

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF OFFICE IN THE CHURCH

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ANY HISTORICAL and theological consideration of the past in the Church always implies the questions of today. The origin and past of the Church are, of course, always normative for the Church, but only in dialogue with the present. The present questions concerning the priesthood are therefore bound to play an explicit part if we look in the origin and past of the Church for the normative criteria which must be taken into account in any attempt to give a new structure to the office of the priesthood. On the other hand, however, it would be incorrect to think of the past—and especially the origin and past of the Church—simply as an aspect of our contemporary understanding of the Church and the world. If we do this, any appeal that we may make to the past will simply be an attempt to strengthen our own conservative or progressive views and our own conservative or progressive positions. A historical and theological examination of the origin and past of the Church must always be a critical event. It confronts not only us and our present, but also our ideas of origin and past with the difference, the alien aspect, of a historical situation. In this way, the past calls in question our contemporary understanding of the Church and the world. Moreover, it would be dishonest to question the past in the light of our contemporary experience of the world and the Church without critically questioning this modern understanding and without allowing it to be subjected to the scrutiny of the past. Every period in the history of the Church is subject to the criticism of the period that follows it, and this period in its turn must be open to correction from every preceding period.

OFFICE IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

We shall have especially to consider, hermeneutically and dogmatically, the traditionally Catholic statements, in particular when formulated in ecumenical councils, about the priesthood. These can be set out schematically in the following way. The *sacerdotium*, which is subdivided into episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate, was instituted by Christ as one of the seven sacraments, and this sacrament of ordination, which is guaranteed by the “apostolic succession,” imposes—only in the case of a “valid ordination”—a character. Despite the universal priesthood of all believers, this “official” priesthood is, in its correlation to the community, nonetheless “essentially distinct” from the

services rendered by the laity, although these are equally of the Church.

In the formulations of this survey, the actual form of the priestly office during a previous period of history is so closely interwoven with the understanding of faith of this same period that without a historical and hermeneutical approach all kinds of premature theological and pastoral conclusions might be deduced from it, conclusions which could completely inhibit any attempt to bring the pastoral office up to date or at least limit such an *aggiornamento* to minor adjustments. A hermeneutical and dogmatic reconsideration of the *sacerdotium* in the Church is urgently necessary, both in view of the present crisis in the priesthood and also in the light of ecumenical concern. In this reconsideration the claims and the prestige of experts in every field which have made the "investiture to sacral authority" incredible in our modern desacralized world must also be borne in mind. It is obvious that it will only be possible to provide a few basic outlines here.

I shall confine myself to the "office of the Church," which I see in the following light. The offices of the Church, which certainly emerged from the community of the Church according to sociological laws, nonetheless owe their emergence to the community of the Church as set in order by the apostles—in other words, to the community of the Church as authoritatively guided by the apostles from the very origin of that community. What, then, is at the origin of the sociological process of growth (in which the Spirit of God is active) is not a community that was initially without authority, but the apostolic community itself.¹

There is no direct link between the contemporary offices of the Church (the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate) and an act of institution on the part of Jesus while He was on earth. It is clear from his-

¹ E. Käsemann, "Amt und Gemeinde im Neuen Testament," in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* 1 (Göttingen, 1960) 109-34; "Die Legitimität des Apostels," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 41 (1942) 33-71; "Sätze heiligen Rechtes im Neuen Testament," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55) 248-60; E. Schlink, *Der kommende Christus und die kirchlichen Traditionen* (Göttingen, 1961) pp. 160-95; J. L. Leuba, *L'Institution et l'événement* (Neuchâtel and Paris, 1950), which, in broad outline, is still an important work. Among the Catholic contributions (in confrontation with the vast number of books and articles in which the various positions concerning the concept of "apostle" have been situated), one particularly clear analysis has been provided by J. Giblet in his article "Les Douze: Histoire et théologie," in *Aux origines de l'église* (Paris and Bruges, 1964) pp. 51-64. H. F. Campenhausen's *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (2nd ed.; Tübingen, 1963) is still full of data; see the recent English translation by J. A. Baker, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, 1969).

torical analysis² that already existing models in the Jewish and Hellenistic world and concrete demands made by the historical situation of the Church influenced the factual structure of the leadership of the community. Even seen from the sociological point of view, a social group such as the Church would be unthinkable without official ministries. The sociological process within the Church which caused the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate to emerge from an originally greater number of offices in the Church (many of which disappeared later or merged with others) is, however, correctly interpreted, on ecclesiological grounds (the Church is, after all, the "temple of the Holy Spirit"), as the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the exalted Christ. Even though these offices do not go back to a historical act of foundation by Jesus, they are, by virtue of the pneumatic nature of the apostolically ordered Church, themselves the fruit of the Spirit and not simply the result of a sociological process of growth. In this sense it can be said that these Church offices are based on a *ius divinum*. Such a "divine dispensation" can, however, be so understood that it includes and at the same time makes possible a historical growth of various forms and divisions.³ So long as the Church is able to distinguish the sign of the Holy Spirit in it, restructuration is therefore possible, not only in the past (this is quite clear from history) but also in the future. Having regard to the unique aspect of the apostolate, the apostolic leadership of the primitive Church clearly functions as a model if a criterion is sought by which the pneumatic character of a proposed restructuration can be recognized.

