

MINISTER CHRISTI SACERDOS

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IN THE Encyclical Letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Pope Pius XI of happy memory wrote:

The priest is the minister of Christ, an instrument, that is to say, in the hands of the Divine Redeemer. He continues the work of redemption in all its world-embracing universality and divine efficacy, that work that wrought so marvelous a transformation in the world. Thus the priest, as is said with good reason, is indeed 'another Christ'; for in some way he is himself a continuation of Christ. 'As the Father has sent Me, I also send you' is spoken to the priest, and hence the priest, like Christ, continues to give glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.¹

In this description, the Roman Pontiff calls the priest a minister of Christ, an instrument in the hands of the Divine Redeemer, another Christ, and a continuation of Christ. Thus the dependence of the priest on Christ and the relation of the priest to Christ is reiterated. Many devotional books on the priesthood emphasize these points in depicting the role of the priest as another Christ and as an ambassador of Christ. Yet there are many neglected aspects of the union which exists between Christ and the priest in administering the sacraments; in consequence, the designations *alter Christus* and *vicarius Christi* may remain thrilling titles rather than realized and motivating truths in the life of the priest. This study is an investigation into the union which exists between Christ and the priest as he continues the work of redemption, with a view to setting forth the dogmatic foundations on which the dignity, the greatness, and the duty of the Christian priesthood are built.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

When discussing the priesthood of Christ, St. Thomas says that the special duty of a priest is to be a mediator between God and men.² In turn, the special duty of a mediator is to reconcile those between

¹ Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, AAS, XXVIII (1936), 10.

² *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 22, a. 1 c: "... proprie officium sacerdotis est esse mediatorem inter Deum et populum . . ."

whom he intervenes.³ The mediator must be different from those whom he reconciles by his work of mediation.⁴ Since the need of a mediator implies an estrangement between the parties to be reconciled, the mediator must be acceptable to both parties and must be willing and able to effect a real reconciliation.

All these requirements are fulfilled in Christ. By His Incarnation Christ became true Man while remaining true God. Christ as Man is mediator. His human nature is not the same as His divine nature which He possesses equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit; hence, He differs, in that respect, from God. However, His human nature is the human nature of a divine person and so Christ as Man differs inexpressibly from all other men in dignity, grace, and glory.⁵ In His Incarnation Christ as Man received at least a fundamental anointing as priest.⁶ Hence He is able to act as mediator. Christ had no need of a sacramental character of the priesthood because the hypostatic union produced a substantial consecration of Christ's whole human nature to the priestly work of redemption.

The cause of the estrangement between God and men was Adam's sin, which forfeited the precious heritage of God's friendship and grace that all men would otherwise have had. The inability of mere man to effect a real reconciliation with God arises from the disproportion between the offering of a rebellious creature and the majesty and excellence of an offended Creator. A mere man could not bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite. Christ as Man could repair the ruptured bonds of friendship between God and men because His offering would have a morally infinite value—a value resulting from the dignity of the divine Person whose human nature made the offering and to whom that offering is ascribed. Sacred Scripture abounds

³ "... ad mediatoris officium proprie pertinet conjungere et unire eos inter quos est mediator: nam extrema uniuntur in medio" (*ibid.*, q. 26, a. 1 c).

⁴ "... est autem de ratione medii quod distet ab utroque extremorum" (*ibid.*, a. 2 c).

⁵ "... secundum quod est homo distat a Deo in natura et ab hominibus in dignitate et gratiae et gloriae" (*loc. cit.*).

⁶ Theologians agree on this point; they differ in further explanations, some requiring a special designation on the part of God formally constituting Christ a Priest; cf. Galtier, *De Incarnatione et Redemptione* (Paris, 1926), p. 424, n. 504: "... existentia, dignitas, virtus et praestantia sacerdotii eius derivetur ex unione hypostatica. Illa enim humanae Christi naturae est *per modum consecrationis sacerdotalis*, quae facta est proinde ipsa Incarnationis hora...."

with evidence of Christ's willingness to undertake the task of redeeming men.⁷ No less clear is the testimony to the fact that Christ the Priest fulfilled the office of mediator by His sacrificial death on Calvary.⁸ Thus all the requirements for a priest are fulfilled in Christ.

Christ alone is the perfect priest, the perfect mediator. In fact, He is the one priest, the one mediator. If He so wills, others may share in His priesthood and carry on His work of redemption as mediators between God and men, but they do so in His name and person, and as His instruments.^{8a}

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

At the last supper, Christ our Lord made special and solemn provision for the continuation of His priesthood in the New Law.

Because His priesthood was not to end with His death, at the last supper the night before He was betrayed, that He might leave to His own beloved spouse, the Church, a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, by which the bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, and its memory remain to the end of time, and its saving power applied to the remission of the sins we daily commit, declaring Himself constituted a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, He offered to God the Father His own Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine; and under the symbol of those same things, He gave (His own Body and Blood) to be received by His Apostles, whom He then constituted priests of the New Testament; and by the words 'Do this in commemoration of Me,' He commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to offer; as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught.⁹

This document clearly states the time of the ordination of the Apostles and the chief purpose for which they were made priests. It also teaches Christ's pragmatic declaration of His priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech by His use of the rite which Melchisedech used. When they offer the sacrifice of the Mass, Christ's priests use the rite which He used at the last supper. Thus

⁷ E.g., "Oblatus est quia ipse voluit" (Isa. 53:7); "Filius hominis venit . . . dare animam suam redemptionem pro multis" (Matt. 20:28).

⁸ I Tim. 2:5-6; I Petr. 1:18-19; Hebr. *passim*.

^{8a} "Et ideo solus Christus est perfectus Dei et hominum mediator, in quantum per suam mortem humanum genus Deo reconciliavit. . . Nihil tamen prohibet alios secundum quid dici mediatores inter Deum et homines: prout scilicet cooperantur ad unionem hominum cum Deo dispositivè vel ministerialiter" (*Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 26, a. 1 c).

⁹ *DB*, 938.

they show that their priesthood is a continuation of His. Hence, when the priest is called "another Christ" and a "continuation of Christ," these titles stress particularly his role at the altar. There, in the name and person of Christ, the priest offers the Body and Blood of Christ in sacrifice to God.

Christ came into this world as Teacher, King, and Priest to redeem man. He consummated the work of redemption by His sacrificial death on Calvary. The sacrifice which He instituted in His Church has its part in applying to men the saving power of His death. Hence the priest "continues the work of redemption" when he does what Christ commanded His priest to do at the last supper.

THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF HOLY ORDERS

The Council of Trent calls the sacramental character "a spiritual and indelible sign imprinted on the soul," and solemnly defines that the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders confer this character.¹⁰ In the decree on the sacrament of holy orders, the council directly connects the perpetuity of the powers of the priest with the sacramental character imprinted in the soul. The power to function as a priest cannot be lost because the sacramental character cannot be taken away nor destroyed.¹¹ The Church may prohibit a duly ordained minister of Christ from exercising the power conferred by the sacrament of holy orders, but the priest's refusal to comply renders his action sinful indeed, but not invalid.¹²

St. Thomas calls the sacramental character a sharing of the priesthood of Christ and says that the rite of the Christian religion is derived from Christ's priesthood.¹³ The sacramental character gives its recipient the right to have a part in the worship of God which Christ

¹⁰ *DB*, 852.

¹¹ *DB*, 960: "Quoniam vero in sacramento ordinis . . . character imprimitur, qui nec deleri nec auferri potest, merito sancta synodus damnat eorum sententiam, qui asserunt, Novi Testamenti sacerdotes temporariam dumtaxat potestatem habere. . . ."

¹² The necessity of jurisdiction for the valid exercise of the power to forgive sins is an added requirement in the administration of the sacrament of penance (*CIC*, 872).

