

# Priesthood and Ministry'

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121

Whatever may have been the case at other epochs of the history of the Church, it is clear that today treatments of confined topics of theology which can afford to take for granted theology and Christianity as a whole are no longer possible. This is true in a special way of the topic which concerns us here, the theology of the priesthood and the ministry, since we have to examine an essential element in the structure or form of Christianity itself, and since we are making this examination not as detached observers but as people who are considering the fundamental sense of our own lives.

Consequently it seems suitable to make explicit two presuppositions of what is to be said later. Firstly, Christianity is real. That is to say, it is real not only with the kind of reality which will allow it to be included among other realities in accordance with a scale of reality already set up apart from Christianity itself. Christianity is real in the sense that its reality modifies the scale of reality itself. Whether we say that Christianity is a new reality in a world considered as being without it (say, as being prior to it, or posterior to it, hostile or neutral to it), or whether we say that Christianity has always been and still is 'anonymously' present in the world (as, say, prefigured in a total history of humanity within the eternal design of God), we must, in terms of Christianity itself, claim that Christianity is at the very least a dimension of reality which needs explicitly to be taken into account if the ontological scale which we use to assess it and indeed anything else is to function as a true criterion of the real. If in some of its aspects, Christianity is a social phenomenon, it cannot be assessed adequately in terms of sociology; if it is a 'spiritual' phenomenon, it cannot be assessed adequately in terms of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the humanities; if it is a religion, it cannot be assessed adequately in terms of comparative religion.

If then Christianity is a novel reality or a novel dimension of the real which modifies our total apprehension of reality, it should be possible to specify in what its characteristic modification of apprehended reality consists. Rather than undertake the complex theological and epistemological analysis which this would involve if it were to be done seriously, I shall merely say here that the novelty of Christianity emerges in experience as an opposition to the 'world', an opposition which is in part the opposition of contraries and in part

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a paper given at the Clerical Students Conference at Spode House at the end of August this year.

the opposition of perfect and imperfect: in the exhortation, 'Have courage, I have overcome (*nenikeka*) the world' (John 16 : 33), both kinds of opposition are united dynamically, as the dynamic transcendence of Christianity in the victory of Christ over the world. It is this experience of dynamic transcendence, shared victory in Christ, which is the expression of the ontological novelty of Christianity: 'This is the victory that overcomes (*he nike he nikesasa*) the world, our faith' (1 John 5 : 4). The dynamic transcendence of the world is achieved once for all, *ephapax*, in the paschal mystery of Christ which ontologically transfigures the world, and is shared in and appropriated by Christians in faith; and it is figured (socially, culturally, religiously) in the phenomenon of the Church. The Church is, we say, the figure or 'sacrament' of the dynamic transcendence of Christianity. In this paper, we are concerned both with the dynamic transcendence of Christianity 'in itself', in particular in one of its historical interpretations (notably the epistle to the Hebrews), as sacrifice and priesthood; and also with one of the elements by which this dynamic transcendence has been sacramentally figured, also including a 'priesthood', the apostolic ministry of the sacrament of Order. This characteristic figure is neither identical with what it figures, nor is it the only figure, even in terms of 'priesthood', of what it figures, since baptism too constitutes a 'priestly' title. In what follows, we shall discuss the 'real' priesthood, that is, the dynamic transcendence of the victory of Christ and its appropriation in faith by Christians, in its interpretation as 'priesthood'; and we shall discuss 'sacramental' priesthood, that is, figure of this victory, and in particular the ministerial form of the latter. It may be helpful to anticipate here, and note that the ministerial priesthood is primarily episcopal and only subordinately presbyteral; so that member of English society whom we call the 'Catholic priest' (Roman collar, black suit, with or without black hat) is a sociological variant of a presbyteral grade of an apostolic ministry figuring a dynamic transcendence of Christ and Christians, which itself has historically been interpreted as priesthood; so that he is not connected with the Christ of the epistle to the Hebrews in any simple way.

