

The Ministry of the Laity

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During the recently concluded Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, there was much feeling of pride and excitement because the Council was the first being held throughout the world under the new Code of Canon Law; and that for the first time likewise, lay people were being allowed to participate. In fact, roughly 32% or one-third of the almost five-hundred participants or delegates to the Council were lay people.

It was not surprising therefore, to notice that during the conciliar deliberations there was much agitation for more active participation of the laity in Church affairs whether administrative, pastoral, or liturgical. Many of the suggestions were focused on the ministry of the laity and not a few of them were advanced in the sense that they dealt with functions heretofore unheard of or unlegislated in Church discipline. Much discussions were centered on the extent of the role of the laity in the apostolic ministry of the Church; and not all of the views could be accommodated naturally, since they not only infringed on the ministerial functions proper of the clergy, but that they also tended to becloud the distinction between the clerical and the lay states.

While the Church recognizes the importance of the role of the laity in Her life and holiness, certain facts have to be clarified. It is the hope and purpose of these pages to trace the doctrine of lay ministry, to delineate concepts regarding its various connotations, differentiate it from sacred ministry, and of course, endeavor to place it in its proper perspective in the vitality of the Church and its ecclesial actions.

A. Sources of the New Ministries

Because of the contemporary attention accorded to it, the ministry of the laity appears evidently as a sort of novelty today. And since the laity is institu-

tionalized in various communities, it is clear that its material source is ecclesiastical power itself through whose legislations they are accorded existence in the Church. What is important to verify however, is how ecclesiastical authority convinced itself of the necessity and convenience of recognizing and granting to the laity determined functions for the good of the community. In other words, it is interesting to know what the reasons were for the institutionalization of lay ministries.

The theme of minor ministries or functions not properly sacramental were already discussed in the Council of Trent. The theologians of the Council were already occupied with what were known as minor orders, so much so that a series of functions were contemplated to lectors, subdeacons, and deacons of which they could be responsible; like visiting the sick, catechesis, administration, benefices, etc. This plan, nevertheless, never took off the ground due to the preoccupation of the Council in avoiding the desacralization of the sacred ministries on the one hand, and in over-emphasizing the relation between ministry and cult, on the other hand.

Vatican II offered two new ecclesiology and praxis for the lay ministries from the doctrine of the common priesthood different from the ministerial priesthood *essentia et non gradu tantum*,¹ and from where are derived services and charisms of the laity which the pastors must recognize as integral elements of the salvific mission of the Church.²

However, this Conciliar vision is not the only source which has placed in motion the theological reflection and pastoral praxis which has rather been abundant as far as the theme of lay ministries is concerned. To have a more global perspective of this theme, it is important to recognize other sources which have contributed to the formation of the current ecclesiology concerning the ministries of the laity.

Historicity of Ministries in General

The primordial point of departure regarding the ecclesiology of ministries in general is a *historical vision* in the light of the practice of the Christian communities starting with the apostolic community. Several serious studies concerning ecclesial functions in the primitive Church were pioneered by French authors of the fifties and have been expanded abundantly by Vatican II authors.³

¹L.G., 10.

²L.G., 30.

³Cf., for example, Dix, G. *Le ministère dans L'Eglise ancienne* (Paris: 1955); Colson, L. *Les fonctions ecclésiales aux deux premières siècles*, (Bruges; 1956); Urbina, F. "Hacia una figura histórica del ministerio", *Vocaciones*, vol. 43 (1969), pp. 23-65; Delorme, J., "El ministerio y los ministerios según el Nuevo Testamento," Ed Cristiandad, Madrid, 1975; Schillebeeckx, E., *El ministerio eclesial*, Ed. Cristiandad, Madrid: 1983; etc.

Charisms – An important coordinate for the ecclesiology of lay ministries is the rediscovery of charisms in the Church not only as simple grace *gratis datae* with spiritual and ascetical character destined for the service of others; but also as constitutive elements for the ordering of the life of the Church. The dynamic element of charism exists together with static character which represents ordained ministry; and far from creating a particular privileged state in the ecclesial community, are distributed indifferently to all and to diverse members of the Church. And in the life of the Church the bearers and titulars of these charisms have always been either ordained ministers or lay people. Furthermore, the charisms residing among the laity in a more or less permanent manner, constituted in the primitive Church as well as in the actual ecclesial society, a form of service to the community which the Church has to continuously discern and recognize.