¹³ "Totum autem ritus christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi. Et ideo manifestum est quod character sacramentalis specialiter est character Christi, cuius sacerdotio configurantur fideles secundum sacramentales characteres, qui nihil aliud sunt quam quaedam participationes sacerdotii Christi, ab ipso Christo derivatae" (*Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 3 c).

instituted.¹⁴ The worship of God in the New Law is contained especially in the divine sacrifice and sacraments of the Church.¹⁵ The sacramental character of holy orders alone confers the power to be the official minister of the Church in dispensing the appointed gifts of God to the faithful.¹⁶

When setting forth the powers which the priest receives in his ordination, the Council of Trent stresses the centrality and superior excellence of the priest's power over the real Body of Christ.¹⁷ St. Thomas states that the best explanation of the different orders is their varying connection with the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist.¹⁸ Both the Council of Trent and St. Thomas connect this power with the sacramental character received in the rite of ordination to the sacred priesthood.¹⁹

Thus the sacramental character of the priest produces in him a special configuration to Christ the Priest and gives him a participation in the priesthood of Christ which can be obtained only by the sacrament of holy orders. This special configuration to Christ the Priest heightens the dignity of the man so elected by God and deepens the awareness of the union which exists between Christ and the consecrated and ordained *alter Christus*. Without the power the character connotes and imparts the priest could not speak nor act in the name and person of Christ when he renews the memory of the most important work Christ performed on earth.

It is not our intention to enter here into an evaluation of the different views which theologians hold concerning the nature and proximate subject of the sacramental character. Theologians agree that the remote subject of the sacramental character is the soul and that the sacramental character is an absolute ontological accident and a

¹⁴ "Sacramenta novae legis characterem imprimunt in quantum per ea deputantur homines ad cultum Dei secundum ritum christianae religionis" (*ibid.*, a. 2 c).

¹⁵ Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*, *AS*, XXVIII (1896), 723. "Adhiberi necesse est . . . Dei cultum justum et pium, qui maxime sacrificio divino et sacramentorum communione continetur . . ."

¹⁶ "Sed ad agentes in sacramentis pertinet sacramentum ordinis, quia per hoc sacramentum deputantur homines ad sacramenta aliis tradenda" (*Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 6 c).

¹⁷ *DB*, 957.

¹⁸ "Et ideo distinctio ordinum est accipienda secundum relationem ad Eucharistiam" (*Suppl.*, q. 37, a. 2 c).

¹⁹ *DB*, 960; *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 6 c.

quality according to the Aristotelian categories.²⁰ But the special congruity in the opinion set forth by St. Thomas, who calls the sacramental character a *potentia spiritualis activa*,²¹ should be mentioned. The sacramental character enables the priest to do something Christ commanded him to do. We can best understand the possibility of fulfilling a command by realizing that the one who is ordered to act has the power to perform the action. Later we shall consider the part the sacramental character plays in enabling the priest to be the instrument of God in effecting transubstantiation. Then the fitness of calling the sacramental character an active spiritual power will be even more compelling.

The priest is empowered to consecrate the Blessed Eucharist and to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. All his other powers have full meaning according as they are connected with this quintessential power. He has the power to baptize solemnly, that infants may become the children of God, incorporated into the Mystical Body, and have the right to live by the life of that body in sacramental communion.²² The priest has the power to absolve in order that all who have severed the ties of supernatural friendship with God by serious sin may quickly return, with the proper dispositions, to the table from which the Bread of Life is distributed to them. He has the power to anoint in order that the children of God may go joyfully through the gates of death to that eternal union with God for which Holy Communion here on earth has so marvelously prepared them. Thus the appropriateness of calling the sacramental character a spiritual power and stressing its connection with the Eucharist becomes clearer. Likewise, the fitness of calling the sacramental character a configuration to Christ the Priest becomes more appealing, because the devotional life of priest and people is centered around Christ, who

²⁰ "... character non proprie est in genere vel specie, sed reducitur ad secundam speciem qualitatis" (*ibid.*, a. 2 c).

²¹ "Divinus autem cultus consistit vel in recipiendo aliqua divina, vel in tradendo aliis. Ad utrumque autem horum requiritur quaedam potentia: nam ad tradendum aliquid aliis requiritur quaedam potentia activa; ad accipiendum autem requiritur potentia passiva" (*loc. cit.*).

²² "Ad hoc autem datur baptismus ut aliquis per ipsum regeneratus incorporetur Christo, factus membrum eius . . ." (*ibid.*, q. 68, a. 1 c); "... per baptismum ordinatur homo ad Eucharistiam . . ." (*ibid.*, q. 73, a. 3 c).

is really present in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and who is the holy Priest and Victim in the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

THE PRIEST IS THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

Exegetes commonly explain the text: "Let a man so account us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God," by stating that the "mysteries" primarily refer to the revealed truths of the faith. Hence, the ministry in question is the ministry of the word.²³ However, all agree that the ministry of the sacraments is not excluded.²⁴ There is a special point to be made of the meaning of the Greek word which is translated "ministers." Zorell gives this meaning: "One who assists another in the more honorable services pertaining to his own proper works and offices according to the will of the other."²⁵ This meaning is set in opposition to the meaning, "servant-slave who assists in lesser works."

Without overemphasizing a point of grammar, it is very true that the notion of doing the will of the one in whose service he is enlisted is essential for the minister of Christ. Similarly, the notion of being a subordinate in the more noble works of the principal agent must be stressed. The priest is the minister of Christ in His most noble work when the priest stands at the altar, consecrates and offers the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Then the priest is fulfilling the truth and the office the Church speaks of when she proclaims that in the divine sacrifice which is offered in the Mass it is Christ who offers through the ministry of His priests.²⁶

In fulfilling his obligations as the minister of Christ, the priest is an instrument in the hands of the divine Redeemer. The priest is called

²³ Cornely, *Comm. in S. Pauli Apostoli Epistolas, Prior Ep. ad Cor.* (ed. 2a; Paris, 1909), p. 101: "... in Novo Test., quamvis aliquoties a Vulg. *sacramentum* vertitur . . . , nusquam definito hoc sensu usurpatur; ubique potius doctrinas arcanas significat, quae revelatione divina nobis innotuerunt."

²⁴ "Tam vero mysterium in ecclesiastica lingua Graecorum omnino est receptum ad designandam rem sacram, qua interna gratia significatur et confertur, ita ut theologico termino sacramenti plane respondeat" (*ibid.*, pp. 100-101); cf. *DB*, 931.

²⁵ Zorell, *Lexicon Graecum N.T.* (ed. alt.; Paris, 1931), col. 1368-9, s. v. *ὑπηρέτης*: "minister (Diener); is qui alci. in eius propriis operibus ac muneribus honestiora servitia ad nutum praestet."

²⁶ *DB*, 940.

an extrinsic instrument²⁷ and a separated instrument,²⁸ when he is compared with the perfect united instrument which is the humanity of Christ. But the priest is an instrument animated by a rational soul. Hence, he is not a separated instrument in the same sense in which the external sacraments are separated instruments.²⁹ As an instrument animated by a rational soul, the priest is so acted upon that he also acts; he is moved but not without his own movement; he follows the will of another but his own will is also operative.³⁰ The external sacrament is acted upon and moved, but it has no power of self-determination. Since this is so, we can say that when the priest offers sacrifice and administers the sacraments he is more like the united instrument, which is the humanity of Christ, than the separated instrument, which is the external sacrament.

God has revealed to us that He has willed that the grace of Christ be conferred on men, who receive the sacraments, through the mediation of the priest who is the living, visible mediator of Christ the supreme mediator. This fact must be weighed in setting forth the instrumentality of the priest in the production of grace. His instrumentality is not exactly the same as that of the external sacrament.³¹

This point may be illustrated further by the following consideration. The extremes in the process of justification are God and the human soul.³² God is the completely independent cause of the grace that is

²⁷ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 3 c: "Sed tamen quia (humanitas Christi) est instrumentum conjunctum divinitati in persona, habet quamdam principalitatem et causalitatem respectu instrumentorum extrinsecorum, qui sunt ministri Ecclesiae."