The second presupposition which it seems appropriate to make explicit in advance is concerned with the nature of self-understanding. Self-understanding is intrinsically diversified. The personal 'I' of each one of us is a principle and a possibility of dynamic transcendence (which is what makes it possible for us to enter by faith into the dynamic transcendence of the eschatological victory of Christ); but none of us is purely this. The transcendence is exercised in a history of personal experience of the self with others, contemporaries, predecessors and successors, related in a variety of ways, biological, social, spiritual; every personal achievement of identity is a modification of the history of the whole. At any given

moment prior to death a personal identity is achieved as a partial integration of a past, conscious and unconscious, into the roles and relationships given and assumed, which provide the ground and matter for future integrations. The role and relationships accepted in ordination to the ministry imply a permanent identification with the figure of God's saving purpose in Christ in the Church: an identification which has the form of a 'consecration'. It is perhaps instructive that one of the senses which can be taken by the word *mysterium* in liturgical texts is precisely *ministerium* (cf. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs chrétiens*, s.v. 'mysterium', n.9): the acceptance of this ministry is the acceptance of oneself as ritually figuring a mystery, consequently as affording inexhaustible possibilities for future integrations. Here 'role' becomes 'type'. Incorporation into the typical ministerial role of the Church's figure is acceptance for one's personal growth of a typical constituent of identity; and just as one's interpretation in a personal idiom of this type is indefinitely variable, so too the history of the Church provides and allows for an indefinite variety of styles of interpretation of the ministerial role (diocesan and religious clergy, to take an obvious example). The first task of theology is to identify not so much what is common but what is typical in this variety. It may be noted here that precisely because the ministerial role in the Church is typical it figures an essential element in the real victory of Christ and is therefore imitable even by those who do not possess and do not wish to possess the role, i.e. the laity: the ministry is imitable as transcendent type and not as role. All Christians are 'apostles' but only some are incorporated by consecration into the apostolic ministry (cf. H. V. von Balthasar, 'Office in the Church', *Church and World*, New York, 1967, pp. 44-111).

## II

The dynamic transcendence of Christ, the 'Christ-Event', receives a variety of determinations in the New Testament. Characteristically this Event is unique and unrepeatable in Christ; it is also communicated, reactualized in Christians. Christ and his victory are One and Many. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews interprets the Christ-Event and its communication in terms of priesthood and cult. If he does not himself speak of the *communicated* Christ-Event as a priesthood, elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Peter 2 : 5, 9; Rev. 1 : 6; 5 : 10; 20 : 6, in dependence on Exodus 19 : 6 and Is. 61 : 6) the generalization of priesthood is made explicit. But just as in 1 Peter the priesthood offers *spiritual* sacrifices, just as in John 4 : 23, 24 a worship 'in spirit and truth' is announced, so in Hebrews Christ is the priestly mediator of the New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah, a covenant in the mind and heart (Heb. 8 : 9-12; 1 : 17 citing Jer. 31). The blood of Christ alone 'who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify

our inner self (suneidêsin, 'conscience') from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God' (Heb. 9 : 14). The elaborate and unfamiliar machinery of Old Testament cult on the one hand, and the author's effort to transpose this into a cosmic dimension in the case of Christ's priesthood on the other, tend to obscure for the modern reader of Hebrews the spirituality of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice and its effects which it is the main purpose of the epistle to insist on. Certainly the 'spirituality' is not one which is divorced from the 'matter' of Christ's blood or his human sympathy (cf. 4 : 15; 5 : 1); but it reaches to that inwardness of sin exposed by the judging word of God which is like a two-edged sword, 'piercing to the divisions of soul and spirit and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (4 : 12). The heavenly throne to which Christ the high priest penetrates does not separate him from us but brings him into more intimate connexion with us: his blood is the new and living way opened for us into the heavenly sanctuary (10 : 19-20).

