

ecclesial consciousness that allows for an almost complete connectedness between the mysteries of faith, especially the trinitarian and christological, with every detail and structure of Christian and ecclesial living. For him, there is an unambiguous connaturality between the objective office of the ministerial priesthood and the radical and subjective demands of a life of intense discipleship as enshrined both canonically and spiritually in the evangelical counsels.

The capacity to contain what has become in practice a fragmented and painful dimension of the Church's life and mission in a beautifully fashioned synthesis of doctrine and spirituality, clearly defined in contours of identity and commitment, might appear as a failure to grasp the grey areas of the theology of priesthood and the contemporary questions surrounding its authentic shape and identity which certainly dominate the contemporary literature. This weakness, however, does not diminish the power of his spiritual insight into the radicalism of Christian holiness and of priestly existence. The absence of the pragmatic, in a sense, allows us to face the level of the being of the priest as a person. Balthasar plunges reflection on the priesthood into the unchartered waters of the objectivity of office, the ontology of priestly identity and the hiddenness of grace. In this he brings both depth and theological imagination to a ministry that is conscious of its function, but in crisis over its identity. It is precisely as a spirituality that seeks to integrate function and personal identity that Balthasar's vision has a concrete contribution to make to the presence and ministry of priests in the Church and in the world. □

Thoughts on the priesthood of women

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Mary, under the Cross, does not have to represent the love of the Father, as does the Son, but stands only for the creature, which, together with all other creatures, *she is*.

I. Preliminary considerations

1. The demand that women be admitted to the ordained priesthood relies essentially on sociological, not theological, considerations. Proponents of women's ordination, talking for granted the largely unexamined premise that the ancient cultures known to us were prevalently masculine and that women were as subordinate in Judaism as they still are today in Islam, advance the following argument. The liberation of women to full equality with men, they say, may owe its origins to the impact of Christianity, but not its realization. In any case, the liberation of women highlights the absurdity and unacceptability of continuing to exclude them from ecclesiastical office [Amf]. The demands of the feminists cut both ways in today's chiefly male-invented and male-run technical civilization, because these demands aim at fitting women into a predominantly masculine world. This fact need not occupy us here, where we are concerned primarily with intra-ecclesial questions. Our purpose was only to point out that the demand that women be permitted to exercise the same functions follows from a sociological perspective.

2. A second, equally weighty matter is the question of the essential difference between the basic constitutions of the Catholic and non-Catholic churches, a question which gets pushed into the background, if not canceled altogether, in the ecumenical dialogue. (In this context we can leave out Orthodoxy, in which it is unthinkable for women to aspire to the priesthood; by contrast, the Anglican Church, given recent trends, must really be put on the side of Protestantism.) According to the Catholic view, the episcopal-priestly office is permanently instituted within the organism of the Church by Christ through the Apostles. When, on the other hand, there is a denial of apostolic succession as a divine institution, it is the Church itself that has the power to organize from out of the community the "functions" which it deems necessary, even if it bestows on those functions the title of bishop or pastor. In this second view of the Church, there is no significant obstacle to the conferral of such functions on women. The Catholic view, in which priestly office has been established *de jure divino*, requires, on the contrary, that we ponder much more seriously whether it is permissible to depart from the order established by Christ.

3. This point brings us immediately to another preliminary consideration. Christ brought about an unprecedented—*for his time*, at any rate—"liberation" of women. Just think of his conversation with the Samaritan woman, which would have been scandalous for a Jew; of the scene with the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house; of the episode of the adulterous woman; of his toleration of women in his travelling entourage; of the role that he sets aside on Easter for the once possessed woman of Magdala. We find an analogous "liberation" in Paul, where the woman is accorded the same right of divorce as the man (1 Cor 7:10f), Eve's production from Adam is relativized (1 Cor 11:12), and the woman is granted the same right over the man's body as he is given over hers (*ibid.* 7:4). Yet this "liberation" happens against the backdrop of an equally unique [*einmalig*] and permanent reevaluation of the gender difference. In fact, the difference is maintained throughout: from the special designation of Mary as the mother of the Lord and, later of John (hence of the Church) to the (no longer merely symbolic, but) "incarnatory" relation between Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as Bride and the new valuation of marriage that follows from it (Eph 5). This goes far beyond the relation between Yahweh and Israel in the Old Testament, which had not yet found an echo in the human-sexual sphere, and which also has nothing in common with pagan and

Gnostic "syzygies." We need to recall this at the outset, because the New Testament's "reevaluation" of the woman to equality of dignity is inseparable from the simultaneous accentuation of the difference between the sexes. Christianity is the religion of incarnate love, and this love ultimately presupposes God's trinitarian mystery, in which the "persons" are so different that they cannot be subsumed under any generic concept of person and precisely thus constitute the one and only essence of God. This suggests the following anthropological principle: the more diverse the characteristics of man and woman in the identity of human nature, the more perfect and fruitful their union in love can be.