Theology of the Laity – Another coordinate which serves to illustrate lay ministries is the condition of the laity in the Church. The theme of the condition and formation of the laity in the Church has followed an extreme trajectory in both pre-conciliar and post-conciliar studies and literature.⁴ Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* offer the definitive theological sources for the study of lay ministries but whose wealth and complexity we need not discuss here.

Ecumenism – One of the more dramatic innovations introduced by Vatican II is the theology of the separated communities or ecumenism which opened new vistas for their understanding and praxis. This of course, has to illumine the sense in which lay ministries which primitively was developed in these separated communities could be adopted to Catholic tradition.

Pastoral Needs – For the past decades, the Church felt the lack of sacred ministers. This fact led the Church to grant certain functions to the laity proper to them in a manner of supplement and subsidiarity. Nevertheless, because of recent advancements in ecclesiology, this practice has gained a deeper and more authentic ecclesiological fundamentation from the original supplemental function it was thought to only possess.

B. Lay Ministries in the Vigent Church

Authors have affirmed that Vatican II did not take much attention and consideration of the results offered by recent historico-exigential studies regarding the progressive structurization of services in the primitive Church. And perhaps there was sufficient reason for this because the result of the studies are not sufficiently secure.

However, an extensive review of the various documents of Vatican II will show that the *ministerial aspect* of the whole Church has been amply placed in relief not so much in particular texts but in the singular conciliar vision it

⁴See for example Feiner-Visher, *Nuevo libro de la fe cristiana*, (Barcelona: 1977), p. 689 ff.

presents of the whole Church in which the unity of mission through plurality of ministries is recognized and which offers several significant doctrines.⁵

First, that the bishops, together with the presbyters and deacons received the ministry of the community in order to preside over the flock of which they are pastors in the name of God, as teachers of doctrine, priests of divine worship and ministers endowed with authority.⁶ Second, that the sacred pastors should know that they were not created to assume solely for themselves the salvific mission of the Church, but must, likewise, recognize the services and charisms of the laity in such a manner that all should cooperate unanimously in the common work of the Church.⁷ Thirdly, that the laity, participating in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministries of Christ exercise their apostolate in the world as a ferment,⁸ and to which everybody is called.⁹ Lastly, there are lay persons who, either through personal initiative or through hierarchical invitation, consecrate themselves temporally or perpetually in the apostolate of the hierarchy by engaging in the service of its various institutions and work.¹⁰

These significant conciliar doctrines delineate a unique scheme which has been later developed by praxis and the Magisterium of the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences. This scheme can be viewed as follows:

- a) There exists a hierarchical ministry in the Church emanating from the sacrament of Order.
- b) There is a ministry common to all the Christians, consisting in the participation of the triple ministerial function of Christ: prophetic, sacerdotal and regal.

Between these two should be considered a ministry of *ecclesial institution* or one which is *determined* or *recognized* by the Church. The term *ministry* is used here in a more depurated sense as has been used in post-conciliar ecclesiology. The process of depuration has been gradual and not always uniform because in the expression *lay ministries* peculiar terminologies have to be reconciled which in canonical tradition have been considered incompatible.

From the Council of Trent the term *priesthood* (*sacerdotio*) and *ministry* (*ministerium*) were already used to connote sacred order and hierarchy.¹¹ Vatican II speaks of common priesthood and ministerial priesthood,¹² but it

⁵A.A., 2.

⁶L.G., 20.

⁷L.G., 30.

⁸A.A., 2.

⁹A.A., 16.

¹⁰L.G., 33; A.A., 20 & 22,

¹¹Cf. Denzinger, *E.S.*, 1776.

