of love God desires to make with each of us (English: 11).

In a nutshell, God wills for each of us to be the most authentic person we can be. Sometimes this truth seems almost too basic. After all, we even teach it to little children from the onset of all our catechetical programs, but as adults we often have difficulty remembering—and possibly even believing—this elementary truth. Thus, discernment begins with remembering anew the lessons we learned as a little child. The circumstances of our lives may be very different, but God wills for each of us to enter into an ever-growing love relationship with our Creator and Redeemer.

#### OUR JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS, FREEDOM, AND AUTHENTICITY

How is discernment part of the process of human maturation? First, we must recognize that psychological and spiritual growth go hand-in-hand. The Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan has proposed a way of describing human growth which correlates the two. He describes our fundamental human life-project in terms of our gradual existential self-realization as free and responsible subjects. In other words, as human beings (subjects), we are capable of freely choosing our path and taking responsibility for our choices. Lonergan called this the "ever-advancing thrust towards authenticity" by which we "move to the existential moment when we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves" (Lonergan: 240).

Building on Lonergan's basic ideas, Walter Conn has developed a comprehensive analysis of human development as conversion. In Conn's view, each progressive stage of human development requires some form of intellectual, affective, moral, spiritual and/or religious self-transcendence, which he simply defines as "the radical drive, the dynamic exigence of the human spirit for meaning, truth, value and love" (Conn: 24). Thus, at each stage of development, from infancy through childhood through adolescence through the entirety of adulthood until death itself, the human person grows in the capacity to transcend the former self and become a more authentic self.

For Conn, the most important form of self-transcendence is the capacity to love. The greatest conversion is when we decide to offer our very lives to others in some form of generous and creative compassion, care, and service. Because self-transcendence always propels us into a new way of being, it is not surprising to conclude that we are our most

“authentic selves” when we are truly free to love in committed and mutually self-giving relationships. Conn notes: “People fail to perceive the paradoxical truth that authentic realization of their deepest human desires occurs only when they turn their primary attention from their own interests and desires and genuinely involve themselves in the needs and desires of others” (Conn: 20).

#### ATTRACTION AND RESISTANCE

We are naturally inclined to this process of self-transcendence and conversion. The human person has an attraction to progression rather than regression. But in every psychological and spiritual transition, we also experience a strong tendency to resist leaving behind what has become a comfortable way of being. At first, the challenge of self-transcendence threatens us and we fear the transition to a new self-awareness or lifestyle. We might react to this challenge with outright rejection until we develop the confidence and are secure enough to make this transition. Surrender to the new may even feel like a death. Indeed, in a very real way, such a transition is a death to the former self. We certainly will never be the same again. Yet at the same time and paradoxically, surrender to change, to growth, to love, to generous service becomes the only path to greater freedom and self-fulfillment. When we recognize this, we are able to move beyond whatever form of entrapment or complacency we have known before and take on the next challenge. We put aside the former self and become a new self.

The opportunities for transition in our ministerial careers should always be discerned in the larger context of all the various transitions we experience as part of the normal maturation process. Our lives cannot be compartmentalized. We always discern as a whole person on an interior journey towards ever-advancing authenticity, freedom and self-transcendence—and thus, towards God and God’s passionate desire for us. Ignatius captured this insight as he declared himself a “pilgrim” in his autobiography (*Acta Patris Ignatii*). The concept of lifelong conversion is as fundamental to Ignatian discernment as it is to the entirety of the Christian spiritual tradition itself. Ignatius never considered his own spiritual pilgrimage complete. So, too, as we discern the various transitions in our lives, including those in our ministerial careers, we also must see ourselves as pilgrims on a journey.

With this larger perspective in mind, then, the key questions to ask ourselves should be: “What is God offering me in this transitional experience? What advances my authenticity as a person in a growing relationship with God? What am I attracted to doing and what am I resisting—and why? To what am I too attached? From what do I need to free myself so as to discover where God is inviting me to go so that I will grow into a fuller and freer person?”

Susan asked these very questions when she felt frustrated with the repetitiveness of her ministry. In secular terms, we might just say that she was bored and had “reached her peak.” She certainly yearned to move on to intellectual and spiritual growth. At the same time, she was trapped in the comfort zone of her successful ministry. On the one hand, she truly feared the risk of losing her job security, but on the other hand, she knew down deep that she was stagnating. Her self-gift to the parishioners was no longer an authentic expression of her identity.

Lu and Tom both experienced tremendous disappointment and loss in ministry. For a time, they both wanted to retreat within themselves to a safer place where they could avoid giving of themselves. Their gut reactions were to “lick their wounds.” They wanted to return to the safety of the past. Their attachment was a form of self-protection and even a bit of wallowing in self-pity. But they also sensed an urgency to move on, to let go and to trust the future.

Lu was strongly attracted to the more life-giving idea of sharing herself and her gifts in youth ministry even though she still grieved the loss of her beloved mentor.

Tom eventually stopped clinging to the sense of rejection he justifiably felt because he realized that refusing to let go was holding him back from creating a good future.

#### DISCERNMENT OF INTERIOR MOVEMENTS

A key factor in the discernment process is the identification of the frequently simultaneous interior movements of attraction and resistance to growth, which Ignatius described as *consolation* and *desolation*. Generally speaking, we will experience consolation as a deep sense of peace and integration, whereas in desolation we will experience interior disturbance. However, we must always look at the outcome or *terminus* of these interior movements, in other words our actual attitudes and behavior, to determine the real source of consolation and desolation (Buckley, 1991, 229). These movements are more than mere emotions, for they are rooted within the very core and sanctuary of our being (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, #16). One of the greatest Ignatian insights is that God communicates with us through every part of our complicated psyches—our intelligence, emotions, reason, reactions, urges, dreams, hopes, disappointments. In all this, God always urges us towards greater freedom and authenticity.

According to the Ignatian scholar Michael Buckley, the sign of true consolation from God is that it generates not only inner peace, but also a demonstrated increase in authentic freedom which he defines as the “potentiality for self-determination” (Buckley, 1984: 69). Buckley cautions

that self-determination is not mere liberty, but rather a self-transcending “interpersonal liberality” which manifests itself as “generous magnanimity” in our relationships. Most especially, it shows itself through loving, unselfish, and unconditional service of God’s people. What this means is precisely that all ministry is motivated by the profoundly experienced consolation of God’s love and a response of gratitude through service. This, of course, is the model Jesus gave us. Ministry is first and foremost self-transcendence. For Buckley, then, the most important questions in evaluating the source of interior movements, especially of consolation, would be: “What are you going to do with your freedom? What are you going to do with yourself?” (Buckley, 1984: 71)

Marilyn was at first attracted to running away from her responsibilities just for sheer relief. Yet she felt dissatisfied and sad when she considered this. Gradually, she was forcefully drawn to the deep-seated awareness of God’s personal love for her. She became more conscious of how much Jesus had done for her, especially through his passion and death. Could she, without resentment, put aside some of her immediate needs for the long-term needs of the diocese? She realized her unique qualifications for her ministry and decided to continue in her present capacity while she discerned options for the future. In this way, she was able to commit herself generously to an act of self-transcendence without forsaking her own spiritual journey. In fact, she experienced consolation even more powerfully as a result.

We can readily identify how Marilyn sorted through the interior movements of consolation and desolation in her discernment process by the visible outcome in both her attitudes and actions. Let us look more closely at the interior movements of consolation and desolation.

#### THE INTERIOR MOVEMENT OF CONSOLATION

David Fleming, S.J., describes consolation as a “deep down peace” (Fleming: 316). Maureen Conroy, R.S.M., further suggests that in consolation, we experience a sense of being “congruent with God” (Conroy: 19). True consolation always originates in God’s active movement towards our hearts. Consolation puts everything in proper perspective, even the most conflicting and discomfiting circumstances which encompass the life-event of transition. Consolation most often happens gradually, but it can occur suddenly with great clarity, especially if we have been concentrating on our relationship with God through regular prayer and sincere attempts to listen to God’s movements.

Angela experienced immediate consolation and a deep connection with God when her spouse unexpectedly informed her of his new

position. Because she had been praying about her spouse's employment and her own future in ministry, she was quite in touch with her genuine desire to entrust herself to God's unfailing love and protection. She was not afraid of the transfer, even though it meant relinquishing her current position and putting her own ministerial goals on temporary hold. She was able to assent confidently to this job-transfer.

One clear indication of consolation is the energy which flows from such spiritual integration. We may find ourselves remarkably capable of transcending pettiness and drudgery to serve joyfully, as Marilyn and as Angela did. Both of these women experienced what John English, S.J., calls a "holy *anamnesis*," or "felt trail of consolation" in our own unique spiritual history (English: 11). Such *anamnesis* helps us recall our original awakening to God's unconditional love, our call to discipleship, our desire to enter into ministry in the first place.

When Tom was terminated, anger and hurt dominated his spiritual landscape for months. But as he slowly unraveled his feelings in prayer, he recognized that his termination was the result of human decisions, albeit unjustified ones. He remembered his initial sense of vocation and how energized and hopeful he was at that time of his life. He recalled vividly God's healing love at other crises in his life, and he truly desired to trust God again in the same way. He realized that God's will was for him to survive and continue in ministry, and that God wanted his healing to begin.

We see in Tom's story the element of *self-transcendence* which is initiated and supported through genuine consolation even when we have experienced injustice, betrayal or failure in ministry. Consolation helps us ask these questions during a painful transition: "How could I become a better minister because of this experience? How might I support others who have experienced injustice in ministry? How will I reach out and move beyond this hurt, pain, and humiliation?" Such consolation is, once again, described beautifully by David Fleming: "My consolation: who I am by the grace of God" (Fleming: 234). When we come to understand yet again who we are by the grace of God, we can be sure that we are again embarking on another part of our journey towards authenticity.

#### THE INTERIOR MOVEMENT OF DESOLATION

Desolation is often rooted in our sinfulness, in self-centeredness, or in deeply unfree areas (Conroy: 23). People often describe desolation as a spiritual feeling of entrapment in a heavy darkness of spirit, as paralysis, fear, alienation, emptiness, dryness, rebelliousness, restlessness, frag-

mentation, brokenness, disintegration, perhaps even despair. There is often a marked distaste for prayer. Symptoms may include a lack of energy and enthusiasm, sometimes even developing into apathy. We feel a desperate desire to reverse our current forward-moving behavior patterns, to give up, run away, escape from responsibilities and relationships. We might feel isolated and alone, as though God has abandoned us, as though “we are living a skeletal life of the bare bones of faith” (Fleming: 320). Many ministers have described desolation as almost like spiritual burnout, and indeed, sometimes it is hard to distinguish whether burnout is the cause or the result of spiritual desolation. Whatever the source, the inner turmoil of desolation clearly has the power to prevent self-transcendence and healthy ministry.

John’s desolation began to de-energize him as the dysfunction in his ministerial employment dominated his life. His original sense of joy in ministry disappeared. He became angry and cynical as exhaustion engulfed him. He realized that his ministry had become mechanical. As the crisis mounted, he felt increasingly isolated from his colleagues who did not want to address the problem. John began to distance himself first from liturgy, then even from personal prayer. Finally, John faced his desolation squarely. He began to seek help. He saw that he had been relying only on himself and had been resistant to liberate himself from this addictive atmosphere. His own desolation had nearly sabotaged his ministry.

Ignatius described inner turmoil like John’s in combative terms, as a battle requiring all our spiritual energies. In desolation we seem to be immensely attracted, almost in an addictive way, to what moves us away from God and towards what Ignatius called *inordinate attachments*. These might be any person, desire, or habit which is an obstacle to the development of our relationship with God. Inordinate attachments are surprisingly deceptive. They provide a “false consolation” in that they initially feel so right and bring a shallow peace, but they eventually lead us to desolation because we cannot detach ourselves from them. Thus, we cling fiercely to these attachments, sometimes long after we have acknowledged to ourselves the harm they bring to our well-being.

In Ignatius’ mind, it is the Evil One who tempts us to abandon God’s love for us in favor of harmful attachments or yearnings. Whether we attribute this struggle to the Evil One, to our own complex tendency towards self-deception and self-destruction, or to the normal attraction and resistance in the process of maturation, we must still remember that God never inflicts desolation as a test of loyalty, as though God’s will and my will are adversaries. Quite the contrary: God’s fundamental desire for each person is freedom, grace, life and authenticity. God

always wants to draw each of us out of desolation, but we must accept this invitation freely.

John discovered that his *inordinate attachment* was his own ministerial self-image as hero! The more he quixotically attempted to play the role of savior/martyr, the more chaotic his interior movements became. He could no longer concentrate on his ministry, only on his misery. His false bravado led to a joyless period, which only ended when he finally admitted to himself that he was not the Messiah.

