TOBE A PRIEST

Perspectives on Vocation and Ordination

Foreword by John Maury Allin

EDITED BY

Robert E. Terwilliger & Urban T. Holmes, III

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edited by ROBERT E. TERWILLIGER URBAN T. HOLMES, III

with a Foreword by John Maury Allin

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preface

At this moment in the history of the Church, attention is being focused intensely on the nature of the Christian ministry. This concern centers particularly on the ministerial priesthood and the episcopate. The immediate cause of this is, of course, the debate about the ordination of women. There has also been the long-continuing "crisis in ministry" with its anguished questions of identity and personal vocation. The Church has, in consequence, the mandate to explore in depth a theological issue which has much wider ramifications than the relationship of sexuality to ordination. This book is a response to that opportunity in essays which embrace a wide range of related topics.

In selecting subjects and essayists the two editors have sought to present a balance of viewpoint, drawing on various traditions and sources. There is, by intention, considerable disagreement among the authors, since we believe it is important for the readers to be exposed to many points of view to stimulate their thinking. In a volume such as this not every essay is directed to the same audience nor written on the same level. Our intention is that these contributions should reflect the best in current scholarship, yet at the same time be intelligible to both priest and layman.

We think it is important for the readers to understand that the two editors themselves have differing opinions on the matter of the ordination of women. At the same time we found a freedom to work together, which combined a natural collaboration with a kind of independence. Each of us does not necessarily sponsor every article in the book, but we have found it easy to live in peace with one another in the presence of this fact. This is, we think, a sign that it is possible to have a basic difference of opinion and still be in Christian fellowship within the same Church. We are both committed to a thorough theological appraisal of the nature of priesthood and its relationship to the Church, which we think is reflected in this book.

It should also be clear that in contributing to the volume no author is endorsing the opinions of his fellow essayists; each article stands by itself. Only the editors of the book have read all the articles, and the opinions of one person should not be attributed to anyone else who is part of this study.

In assembling the essays, we have sought to follow a general outline,

which should become apparent to anyone working through the contents. We have begun with four essays with distinct points of view on the definition of priesthood. This is followed by a number of articles on biblical and historical themes related to the ministerial priesthood. After that is a section that deals with the functions priests perform, and we conclude with an examination of the priestly vocation today.

The reader should keep clear in his mind the difference between ministry and the priesthood. We do not understand these terms in any sense to be synonymous, and this volume is directed only toward the issue of priesthood and the related subject matter of the episcopate. We do not claim that the volume is in any sense exhaustive of the subject, although we do think it is representative. Undoubtedly some will criticize it for not having a particular point of view or group represented among the essayists. We have made a conscientious effort to draw on both men and women, Anglicans and non-Anglicans who have a particular interest in the subject of priesthood, people who are in favor of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and people who are not, and scholars throughout the United States and elsewhere. Undoubtedly, in a venture of this kind it is not possible to have everything in proportion; and sometimes the inability-for good reasons-of some persons to comply with our request for an essay has upset that balance a bit more. However, we do think that this volume embodies a fair representation of opinion in the Episcopal Church and beyond.

We do hope that the readers of this book will not be Episcopalians only. The essays represent substantial work, and although they do not in every instance contain new scholarship, they do make available a valuable summary of considerable research in the field on the part of distinguished theologians, historians, biblical and liturgical scholars.

In conclusion, we would note that while these are times of deep division on some very basic issues in the life of the Church, they are not times of darkness. The belief of the two editors is that in such times light often breaks through the rifts in the unity of the Church of Christ, and we have great hope that a deeper understanding of the ministry, and particularly of the priesthood, in the life of the Church will be the result of the struggle in which we are presently engaged. This book is offered as a contribution to that understanding.

Robert E. Terwilliger Urban T. Holmes

chapter 2

WHAT IS A PRIEST?

Another Anglican View

C. FitzSimons Allison

My fixed Principle is: that a Christianity without a Church exercising spiritual authority is vanity and dissolution.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The first step in understanding the nature of any Christian ministry is to recognize the overwhelming agreement in virtually every tradition in the history of the Church that a vocation to ministry must be twofold: it must be an inner call to the individual and it must be validated by the corporate body, the "holy folk." Neither one, without the other, is sufficient.