¹²L.G., 10.

does not reserve the term *ministry* for the hierarchical functions. A careful examination of the various places in which the term *ministerium* is used with a *determined theological connotation* will reveal the following insights of Vatican II in this regard:

- a. It utilizes the words *ministerium* or *ministerialis* with reference to sacred orders.¹³
- b. In order to signify service in general, within the People of God, Vatican II prefers to use the term *ministratio*.¹⁴
- c. The task recommended preferably to the laity, which consists in offering the temporal services of man for the kingdom of heaven, is denominated by the term *ministerium*.¹⁵

Thus, the term *ministerium* came to be used and applied in various pontifical documents to mean offices or tasks performed by the laity. In the instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* issued by the Sacred congregation of Rites in 1967; in the new *Ordo Missae* of 1970; in the *motu proprio* of Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* of 1973; and in the instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments *Immensae Caritatis* of 1973, the connotation of this term carried this meaning. However, in all these documents the *ministerium* performed by the laity appears as a participation of the ministry of the ordained and their function were almost exclusively *liturgical* in nature.

It was in the Apostolic exhortation of Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that for the first time a pontifical document applied the term *ministerium* to offices, tasks, and services which originated from the proper laical vocation of the Christian. In this document the ministries connected with sacred order and the ministries not connected with it were properly delineated. The latter were sufficient to assure special service to the Church. Examples of these ministries were that of a catechist, prayer leader, choir leader, service of the Word, help to the needy, direction of small communities, and other related responsibilities in the ecclesial community.¹⁶

Pope John Paul II in his various allocutions and writings has always insisted on the theme of lay ministries. A cursory glance of his many allocutions gives the following insights:

- a. He approves of the various institutions and experiences the Church has achieved in this regard.
- b. He insists on the specifically lay character of these ministries since they proceed not only from a participation of the ordained ministry but also from the condition of the laity as baptized and confirmed.

¹³L.G., 10.

¹⁴L.G., 4, 30, & A. 6, 4.

¹⁵G.S., 38.

¹⁶Paul VI, A. E. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (8 Dec. 1975), n. 73. It should be noted that this document parts from the experiences in various Churches referred to by the Synod of 1974.

- c. These ministries should not substitute or supplant the ministry of the ordained.
- d. He encourages its development and promotion since lay ministries are a form of manifestation of the active solidarity of the different members of the Christian community.
- e. He specifies some of those ministries.¹⁷

In connection with the theme of lay ministries, the Holy See has exercised the least direct intervention, but has encouraged more freedom of initiative by the particular Churches. The Holy See has in fact, abstained from institutionalizing directly the so-called *lay ministries* even if not a few episcopal conferences have solicited the same.

On the other hand, the documents from various episcopal conferences concerning the new ministries have been abundant because of the fact that the Holy See has extended to them a wider latitude in the sphere of doctrinal activation and praxis in this regard. From these documents, an excellent source of materials for the ecclesiological study of the nature of the *lay ministries* and its relation with the ministry of the ordained can be gathered. They serve also as sources of knowledge for the existence of these ministries in the diverse communities present in the Church. A study of these episcopal documents on the theme of the lay ministries gives us an idea and a working scheme of the ministerial functions in the Church.

Ministry in general, is either ordained, non-ordained or laical, and common. Laical or non-ordained ministry is either instituted or existent in fact. Instituted non-ordained or laical ministry is either liturgical or non-liturgical. These two latter are both conferred either by means of a rite or through designation.

Lay ministries are those which do not proceed from the sacrament of Order but is something more than the *common* ministry of all Christians since they are special gifts by means of which the Church is enriched by the Holy Spirit. If ecclesial authority gives a public ministerial character to certain of these determined services or functions, these non-ordained ministries are designated as *instituted*. Nevertheless, there exists ministries *in fact* which should not be confused with activities that develop marginally or against

¹⁷In giving emphasis to the laical character of these ministries, Paul VI affirms: "*Los laicos tienen que anunciar también ellos el Evangelio, poner al servicio de las comunidades cristianas sus múltiples carismas y ejercer aquello que el bautismo y la confirmación les confiere; y ello, a ser posible, de manera estable, con un compromiso permanente a la manera de un ministerio recibido por delegación o por institución. Siendo toda la comunidad la que hay que evangelizar es necesario tomar muy en cuenta el problema de una mayor incorporación de los seglares a las actividades del apostolado . . . Se trata más bien de estimular la conciencia de los seglares respecto del puesto y responsabilidad que les competen en la Iglesia en virtud de su vocación cristiana por el bautismo.*" Cf. Talk to the lay collaborators in the ecclesial ministry, Fulda, Germany, 18 Nov., 1980, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 (1980) pp. 829-830; also allocution to the Belgian Bishops, Sept. 18, 1982, *Docum. Católica*, 79 (1982), pp. 910 ss; also allocution to the Bishops of Northern France, Oct. 9, 1982, *AAS*, 74 (1982) pp. 1273-1274.

ecclesiastical authority. The so-called *lay ministry in fact* is exercised in consonance with Church authority although this latter does not *institutionalize* these ministries; hence, they may not enjoy stability and public recognition all the time.