The theological idiom of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews provides us with what was called above an 'interpretation' of the dynamic transcendence of the Christ-Event. To speak of interpretation is to recognize the possibility of alternative interpretations; it is not to suggest that alternative interpretations are open to us today as a matter of free choice. The priestly and cultic interpretation of Christ in Hebrews is one of those inspired and canonical interpretations of Christ which, together with, say, the Johannine and Pauline interpretations, help to constitute the very reality of Christ himself in his communicable meaning. The Epistle to the Hebrews, inspired as we believe by the Spirit of Christ, is an intrinsic element in the mystery of Christ, such that *no* communication of Christ to Christians is possible which may not be interpreted in priestly and cultic terms: so St Thomas can speak in a fine phrase of the *religio Christianae vitae*. Thus not only the Christian's external acts of cult but his whole life in the Spirit is religion, cult, sacrifice: participation in the priesthood of Christ. Congar is surely right to say that the 'universal priesthood' of Christians is not *primarily* a title to a part in the Christian liturgy ('Structure du sacerdoce chrétien', *Sainte Eglise*, Paris 1963, pp. 239-274; 'The two forms of the Bread of Life', *Priest and Layman*, London, 1967, pp. 103-138). The Christian liturgy is an aspect of the ecclesial figure of the mystery of Christ; participation in it is itself granted liturgically, in the ecclesial figure of Christian baptism, so that the Father may be worshipped in spirit and truth even by those who do not bear the ecclesial figure of Christ. That there must be some 'figure' of this worship in spirit, though not an ecclesial one, is not being denied; all that is being said, briefly, is that wherever there is the grace of Christ, there is his priesthood.

It should now be clear that no direct application of Hebrews may be made to what is usually called the Catholic priesthood. What we

may say is that the Catholic priest, in virtue of his ministerial priesthood, serves as an emblem of the 'real' priesthood he shares with every worshipper of the Father in the Spirit, and as a type of the sacramental figure of this worship in the liturgical worship of baptized Christians. But this emblematic or typical function is derived from a ministerial role in the Church which is not to be defined in purely sacerdotal, cultic terms.

### III

One of the major doctrinal achievements of Vatican II has been its full treatment of the apostolic ministry in the Church. For our purposes the two most important documents are chapter III of the *Constitutio dogmatica de Ecclesia (Lumen Gentium)* and the *Decretum de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita (Presbyterorum Ordinis)*; the original title of what was to be only a series of propositions was 'De ministerio et vita sacerdotali'. The English translations seem to be unwilling to follow the Latin text, and translate both 'sacerdos' and 'presbyter' by 'priest'.

As the title of chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* ('De Constitutione Hierarchica Ecclesiae et in specie de Episcopatu') makes clear, the term 'hierarchy' is used in Vatican II as it was used in the Council of Trent (Denzinger-Schonmetzer 1768, 1776) to refer to all the grades of the ministry and not, as has regrettably been the custom in recent years, merely to bishops. It is to be hoped that in future we shall here less of activities of 'the English hierarchy' which have in no way involved the co-operation of the clergy apart from the bishops. The first sentence of the chapter tells us in what this hierarchical structure consists: 'For the pasturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in his Church various ministries, which work for the good of the whole Body' (LG 18). The notion of *ministerium*, explicitly connected with *diakonia* (LG 24), is central to the treatment of 'office' in Vatican II. As the text continues: 'For ministers endowed with sacred power are at the service of their brethren'. It should be noted that the ministry is not only 'pastoral' (*pascendum*) in a restricted sense but includes the promotion of the increase of the People of God (*semperque augendum*). In accordance with the explicit recognition in *Lumen Gentium* of the role of images in reflection on the Church (cf. LG 6, 'figuris', 'imaginibus', including those of 'flock' and 'shepherd', *pastor*), we should allow our sense of the pastoral ministry to be reanimated by the biblical imagery behind the formalized expression.