²⁸ *Cont. Gent.*, IV, c. 41 " . . . sed alii homines comparantur ad Deum quasi instrumenta extrinseca et separata . . ."

²⁹ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 62, a. 5 c: "Principalis autem causa efficiens gratiae est ipse Deus, ad quem comparatur humanitas Christi sicut instrumentum conjunctum; sacramentum autem sicut instrumentum separatum." *Ibid.*, q. 64, a. 8 ad 1m: "Instrumentum inanimatum non habet aliquam intentionem respectu effectus; sed loco intentionis est motus, quo movetur a principali agente. Sed instrumentum animatum, sicut est minister, non solum movetur, sed etiam quodammodo movet seipsum, in quantum sua voluntate movet membra ad operandum; et ideo requiritur eius intentio, qua se subjiciat principali agenti, ut scilicet intendat facere quod facit Christus et Ecclesia."

³⁰ " . . . instrumentum vero animatum anima rationali movetur per voluntatem eius" (*ibid.*, q. 18, a. 1 ad 2m).

³¹ "Ministri Ecclesiae instrumentaliter operantur in sacramentis, eo quod quodammodo eadem est ratio ministri et instrumenti" (*ibid.*, q. 64, a. 5 c).

³² *DB*, 799-800.

conferred, and the divine operation wonderfully enriches and ennobles the human soul. Between these extremes we ascribe instrumentality to the humanity of Christ hypostatically united with the person of the Word and to the external sacrament. Between the humanity of Christ and the external sacrament we ascribe instrumentality to the priest who is the minister of the sacrament. The priest is a secondary mediator and is subordinate to Christ.³³ Still, the priest is an instrument animated by a rational soul, and in the ordinary providence of God the sacramental grace will not be conferred unless the priest acts, moves, and wills. The priest's instrumentality differs, therefore, in some way, from the instrumentality of the external sacrament.

The configuration of the priest to Christ becomes more striking and more consoling when we realize that it is the configuration of a living, rational being. The principal living instrument which God uses in effecting the salvation of man is the humanity of Christ hypostatically united to His Godhead. The subordinate living instruments are priests whose souls are sealed with the seal of Christ's priesthood and who are empowered by Him to make Him present on the altar, to offer the same sacrifice He offered, and to speak the words which have the divine guarantee that grace will be poured into souls. That is the dignity and power of the priests who are the ministers of Christ.

The union between Christ and His priests is not a hypostatic union. At the same time, it is a union so powerful that it enables a human being on whose soul God has imprinted the sacramental character to do under God some of the things Christ as Man could do by virtue of the hypostatic union.³⁴ Christ as Man could be an instrument in the production of grace because His human nature was the human nature of the Son of God. The priest can be an instrument in the production of grace because he is the instrument of Christ, the minister of Christ, and "another Christ."

³³ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 26, a. 1 c.

³⁴ "Ministri Ecclesiae neque a peccatis mundant homines neque gratiam conferunt sua virtute; sed hoc facit Christus sua potestate per eos sicut quaedam instrumenta" (*ibid.* q. 64, a. 5 ad 1m); ". . . humanitas Christi non causat gratiam propria virtute, sed virtute divinitatis adjunctae, ex qua actiones humanitatis Christi sunt salutares" (*ibid.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1 ad 1m).

BAPTISM AND EXTREME UNCTION

The sacraments of baptism and extreme unction are selected for separate treatment because a material substance is the valid matter of the external sacrament in each case.³⁵ The priest is the minister of the sacrament of extreme unction³⁶ and the ordinary minister of the sacrament of baptism, though others may baptize in certain cases, on account of the necessity of this sacrament for salvation.³⁷ The matter and form, properly united, constitute the efficacious sacramental sign.

Theologians agree that the sacramental action is vicariously the action of Christ. Hence, when the minister of the sacrament of baptism pours the water and pronounces the trinitarian form, he acts in the name and in the person of Christ, and Christ baptizes.³⁸ Similarly, when the minister of the sacrament of unction anoints the seriously sick person and pronounces the prescribed words, he acts in the name and in the person of Christ, and Christ anoints.

When theologians discuss the instrumentality of the sacraments in producing grace, they frequently illustrate the discussion by use of the sacramental sign of baptism. This is natural enough in view of the dominant position of the sacrament of baptism in the treatises on the sacraments in general, but it leads to special emphasis on the instrumentality of the baptismal water and the trinitarian form. As a result, there is not a sufficient discussion of the instrumentality of the sacraments in which there is no material substance that constitutes the external sacrament.

In the same connection, there are less extensive discussions on the instrumentality of the minister in the production of grace. This is due, I believe, to the wide extension of the concept of the minister of Christ, when that concept is applied to the sacrament of baptism.

³⁵ *DB*, 696, 700, 858, 908; the same is true of the sacrament of confirmation, but the ordinary minister is the bishop; what is true of the priest is true of the bishop in administering the sacraments.

³⁶ *DB*, 700, 929.

³⁷ *DB*, 696; *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 67, a. 3 c: ". . . Minister baptismi etiam sit quicumque non baptizatus, ne propter defectum baptismi homo salutis suae dispendium patiatur."

³⁸ E.g., St. Augustine, *In Joann. Evangel.* (*ML*, XXXV, 1424): "Sic ergo quos baptizavit ebriosus, quos baptizavit homicida, quos baptizavit adulter, si baptismus Christi erat, Christus baptizavit."

Yet the sacrament of baptism is unique among the sacraments in the wide extent of the ministers of the sacrament. It is true that all theologians stress the fact that the priest is the official minister of the sacrament of baptism. The sacrament of baptism incorporates the baptized into the mystical body of Christ and gives the baptized the right to receive the real Body of Christ. Since the priest alone has the power to consecrate the Eucharist, the priest alone is the official minister of the sacrament of baptism.

The priest is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of extreme unction and there are no extraordinary ministers. In our discussion we speak only of the ordinary ministers of baptism and extreme unction. Our purpose is to arrive at an understanding of the priest's union with Christ in administering these sacraments.

Sacred Scripture provides us with several instances in the life of our Lord on earth in which He used material substances in producing effects which required supernatural power. Two such cases are these: (1) "And as He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. . . He spat upon the ground and made clay with the spittle, and spread the clay over his eyes, and said to him: 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloe.' . . . So he went away, and washed, and returned seeing."³⁹ (2) "And they brought to Him one deaf and dumb, and entreated Him to lay His hands upon him. And taking him aside from the crowd, He put His fingers into the man's ears, and spitting, He touched His tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him: 'Ephpheta' that is, 'Be thou opened.' And his ears were opened at once, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak correctly."⁴⁰

The exegetes give many reasons why Christ acted as He did in giving sight to the blind man.⁴¹ Christ could have restored sight and speech and hearing by a word. One of the reasons given is this: "Jesus wished to show that His body as the organ of the divinity had a certain saving power."⁴² This manner of acting also prepared the minds of the Apostles to understand how the ministers of Christ could remove the moral blindness of sin in administering the sacraments He instituted.

³⁹ John 9:1, 6-8.

⁴⁰ Mark 7:32-35.

⁴¹ Knabenbauer, *Evangelium secundum Joannem*. (ed. alt.; Paris, 1925), pp. 321-2.

⁴² *Loc. cit.*

Maldonatus observes in his commentary on the second case:

It seems that Christ did not wish always equally to declare His divinity and power, which He judged was not always fitting, though we may not know why. Sometimes He drove out devils and raised the dead by a word alone; sometimes by touch, spittle, mud He healed the sick, accommodating, in a way, His power to the manner in which natural causes act and according to the understanding and custom of men.⁴³

We do not know the reason why Christ chose various means to manifest His divine power, but we can conclude from the instances cited that the use of matter (spittle) and form (ephpheta) helped the Apostles to understand that Christ's power could work through material, extrinsic instruments.