The *instituted lay ministries* has for its object both liturgical and non-liturgical services or functions. By reason of the manner of conferment, both are conferred either by special mandate or by commission or designation. In both cases, grace is granted, although not properly sacramental, but indeed through the intercession, merit, and blessing of the Church which in liturgical rite acquire a greater expressiveness.¹⁸

Diverse Practices

Throughout the life of the Church, various lay ministries have arisen in distinct communities, and which have been echoed in various episcopal documents. However, all of these can be reduced into three distinct blocks; namely, Liturgical (or Cultural), Word, and Community.

Lay ministries which originate from the *liturgical* or *cultural* grouping are a result of the collaboration principally with ordained ministries and on the need to supplement them in certain cultural or sacramental acts. To this group pertain in the first place, the ministries of lector and acolyte. Likewise, the faculties granted to lay people to distribute Holy Communion, to preside at worship, and to publicly administer the sacrament of Baptism pertain to this block.

Through the years new forms of services recommended to the laity have arisen within this grouping due to the need to vitalize divine cult and to integrate more fully the laity with the rest of the ecclesial assembly. To this last group pertain prayer or worship leaders, cantors, directors of retreats and leaders of spiritual exercises.

Since the service of the *Word* is the point of departure of all forms of evangelization and the model from which to gauge the authenticity of all Christian communities, it is no small wonder why this grouping has given rise to most forms of ministries and attracted the interest of the laity for the service of the Church; except perhaps, the strictly liturgical. To this group belong the various announcers of the Good News, the catechists in their different modalities, the directors of centers of reflection and studies, and the directors of spiritual exercises and retreats.

From the *communitarian* dimension of lay ministries a considerable variety of services can be recognized within three sub-groupings. As far as *communion* is concerned the ministry of callers for families in mourning or affliction, and the ministries of service for information or intercommunication,

¹⁸Cf. L.G. Martín, "Los Ministerios Laicales," *Jus Canonicum*, XXVI (1986), p. 194.

are examples. A second sub-grouping would be *assistance*, which includes the various ministries of *social* character like the promotion of justice in favor of the oppressed, services of assistance and social aid, and ministries of charity for the orphans, widows, the old, the sick, and the needy of all forms.

Lastly, the sub-grouping on *material concerns* is another dimension where lay ministry in its communitarian aspect may be genuinely exercised as a Christian vocation. In this category, are included the service of financial officers or advisers concerning the material goods of the Church, the administration and organization of Church property, and the distribution of offerings.

Lay Ministries in the New Code of Canon Law

In the new Code of Canon Law, the term *sacred ministry* is contraposed to the expression *lay ministry* and is synonymous to *clergy*. Thus, Canon 1008 clearly states that "by divine institution, there exists in the Church among the faithful sacred ministers who in law are also called clerics; the rest are called lay." These sacred ministers are thus constituted by divine institution through the sacrament of Order.

The term *minister*, therefore, sans any qualification signifies in the majority of cases sacred ministers. Nevertheless, there exists various legal texts in the Code in which the term minister is also used to refer to the laity who performs a determined function in the Church especially of a liturgical character.¹⁹

The term *ministry* is used with a wider amplitude at present and its connotation becomes exclusively clerical when it is qualified with the adjectives *sacred*, *ecclesiastical*, or *pastoral*.²⁰ The service of lector and acolyte, conferred by means of liturgical rite is denominated *ministry*.²¹ One speaks of *ministerium verbi* not only when it is exercised by sacred ministers, but also when it is done by lay persons who have not yet received the ministries of lector and acolyte.²²

From these considerations, it is easy to conclude that the new Code of Canon Law contemplates lay ministries from two types offunctions clearly diverse from each other: one typically liturgical or pastoral, and the other which does not have a proper origin from sacred Order. The former are also considered under the modality of instituted or stable ministries, or of temporal and extraordinary ministries.