The foundation of this ministry in the Church is *mission*; as the Son was sent by the Father, so the Apostles were sent by Jesus Christ in the construction of the Church; it is by his will that the bishops, as successors of the Apostles, should continue this pastoral ministry to the end of time (LG 18). Recalling and restating the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* has a fine passage in which the

unity in diversity of the apostolic mission and ministry is clearly brought out:

So it was that Christ sent the Apostles just as he himself had been sent by the Father. Through these same Apostles, he made their successors, the Bishops, sharers in his consecration and mission. Their ministerial office (*munus ministerii*) has been handed down to presbyters in a lower degree (*subordinato gradu*), so that established in the Order of the presbyterate, they might be co-operators (the traditional term in the ordination prayers of the sacramentaries) of the episcopal Order in the proper fulfilment of the apostolic mission entrusted to them by Christ. (PO 2)

Ministry in the Church is the expressive figure of the single mission and ministry of Christ and the Apostles. There can be no genuine understanding of what is commonly called the 'Catholic priesthood' unless this is seen as the permanent presence and exercise, in a limited degree, of the Apostolic office and ministry. There are extremely complex historical questions concerning the definition, differentiation and transmission of the Apostolic office in the first two centuries of the Church; if the letters of Ignatius of Antioch show us a recognizably Catholic order, it is far from clear how this emerged even from the state of affairs discernible in the Pastoral Epistles, and every attempt at reconstruction has to admit honestly the existence of considerable gaps in the evidence (cf. P. Benoit, 'Les origines apostoliques de l'Episcopat selon le Nouveau Testament, *L'Evêque dans l'Eglise du Christ*, 1963; P. Grelot, 'La vocation ministérielle au service du peuple de Dieu', *Aux Origines de l'Eglise*, Recherches Bibliques VI, 1965, pp. 159-173; see also various books by J. Colson). But these complexities should not obscure the fundamental Catholic truth of the permanence of the Apostolic office in the Church, however this office was at first differentiated. The episcopal function may well have been shared in a given community by the entire presbyterium, so that the individuals we should now call bishops may have had regional rather than local responsibilities like Timothy. But this should rather be seen as an aspect of the episcopate which has been restored to Catholic consciousness in the teaching of Vatican II on episcopal collegiality: once again, it is the continuance in the Church of an Apostolic office, a re-presentation of the Apostles, however differentiated, which is the essential.

The later history of the Church has also shown fluctuations in the differentiation of this single ministry, but we may say that essentially two contrasting ideologies have succeeded each other. And to understand the nature of this contrast, we should notice that two different kinds of analysis of the apostolic ministry are simultaneously at work in discussions of this kind. In the first place, there is a distinction of the *content* of the powers handed down in the ministry; secondly, there is the question of the *grading* of these powers.

Now according to a long and honourable tradition going back to

St Jerome, bishops and priests were seen as equal in sacramental priesthood (regarded as primarily a power to consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine), and differing only in 'jurisdiction'. This view has been maintained as part of a more general theory of a two-fold division of 'powers' in the Church, priestly and pastoral, an analysis strongly influenced by canon law. If the council of Trent maintained the superiority of bishops to presbyters (DS 1768), it did so in a not wholly unambiguous way (including, for instance, the power to confer the sacrament of confirmation as a power possessed by bishops alone); and it has in fact been widely maintained that episcopal consecration was not part of the sacrament of Order. Rather than attempt here to examine the complex ecclesiological problems involved, it may be helpful to recognize the strong unconscious hold of attitudes like these even in consciously progressive Catholic lay writers today. It has for instance been argued that a Catholic community should choose one of its members to perform the sacramental rites, in particular to consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine, while the community itself should see to its own running and its understanding and spread the Gospel by democratic discussion. This is a view of the ministry which reduces the minister to the status of a tame witch-doctor or medicine-man; from a different point of view, it has a curious resemblance, in its democratic idiom, to the imperial or royal claims to dominate the ecclesiastical hierarchy in earlier periods of the history of the Church.

In other words, in the complex of views at which we have just been glancing, a single 'power' of the apostolic ministry is isolated—the *sacerdotium*—and this is defined in a narrowly sacramental, or rather ritual, sense. Once the power has been defined in this sense, it seems that the grading can proceed only in terms of another 'power', the pastoral power of jurisdiction. Scholasticism provided this view with an ontology of the sacramental character and the sacraments in general; canon law with a legal theory not uninfluenced by papal centralization; popular superstition (clerical and lay) gave it a mythology of 'anointed hands', and secular authority served as a dialectical opposite in such a way that a claim to universal ecclesiastical *regnum* was based on *sacerdotium*.