The source of Lu's desolation was her immature dependence on her mentor. She missed his companionship, advice, and his daily interest in her ministry. She discerned that her fear at the very thought of ministering without his presence was an obstacle to her personal growth. In time, she came to trust that her mentor's departure was an invitation from God for her to grow into a more mature and independent self-image. Soon she was able to find new energy in her ministry. Another surprise followed: her relationship with her mentor actually moved to a new level of collegiality in ministry.

Overcoming desolation first requires the recognition that we are indeed experiencing a movement drawing us further from God. In desolation we need time, patience, honesty with ourselves and a trusted spiritual advisor to walk with us through its many complexities. Ignatius's basic advice about desolation still holds true today. During desolation we should not change our current course of action until we have taken time for adequate prayer and discernment. We should honestly confront our own stubbornness, immaturity, attachments, pride and sinfulness. We need to ask for God's help.

In desolation we should put extra effort into remembering our experience of past consolations which will help nourish our trust and hope in God's abundant healing love for us. Above all else, we should never keep desolation bottled up inside ourselves. We should acknowledge it openly to dispel its power and control, as John and Lu did. We can be sure that God will always show us a way through the darkness of desolation, because God has invited us into relationship in the first place.

#### DISCERNMENT: FOLLOWING JESUS THROUGH THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

In a very real way, discernment through desolation can be a graced opportunity to enter into the dying and rising of Jesus. Jesus discerned and embraced God's will through many transitions in his life, but his most self-transcendent action was his embrace of his own impending death during his agony at Gethsemani. Here we see Jesus struggling

between intense desolation, even sweating drops of blood, yet surrendering with stunning freedom and faith in Abba. Jesus remembered, in "holy *anamnesis*," his union with Abba. His sublime moment of existential self-realization and authenticity brought him immense consolation in the midst of desolation. He did not turn back to the past and to security but embraced his suffering and death. Thus, Jesus' death by crucifixion became the self-transcendent act of God's glory and his cross became the contradictory sign of victory, new life and liberation for all time. The paschal mystery is at the heart of our Christian faith.

Because dying and rising is what transition is all about, Jesus himself is the best model of discernment. Each and every transition on our journey to authenticity has the potential to reveal the paschal mystery to us in our own here and now. Each ministerial transition is God's invitation to die and rise, whether in small or profound ways. Discernment helps us accept the grace to participate freely and willingly in the paschal mystery.

"This feels like I'm dying in a way," Angela declared at one point. "Yes, part of me is dying. But somehow I've never felt so alive before! I know God will bring me life."

In our own way, each of us says these words as we strive to embrace the paschal mystery in our own transitions. The real question of each discernment is: "Am I willing to accept God's invitation to share in Christ's death and resurrection?"

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*True collaboration requires an appreciation of the distinction and differentiation of roles and responsibilities in the body of Christ, together with a clear recognition of the fundamental equality of all the baptized, ordained and nonordained. For effective collaboration to occur, each one must believe that he or she has something to offer and have trust in the gifts that others bring to our common task. Above all, we must be willing to admit that we can achieve something together that we cannot achieve alone.*

—Roger Cardinal Mahony  
"As I Have Done for You"  
a pastoral letter on ministry

*Margaret Costello and Ana M. Villamil*

## **Celebrating Lay Ecclesial Ministry**

On a warm May evening, about fifty people made their way along old cobbled streets toward an historic church. A service was about to begin that would reflect the enormity of the changes in ministry that are taking place in the Catholic Church. Beth was about to be commissioned as a lay minister for her parish. This service was to be a celebration of a new and wondrous gift of the Spirit to the Church: the gift of lay ecclesial ministry.

The assembly rose and joined in singing the opening hymn, "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service." The presider, who was pastor of this parish, took his place in the sanctuary. The Liturgy of the Word included proclamations of Isa 6:1-8, Rom 5:15, and John 21:1-19 and, as responsorial psalm, "Here I Am, Lord." The homily engaged those assembled in a reflection on the question, "What is ministry?"

Following the homily, Beth who was seated in the first pew with her family walked to the microphone. On the previous evening, she had received a master of divinity degree from a Catholic school for ministry. The conferral of this degree marked the end of nine years of courses, almost one hundred credit hours. During these years, she juggled a family and a full-time position on the pastoral staff of this large urban parish, along with papers and exams.

At the microphone she began by talking of the call to ministry that she had experienced: how this call was unsought and, in fact, actively resisted. She recalled that once this call was embraced, it provided such integration with the rest of her life as wife, mother, sister, daughter, granddaughter, and grandmother. She expressed her gratitude to the parish that had nurtured her vocation and the pastor who had served as mentor and model. His confidence and joy in his own vocation had been the wellspring of his generous recognition and support of lay ministry.

In conclusion, with those present as witnesses, Beth made these solemn promises: "Baptized and confirmed in the Catholic tradition of the Christian Church, I consecrate my life to God as a disciple of Jesus Christ. In embracing a call to ministry that is rooted in our shared baptismal call to service,

— I promise to be generous with my love, my time and energy, and my worldly goods in service to the people of God.

- I promise to seek opportunities to serve God’s people, wherever I may live, for the rest of my life.
- I promise to do all that I can to contribute to a Church and a world which recognizes and celebrates the gifts of all people, especially those who are excluded or pushed to the margins for any reason.
- I promise to strive to change structures and symbol systems that limit our understanding of God, so that a new community may be born, a liberating community of all women and men characterized by mutuality with each other in which all may flourish.

I solemnly make these promises in the name of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

In thy light, may we see light.”

As she completed these solemn promises, her husband and children came forward to place a cross on a chain around her neck. This cross now serves as a sign of her commitment to compassionate companionship of the People of God.

At the reception afterwards, two members of the assembly compared their reactions. “It was such a moving service wasn’t it?” asked Tanya.

“Yes, it was,” Chris agreed. But it was also so different from when I was commissioned as a parish minister in my diocese last year. I wasn’t the only lay minister being commissioned that night. And it wasn’t even at my parish. The bishop invited all of us from the various parishes to the cathedral and then we had a diocesan-wide commissioning service.”

“So your pastor and your parishioners didn’t participate in the ceremony?” asked Tanya.

“They were there in the assembly, but the bishop emphasized that we were being commissioned by the entire diocese for service to the Church. What was your commissioning service like?” wondered Chris.

Tanya reminisced, “Well, it was nothing like either service. In fact, I’m not really sure that you can call it a commissioning service, although that is the name we gave it. It was right after our entire class finished the two-year diocesan ministry formation program. We had a service where we were all commissioned for future ministry in the Church and we all received certificates saying that we had successfully completed the diocesan lay ministry program. But, as you know, I didn’t have a ministry job yet and neither did about half of my classmates. Of course we were all doing some volunteer work, but it can be very difficult to switch professions. In fact, some of my colleagues are still working in other professions and are able to minister only on a

part-time, volunteer basis. So we weren't really commissioned to do something specific. Rather what was celebrated was that we had completed the program and had the skills and competence to be ministers in the name of the Church. Somehow, without having a specific job to which I was being commissioned, it really didn't feel like a commissioning service. I guess it felt more like a graduation service."

Tanya continued, "But, you know, I could have made every single one of the promises that Beth made tonight. They really were beautiful and they spoke the truth about what it is to be a lay ecclesial minister in the Church today. I wish I had the opportunity to publicly make promises like these in front of the parish community which I now serve."

One of the gifts of lay ministry in today's Church is the vast diversity of the lay ministers. Their journeys to ministry do not follow a simple pre-determined path. They come as newly graduated college students who enter a graduate program seeking to become professional lay ministers. They come as second career professionals who have experienced a call to ministry which they could not ignore. They come as retired people who are filled with the joy of being able to enter a profession where they feel that they are doing God's work. Sometimes they come to ministry almost by accident. Volunteer work in a parish increases in scope, as the pastor, staff and other parishioners ask more of them. Slowly, almost without their notice, what was once an occasional activity in their spare time has become an important and central part of their lives, and they realize that they truly are being called to this ministry.

The challenge of this diversity of paths is that there is no simple or correct way to celebrate lay ministry. Yet given the ritualistic nature of the Catholic faith, how can we not celebrate this gift in a public manner?

Beth, Tanya and Chris all share a common experience of having their call to ministry publicly recognized and affirmed by the faith community. But the differences in their commissioning services show just how new this ritual is. In our Church today, there is no single, official rite for commissioning lay ministers. Therefore, each diocese or each parish or each ministry program decides how, or even if, to commission its own lay ministers.

Many questions need to be examined. Should lay ministers be commissioned at their place of employment as they begin their new ministry or should they be commissioned at the end of their academic and formation program? Ideally, a commissioning service indicates that this person before us is being given the responsibility of ministering here, in this specific role, in the name of our Church. Yet, some commissioning services indicate that this person before us has the competence, the skills, and the formation to be called to minister by a future

church employer. This is more properly the role of a graduation or certification ceremony. Ideally, one should be commissioned “to” something. A commissioning should not so much mark the end of a program than the beginning of a new phase of ministry. But with the diversity of paths taken by lay ministers, creativity is required in publicly recognizing and affirming each person’s call to ministry.

Another series of questions involves: who should do the commissioning and, more specifically, what is the proper relationship between the lay minister and the ordained ministers? It is easy to agree that a diocesan lay minister should be commissioned by the bishop. But what of a parish lay minister? Would it be better for the pastor and the parish community to do the commissioning service in their own parish? Or would it be better for the bishop to recognize and commission all lay ministers within his diocese? In addition to an employer-employee relationship between the pastor and the lay minister, should there also be some type of relationship between the lay minister and the bishop who is the one ultimately responsible for all ministry in the diocese?

The U.S. Bishops’ Subcommittee on Lay Ministry in its 1999 report *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* agreed with the importance of these questions. They noted that “The relationship of the lay ecclesial minister to the bishop emerged as one of the central themes in subcommittee discussions. It is a relationship desired by the lay ministers themselves as an expression of their role within the local church. There is also a concern that, on occasion, some lay ministers develop and minister from a too parochial view of the church.” They concluded that “The nature of this relationship of the bishop and the lay ecclesial ministers—its theological and practical implications—is one that requires further exploration and attention. How this relationship is expressed and ritualized is another issue that needs attention” (44).

Both Chris and Tanya have been commissioned by their respective bishops, so they at least are aware of each other. Chris’s bishop commissioned her for a specific ministry, so there is an intentional relationship where the bishop affirmed Chris’s call to this ministry. Tanya’s bishop commissioned her for lay ministry in general. So theoretically, he may not even know that she is now employed in one of his parishes. In Beth’s situation the bishop may not even know Beth exists, much less that she is a minister in one of his parishes.

Ideally, there should be a two-way relationship between the bishop and every minister, whether lay or ordained, in his diocese. Relationships entail accountability and support; they call for responsibility and collaboration. Yet, are these relationships realistic given today’s statistics? The number of lay ministers is increasing exponentially. According to a recent report, in just five short years from 1992 to 1997, the number of lay ecclesial ministers employed at least half-time at the parish level

rose 35 percent from 21,569 to 29,146. Given this trend, how can the relationship between a bishop and the lay ecclesial ministers in his diocese best be structured? Again, creativity can lead to some helpful options. In one diocese the bishop has created a Lay Ecclesial Ministers Council consisting of twelve members who will address issues such as recognition and support for lay ecclesial ministers (Murnion and DeLambo: 4).

What about the promises that Beth made at the commissioning service? Should every lay minister be invited to make promises? Should the promises be to the local parish, to the diocese, to the entire Church or to God? Are the promises for a specific time period (e.g., while the lay minister is in that position) or should they be for life, like Beth's promises were? And what does the Church, represented by either the parish or diocese, promise in return? Certainly, given today's organizational structure, the Church cannot promise to always employ the lay minister nor even to always affirm or support the gifts of that lay minister. Yet, what theological and moral responsibility does the Church have in affirming and supporting a lay ecclesial minister's response to his or her call to ministry?

As Chris and Tanya were pondering these questions, six-year-old Jeremy came running up to them.

"What did you think of your grandmother's commissioning service, Jeremy?" asked Chris.

"That was neat," responded Jeremy as his head bobbed up and down. "When I grow up, I want to be commissioned, too!" he exclaimed with a big smile on his face.

Only the Spirit knows what will be the shape of Jeremy's commissioning service many years from now.

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## **Strengthening the Spirituality of Lay Ministers**

*When the apostles returned, they explained to him what they had done. He took them and withdrew in private to a town called Bethsaida. Luke 9:10*

As I have participated in ministry at my home parish and in the broader context of the Catholic Church in the United States, I have experienced ups and downs, contributed to successes and failures, and felt closer to and farther away from God. My spiritual life has involved many struggles to discern God's call and my response to that call. The three things that have consistently helped me to maintain my relationship with God are personal prayer, belonging to a small Christian community, and regular participation in my parish's liturgical life.