¹⁹For example, in Cc 910 §2 & 911, §2, the lay person deputed to distribute holy communion is called a *minister*. C. 1254, §2 contraposes the expressions *cleric & other ministers*. Also in C. 1457, §2, persons who not being judges nevertheless, collaborate in the administration of justice are called *ministers* of the Tribunal. This includes the promotor justice, defender of the bond & the notaries who can be lay.

²⁰Cf. for example Cc. 249; 279, §1-2; 545; 551; 674; 1036; 121, §1-3; etc.

²¹See for example Cc. 230, §1; 1035, §2; 1050, §3; etc.

²²Cc. 230, §3; 759.

As stated, some *functions are derived from ordained ministry*. These are functions which proceed from the participation on the part of the laity of the ordained ministry and carries a properly *functional* character. In other words, they collaborate or supplement the sacred ministries. Included among these are:

- a. The ministries of the lectorate and acolytate conferred in a more or less stable manner by means of a *liturgical rite* this latter being considered as an essential element.²³
- b. The temporal function for the fulfillment of certain proper acts of these two mentioned ministries granted to lay persons who have not yet received the said ministries, as well as the functions of commentator, cantor and similar actions.²⁴
- c. When the need of the Church so demands and there is lack of ministers, lay persons, even without the institution through a liturgical rite can also be called upon to exercise the ministry of the Word, leadership in liturgical prayers, the administration of baptism, and the distribution of Eucharist with a stable character.²⁵
- d. Lay persons can be summoned to cooperate with the bishop and with other priests in the exercise of the ministry of the Word.²⁶
- e. Lay persons may be allowed to preach in any Church or oratory in case of necessity and utility. But that form of preaching called homily is always reserved to the priest or deacon being part of the liturgy.²⁷
- f. Lay persons can be delegated to assist at the celebration of marriage.²⁸
- g. Lay persons can participate in the pastoral care of a parish.²⁹
- h. Lay persons can administer sacramentals according to the prescription of liturgical books and the consent of the Ordinary.³⁰
- i. Lay persons can conduct funeral services.³¹
- j. The new Code has canonized the ministerial figure of the catechist in mission territories attributing to them liturgical and lay functions

²³Cf. *Communicationes*, (1981), p. 321.

²⁴Cf. C. 320, §2.

²⁵Cf. C. 2330, §3.

²⁶Cf. C. 759.

²⁷Cf. Cc. 766; 767m §1.

²⁸C. 1111, §2.

²⁹C. 517, §2.

³⁰C. 1168.

³¹Cf. *Ordo Exequiarum*, n. 19, 2.

especially that of proclaiming the evangelical doctrine, of organizing liturgical acts, and initiating works of charity.³²

Women can participate in all of the above ministries except those proper of instituted lectors and acolytes. Canon 230, §1 deliberately uses the term *viri* (*viri laici*) to exclude women. When the said term is not used in the rest of the legal text, the possible inclusion of women is intimated.³³

Other ministerial functions which are properly laical. These are those which do not necessarily originate from the sacred ministry and require a special mission on the part of the hierarchy in order to be exercised in favor of the Christian community. The new Code of Canon Law mentions the following:

- a. The laity have the capacity to receive from legitimate ecclesiastical authority the mandate to teach sacred sciences.³⁴
- b. They can and even ought to collaborate with the Pastor in the catechetical formation of adults, the youth, and children.³⁵
- c. They can collaborate in the functions connected with administration of justice.³⁶

Nevertheless, can. 231 makes an independent formulation apart from the above-mentioned specific cases when it affirms in general that "the laity who are pledged to the special service of the Church . . . have a duty to acquire the appropriate formation which their role demands, so that they may conscientiously, earnestly, and diligently fulfil this role."

It seems that this legal text refers to n. 22 of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* which is the reference which best marks the source for the new ministries and which makes these latter specifically *lay*.

The Specificity of Lay Ministers. After indicating the sources for the restoration of lay ministries in the Church, we observe that the primary reason for its urgency was the need to answer the various necessities of the ecclesial community compounded by the lack of priests and precisely in the specific functions proper of the ordained ministry. This is best illustrated in the institution of the ministries of lector and acolyte, in the faculty to distribute the Eucharist, and that of administering Baptism by the laity in determined circumstances, etc.