*This whole complex ideology has been set aside by Vatican II.* Whereas in the former ideology, the grading was in terms of different contents or powers, now the content of the powers of the apostolic ministry is in all cases analysed in terms of participation in the threefold office of Christ as Teacher, Priest and King; and the grading of the ministry is seen in terms of *degrees* of participation in the fullness of the ministry granted to the episcopal Order.

On this latter point Vatican II is quite explicit. With a solemn 'Docet Sancta Synodus', *Lumen Gentium* declares that the plenitude of the sacrament of Order is conferred by episcopal consecration, in which ancient tradition has seen the supreme priesthood and the

fullness of the sacred ministry ('summum sacerdotium, sacri ministerii summa', 21, with references to ordination prayers in the sacramentaries). It is Christ himself that the bishops make present in the midst of the faithful. They play the part of Christ himself as Teacher, Pastor and High Priest (*Pontificis*), and act in his person (*in Eius persona agant*, *ibid.*).

But this ministry is exercised in the Church at different levels (*diversis ordinibus*, 28). Presbyters too, although lacking the supreme office of the high-priesthood (*apicem pontificatus*, a phrase taken from St Cyprian), are joined with the bishops in the sacerdotal dignity, and are consecrated into the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest (*sacerdotis*), for the preaching of the Gospel, the shepherding of the flock, and the celebration of divine worship (*ibid.*). Within the three degrees of the apostolic ministry, bishops and priests share a *sacerdotium*, unlike deacons.

We meet here an ambiguity, partly terminological, partly an index of something deeper, concerning this *sacerdotium*, said to be exercised in preaching and shepherding as well as in the celebration of worship; and we shall return to this threefold activity in a moment. But first let us notice that the grading of the ministry is seen, in accordance with pre-conciliar studies, notably by Botte, in the terms of the liturgical prayers of ordination; presbyters are the 'providi co-operatores' of the Episcopal Order (cf. e.g. B. Botte et al. *The Sacrament of Holy Orders*, London, 1962. Cf. A. Béraudy, 'Les effets de l'ordre dans les prefaces d'ordination du Sacrementaire léonien', *La Tradition Sacerdotale*, Le Puy, 1959. It may be remembered that in the important Apostolic Constitution of Pius XII in 1947, it was laid down that the essential form of ordination to the presbyterate consisted in the formula containing the phrase *secundi meriti munus*, as against the form for the episcopal consecration, *Comple in Sacerdote tuo ministerii tui summam*. In neither form, it should be noted, is there any explicit mention of sacrificial, cultic powers. Presbyters exercise in a second, lower degree, the fullness of the ministry exercised by the bishops. In a way, presbyters render the bishop present in every assembly of the faithful (PO 5).

If this account may be allowed to suffice for the grading of that 'one and the same priesthood and ministry of Christ' shared by presbyters and bishops (PO 7), we must now examine briefly the *content* of this ministry. As has already been suggested, the ministry is consistently seen by Vatican II as a representation of and participation in the three offices of Christ as Teacher, Priest and King, this triple function being expressed in a number of equivalent ways. The systematic analysis of the offices of Christ in this threefold form seems to have been due in the first place to the theologians of the Protestant Reformation, though of course it has a long history in scholasticism and the Fathers (cf. Schmaus, art. 'Amter Christi' in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, I). In the years before the Council this threefold



analysis was strongly recommended by Congar for ecclesiological purposes, in conscious opposition to the analysis in terms of two powers mentioned above. What it is important for us to see is that the totality of the ministry, analysed in this threefold sense, is possessed by bishops and priests in different degree. *The 'Catholic priest' is not defined primarily in cultic terms.*