The "office of the Church" thus forms an essential part of the apostolically ordered Church as this is apparent from Scripture, and therefore an essential part of the Church as the "Church of Christ," but the Church herself can regulate the concrete forms, division, and powers

² P. Benoit, "Les origines de l'épiscopat selon le Nouveau Testament," in *L'Evêque dans l'église du Christ* (Bruges, 1963) pp. 13-17 (see his *Exégèse et théologie* 2 (Paris, 1962) 232-46; R. Boon, *Apostolisch ambt en Reformatie* (Nijkerk, 1965); M. Thurian, "L'Organisation du ministère dans l'église primitive selon saint Ignace d'Antiochie," *Verbum caro* 21 (1967) 26-38; P. Menoud, *L'Eglise et le ministère selon le Nouveau Testament* (Neuchâtel, 1949); H. Schlier, *Die Zeit der Kirche* (Freiburg, 1955) pp. 129-47; H. Küng, *De Kerk* (Hilversum, 1967) pp. 415-558 (English tr., *The Church* [New York, 1968] pp. 361-480). See also the works quoted in n. 1 above.

³ See especially Joh. Neumann, "Erwägungen zur Revision des kirchlichen Gesetzbuches," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 146 (1966) 285-304, in which the author correctly reacts against the idea of "irreversibility" defended by Rahner; see K. Rahner, "Über den Begriff des *ius divinum* im katholischen Verständnis," *Schriften zur Theologie* 5 (Einsiedeln, 1962) 249-77.

of this office. In accordance with the example of what has been done in modern society, it is possible to divide the offices of the Church into legislative, administrative, and corrective (or penal) authorities. Furthermore, even an episcopal or presbyterial structure of the leadership of the Church is not dogmatically inviolate, although the collegial unity of all the "shepherds" of the Church, with the office-bearer who has the function of Peter in their midst, is. It is therefore possible to divide and regulate all the powers of those who are now called bishops, priests, and deacons differently, so long as this is done in a way that really enables the Church to function as the Church that was founded on the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone. It is clear from the acts of the Second Vatican Council that even the statement that the episcopate is the "fulness of the priesthood," that is, of the office of the Church, is not a dogmatic statement, not only because the Council had no intention of laying down "dogmas," but also because this statement is concerned with the *present-day* order of the Church, which can essentially never be defined, since different orders of the Church are dogmatically possible. (It is clear from earlier practice in the Church that ordinary priests, for example, could have the same powers within the Church and even the same sacramental powers as bishops; there have, moreover, also been times when the powers of deacons were greater than those of presbyters or priests.) The threefold division of the one office, with the familiar demarcation of their special ministries and powers, is, from the dogmatic point of view, subject to change and restructuration, within the fundamental college of those bearing office in the Church with the one who has the function of Peter among them. Whether or not they will have to be readapted in the future to the modern situation and to what extent they may have to be adapted is a question of pastoral policy in the Church. This has, in the first place, to be seen in the light of the needs of the community of the Church, in which at the moment the question of a new division of functions in the office of the Church is unmistakably present. Even without "dogmatizing," it is, however, possible to say in general that, on the basis of their real content, a threefold division between episcopate (in the original sense of supervision over the various communities within the Church and their priests), pastorate, and diaconate is a pastorally suitable formula and that it is still an open question as to how the pastorate should be differentiated or how it can be subdivided into specialized functions.

What, then, emerges in the concrete from the foregoing is that there is a real need for the leadership of the Church to consult the behavioral sciences, and in particular religious sociology, in order to conduct

a suitable pastoral policy, especially in changed cultural circumstances. What must emerge from pastoral experience, illuminated by sociological investigation and research undertaken among groups, and seen against the background of dogmatic possibilities, is what new divisions are necessary within the office of the Church in order to ensure that it will function meaningfully in the future, not only in the light of the situation in the West, but also in the light of the situation in the East and the "third world," with the meaningful models that already exist there. Within the apostolic criteria, meaningful development and pastoral suitability must be the guiding principle in any such restructuration—that is to say, the guiding principle for a *ius condendum*, since the apostolic criteria do not bind the Church to a definitive structure of her offices which might crystallize out into a rigidly fixed and unchangeable *ius conditum*. It is, for example, evident from scientific research that there is a lack of "vertical" lines in the structures of the Church between the summit, which is in fact formed by the bishop, and the very broad base, formed by the priests and the people. Between these two there are no intermediary structures, that is, offices with real powers sanctioned by the order of the Church. This, however, is a pastoral conclusion and here I wish to confine myself to the dogmatic possibilities.

In any attempt to give the Church new structures, the ecclesiological foundation must be borne in mind. This is that (a) the universal Church is made fully present in every local church, so that the local church has, in accordance with its own needs, a right to its own special appearance and its own order; and (b) every local church, in making the universal Church fully present in this way, has at the same time to be "in communion" with other local churches and with that Church in which the one who bears the office of Peter resides. The concrete result of this is pluralism, but a pluralism within a necessary unity of Church order.

MEANING AND VALIDITY OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHURCH

The content of the office of the Church and its validity or authenticity within the Church must also be apparent from the essence and mission of the apostolically ordered (local and universal) Church as the Church of Christ or the "community of God."

Content and Meaning of Serving Leadership

The content and meaning of the serving leadership of the community of the Church (here I am disregarding the manner in which these functions can or should be divided among various "offices" so that the Church can perform her pastoral task suitably) are, by their very na-

ture, determined by the essence and mission of the whole Church. Our ideas of the content of the office are, therefore, partly determined by a more explicit and more subtle understanding of the Church which may even include a correction of the past. We can, therefore, provide the following schematic outline of the lines of force in the Church's office of leadership in the light of the Church's earlier and present understanding of herself. These lines of force include leadership and guidance of the Christian life of the community of believers so that Christ may really be the only Lord of that community, directing the ministry of the Word in faithfulness to the apostolic confession of faith, conducting the sacramental services of the community, and taking care of the "consolation of the gospel" in admonition, exhortation, and so on. The Church's office of leadership also implies leading in the love that desires and seeks to attain justice for all men—in other words, being responsible for the evangelical care which the community must have for man in his concrete historical situation. This task also includes not only a critique of society as a whole, but also a critical attitude towards the community or the Church. Finally, one of the normal tasks of the leadership of the community is that of receiving new candidates into the office of the Church. In a word, it is a special, official care which will ensure that Christ is really the only Lord of the living community that is to be founded or perpetuated. All these tasks do not, moreover, have to be carried out in a purely formal manner, but in a way which is really credible within our contemporary society and which can function suitably, understandably, and meaningfully. The behavioral sciences have their own special contribution to make to the furtherance of these tasks of the Church's office.