The work of ministry is demanding. It requires substantial reserves of physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. As with any of the helping professions, ministers must constantly strive to maintain the balance between their jobs, their "clients," and their own individual lives. Jesus knew the importance of taking time to restore his spiritual strength, and he invited his appointed ministers to do the same. This article will look at some examples of how the Roman Catholic Church is working to support the spiritual needs of its lay ministers and will offer suggestions for future directions to further strengthen this element of ecclesial lay ministry.

The foundation for any Christian's relationship with God is a strong prayer life nourished by diligent reading of sacred Scripture. While all practicing Christians should take time each day to talk and listen to God, it is especially important for ecclesial lay ministers who are called to play a more active role in building up the Reign of God. Pastors and others responsible for ministry teams can easily make it a routine practice to set aside the first fifteen minutes of each workday for prayer and Scripture. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has created a space on its website ([WWW.NCCBUSCC.ORG](http://WWW.NCCBUSCC.ORG)) with daily scripture readings and psalms from the Lectionary. The text is taken from *The New American Bible* and the site also provides a link to the electronic text of the entire Bible.

The prayer lives of ordained clergy and vowed religious have benefited significantly from spiritual directors who help directees deepen

their prayer experience, work through barriers and issues affecting their prayer life, and experiment with new forms of prayer. Increasingly, lay persons are also working with spiritual directors either during graduate studies or in support of their ministry placements. At Washington Theological Union lay students are encouraged to work with spiritual directors as part of their formation, and the school maintains a list of over thirty spiritual directors who have agreed to meet with students. Most directors work on a fee basis and this can often be a barrier for ecclesial ministers whose salaries often do not provide much room for discretionary spending. Dioceses and/or parishes might subsidize or absorb costs for spiritual direction for ecclesial lay ministers in order to support the spiritual health of the ministry team.

Ministers are also sustained in their work through regular participation in the sacramental life of their home parish. The Eucharist provides the spiritual nourishment essential to effective ministry. Ministers in parish settings are often torn between continuing their participation in their home parish and belonging to the parish where they work. Participation in liturgy within the communities they are serving helps to solidify the connection with parishioners and helps the minister to more easily identify and respond to the needs of the community. At the same time, ministers also need a space where they can worship and be nourished without the expectation that they are available to address pastoral needs seven days a week.

Throughout the world Catholics have found enormous spiritual benefit from coming together regularly in small Christian communities (SCCs) to reflect on Scripture, pray, share their faith, and deepen their relationship with God. Ecclesial lay ministers belonging to such communities receive substantial support and affirmation. At St. Rose of Lima parish in Gaithersburg, Maryland, most of the parish's staff of eight full or part time lay ministers and the church's pastor belong to faith sharing groups. By being "just a member," staff members affirm that they are able to relax and connect with God and the other members of their communities.

I have been a member of a small Christian Community for over nine years. During this period we have celebrated first communion, confirmation, graduation, and marriages within the community. We have supported one another through deaths of family members, marital separation and divorce, loss of jobs, and struggles with children. Through dialogue with Scripture, sharing our stories of faith in action, and prayer, we have supported one another in a wide variety of ministries. Our lives have grown together in ways that approach the intimacy of the first Christian house churches and the support from this community is a foundation for all of my ministerial work.

A retreat provides a unique opportunity to focus on issues of spirituality. Whether for a day, a weekend, a week or more, time spent away from regular responsibilities allows for an extended conversation with God, and exploration of issues specific to each ecclesial lay minister's duties. Retreat centers are beginning to recognize the need for specific programming for ministers. At Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriotsville, Maryland, Dr. Francis Van der Wall, the center's director, conducted a three-day retreat this spring focusing on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The retreat was offered to priests and ministers, both vowed religious and ecclesial lay, to help interiorize the experience of Lent. The local church can help to increase the availability of programs specifically targeted at lay ministers by funding development of a retreat experience designed explicitly to meet the needs of the lay minister. This program could then be made available to all retreat facilities.

Dioceses often provide resources for formation and professional development of ordained clergy, and are beginning to expand their programs to meet the needs of ecclesial lay ministers as well. Marti Jewell, director of the Office of Ministry Spirituality in the Archdiocese of Louisville, noted that an Archdiocesan Leadership Institute has been established there for this purpose. The institute provides cross-role training and offers opportunities for parish staffs to come together and improve their teamwork as well as their spirituality. The institute has developed a three-day program to provide a shared experience and to nurture the Catholic identity of a ministry team. The archdiocese also sponsors prayer days for lay and ordained ministers.

The increasing numbers of ecclesial lay ministers and the prominent role that they are now playing in the life of the Church in the United States makes it critical that the Church provide appropriate support for their work. Providing resources for "spiritual wellness" is an important need that has not yet been fully addressed. Spiritual health is vital to prevent burnout and to being an effective minister. Each ministry supervisor together with each ecclesial lay minister should look carefully at what they are doing to meet their own spiritual needs and the needs of their team members.

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Richard R. Gaillardetz

## Reflections on the Future of Papal Primacy

In his encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II invited the leaders of other Christian traditions to help him discover a new manner of exercising papal primacy as a “service of love” (John Paul II, 1995: #95). This remarkable invitation suggests the possibility of a new future for the exercise of papal primacy. In this article I would like to consider the extent to which this new future is already being glimpsed in the pontificate of John Paul II. I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive analysis of his pontificate. Rather, I aspire only to sketch out the vision of primacy that he has offered in *Ut unum sint*, followed by an analysis of three dimensions of the concrete exercise of that primacy during his pontificate.

### UT UNUM SINT ON THE PAPACY

In the encyclical we can learn much about the Pope’s theological understanding of primacy by considering the terminology he employs. One of the most significant developments is the choice of papal titles. While “pope” appears eight times (apart from reference to individual popes), and “successor of Peter” six times, neither “pontiff” nor “vicar of Christ” appear at all. In contrast, the Pope used the title, “bishop of Rome,” over twenty times.

#### A. *Bishop of Rome*

The use of this title reminds us that the pope is only pope because he is first a bishop of a local church. That local church is Rome, the apostolic see of Sts. Peter and Paul. It was a church acknowledged from the second century on to possess a primacy within the ancient communion of churches, however much the scope and character of that primacy changed over time. Historically it is this primacy of the church of Rome that grounded the developing primacy of Rome’s bishop. The title “bishop of Rome” further points to the pope’s relationship to his fellow bishops. If he is head of the college of bishops it is only because he is also a member of it.

#### B. *Servus Servorum Dei*

John Paul II also draws attention to another papal title, *servus servorum Dei*, “the servant of the servants of God.” The title is noteworthy,

not only because it is an ancient one, first employed by Gregory the Great, but also because it suggests a very different view of primacy itself, one that the Pope obviously hopes will bear fruit in ecumenical dialogue.

“Servant of the servants of God” suggests something quite different from the monarchical and supra-episcopal view of the papacy that was often inferred from the teaching of Vatican I. The Pope observes that “[t]his designation is the best possible safeguard against the risk of separating power (and in particular primacy) from ministry. Such a separation would contradict the very meaning of power according to the Gospel” (#88). He insists that the “authority proper to this ministry is completely at the service of God’s merciful plan, and it must always be seen in this perspective. Its power is explained from this perspective” (#92). Later in the encyclical he recalls an address of his given to the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios in which he admitted that where the exercise of the papacy was concerned, in past times “what should have been a service sometimes manifested itself in a very different light” (#95).

It is evident that the Pope has gone to great lengths to re-conceive papal power within the framework of ministry and service. Strikingly absent in his description of papal primacy is any use of the term “jurisdiction” whatsoever. Rather he describes his mission as that of “keeping watch” (*episkopein*). He does insist that for such a ministry of oversight to be effective the bishop of Rome must possess “a real power and authority” but only in order to “ensure the communion of all the Churches” (#94).

### *C. Primacy within an Ecclesiology of Communion*

The Pope further develops a theology of primacy as a ministry of service within the context of an ecclesiology of communion. While it is a commonplace to speak of the centrality of the notion of *communio* at Vatican II, the truth is that this ecclesiological concept was employed unevenly at the council and in its documents was often juxtaposed with more juridical and universalist ecclesiologies (see Pottmeyer, 1987: 37; Komonchak, 1992: 427). The constructive task of developing a coherent ecclesiology of communion has only really been taken up in the decades since the council. The Roman curia itself had already issued a document on the ecclesiology of communion a few years prior to the issuance of this encyclical (CDF). The Pope’s encyclical presupposes this development. Indeed, more than any previous ecclesiastical document, *Ut unum sint* presents the papacy within an ecclesiology that views the universal Church as a communion of churches. Seen from this perspective, the Church is neither a federation of autonomous congregations nor a universal corporation with branch offices throughout

the world. As Vatican II taught, “Individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are modeled on the universal church; *it is in and from these that the one and unique catholic church exists*” [Flannery, *Lumen gentium*, #23, emphasis added]. This communion of churches, manifested by institutional bonds, is constituted by the Holy Spirit and sustained in a profound sharing among local churches in the proclamation of the word of God, the celebration of the Eucharist, the leadership of an apostolic ministry and the life of faith and charity. The term “universal Church” does not name some ecclesial entity separate from or “above” these local churches. Rather “universal Church” names the living spiritual communion which is realized in these local churches.

As a communion of churches, the primary responsibility for shepherding a local flock lies with the local bishop, the ordinary pastor of the local church. It follows that within this ecclesiology, the principal manifestation of papal primacy will be to support the bishops in the exercise of their pastoral charge. Consequently, papal primacy must be seen in a significantly different light than that offered in the treatment of primacy at Vatican I and even, to some extent, Vatican II. The Pope explicitly situates his primacy within this ecclesiology when he describes it as a “service of unity . . . entrusted within the College of Bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people . . . but of leading them toward peaceful pastures” (#94). His unique task is to keep watch, ensuring that through the effective ministry of the local bishops, the voice of Christ is heard.

#### *D. Ecumenical Prospects*

Is there ecumenical promise in this attempt to re-frame papal primacy as a ministry of service? It appears that the Pope was offering this presentation of primacy with an eye cast toward East-West relations. In the Orthodox tradition, there are a number of bishops and theologians who are prepared to acknowledge a kind of universal primacy for the bishop of Rome. But this universal primacy would have to be exercised within the same constraints imposed on that primacy exercised at the patriarchal and metropolitan levels, that is, it could only be a primacy of honor. Within those limits, even if Orthodoxy were to grant a unique primacy to the bishop of Rome as “first among equals” (*primus inter pares*), there is a common assumption that such a primacy would still be irreconcilable with Vatican I’s assertion of universal papal jurisdiction. For the Orthodox, Vatican I established the pope as a monarchical, supra-episcopal authority over all the bishops, an approach that is directly opposed to the Orthodox emphasis on synodal decision-making and the fundamental equality of the episcopate.

However, from the Catholic perspective, most scholars of Vatican I acknowledge the limitations and even inadequacies of the overly juridical view of papal primacy offered in Vatican I's constitution *Pastor aeternus*. If ecclesiology, from the Roman Catholic perspective, always demands some juridical form, what Vatican I offered was an ecclesiology *reduced* to its juridical form. Nevertheless, careful studies of Vatican I's teaching demonstrate that in spite of its shortcomings, *Pastor aeternus* in fact offered a much more circumscribed view of primacy than many realize (Tillard, 1983; Pottmeyer, 1998). When, in the wake of Vatican I, Chancellor Bismarck attributed to the council the view that the pope had subsumed all episcopal jurisdiction under his own papal jurisdiction, the German bishops issued an important clarification. They insisted against Bismarck that the council did not in any way undermine the legitimate authority of the local bishop. The pope's ordinary, immediate and universal jurisdiction implied only that proper to the bishop of Rome's office was the responsibility to ensure the welfare of the churches, intervening only because of the incapacity of the local bishop or because the good of the Church required it. Pope Pius IX immediately applauded the German bishops for their response and officially confirmed the authenticity of their interpretation of Vatican I (Denzinger: 3112–17).

It was regrettable that this important clarification never found its way explicitly into the documents of Vatican II. That council had to be content simply to juxtapose the more expansive view of papal jurisdiction popularly assumed in the wake of Vatican I with new insights regarding episcopal collegiality. John Paul II's treatment of primacy represents a genuine effort to go beyond both the juridical and universalist ecclesiology of Vatican I and the uneasy conjoining of that ecclesiology with a *communio*-ecclesiology at Vatican II.