4. Every one of the baptized is a "priest for God" (Rv 1:6; 5:10), a "priest of God and of Christ" (Rv 20:6). When as a priest he has to "offer gifts and sacrifices" (cf. Heb 5:1), these gifts will be above all his own person. Such is Paul's demand: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (or logos-conformed) worship" (Rom 12:1). We can therefore term this priesthood an inward one, in contrast to the ministerial office [*Dienstamt*], which is an outward priesthood: "As for the inward priesthood, all baptized Christians are called for the inward priesthood, all baptized Christians are called priests, above all the just, who have the Spirit of God and, by God's grace, have become living members of Jesus Christ the high priest. In a faith inflamed by love, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God on the altar of their spirit. The outward priesthood does not belong to the whole multitude of the faithful, but to individuals who by the valid laying on of hands have been consecrated for a special holy priesthood."¹ (Note that this distinction already existed in the Old Covenant). This passage shows above all that the ordained priesthood [*Amtspriesteramt*], with its objective-sacramental holiness, is entirely at the service of the interior (personal, existential) priesthood of believers and presupposes unconditionality the realization of the inward priesthood in the ordained minister. Hence the question put to Peter when he is installed in office: "do you love me more than these?" If so, then "feed my sheep." The more precise qualification of the relationship between the two forms leads us to our central, theological considerations.

II. The Priesthood of Christ

1. In its essence, Christ's high priesthood is characterized by his self-sacrifice (Heb 9:12-14), hence, by an inward

¹ *Catech. Trid. Pars II, cap. 7 qu. 22.*

priesthood. This priesthood is absolutely unique, because Christ's sacrifice is possible only on the basis of his divine Sonship and his God-manhood. Since his divine Sonship is identical with his essence, no installation in office or conferral of authority could have occurred in his case. (He could not have been chosen and empowered to be God's Son; indeed, not even the Messiah of Israel could be "ordained" to this office.) Even at Jesus' baptism the Father can only refer to the fact: "this is my beloved Son" (Mt 3:17). On the other hand, Jesus is "sent" by the Father and fulfills the Father's "commission" (*mandatum*). Jesus' death on the cross, though certainly his own act of laying down his life for the sin of the world, at the same time "represents" the love of the Father, who "has reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor 5:18). The two aspects that appear in Jesus' deed of reconciliation are inseparably united in the common Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son. "Through the eternal Spirit" Jesus "offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14). The duality of aspects in his sacrifice stands out with particular clarity in John, where Jesus stresses his own authority and plenary power ("even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony has force," 8:14), but does so only because "I know whence I come and whither I am going . . . for it is not I alone . . . but I and he"; "I bear witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me" (8:18). Here lies the deepest (trinitarian) root of the division into an inward and outward priesthood in the Church: self-offering [*Selbsthingabe*]—by commission [*im Auftrag*].

2. Insofar as the incarnate Son has to reveal and represent in his existence the love of the Father vis-à-vis the world, he can do this only as a male. For the Father, as the absolutely fruitful origin, is not dependent upon any insemination. On the other hand, this is not at all to suggest that the Father is the archetype of the created male, who himself comes from the woman (1 Cor 11:12) and who cannot be fruitful at all without her. Addressing God as Father thus has nothing to do with "patriarchy."

Christ, however, is both God and man. Insofar as he is the God-man, who acts and suffers in the name of the triune God, his (absolutely incomparable) sacrifice needs no completion [*Ergänzung*] of any kind. Nor will it ever be augmented by anything (by the Church's sacrifices, for example). Contrariwise, insofar as he is the God-man, he is fully human only if his maleness, in order to attain its full fruitfulness, is completed by a feminine principle. This consideration justifies an ambiguous (because one-sided), though correct statement of Paul's: "In my

flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24).

3. An account of this complementary element would require at its heart a development of the whole of mariology. For the completion mentioned above cannot have happened on the purely natural level of physiology and psychology. Rather, if on-ly because *this* man must be from the woman, while the woman has to share in the accomplishment of *this* unique sacrifice, it presupposes a unique endowment of her nature with grace. It does not follow—nor could it (contra Boff!)—that she can be elevated beyond her creatureliness into a "hypostatic union" (say, with the Holy Spirit). Nor does it follow that she can participate in the aspect of representing the Father, even though she shares in the accomplishment of the sacrifice. She is, then, fitted for the inward (personal, existential) priesthood insofar as her femininity completes the man and she is endowed with supernatural grace, but this does not entail an assumption of the second aspect of Jesus' "task" and "mission" to represent the Father, an aspect which is dependent upon his masculinity.