Christ worked miracles in the power of His divinity. Christ instituted sacraments as efficacious signs of grace. His human nature was the instrument of His Godhead in producing supernatural effects.⁴⁴ The human will of Christ was active in producing these effects.⁴⁵ When we turn to consider the sacraments of baptism and extreme unction, we see that (1) God alone has the power to produce grace as a completely independent principal cause, (2) the humanity of Christ is the principal instrument, (3) the ordained priest is the subordinate instrument, and (4) the external sacrament is the separated instrument, the last link in the chain of agents producing grace in the human soul. The human will of Christ was an important factor in electing the person in whose behalf a miracle would be worked or grace produced by divine power. The will of the priest must act in order that an individual may receive the grace of the sacraments. The minister of the sacraments must will to do the will of Christ; otherwise the sacra-

⁴³ Maldonatus, *Comm. in Quattuor Evangel.* (Moguntiae, 1874), I, 744.

⁴⁴ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 13, a. 2 c: "Si autem loquamur de anima Christi secundum quod est instrumentum Verbi sibi uniti, sic habuit instrumentalem virtutem ad omnes immutationes miraculosas faciendas, ordinabiles ad incarnationis finem"; *ibid.*, II-II, q. 178, a. 1 ad 1m: "... operatio virtutum se extendit ad omnia quae supernaturaliter fieri possunt"; and see *ibid.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1 ad 1m for instrumentality of Christ's human nature in the production of grace.

⁴⁵ "... instrumentum dicitur aliquid agere ex eo quod movetur a principali agente, quod tamen praeter hoc potest habere propriam actionem secundum suam formam" (*ibid.*, III, q. 19, a. 1 ad 2m).

mental grace will not be conferred.⁴⁶ The instrumentality of the humanity of Christ is a more important consideration in the miracles He worked than the instrumentality of the material substances He used on occasions. The instrumentality of the priest in the administration of the sacraments should be stressed, since the priest alone is the vicegerent of Christ in administering extreme unction, and the official minister of the Church in baptism.

PENANCE

The power of the priest to forgive sins is so marvelous a gift of God that, in the Tridentine decree on the sacrament of holy orders,⁴⁷ it is joined with the power to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ. Pius XI stresses the special place the power to absolve holds among the powers of the priest:

. . . among all these powers of the priest over the Mystical Body of Christ for the benefit of the faithful, there is one of which the simple mention made above will not content Us. This is the power which, as St. John Chrysostom says: 'God gave neither to angels nor archangels'—the power to remit sins. 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: whose sins you shall retain, they are retained'; a tremendous power, so peculiar to God that even human pride could not make the mind conceive that it could be given to man. 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' And, when we see it exercised by a mere man, there is reason to ask ourselves, not indeed with pharisaical scandal, but with reverent surprise at such a dignity: 'Who is the man that forgiveth sins also?' But it is so: the God-Man Who possessed the 'power on earth to forgive sins' willed to hand it on to His priests; to relieve, in His divine generosity and mercy, the need of moral purification which is rooted in the human heart.⁴⁸

In these words the Supreme Pontiff beautifully expresses and portrays the grandeur of the gift and the dignity of the man who says to the penitent and confessed sinner: "I absolve you from your sins."⁴⁹

There is no material substance constituting the matter of the sacrament of penance. The whole rite is completed when the words of

⁴⁶ *DB*, 695: "Haec omnia sacramenta tribus perficiuntur, videlicet rebus tanquam materia, verbis tanquam forma, et persona ministri conferentis sacramentum cum intentione faciendi, quod facit Ecclesia, quorum si aliquod desit, non perficitur sacramentum."

⁴⁷ *DB*, 957.

⁴⁸ *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, *AAS*, XXVIII (1936), 13.

⁴⁹ *Loc. cit.*

absolution are pronounced over the penitent who has sorrowfully confessed his sins and is prepared to accept the penance imposed upon him.⁵⁰ The principal power of the sacramental rite is in the words of absolution.⁵¹ The absolution of the priest is a judicial act.⁵² Hence the priest is the instrument used by God in forgiving sins and conferring grace in the sacrament of penance. This brings the instrumentality of the priest into sharper focus than do the ablution and anointing in baptism and extreme unction. At the same time, it makes the text in which St. Thomas explains the instrumentality of an instrument animated by a rational soul more applicable.⁵³

St. Thomas directly applies his teaching on this point to the instrumentality of the humanity of Christ in forgiving sins.⁵⁴ Christ as Man had the power to forgive sins as the instrument of the united divinity. Christ gave to His priests the power to forgive sins; and the role of the priest as the vicar of Christ becomes clearer in studying their use of this power. There is no material substance in the sacrament of penance as there is in the sacraments of baptism and extreme unction. Hence, the concept of the sacrament as a separated instrument must be modified. The absolution of the priest is not a separated instrument in the sense in which the baptismal water and ablution are in the sacrament of baptism, and the oil and anointing are in the sacrament of extreme unction. There is no separated instrument, in that sense, in the sacrament of penance; there is an instrument animated by a rational soul which can use the power given by another only if the instrument determines itself to do so by an act of the will. At the same time, it is clear that the priest is not an instrument united to God in the sense in which the humanity of Christ was united to God. With that difference noted, it should still be said that the priest is an united instrument rather than a separated instrument. The priest has the sacramental character, an ontological reality imprinted on his soul which configures him to the priesthood of Christ. The priest has a rational soul which enables him to act in a manner in

⁵⁰ *DB*, 896.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *DB*, 919.

⁵³ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 8 ad 1m.

⁵⁴ "Filius hominis habet in terra potestatem dimittendi peccata, non virtute humanae naturae, sed virtute divinae naturae; in qua quidem natura divina consistit potestas dimittendi peccata per auctoritatem; in humana autem natura consistit instrumentaliter et per ministerium" (*ibid.*, q. 16, a. 11 ad 2m); cf. q. 84, a. 5 ad 3m.

which the external sacrament cannot act. The grace-giving absolution is a judicial act; the priest must make an act of the will in order that the sacrament exist. Hence his activity reflects the manner in which the human will of Christ acted when He forgave sins.⁵⁵

The links in the chain of agents operative in conferring the grace of the sacrament of penance are somewhat changed, in comparison with the links in the chain of agents operative in conferring the graces of baptism and extreme unction. The extremes are the same—God and the human soul. The humanity of Christ and the priest retain their respective places. But now the sacrament exists at the will and the word of the priest elevating to sacramental signification the sorrowfully confessed sins of the penitent. The instrumentality of the priest in the administration of the sacrament of penance is of great moment, because there is no material substance constituting the external sacramental sign.

At the same time, the bonds of union which exist between Christ and the priest are perceptibly closer, because the instrument Christ uses is the will of the priest (intention), and the word of the priest (the formula of absolution), as the priest plays his appointed role as *vicarius Christi* in the sacred tribunal.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The ineffable greatness of the human priest shines forth in all its splendor in his power to consecrate and offer the Holy Eucharist. The priest has the power to make really, truly, and substantially present on the altar the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ In the name and person of Christ, the priest offers the Body and Blood of Christ, a Victim pleasing to the divine majesty.⁵⁷ The priest receives the Body and Blood of Christ in a communion holy beyond the power of words to describe and distributes to the faithful the "living bread that has come down from heaven."⁵⁸

The Council of Trent teaches a threefold power which the priest has over the real Body of Christ: (1) the power to consecrate, (2) the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 64, a. 5 ad 1m.

⁵⁶ *DB*, 883, 876-7.