The pneumatic character of the Church's office means that it always has a twofold dimension. Those bearing office are at the same time both (a) representatives of the community of believers in the presence of the world and (b) representatives of Christ in the presence of the community. This implies that (a) what is living in the community will crystallize out in their person, because this community itself is the bearer of the good news to the world and may, on the basis of the gospel, express itself in a "critical no" to the world. It also implies, however, that (b) the office-bearer has a special, that is, an official mission, brought about by the Spirit, *over and against* the community and for the benefit of the world. His authoritative function, which is purely service to the full power which the Lord has over the community, also gives the office-bearer a critical function towards the community, in which he nonetheless remains tied to the apostolic confession of faith. This does not mean that the Church is divided into two blocks, the college of those who bear office and the believing people. This is not so, in the first

place because faith and the life of the Church are not in any sense made the exclusive property of the clergy by this function which is set over and against the community. If it were, the clergy would then have the task of handing on the property entrusted to *them* to the community. The treasures of faith belong, on the contrary, to the whole of the believing community, which is, as a whole, the "temple of the Holy Spirit." Those holding office in the community serve that community which is guided by the Spirit, and any authority invested in this leadership is derived from the apostolic message and confession of faith and directly from the exalted Lord. This authority is, therefore, as far as its *content* is concerned, bound to a norm and is not simply formal or jurisdictional, so that it appears as authority purely on the basis of jurisdiction. *Id quod traditur*, the apostolic inheritance (and everything that may appear to be necessary to maintain this inheritance dynamically in every historical situation)—this is always the basis, the fertile soil, and the limitation of "formal" authority. Furthermore, the exercise of authority is also determined in the Church by the Church's character as a community of love. The leadership and guidance of the Church must, on ecclesial grounds, have the characteristic of serving love, which brings authority in the Church within the sphere of a special service of love.

Validity of the Office of the Church

The validity of the office of the Church—in other words, its Christian and ecclesial authenticity—is determined on the basis of its function in the community which is faithful to the apostolic church and therefore above all on the basis of the *fides ecclesiae*, the apostolic faith. This applies not only to the validity of baptism, but also to that of the office of the Church.⁴ This has ecumenical consequences for the Catholic Church since and insofar as she recognized the apostolic and therefore the ecclesial character of other Christian churches at the Second Vatican Council. This means that she has implicitly accepted, to the same degree, the validity of the office in the other churches. The fact that the Church order in the other churches has been again and again differently regulated in the various churches since the Reformation does not detract from this in any way. Even if the universal collegiality and the office of Peter, which could really function in other Church orders, are not taken into account, an episcopal or presbyterial Church order

⁴ A good historical and theological argument in favor of this has been provided by A. (Bertulf) van Leeuwen in his article "Grenzen van Kerk en Doop," in the *Jaarboek 1965-66 Werken. kath. theol. Nederland* (Hilversum, 1966) pp. 71-102. Although van Leeuwen was discussing the question of the validity of baptism here, his principles apply equally to the validity of the office.

should not in itself be regarded as a dogmatic factor leading to division. As such, then, these are not an obstacle to unity, but only different and dogmatically justified Church orders.

Apostolic Succession

The apostolic succession⁵ (in the limited sense of a historical "apostolic succession" in the *office* of the Church) is one of the means by which the apostolicity of the faith of the community can be embodied. It is, however, apparent from the practice of the Church, as formulated in the *ecclesia supplet* of the Western tradition and the idea of *oikonomia* of the Eastern tradition (both of these being ultimately "juridical" definitions of the "charismatic" origin of the mission of the office of the primitive Church) that, in the case of the sacraments and the office of the Church, no dogmatic solution is provided by precise chemist's prescriptions.

The foundation of the apostolic succession in the office of the Church is, in the first place, the apostolicity of the community itself, because it is precisely in the *apostolic* Church that the Holy Spirit is active. The apostolicity of a Christian community implies the apostolic faith and an office which proceeds from the apostolic Church. The pneumatic character of the apostolic community of the Church is therefore also the primary basis of the apostolic succession and thus of the validity of the office of the Church. The apostolicity of the community of the Church, that is, its belonging to one of the empirical communities of the Church which, in mutual "ecclesial recognition," claim to be the "Church of Christ," is the basis of the apostolicity or validity of the office of the Church.