The second step is to appreciate the function and purpose of such ministry. The purpose of the duly authorized regularizing, authenticating, or validating of such ministry is to insure that the ministry be truly the ministry, that it perform the function and purpose of its existence. The priest is one form of this ministry and shares with all other forms its final authenticity as the purpose of ministry is fulfilled. This purpose is well expressed by St. Paul in Romans 15:16 in the phrase "the priestly service of the gospel of God . . ." It is the contention of this paper that priesthood derives its authenticity from its "service of the gospel."

Our present dilemma, in relation to the confusion concerning ministry and its eroding authority, is to see four ways in which ministry has been separated from its true purpose.

PRIESTHOOD NOT SACERDOS

"Priest" is the English word for "presbyter" (elder), and the latter is the only legitimate connotation for "priest." As the Roman Catholic Encyclopedia of Theology correctly points out: "It is important to bear in mind, in the following discussion of the applicability of the terms 'priest' and 'priesthood' to the office holders in the church, that the New Testament does not use the terms *hiereus*, *hierateuma*, to describe ecclesiastical office. They occur, however, in the interpretation of Christ's work of salvation and in the description of the New Testament people of God" (p. 1281). The Gospel's connection with priesthood is that after Christ's "one sacrifice once offered," priesthood in the *sacerdos* and *hiereus* function of offering sacrifice has been completely and finally done away with. As Bishop Lightfoot explains the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Now this apostolic writer teaches that all sacrifices had been consummated in the one Sacrifice, all priesthoods absorbed in the one Priest. The offering had been made once for all; and, as there were no more victims, there could be no more priests."

Hence, Richard Hooker, theologian of the sixteenth century, preferred the term "presbyter" to "priest" because he knew that the word "priest" in English, besides properly translating "presbyter," is also the only English word to translate *sacerdos* or *hiereus*, thus making way for the unwitting denial of the Gospel by slipping from the first to the

second meaning of "priest."

Scripture does use the concept *hiereus*/priest, not for the ministry but for the whole Church, the holy folk. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." (I Peter 2:9). The Reformation doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" gets its root from this text (and from the Epistle to the Hebrews) and has been greatly misunderstood in modern times, as if it were merely some democratic egalitarianism. For Luther and the Anglican reformers the doctrine meant not so much the priesthood of each believer but of all believers. All baptized persons share equally in this priesthood as members of this "holy nation, this royal priesthood," this body, of which Christ is the head. However, it did not mean the "presbyterate of all believers." For both Luther³ and Anglicanism, the presbyter must be lawfully called and sent by duly constituted authorities before he exercises this ministry (cf. article XXIII).

This brings us to the question of how this presbyter/priest is related to that sacrifice of Christ. There are three ways this connection is made. The presbyter/priest does not make the sacrifice as the old *sacerdos*/priest did but he now *represents* that event as elder of the folk, the Church, this whole "royal priesthood," this whole Christian ministry. As he represents the Church his ministry relates all to Christ's completed sacrifice and its benefits. He is not a mediator between God and his people, but he is a representative person of this holy folk, the people of God, the body of Christ. Secondly, this priesthood relates us to that once-for-all sacrifice of Christ by the preaching of the word, the Good News. As in the text from Paul (Romans 15:16), "The priestly service of

the gospel of God" is the function and purpose of this ministry. It is extremely important to note that whereas *hiereus* is never used to describe the Christian ministry in the New Testament, it is here used to describe the function of the Gospel. It is the Gospel that mediates and relates us to Christ. The ministry does so as it is a servant of this Word. Thirdly, as the presbyter presides at the holy table the once-for-all sacrifice is presented in word and action, and this body, the Church, is united anew with its head (Christ) in his sacrifice. As the report of the archbishop's commission, *Doctrine in the Church of England*, so well puts it: "But if the Eucharist is thus spoken of as a sacrifice, it must be understood as a sacrifice in which (to speak as exactly as the subject allows) we do not offer Christ but in which Christ unites us with Himself in the self-offering of the life that was 'obedient unto death, yea the death of the Cross.'"

Hence the true meaning of priest is lost by its association with the Old Testament priesthood which has been done away with by Christ. The meaning of priest is recovered by the presbyter/priesthood fulfilling its purpose as servant of this Gospel.