This initiative in the ministry of the laity could induce one to believe that those who exercise the same acts are the *longa manus* of the clerics, as an extension of the ministry of the ordained. This conception of lay ministry

³²C. 785, §1.

³³This in fact was the mind of the Codal Commission, cf. *Communicationes*, (1981), p. 321.

³⁴C. 229, §3.

³⁵C. 776.

³⁶Cc. 1435; 1437.

carries with it various occasions for misunderstanding, among which is the establishment of a new clerical order, another manner of expressing the incommunicability between ministry and community, and the weakening of the proper role of the priest.

Fortunately, recent theological reflections strive to illustrate new perspectives of the *ministry* depurating it from its excessive clerical luster which characterized it for centuries and centering the same into two concepts: the ministry understood not as a category specifically reserved to a determined state in the Church, but as an undeniable condition of all the ecclesial community and of the disciple of Christ; and secondly, the proper condition of the laity within the Church as titulars of rights and agents of evangelization.

Ministerial Community. Vatican II's concept of the Church as People of God and sacrament of universal salvation has enhanced realities which were present in the very life and function of the early Christian communities. Among these realities, one must put in relief the communitarian sense and the character of corresponsibility of all the believers.

Because of his condition as member of the people of God, the Christian should participate actively in the history and vicissitudes of this people. And if the Church is truly a sacrament of salvation, She should arise from Her encounter with humanity to offer Herself in the act of service and mission to all in the heart of each baptized member. The Church would be ministerial in the measure that all Her members are servers or ministers of salvation in conformity with the gifts which the Holy Spirit sustains for the proper orientation of the saintly functions of the ministry geared for the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.³⁷

From this perspective, all ministries acquire the condition of being the constitutive element of the reality and organization of the Church. The Church is ministerial because through Her, the salvific action of Christ is actualized and prolonged. And a Church which is totally ministerial demands that all Her members possess their respective responsibilities and each acquire his particular ministry. The proper ministry of the ordained more than being an exclusive formation of an *ordo* or class is a function proper of the community. This peculiar function is exercised by those called by the community, accepted by the hierarchy, and enriched by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Lay State. Before all else, it is imperative to understand that the subsistence of the laical condition of the Christian as titular of determined non-ordained ministerial functions should be reaffirmed. The *status communis fidelium* has always been understood in the individual sense receptive and merely passive. Contraposed to this vision of the laity in the Church is the discovery of a great source of *ministeriality*, i.e., a totality of activities *ad extra*, which is laical, autonomous, and different from the ministerial activity of the

³⁷*Ephes.*, 4: 7-13.

hierarchical ministry. The exercise of this ministry far from exceeding or overemphasizing the rights and duties proper of the laity within the Church places them in relief before the hierarchy and the Christian community itself.

However, since all Christian lay persons participate in the common priesthood and collaborate in the building up of the kingdom of heaven precisely in his condition as secular, what does *ministry* contribute to all these?

Firstly, lay ministry enables the laity to precisely take conscience of this ministeriality. The generic call to participate in the conscience of this ministeriality *munus* of the Church expresses more urgently this participation in the lay people who receive *lay ministry*. Consequently, they become more responsible with regards their particular ministry.

Secondly, *ministry* assures the intervention of the authority of the Church in the theological life of the laity. Properly speaking, it is from the sacrament of Confirmation where the ministry of the laity springs from. In it and through it, the faith of the believer is not only strengthened but more significantly, the baptized is integrated into the interior of the ecclesial community more fully and actively at the same time that it communicates a dimension of service to temporal realities. But although all Christians must encounter themselves in this condition, their particular service to the community is not yet denominated with the name of *ministry*.

The Church can likewise, entrust to the laity certain determined functions as long as they are exercised in Her name. These functions whether proper or not of the ordained ministry, are truly *ecclesial* functions. No one can attribute to himself these functions without the mediation of the hierarchical Church. This is so because if it is important for the Christian community to possess all the means necessary to enjoy the fullness of Christian life, it is more important that the same is performed in an orderly manner, i.e., done with the order established by Christ and entrusted to those who represent and make Him present in the community.