In normal circumstances this radical "apostolic succession" of the Church is accompanied by a historical or horizontal succession in the office of the Church: the college of existing office-bearers (however this may be organized) visibly (that is, by the imposition of hands) receives the candidate, at the expressed desire of the community and once this candidate has been accepted, into the college under the invocation of the Holy Spirit. On the basis of the pneumatic character of the apos-

⁵ See Schlink, *Der kommende Christus*, pp. 192-95, and H. Küng's article, which is closely connected with this, "What is the Essence of Apostolic Succession?" in the American edition of *Concilium* 34 (New York, 1968) 28-35 (the whole of this number contains articles on the apostolic succession); F. van Beeck, "Proeve van een ecumenische beschouwing over de sacramenten," *Bijdragen* 26 (1965) 129-79. See also the following historical studies: E. Molland, "Le développement de l'idée de succession apostolique," *Rev. hist. philos. relig.* 34 (1954) 1-29; K. E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry* (New York, 1947).

tologically ordered Church, however, it is in principle possible for an office which is *praeter ordinem*, that is, outside the valid Church order, but which is nonetheless valid in the Church, to come about—namely, under the charismatic impulse of an apostolically founded community which finds itself in a state of emergency. This occurs especially in the missions.⁶ This situation would appear to be even more strikingly justified if (as some historians maintain) there really was a distinction in the early Church between the so-called Pauline Church order (of the Gentile Christians) and the Palestinian Church order (of the Jewish Christian communities), which gradually merged together, the Palestinian Church order becoming predominant.⁷ There is, in my opinion, not enough historical proof for us to say that these two Church orders were set over and against each other as antitheses, but it is quite certain that in the primitive Church (and more conspicuously in the Palestinian communities with their Hellenistic emotion) leading services in the community arose alongside the normal offices of the Church, offices which did not have their origin in an official transference (the imposition of hands) but in a charismatic inspiration, even though this always took place subject to the critical recognition of the apostolic authority (Paul!) and with the approval of the community.

Offices of the Church which arose freely and charismatically were thus in principle regarded as acceptable by the Christian community, but they had to prove their right to exist in the light of the apostolic criteria and to establish this within the community by their authenticity and meaningfulness. These offices arose in difficult, or rather in special missionary, situations. In this way the “first-born” of a newly founded community often appeared spontaneously as official leaders of the community, and it is frequently impossible to find any historical evidence proving that an imposition of hands took place. This is a charismatic fact which Paul simply accepted (see especially 1 Cor 16:15–16; Rom 16:5 can also be seen in this perspective). These cases of leadership in the community, which arose charismatically and outside the normal order of the Church, but were nonetheless within the

⁶ This idea, which has its basis in the early Church but was later forgotten, is being reconsidered at the moment and is beginning to find unanimous recognition among theologians. See, among other works (in addition to those mentioned in n. 5 above), M. Villain, “Can There Be Apostolic Succession outside the Chain of Imposition of Hands?” in the American edition of *Concilium* 34 (New York, 1968) 87–104.

⁷ See especially Käsemann, “Amt und Gemeinde,” in particular pp. 123–30; Schlink, *Der kommende Christus*, pp. 165 ff.; supported on the Catholic side by Küng, *The Church*. See also W. Marxsen, *Der Frühkatholizismus im Neuen Testament* (2nd ed.; Neukirchen, 1964). See also J. Roloff's criticism (of Käsemann especially) in *Apostolat, Verkündigung, Kirche* (Gütersloh, 1965).

one but differentiated Church order, were recognized by the later Church in her canonization of Scripture as possibilities in principle within the life of the Church. In the light of this, we are bound to keep this possibility open now in principle and even take into account a realization of this possibility in the case of apostolically founded communities which are in a situation of emergency. In this context we are reminded of the unlawful and so-called officially invalid consecrations of bishops which took place in China during the persecutions, or of believers who have emerged as leaders of Christian communities in mission countries where there have been no priests for years. This theological possibility is also important from the ecumenical point of view especially, since it may lead to a renewed assessment of the validity of the office in, for example, the Anglican Church and other churches of the Reformation, as the apostolic and "Church" character of these churches is recognized and in addition it can be affirmed that they are (from the Roman Catholic point of view) in a situation of emergency as churches with regard to the apostolic succession in the office. In view of the intention of this article, I cannot go further into this question here. In the foregoing, however, I have established the connection with what has to be considered now: reception into the office of the Church or (as it is in fact called both in Catholic terminology and in the present day) valid order of the Church, ordination to bishop, priest, or deacon.

RECEPTION INTO THE OFFICE OF THE CHURCH

Essential Elements of Confirmation in Office of Church

On the basis of the pneumatic character of the community of the Church as founded on the apostles, reception into the Church's office includes the following essential elements, whatever concrete form may be given to this reception in accordance with the valid order of the Church (which is changeable).

1) Since the one who bears office *also* represents the community, the community's consent to the leadership of a certain candidate must be expressed in one way or another. The question which occurs in the traditional liturgy, "Do you know whether they are worthy?" is certainly a real expression of this consent, but it is in fact formalistic. On the other hand, the candidate's desire to accept office in the community is also necessary. The desire of the local community cannot, however, be regarded simply as the ultimate authority, because a narrow "clan" mentality (both in the conservative and in the progressive sense) may effectively paralyze the function of the "shepherd" who is thus chosen

in accordance with the people's wish to criticize the community in the name of the Spirit of Christ (we have evidence of this in the sad case of certain American Protestant communities, where the members of the community have the last word in the choice of their office-bearer). Nonetheless, a vote on the part of the community is indispensable to the proper functioning of the one who chooses to be the leader in a community. He has, after all, to bear witness to and guarantee the unity and the peace of his community in his own person. This means that the candidate must also be suitable for the task, and the aid of the behavioral sciences is indispensable nowadays in any attempt to assess his suitability.⁸ I would like to make two comments here. On the one hand, the suitability of a candidate must not be judged in accordance with an image of the "priest" which is associated with a previous period in history and which is probably already out of date. If this standard is used, the most suitable candidates might well fail the test and "stereotyped" figures be chosen as the most suitable. On the other hand, there can be no justification for the practice of judging the suitability of a candidate by an image of the "priest" which has been formed privately and which has not been subjected to the norm of the apostolic criteria for an office-bearer in the Church (I am thinking here in particular of the aspect of being "over and against" the community). For this reason, both "dictatorial" tendencies and unsuitability for leadership must be considered very carefully. According to the New Testament, candidates for office in the Church were normally chosen from among those members of the community who had already given some indication of "charismatic gifts" and who toiled for the community (see especially Acts 6:3 and the pastoral Epistles). In modern terminology this means that candidates would be chosen from among fully committed believers. It cannot be denied that testing is useful, but I feel that a better method of selection would be to take into account previous *service* as a layman in the community, of course with the powers entrusted to him, even though this would mean that his reception into the office of the Church would have to take place much later.