A historical example may help to bring out the significance of this point. In an essay written in 1954, 'Le sacerdoce des prêtres-ouvriers', Chenu felt bound to defend the priestly character of the worker-priests, on the ground that the preaching of the Gospel to the unbeliever was an essential element in the priesthood, since the regime of the sacraments is essentially a regime of faith (*sacramenta fidei*) and demands as its precondition the active presence of the Gospel (*L'Évangile dans le temps*, Paris, 1964). Catechetical, didactic, sacramental activity is only possible where the Gospel is already present, so that in a world in which whole sectors of society are ignorant of the Gospel it is no longer possible for priests to forget their evangelical role. In a footnote added in 1964, Chenu remarks that his essay caused considerable controversy at the time, although the essay itself now seemed to him to belong clearly to the past. We may wonder how generally the evangelical role of the priest is in fact recognized even today.

At any rate Vatican II is insistent on this point. In chapter II of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, which is structured on the familiar threefold pattern, it is even said: 'Since no one can be saved who has not first believed, presbyters, as cooperators of the bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all' (4). Later in the same paragraph, after the missionary ministry of the Word has been recalled, the essential connexion between Word and sacrament is reaffirmed; at the celebration of Mass, for instance, 'the proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord, the response of the people who hear, and the very offering by which Christ ratified the New Covenant in his blood, are inseparably united' (*ibid.*). The sacramental Word is in one sense the fullness of the Gospel as a power unto salvation, and the dissociation of Word and sacrament, even in the modern form noted above, is a surrender to superstition.

But the apparent ambiguity mentioned above, where the three functions of the ministry, evangelical, pastoral and cultic, are all attached to the *sacerdotium*, still remains. I have not noticed in the relevant documents of Vatican II an explicit treatment of the *interpenetration* of these three functions, and it is only when a terminological oddness of this sort occurs that a question arises about their relationship. However useful the threefold analysis may be, it seems to me that this distinction of the ministry into three functions is at most highly convenient. Fundamentally the ministry is the ecclesial figure of the ministry of Christ and the Apostles, and the threefold analysis should help to remind us of the complex unity of this mission

and ministry: the evangelical ministry is pastoral and sacerdotal, the pastoral ministry evangelical and sacerdotal, the sacerdotal ministry evangelical and pastoral. The sacrificial and cultic terminology which St Paul used to speak of his evangelical ministry has often been noticed, and has been carefully studied by A. M. Denis ('La fonction apostolique et la liturgie nouvelle en esprit', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 1958, pp. 401-436; 617-656) consider, for instance, Romans 15 : 16: God has given Paul the grace 'to be a minister' (*leitourgon*) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service (*hierourgounta*) of the Gospel of God, so that the offering (*prosphora*) of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit'. But the cult too may be evangelical: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim (*kataggellete*) the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor. 11 : 26). The proclamation is not a separate activity alongside the cult, but is exercised in it. Or consider the pastoral reminder to the 'newborn babes' (1 Peter 2 : 2) of the generative power of the Gospel: 'You have been born anew through the living and abiding word of God' (1 : 23). It is not merely that the 'Catholic priest' is an evangelical as well as a pastoral and cultic minister; it is rather that he is all three simultaneously and inseparably, in a complex and unified representation of Jesus Christ. 'The pilgrim Church is missionary of its very nature (*natura sua*), since it takes its origin from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit according to the purpose of God the Father' (Decree on the missionary activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* 2). From this point of view, the priestly (episcopal and presbyteral) ministry is not simply a figure of the high-priestly interpretation of the dynamic transcendence of the mystery of Christ; this ministry is a figure of the total mystery of Christ the Victor.

Perhaps this helps to bring out the full sense of the repeated statements in Vatican II that bishop and presbyter, in virtue of their ordination, act *in persona Christi* or *in nomine Christi* or *in persona Christi Capitis*. There is a rather formalistic use of the Head and Body language to speak of Christ and the Church even in such a document as Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis*. Without attempting to sort out the complex history of the notion of the 'mystical body of Christ' (this too was a part of the ideological complex discussed above), it can simply be said here that the Christ of faith, the Head of the Church, is identically the historical Jesus or he is only a figure of myth, a Gnostic redeemer. The priestly representation of Christ is a representation of Jesus of Nazareth and not only of the risen Lord. If the priest, bishop or presbyter, is to be a figure of Christ the Head in this world, he must be so plausibly and credibly, as the historical Jesus himself was.