TOO NARROW DOCTRINE OF VALIDITY

The second way in which ministry has been separated from its purpose is by a too narrow and simplistic doctrine of *validity*. However necessary some guidelines must be, the adequacy of the traditional requirements for validity—the proper intention, form, and matter—is increasingly questioned on all sides. John Jay Hughes, the Roman Catholic protagonist for recognition of Anglican orders, cites some very important difficulties increasingly shared by us all concerning such criteria for judging validity of ordination:

One example of these problems is that the existing concept of apostolic succession leads to recognizing the validity of the orders possessed by eccentric *episcopi vagantes*, clerical rolling stones who display considerably greater interest in ritual, ceremonial and a valid "succession" than in belief, and whose numerically tiny churches, despite their grandiose titles, possess more clergy than laity. How can one be happy with standards of validity which treat the Archbishop of Canterbury as a layman while recognizing as valid, or possibly valid, the "orders" of prelates claiming to be Bishops, Archbishops, Apostolic Pontiffs, Patriarchs, Exarchs, Ruling Prelates or Sacred Beatitudes in such bodies as the Autonomous African Universal Church, the Orthodox Keltic Church of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the Old Catholic Church (Integrated Rite), the Old Catholic Evangelical Church of God, the Apostolic Church of St. Peter, the Ancient Catholic Church, the Universal Apostolic Church of Life, the Pre-Nicene Catholic Church and the Old Roman Catholic Church, Caer-Glow

Province of Great Britain—most of these august organizations possessing only a single place of worship, consisting more often than not of a back room somewhere in the dreary wastes of outer London?⁵

To recall one of the purposes of ministry, the safeguarding of the Gospel and doctrine, is to raise serious questions as to the effectiveness of such concepts of validity. Is anyone really comfortable with a doctrine of validity that might depend upon the thread of *one* (three are required for regularity, *one* for validity) bishop in apostolic succession. In 1939, Bishop Hensley Henson wrote: "The Church of England, at the present time, exhibits a doctrinal incoherence which has no parallel in any other church claiming to be traditionally orthodox." If that was true in 1939, little has occurred since then to reassure us that our Anglican polity has been an altogether effective guardian of the apostolic faith.

Hence priesthood loses its vitality and integrity when it attempts to define "validity" in isolation from its function and purpose of serving the Gospel.

PREOCCUPATION WITH CREDENTIALS

The third way in which the purpose of ministry has been frustrated is the tendency to be preoccupied with credentials alone. John Henry Newman, in 1833, set the tone of this preoccupation with his first tract, "Hard Master He would not be to bid us oppose the world and not give us the *credentials* for doing so" (italics mine). For over a century a strong tradition in Anglicanism has presented the credentials of a ministry in apostolic succession (quite narrowly defined) as the *esse* of the Church; that is, to be without it is not to be the Church. Hence, in spite of the refusal of Reformation Anglicans or the official Anglican formularies to specify dogmatically what particular form of ministry or polity is essential, this tradition of Anglicans did not hesitate to unchurch "non-conformists" who shared their commitment to Scripture, creeds, and ecumenical councils, and who for centuries had manifested at least as much "fruit" as had we in the Anglican communion.

Opposed to this exclusive position were those who, following Richard Hooker, refused to elevate a particular polity to the level of dogmatic essence. Hooker's argument with the Puritans was precisely along the lines that no one can be sure what, if any, particular form of polity is prescribed by Scripture. The most we could claim was that our three-fold polity of bishops, priests, and deacons was historical, primitive, and not un-Scriptural. Hooker's restraint has held up far better than the dogmatic claims of his contemporary antagonists or his successors' exclusive position in the light of modern scholarship.

The Anglican Articles of Religion and the Preface to the Ordinal omit any claim that our polity is enjoined in Scripture, or that it is the only valid form of Christian ministry, or even that it is the best form. Anglicans are simply required to recognize that it is a valid form and not contrary to Scripture. Article 36 affirms that the Anglican ordinal contains nothing "superstitious and ungodly," nor is it to be regarded as a defective form of ordaining the ministry.

The exclusive position largely begun with the tractarians in the nineteenth century, came to be called the *esse* view (that valid orders, not just for the Church of England but for all Christians everywhere, required ordination by bishops in apostolic succession, without which there could be no valid sacraments nor any true Church) and was opposed by the *bene esse* view (that such ordination was for the "wellbeing" of the Church). One's head or liver, for instance, is of the *esse* of being human, whereas one's ear or arm is of the *bene esse*.