2) Reception normally takes place *by the college* of the already existing office-bearers under the imposition of hands (and, as I have already said, with the approval of the community). (See Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:22; also Acts 6:6, where this is expressed less clearly.) The imposition of hands by the bishop with his priests is, in the present-day order of the Church, a sign confirming this reception. All the same, there are special ministries in the Church for which there is no

⁸ See, among others, W. J. Berger, *Beoordeling van geschiktheid voor het priesterambt* (Nijmegen and Utrecht, 1968).

evidence in Scripture of an act of reception by the already existing office-bearers—for example, for prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1 ff.) and the ministries referred to in 2 Cor 8:19. What I have already said above about the charismatic emergence of offices in the Church also applies here. These special ministries do, however, ultimately require recognition by the community and by the leadership of the Church.

This reception into the office of the Church (with the consent of the community and of the candidate himself and normally by the college of the already existing office-bearers or, in the case of possibly charismatic emergence, at least subject to recognition by this college) is only the historical and ecclesial form in which God's special call by the Spirit who guides the Church appears (see, among other places, Acts 1:24 ff. and 20:28). The office-bearer is thus able to know that he has been called in faith by God and that his task is to perform a special service in the one mission of the whole Church to the world.

3) This reception takes place *in the college* of the already existing office-bearers. Organic membership of such a college, the ultimate seal of the collegiality of which is to be found in the one bearer of the office of Peter, points to the task of every office-bearer, not only to care for the inner unity and peace of his community under Christ, but also to care for peace between his community and those led by other leaders, and ultimately also for peace between his community and the whole Catholic Church. "Catholicity" originally referred to the mutual communion of all local churches, a unity for which every community, together with its leader, was responsible. That is why the reception of a believer into the office of the Church is not only a matter which simply concerns the local community, but also essentially a collegial matter concerning all office-bearers, insofar as it can be suitably arranged. It is only in collegial unity with his brothers in office and together with them subject to the apostolic norm that the office-bearer can be a criterion for the community. The basis for this is to be found in the writings of the New Testament, which have canonized the fact that *diverse* apostolic traditions in their complementary totality are the norm for the life of the Church—no separate tradition, even though it may be apostolic, can be allowed to isolate itself or become independent and thus be exempt from mutual criticism.⁹

4) Reception into the office of the Church takes place under the *invocation of the Holy Spirit* (epiclesis). In this invocation of the Holy Spirit (which is concretely expressed by the laying on of hands), God

⁹ The fact that younger candidates are no longer able to experience their reception into the office of the Church as a "reception into a college" because they feel strange in this, is, in my opinion, proof of an existing, objective situation of conflict.

is implored to send the charisma of office, by which the one who is called becomes the representative of Christ and is able, *in persona Christi*, to take the lead in the community—to perform official service *in the name of Christ over and against* but *within* (that is, as a member of) the community. This act is what makes it publicly legitimate for a member of the community who is usually already charismatically gifted to act as a holder of office in the Church, and furthermore, in the form of prayerful supplication, it also equips him with the charisma of office by virtue of Christ's promises. Just as the word of God, of which the office-bearer is the minister in the community, is a "power of God," so too is the office-bearer's special mission. That is why even a non-Catholic theologian like J. Jeremias was able to say that the imposition of hands, as the expression of mission to the office, is not only a suitable symbolic act but "an act of the communication of the Spirit."¹⁰ It is not difficult, of course, to verify this from the Bible. It is also why this "ordination" contains a task as well: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim 1:6).

In view of the fact that the charisma of office which God is implored to send under the invocation of the Holy Spirit is not a "parcel" which has been previously determined by *ius divinum*, but is something that is determined by the concretely situated Church, the content of the epiclesis or prayer of supplication will be inwardly marked by the differentiation and specialization which is in fact unavoidable in the one office of the Church. In accordance with what has already been said, then, this prayer will in the concrete refer to, for example, the charisma of office for the supervision of all the communities and their leaders (the "episcopate"), the charisma of the "pastorate," or the charisma of the "diaconate." In this way it would at the same time be "established" that, below the *episkopē* or ministry of the "overseer," the functions of the "pastor" and deacon would be co-ordinate and include "autonomous" ministries and "powers." What is more, it would only in this case be meaningful for a new ordination to be given (epiclesis) on the possible reception of a candidate into a different basic differentiation of the one office of the Church—which does not mean that juridical difficulties about "validity" have to be raised whenever, for example, the temporary situation in which the Church is placed requires a deacon to take over the function of a pastor, or a pastor to assume the task of an *episkopos*.

¹⁰ J. Jeremias, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus* (6th ed.; Göttingen, 1953) Exkurs on 1 Tim 4:14.