Catholic participants in ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox will want to highlight the real progress made in moving beyond the limitations of Vatican I without renouncing the essential substance of its dogmatic decrees. At the same time it may be necessary respectfully to ask our Orthodox partners whether a primacy of honor, as it was understood in the early Church, did not itself imply some real juridical authority. The patristic scholar and ecumenist Brian Daley published a study on the understanding of a primacy of honor as articulated in the canons of the ancient councils (Daley). He demonstrates that this primacy of honor was never understood in a mere ceremonial sense as an authority that was strictly moral or persuasive in character. It was assumed that the one who possessed a primacy of honor was able to make real and binding decisions.

Is there a possible meeting place between, on the one hand, the Pope's account of primacy as a ministry of service and oversight within the

college of bishops and the communion of churches and, on the other hand, the recognition that even a primacy of honor as understood historically, assumed real juridical authority? Those interested in the cause of ecumenism can only hope that the long-awaited resumption of the suspended dialogue between Catholicism and Orthodoxy will provide opportunities to consider this question further. In any event, any realistic hope for progress on this question will also require not only an assessment of official Catholic teaching on this question, but also a sober analysis of the way this teaching is embodied in contemporary church praxis.

#### THE EXERCISE OF PRIMACY

Now I wish to turn from John Paul II's *teaching* on primacy to consider three distinguishing characteristics of the actual *exercise* of primacy in this pontificate: (a) symbolic papal action; (b) papal teaching ministry, and (c) the exercise of primacy in the affairs of the local churches.

##### *A. Symbolic Papal Action*

I suspect that more than any other in history this papacy will be etched in memory by way of a string of compelling media images. One of the most enduring will be an image revisited innumerable times, that of the Pope kissing the ground upon the first visit to a country. This Pope has made unprecedented use of modern transportation to exercise his ministry in service of unity by visiting the many churches throughout the world, publicly affirming the unique gifts of that community, challenging it to further fidelity to the gospel where necessary, and, where such churches suffered from injustice, bringing that injustice to world attention. During these visits the Pope makes full use of the local media. He often appeals in a special way to the youth, elevates for universal emulation the witness of the saints and martyrs of a particular church, and visits with local leaders and representatives of other churches and religious traditions. Indeed, these papal visits frequently have an overtly ecumenical dimension, particularly where he has visited such predominantly non-Catholic countries as Romania.

These global trips can be seen from two perspectives. From the perspective of those who receive the Pope on his travels, these visits are often experienced as an act of papal solidarity with the local church and in many instances an expression of compassion for their plight. From the perspective of those who follow these visits through the media, they have the potential of raising to our conscious awareness the rich diversity of the churches and the unique concerns and challenges that other Christians face in various parts of the world.

Other symbolic papal actions in this pontificate include his joint prayer with the chief rabbi at the synagogue in Rome and his joint recitation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed with the patriarch of Constantinople, in Greek and without the *filioque*. Even more dramatic have been two acts of reconciliation which may well serve as bookends for this pontificate: the first is John Paul II's remarkable offer of forgiveness to his would-be assassin in a private meeting (the photos of which made this, however, an act of public significance) which occurred early in his pontificate and the second is his solemn request for forgiveness on behalf of the Church for sins committed by members of the Church in its past, offered on the first Sunday of Lent, as part of the celebration of the Jubilee.

When we consider these profound public gestures along with the Pope's many global travels, we are left with a paradox. This Pope, considered by many to be iron-fisted in his wielding of juridical authority, has in fact been most successful where he has wielded no juridical authority, relying rather on the prestige of his office as a moral voice, a living example of universal compassion and a symbol of Christian unity.

These actions constitute a genuine *novum* in the history of papal primacy, not because they are individually without precedent but because their *impact* is without precedent. The modern media have increased exponentially the extent to which a particular papal action can be brought to the attention of millions of people throughout the world. In consequence, the effective symbolic power of these actions has also been amplified. Consider a simple papal gesture, like the Pope's embrace of an AIDS victim in Africa. Certainly similar papal gestures of compassion have been repeated numerous times throughout the history of the papacy, but the impact of those actions would have been much more limited. Now an act of compassion, embracing an AIDS victim or the praying with one's would-be assassin, can appear instantly to millions on the cover of international newspapers and on nightly television broadcasts. In this new world, such gestures have more potential for communicating the importance of a basic gospel imperative than a carefully worded encyclical whose readership may number in the mere thousands.

Do these largely symbolic exercises of primacy offer possibilities for the future of the papacy? Yes and no. To be sure, this kind of ministry would have been impossible a mere century ago, but its success depends not only on modern transportation and global communications technologies but also on the character of the pope. This Pope is a remarkably popular and attractive figure and there is no guarantee that future popes could emulate him. Moreover, there is a danger that the very visibility of the Pope in these travels might lead to a "cult of

personality” that could obscure the nature of the office. The Pope’s greatly enhanced visibility could also encourage the perception of the Pope as a supra-episcopal figure, further obscuring the real authority of the local bishops. Others worry that these trips often function less as a celebration of local churches than as a means of exercising control over them.

While acknowledging these reservations, I suspect that a renewed papacy will need to follow Pope John Paul II’s lead in functioning as a public voice to the world for the gospel of Jesus Christ and a visible symbol of the Church’s evangelical mission. This largely symbolic, persuasive authority is likely only to grow in importance in the coming third millennium.

#### *B. The Pope as Chief Theologian of the Church*

My second observation regarding the exercise of primacy under this pontificate concerns the pope’s role as teacher. Catholic doctrine insists that the authority of the papacy is grounded in the pope’s pastoral office as the bishop of the church of Rome. Consequently, that which the Second Vatican Council taught regarding the ministry of the bishop must apply to the bishop of Rome as well. The council affirmed that “among the principal tasks of bishops, the preaching of the gospel is pre-eminent” (Flannery, *Lumen gentium*, #25; *Christus Dominus*, #12).

It is difficult to think of another pope in the modern era who has taken this ministry more to heart. The proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and the call to a “new evangelization” lie at the core of Pope John Paul II’s profound sense of vocation. He has preached the good news “in and out of season” in literally thousands of homilies and addresses. The evangelical character of his papacy has significant implications because, as ecumenical dialogues have made clear, any hope for a recognition of a universal primate by the churches of the Reformation, in particular, lies in its clear subservience to the Word of God.

However, when one thinks of the legacy that Pope John Paul II will be leaving the Church, one thinks not of his more occasional addresses and homilies but of the corpus of encyclicals. Some commentators like Avery Dulles and George Weigel consider this corpus one of his principal gifts to the Church. And yet many young Catholics who have known no other pope may find it difficult to appreciate the relative novelty of this manner of exercising primacy.

The truth is that the papal encyclical itself is a modern development first employed in the eighteenth century by Pope Benedict XIV. However, his encyclicals were all very brief and largely either disciplinary or exhortatory in character. In the nineteenth century Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX made use of the encyclical, often addressing doctrinal

matters, but these too were generally short in length. When they condemned erroneous views there, was no intention of stimulating new theological insight (Schatz: 167–68). With such noteworthy encyclicals as *Aeterni Patris*, *Providentissimus Deus*, *Satis cognitum* and *Rerum novarum*, Pope Leo XIII instigated a significant shift in the teaching role of the pope. While popes had always claimed doctrinal authority on matters of faith and morals, at least going back to the fifth century, the actual exercise of that authority had been relatively infrequent, and when employed, was usually limited to fairly terse doctrinal pronouncements. The pontificate of Leo XIII marks the beginning of a modern development in the papacy in which popes begin to offer, as part of their teaching ministry, extended theological treatments issued in formal magisterial documents on important topics. Pius X would follow Leo's precedent with *Pascendi*, his condemnation of modernism, and both Pius XI and Pius XII would issue lengthy encyclicals during their successive pontificates.

This century-long development culminates in our present pontificate. If one compares the written output of John Paul II to that of his predecessors, in terms of total pages, no pope has written more in the genre of the encyclical than our present one. Indeed, the comparison becomes more dramatic if one were to include his often weighty post-synodal exhortations. By my informal tabulation, at least five of his encyclicals exceed the length of the longest encyclical of any of his predecessors.

What we have witnessed in the last century and a half is the transformation of the papacy from its ancient function as a court of final appeal on theological matters, to the pope as chief theologian of the Church. In the Middle Ages the primary arbiter of theological disputes was the theology faculty of the universities like the faculty of theology of Paris or the canon law faculty at the University of Bologna. After the establishment of neo-scholasticism in the mid-nineteenth century, the various faculties of the Roman Colleges took over this role, ghost-writing papal documents. However, in our present pontificate, it appears as if the Pope, and by extension his curia, has now become the chief theologian of the Church.

Pope John Paul II's encyclicals are often very long, dense treatments of a topic. Moreover, as formal exercises of the ordinary papal magisterium, their very length raises the legitimate question of their binding character. How does one distinguish between binding doctrinal judgments and personal theological reflections? The Pope asserts the existence of intrinsically evil acts in *Veritatis splendor*, but is his phenomenological account of the good equally binding? He defends the Church's prohibition of the ordination of women in *Mulieris dignitatem*, but what is the binding status of his view of gender complementarity employed to

support his position? When the Pope engages in his universal teaching ministry by writing in-depth theological works, is there not a danger of undermining the theological pluralism that he has defended elsewhere?

There is a tradition regarding papal teaching going back at least to St. Robert Bellarmine that distinguished between the pope as a private doctor and the pope as universal pastor. This distinction was assumed at Vatican Councils I and II. Yet our modern situation makes this distinction more difficult to maintain. When the traditional instruments for exercising the pope's ministry as universal pastor and teacher contain extended theological treatments, are we not at risk of blurring the important distinction between an authoritative proclamation of the faith and private theological speculation?

We are living in a period of history increasingly referred to as post-modern. One of the characteristics of post-modern thought is the growing awareness of the significant pluralism that qualifies our consciousness. In such an epoch we must ask whether the papacy best serves the Church by producing lengthy theological tomes. As we move into a third millennium of church history, I am inclined to believe that a more helpful model may be found in the pontificate of Pope Paul VI. He served the cause of theology by creating the International Theological Commission, thereby allowing the whole Church to benefit from the insights of theologians drawn from throughout the world and representing diverse schools of thought.

### *C. The Exercise of Primacy in Relation to the Affairs of Local Churches*

Finally, I would like to consider the exercise of papal primacy in relation to the affairs of local churches. In this regard we will need to distinguish between two complementary modes of exercising primatial authority. The most common exercise of primatial authority we might refer to as "confirmatory." This refers to the ordinary exercise of primatial authority in which the bishop of Rome "confirms his brothers" in the proper exercise of their ministry as pastors of local churches. This might include the convocation of episcopal synods, papal visitations and *ad limina* visits along with other means of facilitating communion among the bishops. The exercise of confirmatory primatial authority will not involve any direct intervention in the affairs of local churches.

Much less frequently, there may also be a need for the exercise of "exceptional" primatial authority. This exceptional authority will be exercised only when the bishop of Rome, either directly or through curial offices, finds it necessary to intervene in the affairs of a local church because the local structures of leadership have proven incapable of addressing a matter that threatens the unity of faith and communion. This exceptional authority functions best when the intervention comes

at the request of the local church itself. These two forms of primatial authority should never be opposed to one another. The exercise of exceptional authority is simply a more direct and authoritative means of confirming the local bishops in the fulfillment of their pastoral responsibilities, namely, the building up of the body and the preservation of unity within the body.

This analysis of the different modes of exercising primacy might also be considered from the perspective of the principle of subsidiarity. As a sociological principle, subsidiarity was first articulated as a means of protecting individuals and local social groups against the unwarranted intrusions of higher and more comprehensive social units. If we admit that, at least analogically, it can be applied to the Church, we might reformulate that principle as follows: *the pastoral authority with direct responsibility for a local community must have primary responsibility for pastoral ministry within that community and is expected to address, without external intervention, the pastoral issues that emerge there. Only when these issues appear insoluble at the local level and/or threaten the faith and unity of the Church universal should one expect the intervention of "higher authority."* Some who view subsidiarity as strictly a sociological principle have criticized its application to the Church as inappropriate. They contend that the Church is no mere sociological reality but a spiritual communion and therefore not subject to the sociological rules that apply to other secular institutions. (For a review of this argument see Leys, 113–19; Komonchak, 1988: 336–37). Yet it is also possible to see subsidiarity as the concrete structural realization of what it means to say the universal Church is a communion of churches (Tillard, 1992: 275–83). A *communio*-ecclesiology demands the preservation of the full integrity of the local church as the concrete presence of the one Church of Christ in that place. Any exercise of authority at a level beyond the local can never be undertaken in a way that undermines that Church's integrity. The exercise of "higher authority" must always be a means toward preserving the integrity of the local church and its communion with the other churches. It is this concern alone that will determine whether confirmatory primatial oversight must give way to the exercise of exceptional primatial authority. Let me offer an instance from the history of the American Catholic Church in which this principle was employed in fact if not in name.