Viewed from these two coordinated points of views, one can easily glean that what is in crisis is not so much the identity of the priesthood, as that of the ministerial identity of the Church in and for the world; and that *ministry* is a constitutive element of the being of the Church and not only of its organization. Consequently, everything which actually contributes to the crisis of the identity of the Priest, also serves to enlighten the ministerial structure of the Church.³⁸

The Ministry of the Word. Among the new ministries, that of the Word is invested with particular importance albeit under different forms. The *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam* teaches that to proclaim the Word of God in a liturgical assembly is the *proper* function of one constituted in the ministry of

³⁸Borobio, "Servicios y ministerios para la evangelización", *Comunicación al Congreso de Evangelización*, Madrid, 1985.

lectorate, for which reason he proclaims the readings of sacred scripture at Mass and other liturgical celebrations except that of the gospel.³⁹ Canon 230, §3 of the New Code calls this proclamation of the Word *ministerium verbi* and this ministry can be exercised by the lay person even if not constituted in the ministry of the lectorate. But then, what is the content of this *ministerium verbi* as exercised by the laity? Is it properly a laical function or rather a participation of the ministry of the ordained?

Since new canonical legislations contemplate diverse presuppositions in the exercise of the *ministerium verbi* on the part of the laity, we can base and note from these legal texts which can enable us to sufficiently illustrate the nature of lay ministry:

- a. This *ministerium verbi* is more than the ordinary evangelical proclamation expected of all the laity by virtue of baptism and confirmation and which they have to do as witnesses of the gospel both by their words and the example of their lives.⁴⁰
- b. It is more than the catechetical function which consists in the teaching of the doctrine and the experience of Christian life in order that the belief of the faithful becomes alive, and which formation is expressed under the direction of the pastors and involves all the members of the Church.⁴¹
- c. The *commentator* makes simple commentaries of texts and admonitions.⁴² The *ministerium verbi*, however, which can be performed by the laity is more than this.
- d. The ministry is the reading of the Word of God but considered in the genre of proclamation;⁴³ i.e., it is a ministry with a prophetic character; which more than being a simple discourse or reasoning, confers evidence of the truth of the testimony, of the signs and of the power of God which guides man in his historical context. All of these are realized in the name of the Church the depository and administrator of the Word of God.
- e. It does not touch the genre of *preaching* which already presupposes an articulation of a message. And if sometimes it is thought of as such, it is not to be considered *preaching* which forms an integral part of the eucharistic liturgy, like the homily, which is reserved to the priest or the deacon. This has been the mind of the Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law.⁴⁴

³⁹*Ministeria Quaedam*, n. V.

⁴⁰Can. 759.

⁴¹Cans. 773 and 774.

⁴²Can 230, §2.

⁴³*Ministeria Quaedam*, loc. cit.

⁴⁴Cf. *Communicationes*, (1981), p. 321.

- f. This *ministerium verbi* if it is such ministry, and as exercised by the laity, is in collaboration with the bishop and other priests,⁴⁵ who exercise it as a function proper of their ministry.⁴⁶ As a consequence, it does not arise from one's condition as baptized or confirmed. This is so because the *ministerium verbi* originates from the *munus docendi* which is proper of bishops, the authentic teachers gifted as such by the authority of Christ the Lord.⁴⁷
- g. The *ministerium verbi* proper of the ordained ministry, but which the laity can participate in are:
 - 1. That which corresponds to the proper functions of those constituted in the ministry of the lectorate;⁴⁸
 - 2. The same functions above whether exercised in a temporary manner,⁴⁹ or even more permanently and stably;⁵⁰
 - 3. Catechesis particularly in mission territories;⁵¹
 - 4. The teaching of sacred sciences;⁵²
 - 5. Preaching in churches and oratories in particular cases with the exception of homilies.⁵³

Just like the liturgical or the lay ministries, the newministries possess an ecclesial dimension. This is gauged from their *supernatural origin* since all is a result of a vocation which is a gift and grace of the Spirit. They are *ecclesial* as to their essence and end or destiny since they collaborate with the ministry of the ordained in the formation of the Christian community. Relatively at least, they are *stable*, i.e., for a determined period of time. And certainly a service which is only transitory or occasional does not properly enter into the concept of *ministry*. Furthermore, they are *public*, recognized by the community as such.