Ordination and Sacrament

Reception into the office of the Church under the invocation of the Holy Spirit and made visible in the sacramental sign of the imposition of hands is known, in the traditional terminology of the Catholic Church, as "ordination." This can, of course, continue to be called "ordination" on the basis of the epiclesis or invocation of the Holy Spirit, in order to give emphasis to the fact that the charisma of office, with its characteristic task of appearing "in the name of Christ over and against the community" and at the same time in adherence to the apostolic norm and in communion with the whole community of the Church, is in fact bestowed.¹¹ This emphasis on the liturgical element is not only justified, but also necessary during a period of radical secularization. On the other hand, many believers still associate such a "consecration" with an anointing of the candidate's hands with oil and tend to interpret this to some extent magically. It is, therefore, understandable that some Catholics prefer not to stress the sacral aspect of "ordination" any more so as to avoid false mystification and also for ecumenical reasons. An attempt is thus made to avoid the suggestion that non-Catholic confirmation in the office of the Church, which is not called a "sacrament" and, in our view, is ritually rather "cool," is in itself a factor which divides the churches and has, by definition, to be regarded as invalid. Whether this is so or not has still to be seen after all. The above-mentioned essential elements contained in reception into the Church's office are in fact accepted not only by the Catholic Church, but also by not all perhaps but many of the other Christian church communities, Lutheran, Calvinistic, and Anglican. These essential elements are regarded by Catholics as sufficient reason for calling reception into the office of the Church a sacrament (*sacramentum ordinis*), whereas, although these essential elements of reception into the office of the Church are fully accepted by many non-Catholic communities, the name "sacrament" is not ascribed to them. In view of the fact that they accept what is objectively the same, how-

¹¹ With the passage of time, Protestant exegetes and historians have also come to re-emphasize more and more clearly this aspect of being "over and against the community" (in reaction against untheological misunderstandings and uncritically accepted secularizing tendencies). The special operation of grace which accompanies reception into the office of the Church has in this way been stressed once again in Protestant circles. This was also the original inspiration of the Reformers, but it was diluted in later controversies. See, among others, Schlink, *Der kommende Christus*, p. 189 and p. 168, n. 6. See also Boon, *Apostolisch ambt en Reformatie*, pp. 157-211; H. Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melancton* (Göttingen, 1962); A. Ganoczy, *Calvin, théologien de l'église et du ministère* (Paris, 1964). Finally, see also A. Houtepen, "Het ambt in de structuur van de kerk," *Vox theol.* 36 (1967) 269-92.

ever, the use of the word "sacrament," which is analogous and has many shades of meaning, is, in this context, secondary. The Tridentine confession "seven sacraments, neither less nor more" is a reply to a question which is different from the one that is asked nowadays. In our days one starts from an ecumenical appreciation of the ecclesial character of each other's churches—we realize now that it is possible to say and do, from the perspective of a different Church order and with a different "Church language," what is objectively really the same, with the result that the Tridentine statement does not need to be opposed to the Protestant churches' present-day understanding of themselves.

CHARACTER: AN APOSTOLIC FACTOR, NOT DIVISIVE

According to the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church, reception into the college of already existing office-bearers has a consequence which is known as a "mark," character. I should like to show that this "mark" adds nothing new to what I have already in substance said.

Augustine introduced the word "character," not in the first place in connection with reception into the office of the Church, but in connection with baptism, mainly in order to illustrate that baptism was *inviolabilis*—in other words, that it had to be recognized if it was administered with the Trinitarian confession of faith, even if this took place unlawfully, that is, in a non-Catholic Christian community. The inviolable or indelible mark was, for him, simply the inviolable value of the Trinitarian confession of faith at baptism, which was, in Augustine's opinion, an activity of faith on the part of an apostolically founded Church, even if this were separated from the *Catholica*.¹² He regarded this inviolability of the apostolic faith as equally applicable to ordination. The effect of ordination was not therefore destroyed by later "heresy." He never called this effect itself, however, a mark or character. Whenever he wanted to refer to the effect of certain sacraments that was not violated by sin as opposed to their effect of grace, he used the terms *sacramentum manens*, *sanctitas* (in the sense of *sancitus*) and *consecratio* or *ordinatio*. Being given office, then, was being placed in an *ordo*, that is, in a "college" or "senate," being received into the college of those holding office in the Church. The "character" or mark was, for Augustine, the outward rite itself in which the triune God was invoked. The "mark" thus consisted of the visible

¹² See N. Haring, "St. Augustine's Use of the Word Character," *Mediaeval Studies* 14 (1954) 79-97; "Charakter, Signum und Signaculum: Die Entwicklung bis nach der karolingischen Renaissance," *Scholastik* 30 (1955) 481-512; 31 (1956) 41-69 and 182-212. These articles give a slightly different shade of meaning to what I wrote about Augustine's "character" in *De sacramentele Heilseconomie* (Antwerp, 1952) pp. 489-91.

and audible expression of the apostolic "faith of the Church," which preserved its inviolable value in the separated churches as well. The effect of this inviolability was that the "ordained" person was *de facto* placed as an office-bearer in the Church and was received into the *ordo* of those bearing office.

Following the early Scholastic theologians, Thomas based his teaching on this Augustinian datum and regarded character in the first place as the outward rite of ordination itself, which was valid in the Church and by which everyone was able to recognize that the ordained person had been validly received into the college of office-bearers and that this was not nullified by his going over to a separated church. In the first place, then, the character was the rite which situated, not the fact of being situated.

It is, however, possible to discern, even among the early Scholastic writers, a tendency to call the effect itself (that is, valid membership in the college of office-bearers) a character on the basis of the rite which bestowed this mark (that is, a rite in which the apostolicity of the community of the Church could be recognized). Thomas took over this idea, but noted that the character could only signify the effect itself of the rite of ordination (that is, real membership in the college of office-bearers) in the second place, by analogy.¹³ Later, however, he lost sight of the original significance of the mark to some extent and began to regard this analogical significance as the real one. This, however, was only a question of words, since it had never been denied in the Church that the ordained person was (by the rite) situated in the "order" of those bearing office; this effect had simply not been called a character. Furthermore, under the influence of the rather one-sided cultic interpretation of the office of the Church in medieval theology,¹⁴ reception into the office was called a *deputatio ad cultum*, that is, a reception into the college of those who led in liturgical worship, with the result that the character came to mean an official power in the sphere of worship. In this way the stress was laid on the view that the official acts of the one holding office were independent of his personal merits or demerits, even though the rite of ordination was still considered to be an active prayer of supplication, so that the ordained person would carry out his official acts in holiness and with apostolic zeal.