#### 1. THE FEENEY AFFAIR

Fr. Leonard Feeney was a Jesuit assigned as chaplain for a student center located in Cambridge and serving the Harvard University student body in the late 1940s (Fogarty: 358–63). Feeney had developed a reputation around the country as a poet and essayist. He founded a journal in which were published articles championing a strict interpre-

tation of Cyprian's axiom: outside the Church there is no salvation. He insisted that American Jews and Protestants were not "invincibly ignorant" of Christ's will that salvation come through the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, he held, these non-Catholic Americans stood in peril of their salvation. He soon developed a significant following in the community associated with Boston College. After the Archdiocese of Boston deliberately allowed the faculties he was granted to expire, Feeney continued exercising his priestly ministry, hearing confessions and celebrating Mass. He was then suspended by his provincial, an action which triggered protest from his followers. When this failed to halt Feeney and his followers, Cardinal Cushing placed St. Benedict's Center, where Feeney was chaplain, under interdict. A letter was sent to all of the American bishops apprising them of the situation. When all of these actions failed to have any effect on Feeney, Cushing asked for direct Roman intervention. The Holy Office then issued a decree condemning the substance of Feeney's views and the Congregation of Religious formally dismissed him from the Society of Jesus.

In the Feeney affair we have a good example of subsidiarity at work. It does involve the rare situation in which the bishop of Rome, through curial offices, must exercise exceptional primatial authority in the form of direct intervention. The particulars of the case are significant. First, a controversy emerges in a local church. Second, the local authorities seek to address the problem while keeping their brother bishops and the Vatican informed. Third, only when local action fails is the Apostolic Roman See asked to intervene.

While Pope John Paul II invoked this principle in *Sacrae disciplinae leges*, the apostolic constitution promulgating the new Code of Canon Law (Pope John Paul II, 1983), it is my contention that over the course of his pontificate we have seen a growing suspicion of the principle of subsidiarity and, not surprisingly, an increasing reliance on the employment of exceptional primatial authority in the affairs of local churches. Let me offer three examples of this interventionist policy exercised with respect to three different local churches.

## 2. RECENT INSTANCES OF ROMAN INTERVENTIONISM

The first case involves the promulgation of the revised English-language lectionary submitted to Rome by the American bishops in 1991. The Congregation for Divine Worship approved the text in 1992 but in 1994 that approval was rescinded by another Roman dicastery, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. At one point, all seven American cardinals traveled to Rome in an attempt to resolve the dispute. Eventual Roman approval came only after substantial revisions were made in the translation in accord with guidelines for English-language translations drawn up by the Apostolic Roman See at the

eleventh hour. The fact that the controversy focused on the question of inclusive language distracted and unduly polemicized what was really an ecclesiological issue: Are or are not the local bishops of a church competent to determine the adequacy of biblical and liturgical translations to be used in their churches? Vatican II's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" held in article 36 that while the translation of liturgical books is subject to "examination or confirmation" by the Apostolic Roman See (referred to as a *recognitio* in the Code of Canon Law, c. 838.3), the *primary* competency over such translations lies with the episcopal conference. Yet in the case of the revised lectionary one had the impression that the primary competency resided in Rome. Recent curial demands for a reform of the structures and policies of ICEL, the commission responsible for English-language translations of liturgical texts, and the accompanying demand that henceforward ICEL staff members must have a *nihil obstat* from the Vatican, merely strengthens this impression (Medina).

A second case occurred recently in Great Britain. The episcopal conferences of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and England had planned, as part of their Jubilee Year celebration, to offer general absolution on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. This would come only after an extended catechesis on reconciliation during Lent with special provisions being made for penitents in a state of serious sin to make individual confession on the Monday through Wednesday of Holy Week. The bishops were then ordered by the Congregation for Divine Worship to abandon the plan. With regard to this case several points must be made. First, provisions for offering general absolution, although restrictive, are included in the rites for the sacrament of reconciliation. Second, canon 961.2 grants the diocesan bishop, when acting according to criteria agreed upon by the fellow bishops of his conference, the right to determine when the conditions for offering general absolution have been fulfilled. The curia doubtlessly justified its intervention based on the judgment that the canonical provisions for granting absolution had not been met. However, from an ecclesiological perspective, that begs the question: By what criteria may local pastoral judgments and interpretations of canon law be overruled by the Apostolic Roman See? Canonically, the answer is straightforward. Canon 135.2 stipulates that local interpretations of law can never be contrary to higher law. If it were evident that a local interpretation had violated higher law, Rome would surely be justified in intervening. It is not clear, however, what higher law was contravened by the interpretation of law made by the bishops of Great Britain.

Finally, we might mention the case of the abortion consultation centers in Germany. According to current German law, a woman may obtain an abortion only after she has provided a certificate indicating that

she has sought abortion counseling. During the late 1990s the German bishops sponsored such centers with the specific purpose of dissuading women from obtaining abortions. Nevertheless, women could use the certificate obtained from a Catholic-sponsored consultation center to obtain an abortion even if she was advised against such action at the center. It is difficult, once again, not to view the German situation as an exercise of legitimate pastoral judgment of the local bishops. Yet once again, Rome demanded that the German bishops withdraw their sponsorship of these consultation centers.

These three cases raise two fundamental questions regarding intervention or the exercise of exceptional primatial authority by the Apostolic Roman See. The first question concerns the increasingly convoluted relationship between the primatial authority of the bishop of Rome and the greatly expanded activity of Roman dicasteries in local church affairs, often without specific papal authorization. While it is generally recognized that in certain circumstances papal primatial authority extends to the activities of curial offices, the scope of this extension, its purpose and limits, and more importantly, the relationship of the activity of the curia to the supreme power and authority exercised by the college of bishops, has not been satisfactorily clarified with respect to sound canonical and ecclesiological principles.

The second question concerns the criteria used to determine when direct Roman intervention is justified. Roman concerns over local pastoral judgments may be legitimate and one might expect, based on those concerns, that the universal primate and/or his representative might express concern or offer counsel to the local authority. But can formal juridical intervention, that is, an exercise of exceptional primatial authority by the Apostolic Roman See be justified where the unity of faith and communion is plainly not at stake? An affirmative answer seriously undermines the pope's presentation of primacy as service to and support of his fellow bishops in the exercise of their ministry.

### 3. THE NEED TO RECOVER INTERMEDIATE ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURES

The remedy for these interventionist tendencies does not lie in some direct attack on the pope's right to intervene but rather in the recognition that the ecclesiology of communion championed by the Pope, in fact *requires* the principle of subsidiarity for its realization. In turn, an effective application of subsidiarity demands not only a local authority (individual bishop) and a universal authority (Apostolic Roman See), but the recovery of intermediate ecclesiastical authorities. When vital ecclesiastical structures exist between the local bishop and the universal primate, appeal can be made to "higher authority" on a more re-

gional basis, leading, one would hope, to more effective pastoral judgment.

For much of the first millennium one could identify a triadic structure of ecclesial authority consisting in: (1) the primacy of the local bishop within the local church; (2) the regional primacy of metropolitans and patriarchs exercised within their regional synods; (3) the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome exercised within the communion of churches and the college of bishops. Relative to the first millennium, today the Western Church relies little on intermediate ecclesiastical structures. Certainly episcopal conferences must continue to play a vital role in church life, but this needs to be further augmented by a recovery of the ancient significance given to the offices of metropolitan and patriarch and the synodal structures that surrounded them. Greater recourse to the convocation of diocesan synods and plenary councils would further enhance these structures. I believe that in the coming millennium, effective papal primacy first, will have to be supported by these intermediate structures and second, its exercise will have to proceed manifestly from an attentiveness to the principle of subsidiarity. If not, it will be difficult for papal primacy to retain any credibility as a ministry in service of the *communio ecclesiarum*.

#### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Many have either read or seen television accounts of the celebration of the Jubilee at St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls in Rome in which, amidst an impressive gathering of leaders from various Christian denominations, the pope opened the Holy Door and entered it accompanied by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury and the Metropolitan Archbishop of Constantinople. This event came only months after the once inconceivable act of ecumenical reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics on the question of justification. Those present that day at St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls witnessed a remarkable symbolic act suggesting a new era ripe with possibility and hope for ecumenical relations. For Roman Catholics, the primacy of the bishop of Rome plays an essential role in the life of the Church. However, if it is to cease being the obstacle to achieving full visible union among the Christian churches that even Pope John Paul II admits it now is, then Catholics must have the courage to seek not just new ways of describing that primacy in our teaching, but new ways of embodying that primacy in its concrete exercise. Then perhaps, if only in the distant future, a renewed papacy in word and deed can be transformed from obstacle to instrument in service of that full visible unity for which Christ prayed two millennia ago.

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## **“I’m Not Religious, but Spiritual”**

“My church is the world—and my body is its altar.” When a faculty colleague recently mentioned that he had spotted this bumper sticker on his way to work, I knew I had found the phrase that captured the theme of this column. Older Catholics might view such a message as an irreverent jab at the sacred truths of their faith. But the sentiment it expresses is an increasingly common one in modern Western society: Individuals should fashion their unique relationship with God, mediated only through their own human experience in the world without belonging to an organized religion. As one woman recently put it: “There isn’t a church in all of America I want to go to.” Yet this same woman, born and raised a Catholic, nurtures a deep personal prayer life and meets frequently with other “seekers” like herself in an informal “Conversations with God” support group (Rosin: A1). These examples illustrate the perspective of the ever-increasing number of people who describe themselves as “not religious, but spiritual.”

In fact, there are signs in some countries that such persons are rapidly becoming more numerous than regular churchgoers. This fact hit me this past Christmas. I was catching up on some reading while seasonal music—the angelic tones of an English boys’ choir singing traditional carols—wafted in the background. But I was quickly brought back to earth when I read in *The Tablet* that a new study showed that “only a minority of Britons now believe in the tenets of Christianity” (Heald: 1729). A century ago, choristers like those I was listening to would have been expressing the faith of a “Christian nation.” Now the words of their carols had a religious meaning for only 45 percent of the British population—those who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. 19 percent felt that Jesus was “just a man,” and even more, 22 percent, “just a story.” The dramatic shift over recent decades should be noted: in 1957, the percentages were 71 percent, 9 percent, and 6 percent respectively [14 percent in both surveys did not know what they believed about Jesus]. In fact, the study indicated that only 48 percent of the British people are willing to identify themselves as belonging to any particular religion, a precipitous decline from 58 percent only a decade ago. However, only about half of these (25 percent) attend worship services on a regular (i.e., monthly) basis. They are far outnumbered by

the 38 percent of the population who express some opposition to organized religion, positively stating that they are “not religious.”

One might be tempted to say that this study shows the growing impact of secularism—there are simply more people who do not believe in any spiritual dimension to reality. To some extent this is true: the number of persons who did not think there was any sort of God has tripled in the last four decades (6 percent to 17 percent). But it is not the whole story. For only 12 percent of the British people were willing to describe themselves as “not spiritual.” The majority of the population (65 percent) continued to believe in the existence of God. And 27 percent positively said they were “spiritual.” Clearly, this illustrates a vital interest in spirituality even among those who do not believe in a personal God or who express some opposition to organized religion. Such trends may not yet be quite so dramatic in U.S. society, but increasing numbers of Americans are saying that their private prayer life is growing although the impact of religion on their lives is diminishing (Gallup and Lindsay, Roof).

What are the causes of this seemingly paradoxical trend: a growing disaffection for institutional “religion” in the midst of a burgeoning business in “spirituality”? The scholar who has gone the furthest in providing some answers is Anthony Giddens who views it as a prime manifestation of “late modern” culture. Giddens’s analysis begins from the fact that our culture is dominated by a global capitalistic economy which promotes a “free market” of capital and resources including human ones. Thus late modern societies are characterized by both geographical and social mobility. People increasingly cannot afford to be socially anchored. They must be open to change jobs three or four times in a lifetime, to move to the other side of the country if need be. More and more people are thus literally uprooted, cut off from extended family and local communities with their traditional authorities and folkways. Places are now interchangeable, where we can shop in malls with the same stores stocking the same plethora of brand names. Global migration patterns and instant communications have made formerly exotic cultures household items. But at the same time, Giddens sees that these same economic forces have produced “surveillance societies” dominated by abstract systems (multinational corporations, government regulations, scientific standards, computerized records) which have depersonalized many areas of life. We are thus confronted with a paradox: In their private lives people are increasingly cut off from the bonds of traditional social institutions, free to do whatever they want, while in the public sphere they are dominated by highly institutionalized systems.