⁵⁷ Pius XI, *Ad Catholicos Sacerdotii*, *op. cit.*, p. 12: "(Sacerdos) qui in idem Jesu Christi corpus potestate praeditus, in aris illud prodigialiter praesens facit ac, Divini Redemptoris nomine, aeternae Dei Majestati gratissimam hostiam offert."

⁵⁸ John 6:51.

power to offer, and (3) the power to administer the Body of Christ.⁵⁹ We will consider each power separately.

The Power to Consecrate

The power to consecrate the Eucharist may be best understood if we recall the teaching of St. Thomas concerning the power of the soul of Christ.⁶⁰ Christ as Man had the power to produce supernatural effects ordainable to the end of the Incarnation;⁶¹ these effects included the working of miracles and the production of grace.⁶² Christ as Man had these powers permanently as a consequence of the grace of union.⁶³ When He used this power, His humanity was the instrument of His divinity, which operated as the principal cause of the effect produced.⁶⁴

The priest has the same power, as an instrumental cause in effecting transubstantiation. In him, this power is limited to the performance of one act and is possessed by virtue of an accidental quality, the sacramental character. In Christ, this power extended to all supernatural effects ordainable to the end of the Incarnation, and Christ had it *per modum habitus* by virtue of the substantial grace of union. This difference between the power in Christ and the power in the priest is important. Still, the priest has this power *per modum habitus* and he may use it as long as he lives.⁶⁵ God alone is the principal cause of transubstantiation, but He uses the priest as His instrument

⁵⁹ *DB*, 957.

⁶⁰ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 13, a. 4 c: "Anima Christi dupliciter aliquid voluit: uno modo quasi per se implendum: . . . alio modo voluit aliquid implendum virtute divina; sicut resuscitationem proprii corporis et alia huiusmodi miraculosa opera; quae quidem non poterat propria virtute sed secundum quod erat instrumentum Divinitatis."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, a. 2 c.

⁶² "Gratia virtutum, seu miraculorum, . . . excellentissime data est animae Christi, ut scilicet non solum ipse miracula faceret (per virtutem divinam), sed etiam ut hanc gratiam in alios transfunderet" (*ibid.*, ad 3m); and I-II, q. 112, a. 1 ad 1m.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III, q. 13, aa. 1, 2.

⁶⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁶⁵ "Potestas consecrandi Eucharistiam pertinet ad characterem sacerdotalis ordinis. Character autem quilibet, qui cum quadam consecratione datur, indelebilis est" (*ibid.* q. 82, a. 8 c); Billot, *De Verbo Incarnato* (ed. 6a; Rome, 1922), p. 256: "Proponitur demonstranda sequens propositio: Sicut sacerdos habet *per modum habitus* potentiam ad miraculosam conversionem panis et vini in corpus et sanguinem Christi, ita Christi anima ut Filio Dei hypostaticè conjuncta, habet *per modum habitus* potentiam, eamque plane inconditionatam, ad omnia miracula quae possunt incarnationis fini deservire."

in effecting this marvelous conversion when the priest speaks the words of consecration. The effect will follow as infallibly as it did when Christ spoke the same words at the last supper. God wills it so. Christ gave this power to His priests and commanded them to use that power.⁶⁶

The power to consecrate is unique among the powers of the priest. The power to administer the sacraments which confer grace *ex opere operato* is directly connected with the sanctification of the individual. The power to consecrate has not the same direct and immediate connection with the sanctification of the individual.⁶⁷

Theologians have advanced various theories in an effort to give some explanation of the mystery of transubstantiation.⁶⁸ These theories help us dimly to understand the magnitude of the gift which God confers on the priest when He gives him the power to consecrate. The theories of adduction,⁶⁹ production,⁷⁰ and conversion⁷¹ lead us to the overwhelming realization that a man is an instrument in producing an effect which requires practically creative power. This is all the more startling when we recall that the theologians deny that the angels were the instruments of God in the creation of the world,⁷² and reserve the act of creation to God alone.⁷³ Although this is so

⁶⁶ *DB*, 949: "Si quis dixerit, illis verbis: 'Hoc facite in meam commemorationem,' Christum non instituisse Apostolos sacerdotes, aut non ordinasse, ut ipsi aliique sacerdotes offerrent corpus et sanguinem suum: A.S."

⁶⁷ The sacrament of the Eucharist confers grace when it is received, not when it is consecrated. Furthermore, the one administering the Eucharist is often not the one who consecrated the sacrament then received.

⁶⁸ Transubstantiation is a *mirabilis conversio* (*DB*, 884), as the hypostatic union is an *admirabilis unio* (*DB*, 876).

⁶⁹ St. Robert Bellarmine, *De Eucharistia (Opera Omnia)*, Paris, 1873, IV, lib. III, cap. XVIII, p. 175: "Ex his colligimus conversionem panis in corpus Domini non esse productivam, nec conservativam, sed adductivam."

⁷⁰ Suarez, *De Eucharistia (Opera Omnia)*, ed. Vives, Paris, 1877, XXI, 157 f.) disp. L, sect. 4, n. 10 ". . . posset illa actio dici sufficiens productio termini . . ."

⁷¹ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 75, a. 4 ad 3m: ". . . virtute agentis infiniti (quod habet actionem in totum ens) potest talis conversio fieri, quia utrique formae et utrique materiae est communis natura entis, et id quod est entitatis in una, potest auctor entis convertere in id quod est entitatis in altera, sublato eo per quod ab illa distinguebatur."

⁷² *Ibid.*, I, q. 65, a. 3 c.

⁷³ "Creare non potest esse propria actio nisi Dei. . . impossibile est quod alicui creaturae conveniat creare; neque virtute propria, neque instrumentaliter, sive per ministerium" (*ibid.*, q. 45, a. 5 c).

the Church has not forbidden the theologians to teach any of these theories on the nature of transubstantiation. Any one of them may be the better explanation of the mystery that they seek partially to penetrate. Each of them represents a praiseworthy effort to make a bit clearer our knowledge of the participation in His omnipotence which God vouchsafes to the priest to whom He has given the power to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest could not offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist and could not administer the sacrament of the Eucharist if he did not have the power to consecrate. This is so because the power to consecrate is the power to make present on the altar the Victim of Calvary, that He may be offered in sacrifice and received in Holy Communion.

Christ our Lord came into this world to redeem man and to establish a Church which would continue the work of redemption.⁷⁴ He redeemed man by His sacrifice on the cross. He gave this sacrifice to His Church at the last supper. This was to be her principal act of the worship of God and her most secure means of winning untold blessings from God. But Christ could not have offered the sacrifice of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist at the last supper, unless He had the power to consecrate. He received that power in His Incarnation, even as He received at least a fundamental anointing for His priesthood at the same time. He gave the power to consecrate to His Apostles at the last supper. He gives the power to consecrate to His priests at their ordination. Hence the priest is the *alter Christus* in consecrating and in offering the most Holy Eucharist.

The Power to Offer

On the evening of the first Holy Thursday Christ made His Apostles priests and commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to offer His Body and Blood: "Do this in remembrance of Me."⁷⁵ The ministers of Christ obey this command in the divine sacrifice offered in the Mass, in which the same Christ is both Victim and Priest, offering now through the ministry of His priests.⁷⁶ In the Mass the sacrifice of Calvary is represented, commemorated, and offered anew.⁷⁷ In

⁷⁴ *DB*, 1821: "*Pastor aeternus et episcopus animarum nostrarum* (I Petr. 2: 25), ut salutarum redemptionis opus perenne redderet, sanctam aedificare Ecclesiam decrevit . . ."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 949.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 940.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 938.

these pronouncements the Council of Trent teaches us the essential truths that the Eucharist is a true sacrifice in which the Body and Blood of Christ are offered to God by Christ through His priests.