In its second meaning, which was analogical but had become traditional, the concept "mark" or character therefore had two essential

¹³ I have already analyzed this in *De sacramentele Heilseconomie*, especially pp. 505-10.

¹⁴ In Ignatius of Antioch (*Ad Eph.* 5, 1 ff.) one already finds traces of the later medieval idea.

characteristics: it indicated (a) that the office-bearer had been validly received into the college of those holding office, and (b) that he was, in his office, placed in a special way on the side of the Lord over and against the community—his service with regard to Christ's unique priestly and pastoral care was simply subordinate. This being "in the name of Christ over and against the community" was, for Thomas, the essential element of the character or of being received into the office of the Church.¹⁵ This was something that was frequently forgotten later. Anyone who considers these two essential elements objectively is bound to admit that they express a biblical datum which has, up to the present time, been regarded in tradition as essential to the office of the Church—no more than this, but also no less. These two elements of the character were interpreted ontologically. Within the framework of medieval thought this is understandable, but it should not make us blind to the inviolable biblical inheritance that they contain. In addition, the Scholastic theologians were, in their ontological extension of these two data of the primitive Church, to some extent misled by a misunderstanding of what Augustine had in fact said. Viewed superficially, Augustine apparently spoke, in a comparison with the stigma branded on soldiers of his own time, not only of an "outward mark" ("si characterem . . . extra habeas"), but also of an "inward mark" ("si characterem . . . intus habeas"). This distinction does not, however, refer to the mark. This is borne out by a more accurate reading of the passage, which is: "Put a te esse militarem. Si characterem imperatoris intus habeas, securus militas. Si extra habeas, non solum tibi ad militiam non prodest character ille, sed etiam pro desertore punieris."¹⁶ The mark with which the soldier was branded (often bearing the image of the emperor) was practically impossible to remove from his body (perhaps his arm). If he bore this mark *intus*, that is, in the army, he was under the protection of the emperor. If he was seen with this mark *extra*, that is, outside the army, everyone would know that he was a deserter and that he would not escape punishment. Augustine's comparison, then, was this: being within or outside the true Church made no difference at all to the validity of the office within the Church, so

¹⁵This is especially clear from Thomas' reflections that Christ, the high priest, did not Himself need any mark (*Sum. theol.* 3, q. 63, a. 6). The primary aim of his teaching about the character was to show that ministry in the Church was simply a being taken into service by the one priesthood of Christ for the benefit of the community. This was unmistakably the reason for all his ontological constructions (see *De sacramente Heilseconomie*, pp. 510–524). This "in the name of Christ over and against the community" was therefore, in the case of Thomas, the only reason why he called the office of the Church a special participation in Christ's priesthood.

¹⁶In *Ioan. tractatus* 6, 15 (*PL* 35, 1432).

long as this had been bestowed with the characteristic rite of an apostolic Church. The question posed by the Church Fathers and especially by Augustine¹⁷ in connection with the inviolability or indelibility of the character—the source of all medieval reflections about it—was therefore posed (in modern terms) from a specifically ecumenical and inter-Church point of view. No direct answer to the modern problem as to whether it is possible to leave the office on the basis of the indelibility of the character can therefore be found in the traditional teaching of the Church. There are, however, elements in patristic teaching which provide an answer to analogous questions: according to Augustine, a priest who had been removed from his office still continued to be a priest,¹⁸ but other Church Fathers did not apparently take this view.¹⁹

The Councils of Florence and Trent simply reproduced this teaching about the office of the Church which had been associated with the character since the twelfth century together with its ontological interpretation: "The character is some (*quoddam*) spiritual and indelible sign in the soul."²⁰ It was (according to the *acta*, with some hesitation²¹) given as the reason for the fact that this sacrament could not be given more than once. The Tridentine formula was in fact a repetition of the Florentine statement, which came about, however, in very different circumstances. The *Decretum pro Armenis* of Florence, which, in addition to repetitions of earlier confessions of faith, also included a practical instruction about the sacraments (taken over almost word for word from Thomas' opusculum *De articulis fidei et sacramentis*), presented this instruction not as a dogmatic statement, but as an expression of the sacramental theology that was current at that period.²² The Tridentine Fathers took over the essence of this decree, but because they were concerned with a new situation, the Protestant teaching of their period,

¹⁷ A similar problem faced the Greek Fathers in connection with the term *sphragis* (seal), but this cannot be considered in this article.

¹⁸ *De bono coniugali* 24, 32 (CSEL 41, 226).

¹⁹ See especially P. van Beneden, "Het sacramenteel karakter van de ambtsverlening," *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 8 (1968) 140-54.

²⁰ Trent: Denz. 852 (1609); Florence: Denz. 695 (1313).

²¹ There was a long debate about the *cuius ratione* (the reason for the unrepeatable nature of the sacrament) and the term was ultimately weakened to *unde*. From the purely grammatical point of view, there was not much change in meaning here, but it is clear from the discussions that the aim was only to establish a *factual* bond between the character and the "unrepeatable" character and not a *de iure* connection. In other words, this was not a *conclusion* from the doctrine of the character.