What implications does Giddens see here for religion? On the one hand, these social dynamics explain the tremendous spiritual hunger

late modern people are experiencing. The traditional social institutions of extended family and local community were value-laden, providing the answers to basic questions of human meaning. Religious faith—whether embodied in tribal custom or in the beliefs and rituals of a structured “higher religion”—was a fundamental expression of these traditional societies. Religious faith and practice expressed a corporate relation to the divine in which the individual participated. But late modernity, by severing people from these traditional social institutions, forces them to find the answers to many basic “value” questions for themselves. Today “individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options” (Giddens: 5). At the same time the technological and bureaucratized social systems that dominate the public sphere are devoid of moral meaning in themselves. Resolutely “value-neutral,” they provide few resources for individuals negotiating such important life choices. The secular educational system, for example, has either marginalized or trivialized the religious questions young people naturally ask during their process of maturation. Thus, lacking any framework for the inner “meaning” and “direction” they need, people are faced with the arduous task of individually constructing and maintaining some kind of coherent inner “self” that can sustain them through the upheavals of personal life passages.

And more and more people are going about this task without the benefit of membership in traditional religious institutions. In a society characterized by a high degree of pluralism, mobility, and temporary institutional and personal ties, the “institutional Church”—with its hierarchical leadership structures, ritualized liturgy, and codified system of beliefs and regulations—seems too confining for many. After all, the word “religion” comes from the Latin word “to bind,” and more and more people do not wish—or feel they cannot—make the type of commitments required by active membership in an organized religion.

The rubric of “spirituality,” on the other hand, creates a space for them to attend to their inner growth, but on their own flexible terms. Indeed, people in late modern society increasingly share the assumption that individuals ought to *choose* their faith. The important thing is that I embark on a “journey” of self-discovery to arrive at a sense of my own life’s uniqueness and coherence: that I come to find truth *for me*. Such a journey might lead an individual to frame this truth in terms of a given religious system, but it may also mean that a person might well continue in a life-long “search,” fashioning an inner “spiritual self” in an autonomous and eclectic fashion without any formal religious affiliation. Indeed, for the latter type of individual, being “religious” often connotes being “rigid,” “uptight,” and “close-minded” (Roof).

In a compelling portrait of the development of Americans’ personal religious practices over the past half century, Robert Wuthnow captures

this shift when he says that a traditional “spirituality of dwelling” in the settled patterns of received truths and time-honored traditions has given way to a new “spirituality of seeking” in which people are forced to negotiate among “complex and confusing” religious meanings (3–4). The challenge such a shift presents for the churches is immense. No longer can they take their membership for granted. The traditional social institutions that created “born Catholics,” for example, and kept them in the Church for life—tight family ties, ethnic communities, strong local identification—simply do not have the hold they once did.

What should be our pastoral strategy for a society of “seekers”? Should the Church “deconstruct itself”—stop acting as an authoritative repository of unchanging truths and become a “spiritual marketplace,” offering a “cafeteria” of items helpful for individual spiritual growth (Roof)? Or should it aim primarily at holding that small segment of modern society that Roof characterizes as “dogmatists,” those who choose to reconstruct a sharply delineated religious “dwelling” in the midst of flux precisely by emphasizing those beliefs and practices which set them apart? Wuthnow—and I tend to agree—feels the most productive approach has to lie somewhere in the middle. If personal spirituality is to be both sustaining in the long term and transformative of the larger society, it needs to be imbedded in a larger religious institution which provides a core narrative and the basic rituals giving an interpretive framework for one’s life, but which also allows and fosters a variety of smaller subgroups which can provide the intimacy and flexibility that “seekers” desire (168–98). But that is another column. I have simply tried here to highlight a phenomenon that is rapidly transforming our contemporary religious landscape, and why it is occurring.

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*Human beings need two things: something to believe in and something to belong to. To be successful, the parish must be a place where both these needs are met.*

—Timothy O'Connell  
*Making Disciples*

KEEPING  
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Scripture  
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**Moral Theology**  
Pastoral Theology

*Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M.*

## Morality and Prayer

Richard McCormick, S.J., died last February. One of the leading figures in Catholic moral theology during the post-conciliar era, his passing reminds us that many of the giants who forged the renewal of moral theology are aging. Franz Böckle and Bernard Häring have already died, Josef Fuchs and Louis Janssens have retired. These men (and all the influential moral theologians of their generation were men) found much of their theological agenda determined by the needs of *aggiornamento*. The need to move beyond the legalism of the manuals to a more biblically rooted moral vision, the crisis of authority after *Humanae vitae*, the debates over proportionalism as a theory of moral norms—all these concerns drew the attention and energy of eminent scholars. Add to the above the so-called “sexual revolution,” the emergence of bioethics as a sub-discipline, and the renewed interest in the ethics of nuclear strategy and modern warfare, and it becomes easy to see why for decades moral theology was largely, though not exclusively, concentrated on resolving problems of normative ethics. In such a climate it was the ethical analysis of actions and determination of the appropriate material norms for behavior that loomed large.

But we are now witnessing a change in the theological conversation. Anyone attending the sessions on moral theology at the last several conventions of the Catholic Theological Society of America would be struck by the shift of interests among many of the scholars who have given papers and made comments during the subsequent discussions. As noted, the previous era did not ignore other aspects of the moral life but it did demonstrate a concentration on normative ethics; now, without ignoring that dimension, the focus is moving to the study and analysis of the moral actor more than moral acts. Expressions such as “virtue ethics” or “character ethics” are used to express the altered

focus. While there are various approaches and a number of distinctions which can be made in this realm, the essential point is that the human person has become the primary object of study. This has given rise to a flood of writings on topics such as the formation of conscience, the nature of virtue and the import of the virtues for moral character, the role of the emotions in the moral life, and the importance of imagination and moral narratives.

Among the key aspects being discussed in this shifting of focus for the discipline is the relationship of the moral life and the spiritual life, in particular communal and personal prayer. For a time the reality of prayer was not a major concern of moral theologians except insofar as it generated moral obligations, i.e., the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday, the duty of clerics to recite the Divine Office, the requirement that all the faithful make their Easter duty. This outlook was in keeping with a legalistic approach to the moral life and the practice of treating moral theology as a discipline separate from ascetical theology.

Two important authors in the early stage of renewal, Häring and the Irish theologian Enda McDonagh, were forerunners in the effort to highlight the interaction of morality and prayer. Now with renewed interest in the moral formation of the person there is growing attention to the import of prayer as a major factor in moral experience. The nexus of morality and prayer is complex in the writings of contemporary moral theologians but it is possible to outline the connection using four general categories: interiority, motivation, formation and discernment.

**INTERIORITY:** A number of authors have seen prayer as central to avoiding the legalistic temptation in the moral life. One can obey rules and perform deeds with external rectitude yet lack any inner life of faith, hope and love. As numerous authors have pointed out, conversion is at the heart of the moral life and genuine conversion embraces the entire person including the affections. It is not enough to do the right thing. A disciple ought to love the Good in response to God's love. Authors such as Edward Vacek and Mark O'Keefe have each made the case that the foundational touchstone for the moral life of the believer is an experience of God's love. Morality is the response of the grateful disciple to love God and the desire to love what God loves, the neighbor.

Enda McDonagh suggests that when understood this way the moral life is situated within a dynamic of call and response with the first move always being God's call to enter into a loving covenant. The inadequacy of human love in the face of divine love impels the disciple not only to act rightly but to offer praise and thanksgiving. In short, prayer and especially adoration are necessary responses to God once we realize the modest nature of our best moral accomplishments. Thus,

it becomes difficult to envision the moral life in a semi-pelagian framework which views the moral life as our way of earning our salvation. Morality is but one element in the ongoing dynamic of conversion, the turning of the disciple towards God.

**MOTIVATION:** It is a commonplace to observe that human beings are driven by an array of values, fears, hopes, needs and desires. Rarely do we act out of a single motive even if we are not conscious of all that propels us to do something. No surprise, then, that moral theologians are concerned with understanding the complex forces that lead us to make our moral choices. Part of moral growth is purifying our motives so that we avoid T. S. Eliot's famous statement of the final treason, "to do the right thing for the wrong reason." Prayer understood broadly as "attending to God" can assist the disciple in focusing on God and divine activity. This, in turn, may allow the converted person to act in the service of love rather than for a lesser motive. It is not that we can avoid having a mixture of motives but moral action rooted in prayer does hold out the possibility that a conscious choice to act in love becomes more prominent as we seek deeper union with God.

Another aspect of motivation is that often the challenge of acting morally is not first of all a matter of intellect (we lack knowledge of what is right) but rather the challenge is at another level (we know what to do but struggle to muster the energy to do what is right). To a great degree it is a matter of passion, coming to desire the good more than a lesser object which attracts us. Training our passions to seek the good is one of the benefits of a mature spiritual life. By encountering the Lord in the practice of regular prayer we find a new object of desire, a new source of energy which draws our passion. Prayer allows us to re-appropriate and deepen our commitment to God so that we come to desire the goods of this life in their proper order.

**FORMATION:** In his most recent book Timothy O'Connell has taken up the question: How does the Christian community actually transmit values and vision to its members? He notes that often individuals will know a theory of the moral life, may even be quite articulate in explaining the process of conversion and the life of discipleship. But that is not the same as actually undergoing conversion and living discipleship. Too often we have settled for education of the mind but have not grappled successfully with formation of character, our own and that of others. O'Connell's helpful volume examines the process whereby we actually grasp values and pass them on to others.

Without attempting to summarize his conclusions, I want to note that a key element in moral formation is the significance of images which reside and dominate our imaginations. It is our imagination which enables us to enter into the experience of others and to recall our own

experiences. Imagination is an internal re-living of external events, our own or others. What images take up residence in our imaginations is conditioned by a number of things but one major factor is the set of narratives we use to identify ourselves and understand basic human experiences of life, birth, death, sickness, love, betrayal, success, failure, kindness, etc. People who regularly reflect upon and pray over the Bible will find their understanding of human experience in these narratives and will be a community whose vision is formed by a particular set of metaphors, myths, parables and stories. A person who actively participates in such a community, especially the rituals and practices of that community inspired by the narratives, is likely to be someone powerfully shaped by the values of the community. And frequent, regular engagement with the communal prayer of such a community can lead to ever deeper appropriation of the community's values.

**DISCERNMENT:** Richard Gula is a moral theologian who has discussed the final category for discussing the relationship of prayer and morality, that of discernment and its role in decision-making. There are several ways in which prayer plays a role in the process of making a choice. In decision-making we hope to be as free and conscious as we can be about what is going on within and around us. Thus, we hope to liberate ourselves from any illusions, biases or inordinate dependencies. Prayer can be clarifying and liberating by helping us center properly on ourselves and God. The experience of God's love can free us from petty and illusory loves that claim us illegitimately as well as strengthen us to see reality as it is without the need to create a false security or comfort in order to feel good about ourselves. Prayer can put us at peace and in touch with reality.

Prayer can not only dispose us to choose well, it can reveal aspects of reality that help us to see the nature of what is at stake. Many people have practiced individual or group ways of discerning the spirit which assists people in decision-making. Through a method of prayer such as the Ignatian exercises it is possible to see deeper into the nature of a situation and understand what it is that God is asking of us. And, of course, a final role for prayer in moral discernment is that of validating a decision. A sense of serenity and peace before God in prayer can be an experience of confirmation that a moral choice is in keeping with one's sense of self and God.

**CONCLUSION:** Much more could be said about the relationship of prayer and the moral life. What is evident, however, is the tremendous increase in interest among moralists in exploring connections between an important dimension of our religious practice and our moral experience. A number of recent works may be cited as good examples of this development in moral theology today.

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## From Cycle B to Cycle C: Preaching Seasonal Elisions

A drop in the temperature, the browning of the landscape and receding sunlight are—for those who live in the Northern hemisphere—sure signs that the season is changing. Winter will soon be upon us. This is not, however, the only seasonal change afoot these days. Gospels about the second coming, readings that feature prophetic predictions of doom or delivery and, ultimately, the Solemnity of Christ the King all signal that the liturgical season is also changing. Even before the onset of winter, Advent will soon be upon us.

This move from Ordinary Time to Advent is not only one more change in liturgical season that marks the unfolding of the church year. It is also a change in the lectionary cycle. We are about to put Mark aside for another twenty-four months, and plunge into Luke. For the preacher, this means adjusting from the largely Jewish world of the proto-evangelist to the Gentile milieu of Luke. It means turning from a gospel that progresses from Galilee to Jerusalem—all the while focused on the central message of the kingdom of God—to what some contend is the most literate of the Gospels, elegantly linking tradition and sources for its mainly Gentile readership.