The priest acts in the name and in the person of Christ when he offers the sacrifice of the Mass.⁷⁸ The essence of the sacrifice of the Mass consists in the double consecration.⁷⁹ Hence, the double consecration may be considered under a twofold aspect: (1) as an act of transubstantiation; (2) as an act of sacrificial oblation. The humanity of Christ was the instrument of His Godhead in effecting transubstantiation at the last supper. The human will of Christ was the principal agent in the act of sacrificial oblation at the supper and on the cross. Thus the priest has a two-fold instrumentality in the double consecration in the Mass: (1) he is the instrument of Christ as God and as Man in effecting transubstantiation; (2) he is the instrument of Christ as Man in the act of sacrificial oblation.

The cycle of the priest's instrumentality is completed in the act of offering the sacrifice of the Mass. His instrumentality in effecting transubstantiation is its highest peak and greatest act, if we consider exclusively the power which this act involves. This power approaches most nearly to the divine omnipotence required for the act of creation.⁸⁰ The priest's instrumentality in administering the sacraments which confer grace is directly connected with the instrumentality of the humanity of Christ in producing grace. This power proceeds from divine omnipotence, but the production of grace is not a creative act.⁸¹ The priest's instrumentality in offering the sacrifice of the Mass is connected with the principal agency of Christ as Man in offering this sacrifice.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 698; *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 82, a. 7 ad 3m: "Sacerdos in Missa, in orationibus quidem loquitur in persona Ecclesiae, in cuius unitate consistit; sed in consecratione loquitur in persona Christi, cuius vicem in hoc gerit per ordinis potestatem."

⁷⁹ Common teaching of the theologians; cf. de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei* (ed. 3a; Paris, 1931), *Eluc.* XXXIV, p. 432 ff.

⁸⁰ In Suarez' explanation of the nature of transubstantiation (see note 70 above) this action is not an act of creation because the term (the Body of Christ) already exists, but it is like the creative act. In St. Thomas' explanation (see note 71 above) the power of the *auctor entis* is in question, and this is the power used in creation: cf. *Sum Theol.*, I, q. 45, a. 5 c.

⁸¹ Beraza, *De Gratia Christi* (Bilbao, 1916), p. 652 ff., gives a good summary of the various views: cf. *Sum. Theol.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 2, 3a et ad 3m; q. 113, a. 9 c; I, q. 45, a. 4 c.

The power to offer the Body and Blood of Christ is the one power received in ordination in which the priest's union with Christ as Man is brought out most clearly. At the *Qui pridie* in the Mass the priest puts on the person of Christ for the ensuing words and actions. Then the priest is most truly the *alter Christus*, for he is about to do the supreme thing that he can do as mediator between God and man.⁸² He is about to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

The human will of Christ was the principal agent in offering the sacrifice of the cross. In the Mass, Christ offers the same sacrifice through the ministry of His priests. Hence the priest is the instrument of Christ as Man when he offers the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Christ as Man has a twofold agency in the Mass—instrumental under one aspect, principal under another aspect. The priest has a two-fold instrumental agency in the Mass. Christ as Man is the instrumental cause of the consecration considered as an act of transubstantiation, and the principal cause of the consecration considered as an act of sacrificial oblation. The priest is the instrumental cause of the consecration viewed under both aspects.

The hypostatic union and the two distinct wills in Christ help us to understand His twofold agency in the Mass; the sacramental character and the powers which the priest receives at ordination help us to understand his twofold instrumentality. At the moment of the Incarnation the soul of Christ received an instrumental power to produce supernatural effects.⁸³ Hence His humanity is the instrument of His divinity in effecting transubstantiation.⁸⁴ The divine will and the human will remained distinct in the Word Incarnate and each was the adequate principle of its own proper activity.⁸⁵ The act of offering sacrifice is an action proper to a human will.⁸⁶ Hence the human will of Christ was the adequate principle (the principal cause) of the act of offering His sacrifice. The sacramental character gives the priest an active participation in the priesthood of Christ. The powers received at ordination include the power to consecrate the body and blood of Christ. Hence the priest can be an instrument of Christ in effecting transubstantiation and in offering the sacrifice of the Mass.

⁸² *Ibid.*, III, q. 22, a. 1; q. 26, aa. 1-2; q. 48, a. 3 c.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, q. 13, a. 2 c.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 75, a. 4 c.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 18, a. 1 c.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 26, a. 2 c.

Thus in the very action in which the priest is drawn into closest union with Christ as Man, the hypostatic union emerges as a vital consideration, because the priest can offer the sacrifice of the Mass only by reason of the fact that he has the power to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ; and the power to consecrate was an instrumental power in Christ, deriving from the hypostatic union.⁸⁷

The Power to Administer

At the last supper, Christ our Lord instituted the Blessed Eucharist, sacrifice and sacrament.⁸⁸ A year before, at Capharnaum, He had promised the Eucharist in the words: "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."⁸⁹ Exegetes agree that the connection between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacrificial death of Christ is expressed in the words which promised the Eucharist.⁹⁰ Hence, when Christ offered sacrifice at the last supper, He distributed Holy Communion to the Apostles in splendid fulfillment of the promise he had made. When the priest receives the Body and Blood of Christ in the Mass, he manifests his own close connection with the sacrifice he offers and reveals his role as dispenser of this great sacrament to others.⁹¹

The Eucharist is the only sacrament which the priest consecrates and administers to himself. All the other sacraments are transient rites; the Eucharist is a permanent sacrament. All the other sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato* when the matter and form are united;⁹² the Eucharist does not confer grace *ex opere operato* when it is consecrated, but when it is received.⁹³ The priest is a direct instrument in the production of grace conferred by the other sacraments

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 13, a. 2 c. ⁸⁸ *DB*, 938, 874. ⁸⁹ John 6:51.

⁹⁰ So clear is this that non-Catholics admit it; e.g., A. Loisy, *Le quatrième évangile*, (ed. 2a; Paris, 1921), p. 242: "L'idée de la passion et celle de l'eucharistie sont aussi étroitement associées dans notre évangile que dans Paul et dans les relations synoptiques de la dernière cène . . ."

⁹¹ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 82, a. 4 c: "Quicumque autem sacrificium offert, debet sacrificii fieri particeps . . . Unde per hoc quod participat sacrificio, ostendit ad se sacrificium interius pertinere . . . Similiter etiam per hoc quod sacrificium populo dispensat, ostendit se esse dispensatorem divinorum, quorum ipse primo debet esse particeps."

⁹² *DB*, 695, 849, 851.

⁹³ John 6:51, 53, 54, 56, 57; *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 82, a. 4 ad 2m.

which he administers; he is not a direct instrument in the production of the grace which the Eucharist confers. The humanity of Christ is the only direct instrument used by God in conferring the grace of the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁹⁴ Hence, the priest can administer this sacrament to himself.⁹⁵

St. Thomas gives these three reasons why the priest alone should administer this sacrament to others: (1) The priest consecrates in the person of Christ, and Christ both consecrated His Body and Blood at the last supper and distributed them to His Apostles; (2) the priest is mediator between God and man; as such, he not only brings the gifts of men to God, but also brings the gifts of God to men; (3) out of reverence for this sacrament, nothing, unless it be consecrated, should touch the Sacred Host; for this reason the chalice and corporal are consecrated, and so are the hands of the priest.⁹⁶

Accordingly, the priest's power to administer the Eucharist is directly connected with his power to consecrate and to offer sacrifice. Since the priest alone has these powers, he alone should bring God to His children in the sacrament of His love, that God may fulfill for His children the truths implicit in the beautiful hymn, "O sacrum convivium. . . ."

INTENTION

The priest must have the intention to do what the Church does when he unites the matter and form in the sacramental rite.⁹⁷ Unless he has this intention, his words and actions are sacramentally meaningless; the sacrament will never exist as a valid rite capable of producing grace *ex opere operato*. Now an intention is an act by which the agent wills an activity and directs it towards an end. Hence the act of the will of the minister of Christ is extremely important in the administration of the sacraments.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ John 6:57: "Qui manducat me, et ipse vivet propter me"; cf. Suarez, *op. cit.*, XX, disp. 11, sect. 3, n. 9.