The *esse* position was claimed for a long time, not only as a position within the Anglican Church but the only true position, and that it was the view historically held by the Anglican Communion. Historical studies have for some time proven this latter claim untenable. Even the Anglo-Catholic leader, Dr. Darwell Stone, acknowledged this:

But I think that we have now to face the facts that, so far as the Reformation and post-Reformation formularies and divines are concerned, there are loopholes which we can use but not the support for an exclusive position."⁶

There have been frantic attempts, however, to maintain this exclusive position in spite of the overwhelming contrary evidence, especially that produced by Norman Sykes in *Old Priest and New Presbyter*. The most judicious view of this whole controversy is perhaps that of the Anglo-Catholic bishop, A. E. J. Rawlinson:

... despite the attempts so insistently made in post-Tractarian times by Anglo-Catholic Theologians to stiffen up the Anglican claim for Episcopacy and to treat it as being of the actual esse of the Church, the attitude of the classical theologians of Anglicanism in the age of the Carolines did not involve quite this assertion. The conclusions reached by the Dean in Old Priest and New Presbyter are not in fact likely to be upset. The defenders of Anglicanism in the 16th and early 17th centuries, however emphatic their claims for Episcopacy, nevertheless did not, with one or two possible exceptions, go so far as to "unchurch" foreign Protestant Churches. The change of opinion on the question of Episcopacy which came about in the 19th century was due to the influence of the Tractarians and of their successors the Anglo-Catholics. The "exclusive" theory of Episcopacy (to use the late Dr. Darwell Stone's epithet) is today widely prevalent among the clergy of the Church, though it is less widespread among

the laity. Its upholders are more vocal than those of the "Evangelical" school; it may be doubted whether they are more numerous. They are a "school of thought" within Anglicanism, and their view is permissible; but it is very unlikely to be adopted as the official doctrine of the Church.⁷

The contrast between the clergy and laity mentioned by Bishop Rawlinson should not be overlooked. The sociological factors that would naturally lead more clergy than lay persons to increasing emphasis upon credentials are hard to exaggerate. A poll in England in 1973 showed 87.7 percent of the Anglican clergy in favor of eventual union with Roman Catholics versus 57.85 percent of the laity for that outcome. On the other hand, only 27.7 percent of the clergy were for eventual union with Congregationalists, versus 72.2 percent of the laity who were for reunion in this direction. One can hardly explain this discrepancy on the basis of doctrine and theology.

The widespread relinquishing of the *esse* position (cf. K. M. Carey, ed. *The Historic Episcopate*, Dacre Press, 2nd ed. 1960) is not so much due to taking account of the historical scholarship that was long ignored by otherwise responsible scholars (e.g., Kenneth Kirk, *The Apostolic Ministry*, 1957 edition with preface by A. M. Farrer, Hodder and Stoughton, London), but to the fact that this *esse* position no longer served to safeguard what Anglo-Catholics so highly—and often correctly—valued. Especially in the case of the reunion of the Churches in South India and in discussions with American Methodists, it became apparent that episcopacy and the *esse* position could no longer be counted on to assure true "catholicity," whatever one's definition of that may be.

Hence, the events of history itself have forced us to return from the exclusive preoccupation with credentials to associate ministry again with its doctrinal and Gospel purpose.

DENIGRATION OF DOCTRINE

The fourth way the ministry has been separated from its purpose is the increasing disinclination of the Church to deal with doctrine. No sensitive person can be unsympathetic with Church officials for their reluctance to open up what is, if not a Pandora's box, certainly an explosive and perhaps divisive enterprise. When the demand for some official response to Bishop James Pike's doctrine resulted in the publication of the book *Theological Freedom and Social Responsibility* (ed. S. F. Bayne, The Seabury Press, 1967), the recommendation was that, "the word 'heresy' should be abandoned except in the context of the radical, creative theological controversies in the early formative years of Christian doctrine" (p. 22). Although there were some wise and helpful things said in the report and the associated papers, it could

hardly be claimed that this was a bold and confident willingness to maintain and proclaim the doctrine and teaching of classical Christianity

William Temple faced a similar issue earlier in this century in regard to the problem of treating the touchy and possibly centrifugal issue of doctrine in the ecumenical movement. He insisted that it could not forever be ignored or delayed. He was opposed on all sides by those who maintained that "service unites; doctrine divides" and that he would tear apart this tenuous association by bringing into it questions of "faith and order." We are all the beneficiaries of his courage and wisdom in helping to bring about the great World Councils on Faith and Order.