The effective preacher needs to be attentive in moving from one cycle to another and, in particular, must reckon with the change in the Gospel which anchors that cycle. At the same time, however, it is useful to recognize the elisions which occur between the ending of one lectionary cycle and the beginning of another. The Gospel of Mark does not simply break off at the Solemnity of Christ the King with Luke abruptly taking over the following week. Rather, the Lectionary—structured so very differently than the Bible—builds a bridge between these Gospels and the lectionary cycles fashioned around them. Such bridges not only exist between the end of Ordinary Time and the onset of Advent, but between most of the major seasons of the liturgical year. Thus, respecting the elision between the end of Ordinary Time and the onset of Advent is a useful rehearsal for similar transitions that await us throughout the rest of Cycle C. Furthermore, such seasonal elisions reveal something fundamental about the liturgical year, and the preaching which should punctuate this cycle of grace.

As most preachers recognize, the season of Advent is not simply an extended preparation for annually recalling Christ's birth. Rather, it is

that moment in the church year when we seriously contemplate gospel living between Christ's appearance in history and his return at the end of time. A strong future orientation of Advent may be best mirrored in the preface prescribed for use from the First Sunday of Advent until December 16. In part it reads, "Now we watch for the day, hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours, when Christ our Lord will come again in his glory." It is this future thematic which provides the bridge between Ordinary Time and Advent.

Some preachers have developed the useful habit of reading ahead through the Lectionary in order to acquire an overview of a season. To explore the elision between cycle B and cycle C, however, it is helpful to do the opposite, i.e., begin at the obvious break in the lectionary cycle and read backwards from the Solemnity of Christ the King (November 26). The appearance of a Johannine gospel for this last Sunday of cycle B may surprise some preachers who might have been anticipating a last proclamation from Mark. As pointed out in the last preaching column, however, the evangelist John is a familiar guest throughout cycle B, occasionally supplementing the relatively brief Markan Gospel. This final guest appearance of John relates the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus, excerpted from John's passion narrative. This rich text not only supplies "king" imagery for this so-named Sunday, but more importantly couches that title in a broader discourse about the essential otherworldliness of Jesus' reign, in the midst of a death narrative. The eschatological emphasis in the gospel is highlighted in the first reading by the apocalyptic vision from the Prophet Daniel and a second reading from Revelation which proclaims Jesus as the one who is and who is to come.

While seasoned homilists might expect this focus on Christ's second coming for the Solemnity of Christ the King, they might be surprised how far back into Ordinary Time this thematic stretches. The Thirty-third Sunday of the Year (November 19) expands this accent, first with its alternate opening prayer which announces God's promise of salvation through the future coming of Jesus. This emphasis parallels the Markan vision of the second coming of Christ (13:24-32) in that day's gospel, and a closing apocalyptic vision from Daniel (12:13) in the first reading. In the second reading there is also a final proclamation from Hebrews, the New Testament letter we began reading on the Twenty-seventh Sunday of the Year (October 8). It is especially the middle section of Hebrews (5:11-10:39) on the eternal priesthood and eternal sacrifice of Christ which resonates with this "end-time" thematic. Finally, selected verses from Psalm 16 further bolster this emphasis.

On the Thirty-second Sunday of the Year (November 12) it is the reading from Hebrews which explicitly acknowledges Christ's second coming, proclaiming that "he will appear a second time . . . to bring

salvation to those who eagerly await him." Psalm 146 lends some support to this future orientation with its final acclamation, "The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations."

Through this eschatological prism, it is even possible to find resonance in the texts provided for the Thirty-first Sunday of the Year (November 5). Again it is the proclamation from Hebrews which draws attention to this seasonal thematic through its announcement of the eternal priesthood of Jesus. The opening prayer this day also announces our trust in God's promise of eternal life. Just a few days earlier we celebrate the Feasts of All Saints (November 1) and All Souls (November 2): feasts shot through with eschatological imagery and prayers for final deliverance, stretching this end-time thematic to the very beginning of November.

Reading backwards through the last Sundays of the church year, it becomes clear that the seasonal change from Ordinary Time to Advent is incremental. This assessment, based on the prescribed texts for this period, could be even stronger depending upon the optional prayer texts chosen through November. The sixth preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time (P 34), for example, announces thanksgiving for the gift of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and provides a "foretaste and promise of the paschal feast of heaven." Innumerable song and hymn texts could further amplify this seasonal strand.

The point to this "backward-reading" exercise is not simply to discover how deep eschatological themes reach back into Ordinary Time or to learn something about the move from one lectionary cycle to another. Rather, it illustrates a pattern that holds true for virtually every other season of the liturgical year: transitions are ordinarily both gradual and permeable. The rites and texts that provide the transition from Advent to Christmas, for example, suggest as much continuity as discontinuity in their unfolding of the mystery of the incarnation. Similarly, a manifestation pattern continues after the first of the year as Christmas gives way to Ordinary Time and lectionary texts announce the call of the first disciples, the baptism of Jesus or the first miracle. The transitions from Ordinary Time to Lent and Easter back to Ordinary Time are somewhat more abrupt since the moveable date of Easter arbitrarily inserts this seasonal cycle at various points in the Lectionary. The move from Lent to Triduum and Triduum to Easter, however, provides many often unexplored connections. In particular, the multiple resurrection appearance stories during the great fifty days continue reconciliation themes sounded during Lent.

Discovering this pattern of elisions from season to season, while useful in its own right, is also significant for the deeper theological insight it provides about the liturgical year. Learning that liturgical seasons are not hermetically sealed reminds the preacher that the liturgical year is

essentially permeable. It is more metaphor than road map, more poetry than prescription. The mysteries highlighted throughout the various seasons of the liturgical year cannot be confined to those seasons. Succumbing to a more literal approach to the church year, however, we often restrict preaching about the cross to Lent, preaching about incarnation to Christmas, and preaching about resurrection during Easter. This does not deny the fact that there are overarching thematics that mark the various seasons of the liturgical year. These master images or central mysteries, however, should not be reduced to temporally bound formula, such as “advent = eschatology.”

Ironically, the more we confine certain thematics to particular seasons of the year, the more likely it is that our preaching about them in any season will be limited in its effectiveness. The basic mysteries of the Christian faith—like the belief that we are living between the coming of Christ in history and the coming of Christ in glory—need to be rehearsed constantly through the whole of the liturgical year. Happily, the seasonal move from Ordinary Time to Advent serves as an annual reminder of one of those central mysteries that must be preached all year long.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**The Book of Job: A Short Reading.** By Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999. Pages, vii + 137. Paper, \$14.95.

Certainly the field of Joban studies is replete with technical commentaries on the book of Job. However, for the non-expert and interested reader, the number of manageable commentaries on Job is fewer. This has been addressed by Roland Murphy, a well-known expert in the field of the Hebrew wisdom literature who has successfully put together a very readable and user-friendly volume on the book of Job that he subtitled, *A Short Reading*.

As the subtitle suggests, the book is primarily a concise commentary on Job that begins with an Introduction in which Murphy deals with basic historical-critical questions regarding the authorship of the book, its date, its being categorized as one of the Old Testament wisdom books, and its place within the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East. This is followed by seven chapters of commentary on the content of Job, following the traditional division of the book into the Prologue (1:1–2:13), the three cycles of dialogue between Job and his interlocutors, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (3:1–31:37), the Elihu speech (32:1–37:24), Job's encounter with God (38:1–42:6) and the Epilogue (42:7–17). The author rounds out his work with two chapters, one entitled, "After-Thoughts," and the other, "Does the Book of Job Have a Theology?"

Two of the overall features of Job brought to the fore in all of Murphy's chapters are Job's struggle between hope and despair and the constant assertion of his innocence in the midst of his so-called friends' accusations to the contrary. These features can and do speak to the situation of many believers today, and therefore point to the importance of the book of Job and a commentary such as this.

Despite the book's brevity the author succeeds in giving his work the feel of a larger commentary. Not only does one come away with a good grasp of an expert's own interpretation of the book, but is also not denied exposure to other proposed interpretations of especially those texts in Job whose meaning is vigorously disputed. In addition, Murphy's interpretation of these passages (e.g., 6:10; 8:14–19; 13:15–16; 14:13–17; 16:18–22) is done without a certainty that would preclude other interpretations. Thus, the author manages to present a balanced, broad-minded and where needed, well-argued commentary despite its compact size.

Another dividend when working with this book is that one learns much more than just the book of Job. Murphy intersperses his commentary with valuable tidbits on the meaning of such words in the Hebrew Scriptures as death, Sheol, *go'el*, satan, Behemoth, Leviathan, prayer, to mention but a few.

The addition of the final two chapters lends more satisfaction to one's reading of the book. Here the author offers an interpretive key—albeit his own—to the book's overall theology. Without these concluding chapters the book would

be a less successful read for the average reader who needs guidance in wading through the convoluted thought of the book of Job.

Murphy's book whets one's appetite for more, and is certainly recommended for all interested readers and Bible devotees who wish to increase their knowledge of the book of Job.

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**Who Is Jesus? Why Is He Important? An Invitation to the New Testament.**

By Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Franklin, Wis.: Sheed & Ward, 1999. Pages viii + 212. Paper, \$10.95.

This book is a real gem, written by one of the foremost Catholic biblical scholars who deftly presents the best of contemporary New Testament scholarship in an accessible way to the beginner. It is part of the "Come and See" Series that aims to offer guidance to spiritual seekers from the best theologians and scholars. Harrington's goal is to show how each of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament address two basic questions: Who is Jesus? and Why is he important? In answering the first, Harrington uses historical-critical methods to situate Jesus of Nazareth both as an historical figure and to explicate the early Christians' articulation of him as the risen Christ. With the second question in view, he further probes in each chapter the significance of Jesus for Christian spirituality, ethics and ecclesiology.

In the introductory chapter Harrington gives a thumbnail sketch of the contents, date and language of the New Testament. He discusses translations and gives an overview of the social and cultural world of the New Testament. He also treats the issues of canon and gospel genre. In the second chapter he deals with the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, highlighting the portrait of Jesus as teacher, healer and suffering Messiah. Chapter three, "Glory of Israel and Light to the Gentiles," is devoted to Luke-Acts and chapter four to "The Word of God: John's Gospel and Epistles." In chapter 5, "Our Lord Jesus Christ," he gives an introduction to the seven authentic Pauline letters. Chapter 6, "The Gospel of God," is devoted to Romans, and chapter 7, "The Head of the Body," deals with the deutero-Pauline letters. In chapter 8, "The High Priest," Harrington treats the Letter to the Hebrews, and in chapter 9, "The Chief Shepherd," the Catholic Epistles. In the final chapter, "King of Kings, Lord of Lords," he studies the Book of Revelation. Harrington's engaging style quickens the desire of the reader to study further. So it is apt that the volume concludes with a list of thirty titles of recommended biblical commentaries for more in-depth study and an index.

In each chapter Harrington deals with the literary, historical and theological levels of the texts in a very inviting manner. Each chapter also has "Questions for Reflection" and "Texts for Special Attention." While a book this compact cannot treat extensively all the current questions of New Testament scholarship,

this reviewer would have liked to see mention of the debate over Luke's treatment of Jews and Gentiles, or about his portrayal of women. While Harrington emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus and his first followers in his treatment of the Fourth Gospel (66), an added comment about how to avoid fomenting anti-Judaism would be apt. And when he calls attention to the admonitions in 1 Tim 2:10-15 for women to be silent in the assembly and bear children (133), he might comment further for the reader on the ways in which such culturally conditioned texts have been detrimental to women and how we might read them today.

This concise guide would be an excellent tool for parish Bible study groups as well as for individuals. Because of the emphasis on spirituality and on actualization of the text in the present, both on personal and communal levels, this book is of benefit not only to the beginner, but for veteran students of the New Testament as well.

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**Following Christ: Models of Discipleship in the New Testament.** By Andrew Ryder, S.C.J. Franklin, Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 1999. Pages, xiv + 181. Paper, \$12.95.

The preface gives a general introduction to the study of Scripture through the historical-critical method. The author begins from the premise that one can build on this study to better understand Scripture. Chapters then follow on each of the major books or divisions of the New Testament. Each chapter gives a general introduction and then traces some of the major theological themes as they relate to the theme of discipleship.