⁹⁵ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 82, a. 4 ad 2m: "Unde nec in hoc sacramento sacerdos consecrat seipsum, sed panem et vinum, in qua consecratione perficitur sacramentum. Usus autem sacramenti est consequenter se habens ad hoc sacramentum."

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, a. 3 c.

⁹⁷ *DB*, 854.

⁹⁸ *DB*, 695 puts the intention of the minister with the matter and form of the sacrament as the elements "quibus sacramenta perficiuntur." This point may be further illustrated

The priest is the vicegerent of Christ when he administers the sacraments. He is an instrument in the hands of the divine Redeemer. He is not acting in his own name nor is he using a power that he has by nature. Therefore he must intend to act as Christ's vicegerent and will to use the power which has been given to him, as an instrument animated by a rational soul with the power of self determination. In administering the sacraments, the object of the act of his will has been set by the Church in the general prescription that he must have the intention *saltem faciendi quod facit Ecclesia*.

In the final analysis, this means that the priest must will to do exactly what Christ willed should be done. This is so because Christ gave the sacraments into the keeping of His Church, and the Church is anxious that these sacraments exist, be applied, and produce their effects according to the will of Christ. Thus the priest must conform his will to Christ's will and must permit his will to be ruled by the will of Christ.⁹⁹ When this conformity exists, the priest becomes the instrument of Christ in carrying on the work of redemption, and grace is conferred on the one receiving the sacrament.

This consequence of the harmony between the will of Christ and the will of the priest in the sacramental action recalls the consequence of the harmony existing between the divine will and the human will in Christ. Christ's Godhead guaranteed the accomplishment of anything the human will of Christ might will absolutely, whenever His human power alone could not produce the effect.¹⁰⁰ The priest has no native power to produce the sacramental graces; but Christ has guaranteed that this effect will be produced when His priests will to do what He determined should be done.

Thus, once more, even as the hypostatic union enables us to understand how the humanity of Christ could be the instrument of His Godhead in producing supernatural effects, so it helps us to formulate a

by the sacrament of matrimony, in which the contracting parties are the ministers. The essence of this sacrament is the matrimonial contract (*DB*, 2234). The contract exists when the baptized parties, *jure habiles*, express their consent (*CIC*, 1081) in the manner prescribed by the Church (*ibid.*, 1094). Thus in the one sacrament in which lay people are the ordinary ministers the act of the will on the part of both is all important in conferring and receiving this sacrament.

⁹⁹ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 8 ad 1m.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 13, a. 4 c.

statement of the union between Christ and His priest in sacramental administration.

THE UNION BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE PRIEST

We are now in a position to make a statement on the nature of the union which exists between Christ and the priest who is the minister of Christ, an instrument in the hands of the divine Redeemer, another Christ, and a continuation of Christ.

To simplify the discussion, let it be recalled that all the other powers of the priest are either connected with his powers of consecrating and absolving or substantially the same powers. For example, the power to offer sacrifice and the power to administer the Eucharist are connected with the power to consecrate. The power to administer baptism and extreme unction, like the power to absolve, is a power to be an instrument in the production of grace.

When Christ spoke the words of consecration at the last supper, and when Christ forgave sins, He performed strictly theandric actions.¹⁰¹ In each case one effect was produced by two agents working jointly. The agents were God (the principal cause) and the human nature of Christ (the instrumental cause). When the priest speaks the words of consecration in the Mass, and when the priest absolves, the same effects (transubstantiation and remission of sins) are produced. These effects are now produced by three agents working jointly. These agents are God (the principal cause), the human nature of Christ (the chief instrumental cause), and the priest (the subordinate instrumental cause). The priest's acts in consecrating and absolving may be called analogously theandric actions.

The actions of an agent lead to a discussion of the proximate and remote principles of the actions. The proximate principles of the action of an intelligent being are his intellect and will, the remote principle is his nature. The proximate principles of the theandric actions of Christ were His divine will (principal cause) and His human will (instrumental cause). The remote principles were His divine nature and His human nature. The Person who acted was the Incarnate Word. Christ could perform these actions because His human nature was hypostatically united with His divine nature.

¹⁰¹ Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 109, n. 125: "Stricto sensu theandricae sunt operationes mixtae, quarum effectui totali cooperatur, per modum principii elicitive quo, utraque forma . . ."

The priest consecrates and absolves in the name and in the person of Christ. The proximate principles of these actions are the divine will (the principal cause), the human will of Christ (chief instrumental cause), and the will of the priest (subordinate instrumental cause). The remote principles of these actions are the divine nature, the human nature of Christ, and the nature of the priest. The priest can perform these actions because he bears imprinted on his soul the sacramental character which configures him to the priesthood of Christ and connotes an active spiritual power to consecrate and to absolve.

When we discuss the theandric actions of Christ we are led back to the proximate and remote principles of those actions and, ultimately, to the hypostatic union. Hence, when we call the actions of the priest who acts in the name and in the person of Christ analogously theandric actions, a statement of his union with Christ *analogously* to the hypostatic union is not unwarranted.

The hypostatic union is the union of Christ's divine and human natures in the one Person of the Word of God. The hypostatic union considered as an action is the action of the Blessed Trinity uniting the two natures in Christ. The union between Christ and the priest in sacramental administration considered as an action is the action of the Blessed Trinity making the priest an instrument of the humanity of Christ in confecting the sacrament and in producing grace.

The hypostatic union considered as an effect of the action of the Blessed Trinity is the permanent state of union which results, specifically it is the Word *Incarnate*. The union between Christ and the priest considered as an effect of the action of the Blessed Trinity is the permanent configuration of the soul of the priest to Christ the Priest. This configuration is effected by the sacramental character which the Blessed Trinity imprints on the priest's soul when he receives the sacrament of holy orders. This sacramental character gives the priest an active spiritual power to be an instrument of Christ in confecting the sacraments and in producing grace.

Theologians agree that the hypostatic union, considered according to the precise formality under which the humanity is joined to the Person of the Word, is a non-mutual (or mixed) relation—logical on the part of the divine Person, real on the part of the human nature. The elements in the logical relation are (*a*) the subject, the Person of the Word

of God, (b) the term, the human nature of Christ, and (c) the foundation, the infinite personal power of the Word of God who virtually extends His personal function to the human nature.¹⁰² The elements in the real relation are (a) the subject, the human nature of Christ, (b) the term, the divine Person, and (c) the foundation,¹⁰³ that which makes the human nature dependent on the Word of God for subsistence. Theologians do not agree in their explanation of this foundation. They variously assert that the divine existence,¹⁰⁴ or a physical mode,¹⁰⁵ or a metaphysical mode,¹⁰⁶ is the foundation; but all agree that the Word of God now possesses the human nature of Christ as His own.

The union between Christ and the priest considered according to the precise formality under which the priest is united to Christ in sacramental administration is a non-mutual (or mixed) relation—logical on the part of Christ, real on the part of the priest. The elements in the logical relation are (a) the subject, Christ the God-Man, (b) the term, the priest, and (c) the foundation, the infinite personal power of the Word of God, who virtually extends His personal function to the priest while the priest confects the sacraments and produces grace.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Whether the further explanation of this phrase means that "esse personale Verbi eminentissime supplet vices esse creati," or "personalitas Verbi humanam naturam in ipsius conceptione hypostaticè terminare coepit," the important point of agreement is that the personal function of the Word supplies the answer.

¹⁰³ There is no need here to select one of the theories cited below; they do not affect our analogy, since there is agreement on the sacramental character as the foundation of the real relation between the priest and Christ.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Billot, *op. cit.*, thesis VII, p. 123 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Suarez, *De Incarnatione, op. cit.*, XVII, disp. 8, sect. 3, n. 8, p. 347 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Galtier, *op. cit.*, thesis XVI, p. 198 ff.