If the Church could take the real risk in following Temple's example, it would face and understand afresh the theological and doctrinal issues without which our understanding of priesthood will be continuously impoverished. From the time of Scripture, Ignatius, and Iranaeus, the ministry has been seen as the expression and guardian of unity and doctrine. Of the eight vows publicly acknowledged by the candidate in the Prayer Book service of the ordination of a priest, four of them are explicitly concerned with the responsibility for maintaining doctrine. Hence the authority of priesthood is derived from its engagement in its function and purpose, preserving and manifesting the unity and doctrine of the Christian faith.

"What He did not assume, He could not redeem."—Athanasius. One of the values in associating again the ministry with Christian doctrine is the light thereby shown on the nature of priesthood. Athanasius' insight concerning Christ, insists that the soteriological (e.g., the salvation of man) purpose of the Incarnation is paramount; it was truly, completely, and fully man that the Logos assumed in the Incarnation. This dictum became the hallmark of orthodox Christianity against the prevailing atmosphere so uncongenial to the New Testament's portrait of a fully human Jesus.

That Jesus was a male must not, then, mean the exclusion of women from salvation. Jesus' humanity must include all humanity lest they be not saved. It would seem, therefore, that his maleness in the work of salvation is *personal* and not *sexual*. Theologians agree that all masculine pronouns, when used of God, are to be understood to mean not *sexual* but *personal*. God is not a *male* but he is our *personal* God, not an *it*. Just such considerations as these should guide us in considering who may represent the Church as priest/presbyter. It would seem that for the Church to exclude a woman believing herself truly called to priesthood merely on the grounds of sex would be confusing what is essentially *personal* with what is merely *sexual*, what is a matter of *humanity* with what is a matter of *gender*.

PRIEST / PARSON

There is a long history of confusion regarding what name to call a priest. As we have seen, the New Testament understanding of priest-hood has no Old Testament sacerdos/hiereus function, but this order is set aside to serve the Gospel and represent the whole body. There is great power in a name, and we must be quite careful by what names we are called. Not to have some name that distinguishes the priest from the laity is to overlook the special functions and distinctions between clergy and laity that have existed from the time of "the 70" through and including virtually all traditions of Christendom. But to name a name that distinguishes and separates is to violate the common priesthood/hiereus character of members of this "holy nation," this "royal priesthood."

The term "Mister" does not seem to satisfy the need to express the special representative character of priest, and the term "Father" would tend to deny the priesthood participated in by all baptized people. It needs to be added that it is difficult to understand how "Father" can be used without seeming to encourage hierarchical temptations of the clergy and at the same time nurturing infantilism in the laity. This latter is a particularly acute and often justifiable criticism by psychologists of the results of conventional distortions of Christianity. The issue is whether God works through Christ, then the ministry, to the Church; or through Christ, then the Church, through which he calls and sends his ministry. The latter is clearly a more "catholic" as well as more biblical view. It is not the ministry which makes the Church but the Church which makes the ministry.

Over the centuries the Church in England evoked from the faithful a name for the priest: parson. It was sometimes used peioratively and is now regarded as quaint. But it was the English word for "person," the "person" of the parish, of the congregation. The sacramental nature of the office worked. The faithful being called on knew their "parson" had come, the congregation was represented to them in this person. I remember quite vividly a few years ago lying in a hospital recovering from surgery. Coleman McGehee, the rector of my parish church came to see me. I was glad to see him as a delightful and affectionate friend but even more as my "parson," the person representing those people of God who had helped set him apart and paid him a salary to represent them, to be their "person." The name seems to carry as none other the New Testament function of priest, the priest/presbyter, who in his person shows the true priesthood of all believers, by whom God is known in this world, and who is set apart to maintain Christian doctrine and unity by "the priestly service of the gospel."

NOTES

1. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry* (New York: T. Whittaker, 1883), p. 141.

2. Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, vol. 2, (New York:

E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954) pp. 429, 432.

- 3. "... no one may make use of this power except by consent of the community or the call of the superior." G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1953), pp. 315–316.
 - 4. Doctrine in the Church of England (London: S.P.C.K., 1938), p. 162.
- 5. John Jay Hughes, Stewards of the Lord: A Reappraisal of Anglican Orders (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), pp. 2, 3.
 - 6. Quoted in Norman Sykes, Old Priest and New Presbyter (London & New

York: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 211.

- 7. The Anglican Communion in Christendom (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), pp. 57–58 and 49–52.
 - 8. Reported in The Living Church, 22 (July 1973).