After the appropriate caveat about relying on Acts for the story of Paul, the author then goes on, like most Pauline interpreters, to take Acts at face value. Paul's conversion is seen as instantaneous, and the heart of his theology is the new relationship "in Christ." Mark's portrayal of Jesus is not as a magician but as a miracle worker who calls his followers to discipleship through the pattern of conformity to his suffering and death as shaped by the three predictions of the Passion. Matthew's Gospel aims to meet pastoral needs in a time of transition from Jew to Gentile, with a stress on Jesus' ministry of teaching. Other reflections include the image of the yoke, the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, Jesus and the Law, and the Law of Christ.

The Gospel of Luke is presented as both history and theology. More focused reflections include life in the Spirit and the option for the poor. The much-controverted intentions of Luke with regard to women are here seen as positive. Unfortunately, Acts is almost completely neglected except for a few comments about its women characters. Presentation of the Gospel of John proposes belief centered on the person of Jesus. Additional reflections on John include the Bread of Life, Light of the World with sustained attention to chapter nine, and a refutation of the charge of individualism that is often directed at John. Unfor-

tunately, there is no consideration of the women characters in John who are in many ways more distinctive than those in Luke and Acts.

The study of Hebrews reminds us that, in spite of the priestly analogy in this book, Jesus was a layman. Jesus becomes priest because he was chosen by God, tested by suffering, heard for his obedience, and is a companion for Melchizedek. First Peter and Revelation develop the notion of the royal priesthood of believers. The Pastorals show the development of forms of leadership. Together the themes of the royal priesthood and of discipleship unite all believers. It is somewhat surprising to read in this chapter: "The New Testament model of leadership is the presbyter-bishop" (138) when so many other forms of leadership appear there.

The final chapter does a sensitive rendition of apocalyptic expectation in Revelation and elsewhere, situating it within its Jewish context. The author understands correctly that "The Book of Revelation is not then, in the final analysis, about the end of the world; rather, it's about the closeness of Jesus to the present moment" (149).

This little book is a good summary of the findings of historical-critical interpretation as shapers of New Testament theology. While it is too basic for academic study, it would serve well for parish Bible study groups.

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**Faith among Faiths. Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions.** By James L. Fredericks. New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999. Pages, vii + 188. Paper, \$18.95.

Make things as simple as possible, Einstein advised—but not any simpler. Fredericks, who teaches at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles and is a long-time participant in the Buddhist-Catholic dialogue, attempts to give a simple but fair account of a complex topic. His success is mixed.

F.'s final point is to suggest the fruitfulness of doing Christian theology "comparatively," that is, "in the light of the teachings of other religious traditions" (139). But he ties this perfectly valid proposal to an unnecessary argument that the "theology of religions" has reached an impasse and should for now be abandoned.

Most of the book is an effort to show that the three main "types" of theology of religions—exclusivism (Christianity is the only revelation), inclusivism (the saving grace of Christ is universally present), and pluralism (there are many ways to salvation besides Christ)—all fail in some way to meet F.'s criteria of (1) being faithful to the Christian tradition and (2) assisting in "living responsibly and creatively" with non-Christians.

Many of F.'s critical remarks, especially on "pluralism," are insightful. However, there are also problems. F. admits that the three "types" are only "rough classifications" and that each includes "a wide range of differences and nu-

ances" (15). His brief summaries of "representative" positions attempt to respect these complexities. But in his argument that every current theology of religions is inadequate (by his criteria), he generalizes from only a few selected cases, neglects the complexity of positions (even those he has examined) and slips into faulty logic. He implies that for "exclusivist" Karl Barth, damnation is the inescapable lot of those unfortunate enough to be born non-Christian. But Barth wrote, on the contrary, that we have good reason to hope that all people will be saved. F. contends that the exclusivist position "lures Christians away from the opportunity to learn from non-Christians" (22). But, as George Lindbeck points out, even if they are not regarded as means of salvation, non-Christian religions could still reveal important truths that Christianity misses. And it is a grave oversimplification to argue that inclusivism and pluralism discourage inquiry into other religions because they hold that one will find there "the same" salvation as in Christianity. In fact, Rahner (an "inclusivist") makes statements about learning from non-Christian religions that sound very similar to F.'s own; and both "inclusivists" and "pluralists" have not only provided sound motives for interreligious dialogue, but have to some degree already practiced the kind of "comparative theology" that F. advocates.

In his last two chapters F. concretely exemplifies the "comparative" method by using insights from Hinduism and Buddhism to evoke a deeper appreciation of truths already present in Christianity. He speaks persuasively of the benefit of interreligious friendships. But many issues remain untouched. For example: How does one deal with the radical challenges religions pose to each other? How can one do comparative theology on a pastoral level while respecting the complexity of religions?

The book is engaging and generally well written. For the undergraduate or lay reader, it can be a thought-provoking introduction to both a significant issue in contemporary theology and a fruitful way of responding to religious diversity. But readers should be wary of F.'s generalizations, especially in his arguments regarding the "theology of religions."

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**Ministry and Community: Recognizing, Healing, and Preventing Ministry Impairment.** By Len Sperry. Collegeville, Minn. The Liturgical Press, 2000. Pages, x + 124. Paper, \$11.95.

Christian ministry is a mystery. Many factors are involved in this complex reality. At times, however, ministry does not happen well. Some sort of impairment takes place. According to conventional practice, when a minister is impaired in ministry, the blame usually falls on one of two places. At times the minister him or herself is blamed for having some sort of psychological or emotional impairment that impedes ministry. At other times the organizational dynamics of the ministry are blamed as the cause of the problem.

Dr. Sperry has written a book in which he presents a model to help understand an often overlooked aspect of the mystery of Christian ministry. He uses a dual rather than a single lens system to provide a more realistic and fair understanding of ministry impairment. He neither blames the minister on the one hand nor the organization on the other for ministry that has gone wrong. Sperry's premise is that if one is to truly understand ministry impairment, it is necessary to understand that it is the synergy between the underlying emotional impairment on the minister's part and the organizational dynamics of the ministry which unwittingly triggers and reinforces the personality dynamics of ministers who become impaired. His lens is not an "either/or" but a "both/and" system.

This book is a step forward in understanding the "hows and whys" of ministry impairment. Even so, Sperry himself cautions that the dual lens provides a necessary but not sufficient understanding of personnel and contextual issues in ministry settings. He notes that additional pastoral, theological and historical perspectives beyond the scope of the book must be considered.

Sperry identifies and illustrates eight common kinds of behavior that cause ministerial impairment. These behaviors can be found in either clergy or lay ministers. The nonprofessional reader has undoubtedly come across much written about two of the categories of disruptive behaviors in ministry. They are sexually abusing and depressive behaviors in ministry. However, there is less written about ministers who suffer from the other six: narcissistic, psychopathic, borderline, manic-depressive, obsessive-compulsive and passive-aggressive behaviors. All of this information with attendant case studies makes the book helpful for those in positions of pastoral leadership to understand why things have gone wrong in a particular ministry. Sperry also describes common organizational dynamics found in ministerial settings that can exacerbate the underlying personality impairments found in some ministers. The behaviors and organizational dynamics affect each other in a circular sequence.

Each of the eight kinds of impairments, Sperry describes how he recognized, treated and prevented. He is a strong proponent of psychological screening of candidates for leadership positions. He also describes the relative treatment prognosis of each disorder and to what extent an impaired minister after treatment may be expected to continue in ministry in an effective way. He also suggests changes to church and ecclesial structures that exacerbate underlying personality problems of certain ministers. For example, religious organizations tend not to have performance reviews that are as frequent or rigorous as those found in "for-profit" business organizations. Performance reviews of for-profit business organizations quickly recognize individuals who have emotional impairment and move them out of positions of responsibility. Sperry's goal is not that ministries be able to turn a financial profit but that they be opportunities for healing and wholeness. The opposite will happen as long as the minister is impaired and organizational dynamics continue to aggravate the impairment. In the early 1970s the late Henri Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer* was very popular. Sperry calls the ministers described in his own book "Wounding Healers." Sadly, they do not heal others but cause more harm.

This book would be useful to anyone in ministry formation, vocation work, pastoral ministry or church authority who are responsible for ecclesial person-

nel. It provides practical information to prevent and heal impairment. Its only drawback is that addiction is not included as one of the common kinds of ministerial impairment. Certainly much has already been written on that subject. However, if addiction had been included, Sperry's book could have been an even better one volume easy reference resource for recognizing and treating ministry impairment.

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**Jesus Symbol of God.** By Roger Haight, S.J. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1999. Pages, xiv + 505. Paper, \$23.95.

Aware of the radical implications of historical consciousness, Haight, professor of systematic theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, attempts to present a Christology which is faithful to the tradition, intelligible in today's postmodern world, and empowering of Christian life (47).

Reflecting many contemporary Christologies, Haight's Christology is based on a genetic structure of understanding, i.e. one rooted in the historical process of the development of Christology (28). Hence, he insists on a Christology "from below," i.e. one which begins with Jesus himself (29-30). This genetic structure necessitates his presenting an "image" of the historical Jesus as known through contemporary historical-critical methods, the understanding of God which Jesus had, the resurrection of Jesus, and the pluralism of New Testament soteriologies and Christologies (55-184).

The third major section of the book deals with classical Christology, primarily that of the fathers and the councils (Nicea and Chalcedon). In this section Haight introduces the notion of symbol as a means of retrieving faithfully the Christological doctrines of Nicea and Chalcedon (187-212).

In the fourth major section he presents his own constructive Christology appropriate for a postmodern world. Here he takes up questions such as the meaning of Jesus as savior, the relation between liberation and salvation, Jesus and world religions, logos and spirit Christologies and the Trinity.

While I resonate with much in this book and share Haight's concern to present a truly human Jesus who can speak to our postmodern ear, nonetheless at the end of the day I have grave reservations regarding several points. I mention merely four.

1) Haight's Christology is a *radical* Christology from below, since for him the pre-paschal Jesus is the sole and absolute norm and source of our Christological statements (see e.g. xii). Lacking here is the constitutive significance of the resurrection for Jesus himself because of which Jesus ultimately is the Christ, lord, savior, son, high priest and spirit sender. A mere Christology from below cannot warrant such titles. Immediately one begins to suspect on methodological grounds a reductionist Christology.

2) Haight's understanding of symbol is inadequate to the Christological task. For Haight a symbol has a dialectical structure, it is that which mediates or makes present something other than itself (197). A religious symbol, therefore, both participates in but *is not* that which it symbolizes or mediates. In the case of Jesus, as with any other religious symbol, such as a sacred stone (201), God *is present to and within* the medium or symbol, and yet the medium or symbol is not the transcendent itself because it is a finite piece of the world (196). One begins to wonder at this point exactly what the difference between Jesus and a sacred stone might be, or between Jesus and Mother Teresa. One also begins to wonder what will happen to Nicea's "one in being with the Father." For Haight, it is precisely this dialectical structure of symbol (and not the Greek metaphysics of infinity) that necessitated Chalcedon's distinction between the human and divine natures of Jesus. Among authors invoked by Haight for his use of symbol is Karl Rahner, who indeed does have a "symbol Christology." For Rahner, however, the symbolized and the symbol are mutually self-defining and the essence of symbol is constituted by the essence of the symbolized. Rahner's Jesus as *Ursymbol* is not the Jesus of Haight.

3) Although he wishes to maintain fidelity to the conciliar tradition, I believe he falls short. For Haight, the "one in being" of Nicea means merely that God is *present to* and *acting in* Jesus (e.g. 284), something which could be affirmed of any graced person. Is that all Nicea was about, i.e. whether God and not something less than God was *present to* and *acting in* Jesus? In the face of Arian reductionism, Nicea was concerned with Jesus' being savior from sin and death. In order to save in *that* sense, Jesus had to be "one in being with the Father" and not merely one in whom the Father (or the Spirit or the Logos) was *present* and *active*. It was precisely this type of indwelling-functional Christology which the Fathers of Ephesus in 431 perceived (rightly or wrongly) in Nestorius and condemned with their teaching of hypostatic union as being incompatible with Nicea. It is interesting that Haight, in spending only one line on Ephesus, never presents an analysis of the issues involved at that Council and its teaching of hypostatic union. Flowing from his interpretation of Nicea is his soteriological position that Jesus is not universal savior in any truly causal sense and hence can admit of other saviors.

4) My most serious reservation is not that Haight demythologizes or de-hellenizes, but that he does not sufficiently de-hellenize and hence remains trapped within the very metaphysical premises which generated the two nature Christology in the first place. Both the Alexandrine and Antiochene models and their underlying philosophical premises, especially that of the infinite antithesis between the divine and the human, must be transcended if we are to maintain consistently a Jesus who is truly and fully human and divine. What is needed is a more biblical, eschatological view of reality, history and God. This I do not see reflected in Haight.

I wish to affirm again that Haight's is a challenging work deserving of serious study. However, it should be read only by those possessing solid background in Christological tradition as well as a dose of hermeneutical skill.

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