¹⁰⁷ It is important that this statement be construed correctly. We are speaking of an extension of the personal function of the Word of God, which is accidental and analogous to the manner in which that extension was made to the human nature of Christ. The effect of this extension may be clearer if we recall the manner in which the divine life is communicated to the soul by sanctifying grace. See, for example, Lange, *De Gratia* (Friburgi Brisgoviae, 1929), thesis 14, p. 296: "Gratiae sanctificantis effectus formalis primarius est in eo, ut animam vere et physice, licet analoge et accidentaliter, reddat divinae naturae formaliter consortem, id est ut in ea supernaturalem imaginem Dei exprimendo, eam assimilet naturae divinae et intellectuali." Sanctifying grace gives an accidental and analogous participation in the divine life; the extension of the personal function of the Word of God to the minister of Christ gives an accidental and analogous participation in the divine power. This divine life remains as long as sanctifying grace is not lost. This divine power is shared while the sacraments are confected and while the priest is

The elements in the real relation are (a) the subject, the priest, (b) the term, Christ the God-Man, and (c) the foundation, the sacramental character configuring the priest to Christ the Priest, and the priestly power which enables him to be an instrument in confecting the sacrament and in producing grace.

The hypostatic union is supernatural, substantial, and indissoluble; it is the greatest union and gift God has ever created.¹⁰⁸ By this union the human, finite nature of Christ is united with His divine, infinite nature in the Person of the Word of God. By this gift a human nature shares the divine nature, not accidentally and analogously, but substantially and properly.¹⁰⁹

The union between Christ and the priest is supernatural, accidental, and permanent;¹¹⁰ it is the greatest union and gift *for action* which God has granted since the Incarnation.¹¹¹ By this union, the priest is so united to Christ that he becomes an instrument of Christ when he consecrates and when he absolves. These actions are vicariously the actions of Christ and are ascribed to Him.¹¹² By this gift the priest can

consecrating. Compare Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 255: “. . . licet sacerdoti actu non insit instrumentalis virtus causativa transsubstantiationis, nisi in ipsa actuali confectione sacramenti, permanenter tamen retinet formam instrumenti, scilicet characterem per quem destinatur ad exercendas ex officio sacramentales actiones sub Deo agente principali.” See also E. Hugon, *La fraternité du sacerdoce et de l'état religieux*, p. 14: “Puisque le caractère de l'ordination nous fait participer au sacerdoce de Jésus-Christ, il doit nous donner une participation accidentelle de l'union hypostatique” (quoted in E. Hugon, *La causalité instrumentale dans l'ordre surnaturel* [Paris, 1907,] p. 152 f.); and J. Gruden, *The Mystical Christ* (Herder, St. Louis, 1936), p. 238: “The significance and the effects of the indelible character are similar to the significance and effects of the hypostatic union.”

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Galtier, *op. cit.*, thesis XIV, p. 164 ff.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-7.

¹¹⁰ It is defined (*DB*, 852, 960) that the sacramental character is indelible and consequently permanent for this life; and it is the common teaching of theologians that it will last forever.

¹¹¹ This statement excludes the gift of the hypostatic union and all the gifts which the human nature of Christ received as a consequence; it also excludes the wonderful prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Note 107 *supra* indicated a distinction between sanctifying grace (as the gift of divine life) and the power of the priest (as a gift of divine power). One further illustration will be helpful. It is defined that the valid exercise of the power of the priest is independent of the personal worthiness of the minister of the sacraments (*DB*, 855). It might seem incongruous to say that the divine power could be shared by a sinful minister, yet it is not incongruous since an entitatively supernatural actual grace can be given to a sinner without his soul being transformed, as it is by sanctifying grace.

¹¹² Cf. note 38 *supra* and corresponding text.

share the divine omnipotence accidentally and analogously to the manner in which the human nature of Christ shared that same attribute.

Hence the priest is the minister of Christ, an instrument in the hands of the divine redeemer, and, to use the words of Pope Pius XI,¹¹³ "as is said with good reason 'another Christ'; for in some way he is himself a continuation of Christ."

CONCLUSION

In the epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul, a zealous *minister Christi sacerdos*, proposes to the members of the Church at Philippi the striking example of Christ's Incarnation as a compelling motive for making their own the thoughts and desires of Christ.¹¹⁴ In the complete pericope Christ is described in three conditions: (1) in His divine, eternal life; (2) in His life on earth as Man; and (3) in His life in glory as Man. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church state that the divinity of Christ is demonstrated in the words: "He was by nature God." The exegetes, in the footsteps of the Fathers, explain the triple reference to the Incarnation: "(He) emptied Himself (1) taking the nature of a slave, (2) being made like unto man, and (3) appearing in the form of man," as signifying respectively: (1) the created nature, since every created nature, even that of angels, is the nature of a slave when compared with God's uncreated nature, (2) the created human nature, since Christ became *like* unto man, because He was not only man, but God also, (3) the created human nature so like unto ours that men looking at Christ would see only a Man.¹¹⁵

The last point is important. Christ could have revealed His divine majesty always as He did on Mount Thabor,¹¹⁶ but the glory of His Godhead was regularly hidden. The Incarnation did not mean a surrender of the divine nature, because that was impossible. The *exinanitio* means that the majesty of the Son of God is veiled in His human nature.¹¹⁷ The power of the Son of God frequently broke

¹¹³ *Loc. cit.*

¹¹⁴ Knabenbauer, *Comm. in S. Pauli Apostoli Epist. ad Philippenses* (Paris, 1912), p. 209: "Verum quod Apostolus vult, clare indicatur dum dicit v. 5 *hoc enim sentite in vobis quod est in Christo Jesu τούτο φρονείτε*. Verbum pertinet tum ad mentem tum ad appetendi facultatem . . . affectionem, affectum et dispositionem cogitandi et appetendi . . ." The pericope in question is Phil. 2:5-11.

¹¹⁵ Phil. 2:5-7.

¹¹⁶ Matt. 17:1-9.

¹¹⁷ Knabenbauer, *op. cit.*, p. 212 f.

through the veil and was made manifest in the wonders Christ performed. These wonders revealed that this Man was the Son of God, coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself said that the miracles He performed proved His oneness with the heavenly Father.¹¹⁸ Thus men looking at Christ might see only a Man, but if they listened to the words He spoke and weighed His works they could learn that He was God.

At the death of Christ on Calvary, a centurion and those that were with him keeping guard over Jesus, moved by the wonders that took place in the heavens and on earth, hailed His divinity in the words: "Truly He was the Son of God."¹¹⁹ Thus the Incarnation and Calvary brought to man on earth the power and the love of God in human form, and enabled man to see in Christ and His works the majesty and power, the goodness and love of God.

By His passion and death Christ merited to give to His priests a share in the power He received in His Incarnation. He gave this power to His priests in order that the goodness and love of God for man might still be made manifest to man by one in human form. Men see only a man when they look at the *minister Christi sacerdos*. The dignity and office that he has as another Christ, and the power that he has as the vicegerent of Christ are hidden from the eyes of men. They are veiled in the invisible sacramental character in which they are founded. But that power frequently breaks through the veil, when the priest administers the sacraments, and reveals that this man is the minister of Christ, the priest. The priest can say that the words he speaks and the works he performs prove whose minister he is.

At the altar, where he uses the power Christ gave him to consecrate and obeys the command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me," the priest best reveals that the power and goodness and love of God for men are at work in the world today, through the priest. A grateful Catholic people, present at Mass, as the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, offers to God through His priests the sacrifice alone He offered on Calvary, can emulate the centurion and cry out: "Truly this man is the *minister Christi sacerdos*."

¹¹⁸ John 10:38.

¹¹⁹ Matt. 27:54.