²² See G. Guibert, "Le décret du concile de Florence pour les Arméniens: Valeur dogmatique," *Bull. littér. ecclés. de Toulouse* 10 (1919) 81-95, 150-62, 195-215.

this theological doctrine was given a different emphasis. They made use of the theology of the character which had been formulated by the Scholastic theologians and had become traditional since the twelfth century, but they wished at the same time to ensure that the office "in the name of Christ over and against the community" was a *reality*, in reaction against the view which rejected all difference between the office of the Church and the community. It is clear from the Tridentine documents that this is the essence of the Council's teaching, expressed, of course, in the terminology of the period, but one cannot maintain that the ontological interpretation of the character that was current in the Scholastic period was sanctioned by the Church.²³ This fact is borne out by various data. The Tridentine Fathers accepted, for example, a proposal that the essence of the character should not be defined.²⁴ There was, moreover, considerable divergence at the Council between the views of the Scotists and those of the Thomists concerning this point. Finally, it is confirmed by later theological interpretations and especially the theory of L. Billot, which continued for many years to prevail in the "Roman" theology and yet maintained the view that this "reality in the soul" was only a sign of "moral power of office." It should also be noted that neither Thomas nor Trent taught that the character was "eternal," and both confined it to the life of the Church here on earth.²⁵

The character is therefore only of *immediate* importance to the office-bearer's official activities, because it is an indication of his having been really received into the college of those holding office in the Church (with all the powers of ministry that result from this).²⁶ It does not therefore in itself refer to the whole duration of the office-bearer's life and does not apply to everything that he does, even though a distinction cannot always be made, in the case of a full-time office, between official actions and everything that the office-bearer may in fact be able to do in addition to these official actions. The mark cannot in any case

²³ See P. Fransen, "Enkele opmerkingen over de theologische kwalificaties," *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 8 (1968) 328-47, and especially J. B. Umberg, "Die Bewertung der Trienter Lehre durch Pius VI," *Scholastik* 4 (1929) 402-9.

²⁴ *Conc. Trid.* (ed. Goerresiana) 5 (Freiburg, 1901 ff.) 903.

²⁵ The character is given "in ordine ad cultum praesentis ecclesiae" (*Sum. theol.* 3, q. 63, a. 2, ad 3m). This was also the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium*, no. 48).

²⁶ See P. Schoonenberg, "Einige Überlegungen über das Weihesakrament, besonders über dessen sakramentales Merkmal," *Informationsblatt des Instituts für europäische Priesterhilfe* (Sondernummer, Akten des 3. internationalen Kongressus zu Luzern, Sept. 18-22, 1967) n. 1, pp. 51-53; see also Thomas, who said that the character was only given for the carrying out of *actiones hierarchicae* (official actions): *In IV Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1.

be regarded as a reason for coming to a negative conclusion in the case of the modern problem of part-time priesthood; such a conclusion would be based on a misunderstanding of the fundamental significance of the character. If this is only directly aimed at the exercise of office in the name of Christ, the possibility of the temporary exercise of office in the Church is not excluded, and the realization of this possibility has to be judged from the pastoral point of view in the light of the Church's situation within a given society. A similar approach has also to be made to the problem of women in the Church's office—a question which could, of course, never have arisen in an earlier, predominantly male society, the remnants of which are still present in our own age. In this context, however, it should be noted that there was a strong tendency in the primitive Church, on the basis of her conviction that there was "neither Jew nor Greek" and "neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28) in Christ and that no discrimination could be made between these, to anticipate the emancipation of women, especially in the to some extent already emancipated female society of the Hellenistic communities. The prevailing situation in society, however, and less fortunate experiences (which resulted from this) inhibited the Church for centuries.²⁷

Finally, the essence of the character cannot as such be regarded as a reason for rejecting the validity of the office in the other Christian churches. The traditional view that the mark, as opposed to the grace, is not bestowed outside the sacrament and that a "sacrament of desire" (*in voto*) is excluded in the case of the office of the Church is to some extent the consequence of the ontological interpretation of the character, but not of the essence of faith, an attempt to express which is made in the character, namely, that the office of the Church functions in the name of Christ over and against but within the community.

"Demystifying" the mark, while at the same time preserving its inviolable essence, seems to have points of contact in the consciousness of the whole tradition of the Church, in which one partial tradition throws light on another. This is especially evident in Trent and less evident in the "spirituality" of the priesthood which has prevailed in recent centuries. The essence of theological teaching about the office of the Church, which became overgrown in the course of time, does, however, give sufficient scope for a deep and personal experience of the office. The office-bearer is able to give, in the name of Christ, a real, valid, and special, that is, leading service, both in the name of and over and against the community. This places him in a situation which ap-

²⁷ For the present situation of this problem, see J. Peters, "Is There Room for Women in the Functions of the Church?" in the American edition of *Concilium* 34 (New York, 1968) 126-38.

peals to his enhanced sense of responsibility, his humility, and his personal and existential involvement with the mystery of salvation in the world. On the basis of the meaning of the charisma of office, it also means that he must "dwell in the things of the Father."

Finally, we may ask explicitly to what extent the teaching about the character is, in its authentic essence, a factor which divides the churches. The essential content of this teaching, as understood by the whole tradition of the Catholic Church—as a totality in which partial traditions have a critical function towards other partial traditions—is in fact accepted by many Protestant churches, even though they reject the term "character." In such questions it is important to distinguish between a difference in the language used by the various churches and the basic conviction that is common to all Christians. In this case the affirmation that there is no difference between the members of the community and the one who holds office in the Church is a factor leading to division among the churches. On the other hand, any church which accepts this difference between the members of the community and the office-bearer, with the qualification that the office-bearer is subject to the norm of the apostolic authority with its Scripture and derives his own authority and leadership from this authority, and therefore maintains that the pastor's function is carried out in the name of Christ as a service to the community, is in fact affirming the same reality that the Catholic Church attempts to express in the concept of the "character."