Added to the above common notes is the fact that all *liturgical ministries* exercised by the laity are characterized by the following:

- a. They should be availed of with the knowledge that they are participation of an act through delegation of an ordained ministerial

⁴⁵Can. 759.

⁴⁶Can 756 and 757.

⁴⁷Cf., L.G., 25.

⁴⁸Can. 230, §1.

⁴⁹Can. 230, §2.

⁵⁰Can. 230, §3.

⁵¹Can. 785.

⁵²Cans. 229, §3 and 805.

⁵³Cans. 766 and 767.

function, which although materially does not require the Sacred Order, are nevertheless public ecclesial actions which originate from this latter order.

- b. This exercise must not lead to the loss of the *laical character* of this ministry which cannot demand or arrogate statutory portions from the clerical state.
- c. They collaborate, but not supplant, the ordained ministry. One should not forget that Christ is made present in each community through His priesthood.
- d. They are, ecclesiologically speaking, less laical than those which proceeds from the condition of the baptized and confirmed as lived from a permanent commitment of the public action of the Church.⁵⁴

Again with regards to the ministries more properly laical, it should be borne in mind that they include only those which result from the proper condition of the Christian as baptized and confirmed, immersed in the realities of the world. They should not be evaluated, therefore, for their pastoral efficacy but for their capacity to manifest an ecclesial ministry different from that of the ordained and as common sign of fidelity to the structure and proper nature of the Church. The lay ministries properly speaking correspond primarily to the laity and are only subsidiary and supplementary to the ordained ministry in the same manner that the clerical ministries should be exercised primarily by the clerics and only supplementarily by the laity.

The distinction between *liturgical* ministries and the properly *laical* ministries helps in unravelling the thesis to which some authors lean in order to explain the nature and origin of the ministries exercised by the laity. The ministries properly *liturgical* is a participation in the unique ministry of the ordained which is rooted in the bishop fully and which admits of distribution or delegation of functions. The *laical* ministry, on the other hand, originates from the solidarity which exists among Christians who have been gifted with different ministerial charisms.

What is truly new in the concept of laical ministries such as it is presented in the Church today, is not precisely the possibility of making the lay faithful participants of the authority and functions of the ordained ministry; but that the Christian laity in his condition as *lay* as distinct from the Christian constituted in sacred order can perform in the Church services which the hierarchy recognizes as such. This presupposes a manner of understanding the Church in Her ministeriality. Even if there were myriads of priests and religious in all parts of the world, the participation recognized and ordained as proper of the laity through diverse services and ministries would always be

⁵⁴Pope John Paul II, "Allocution to the Bishops of Peru" (20 October 1977), AAS, 71 (1979), pp. 14, 18-22, n. 3.

necessary in the realization of the mission of the Church viewed from the same source of ecclesial life.⁵⁵

The immediate future of the *new* ministries is still uncertain. After passing an initial moment of euphoria it seems that there has been a slowing down in this practice for diverse reasons. All because there seems to be no adequate need or reason for it, thus, reducing laical ministry into that which has little of what is properly lay – which is what is cultural or liturgical; or because the properly laical services are performed without the express recognition or official mission of the Church.

If laical ministries are placed in its true perspective, it would not produce among priests doubts regarding their own ministerial function. On the contrary, this could be the best vehicle to purify the concept of the ordained ministry in order to clarify its real and genuine identity.

On the other hand, the topic is not sufficiently mature within the reality of theology most specially ecclesiology. Schillebeeckx laments the condition where certain communities are in fact directed through pastoral collaborators who share with a priest from another place who just comes to celebrate Mass in a particular community; thus, seemingly converting the same priest into just a simple servant of worship, a condition which is left hanging in a most absolute form of theological ambiguity.⁵⁶

This theological suspense coupled with the lack of juridical guarantees give origin to a certain sense of frustration among the titulars of lay ministries except perhaps, among those who serve small communities because precisely in their function as lay ministries they acquire a certain degree of ecclesial social challenge and relief. □

⁵⁵Borobio, R., "Servicios y ministerios laicales para la evangelización", *Comunicación al Congreso de Evangelización*, (1985).

⁵⁶Schillebeeckx, E., *El ministerio eclesial. Responsables en la Comunidad Cristiana*, (Madrid: 1983), pp. 228 ff.