#### IV

Would it be unfair to say that if bishop and presbyter were really

a representation of Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Christ the Lord, there would be no reason for us anxiously to be questioning ourselves about the place of the priest in the modern world? At any rate Pasolini in his film *The Gospel according to St Matthew* has seen, and has made us see, something in Jesus of Nazareth which was there to be seen if we hadn't seen it before; and the Beatles, and the society they sing for, seem to need an experience of transcendence, or else they wouldn't turn to LSD or pursue a Hilton Hotel swami to Bangor. Why don't we help them find the transcendence of Christ the Lord? Can it be because we ourselves don't know how to find Jesus Christ whom we are supposed to represent? Could it be that we might be able to discover him again for ourselves if only we could hear the inarticulate appeal for the Gospel which is there to be heard if we listen for it?

We are living, it has been said, at the end of the Constantinian era, for which the central task of Christianity has been to sacralize the institutions of society: typically in the anointing of the king, more familiarly in the ratification of the Establishment. We have hardly begun as Christians to live in the era which has been displacing it—let us call it the Romantic era (cf. J. L. Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt: Europe 1815-1848*, London, 1967. It seems to me that the central task of Christianity in this new era is the sacralization of the central theme of this era: revolt. Can one seriously envisage a Christianity in the historical form of a sacralization, or better consecration, of revolt, of revolution, or is one, in a sickeningly familiar way, merely playing at 'radicalism'?

It would of course be possible to speak, less provocatively, of a consecration of growth or of historical change. But it seems an inescapable truth, if we listen to the appeal for the Gospel in our time, that growth and significant historical change can only proceed by negation of the whole order of society in which we find ourselves. The growing points of our society are not found in its order but in the rebellion against this order. The world has to be overcome: the 'world' as the systematization of the good life of affluence and the masked or open exploitation and suppression of whole sectors of society, even in the West; the 'world', which as affluent or impoverished blights the growth of the spirit in transcendence.

The sacralization or consecration of revolt: not merely its endorsement. The efficacious symbol of the consecration of revolt can only be the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here there arise for the Christian and the priest those painful problems of violence which are, minimally, his problems to endure if not to resolve. The Christian and the priest have to sanctify revolt and growth from within, by 'a priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the peoples may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit'. Make love, not war.

It seems that the priest may have a special role in this Christian

sanctification of the *populorum progressio*. The rising and assembly of the peoples is the eternal secret of God and his transcendent purpose. The apostolic ministry has a special responsibility to announce the transcendence of God in the midst of his historical manifestation; but one can only announce the transcendence authentically (let us face it) if it is a matter of one's own experience in faith. Perhaps it is only by losing one's soul to the world for God's sake that one may gain both the world and one's own soul. How can one pray in the Church without first accepting the world on behalf of the Church? One prays by identifying oneself with the world (to 'overcome' it) and not by separating oneself from it (cf. PO 3): one prays by incarnation, death and resurrection. The eucharistic synaxis, as the 'centre of the assembly of the faithful over which the presbyter presides' (PO 5), is a local representation of the assembly of the peoples, summoned together by the word of the living God which it is the task of the presbyter to announce (cf. PO 4). Perhaps it is as the servants of God's eternal purpose to sum up all things in Christ that we shall find the sense of our apostolic ministry.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Besides the references given in the text, the following are also relevant: P. Fransen, 'Priestertum', in *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*; J. Lécuyer, *Le Sacerdoce dans le Mystère du Christ*, Paris 1957; K. Rahner, 'Priestly Existence', *Theological Investigations III*, London 1967, pp. 239-262; E. Schillebeeckx, 'Priesterschap' in *Theologische Woordenboek*.