4. Before we go on, we must discuss here the one weighty objection to the New Testament's teaching on the sexes. When Christianity raises the relationship between Christ and the Church (represented archetypally by Mary) to the status of the prototype of all marriage relations between man and woman (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-23), does it not thereby irrevocably enshrine the subordination of the woman to the man? After all, even in Mary the woman is just a creature, whereas in Christ the man is God. Moreover, the man, in contrast to the woman, has counted ever since the Old Testament as the origin of the woman and the privileged "image" and the "splendor" of God (1 Cor 11:7). This difference of levels was already present in the Old Testament whenever Yahweh had the role of bridegroom or husband and Israel that of bride or wife. Yet this was still only a likeness, whereas in the New Covenant its impact on the relationship between the sexes is brought to a head by the Incarnation.

We can do no more here than outline in the most summary form the answer to this objection. The response will begin by conceding that, in the original relationship between God the creator and the created world, the creature's primary stance towards God is feminine and receptive. However, this reception must not be regarded as mere passivity, but as the bestowal of a supremely active fruitfulness. The foundation of this fruitfulness is laid in the quasi-feminine "wisdom" (*koelinn*) pre-

sent in God himself, which he wants to develop in and through the creation. If [this fruitfulness] has its ultimate realization in God's kenotic love, which goes so far as to "empty" itself out into Mary's womb as an infinitesimally small seed, in order to let the "Godbearer" (here the title takes on an awful weight) ripen it out of her own spiritual-physical being and bring it into the world. According to the Fathers of the Church, what happens architecturally in Mary is reproduced in the Virgin Mother Church, who carries to term in her womb the members of Christ's body, thereby helping Christ himself to attain his "mature manhood" (Eph 4:13).

This brief answer to the objection raised above also shows that, in every discussion of the question of women's priesthood, the essence of the woman qua creature, mariology, and ecclesiology must always, if the discussion is to be theological, stay in the picture together. The legend of Paradise, according to which the woman has been drawn from the man's flesh, is also occasionally referred to in the New Testament. But there it remains only an illustration of what really counts, namely, the Christian truth that the Church is from Christ—which, however, must never cause us to forget that Christ is from Mary: "For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (1 Cor 11:12).

III. Priesthood in the Church

1. If we proceed from below, from the nature of the woman as a creature, the first thing we must point out is that, in the production of a child, the woman contributes incomparably more than the man. The man performs his part in an instant, and for him it represents the opposite of a sacrifice, namely, pleasure. For the woman, on the other hand, the same thing becomes a labor and a burden that increase for nine months and that end with the (in some circumstances unbearable, if not downright fatal) pains of birth. The woman is the created active potency to everything, male as well as female. It is true that this potency needs to be awakened from the outside, but it passes over to, and reaches completion in, an act without anyone else's help. A corollary is that this act is the bringing forth of another self [*Idem*] that owes its existence to the woman. For this reason, the woman recognizes the child as hers with a sort of intimacy that is altogether different from that possible to the man. The man cannot recognize any proportion between his contribution and the completed result.

Consequently, the separation of the mother from the child, the severance of the umbilical cord, is a wholly different kind of renunciation, a much deeper inward, existential sacrifice for the woman than it is for the man. As we have said, for the man the sex act has nothing to do with sacrifice at all. If from now on the man functions as "head" of the family, the woman remains in a fundamental sense its "heart."

We should therefore not be surprised, but rather feel how fitting it is, that normally far more women than men participate in the celebration of the Church's Eucharistic sacrifice. The presence of the holy women under the Cross, especially of the mother who gives up [*lahingtib*] the Son as he separates himself from her, plays an organic, theologically correct mediating role here. Mary gives the Son away to the whole world, and she gives him back to God; this can be the woman's normal entry into the understanding of the sacrifice of the Son—and, behind that, of the Father. The entryway passes entirely through the inward sacrifice of the woman. The aspect of representation doesn't play the least role here. The woman taking part in the sacrifice of the Mass does not regard herself as a "representative" of the Church, but is simply a part of it. Likewise, Mary does not "represent" any thing or person under the Cross, but is just herself. She is no more and no less than the mother who gives her Yes—which had never been interrupted—to the "delivery" [*Entbindung*] of her child.

When Mary is assigned to the disciple John as his mother, she obeys, as sacrificial offerer and victim, her Son's command, and in this way she becomes the mother not only of John, but, through him, of all the children of God. Of course, John belongs to the company of men who have heard the words "do this in memory of me" and have thereby received the authority to re-present Jesus' sacrifice in the Church. As the disciple of love, John has undoubtedly already added the "*intimum*" to his "*sacrificium externum*." It is, in fact, terribly hard for him to separate himself from his suffering and dying Master. And yet his inward sacrifice cannot be compared to the sacrifice of the *Mater Dolorosa*. However, it is his task to introduce Mary's *sacrificium intimum*, along with that of the other holy women, into the inner heart of the Church.

2. If we shift our attention now from the sacrifice of women to Mary's, we see that her sacrifice is, to be sure, completely feminine, yet in its femininity is also one of a kind. For the one she carried in her womb, gave birth to, fed, and brought

up was God's only Son. She knew this at the very least in faith, and her knowledge was confirmed by her bodily experience. To see this Son die, not only suffering the cruellest physical agony, but forsaken by God, must have been an incomprehensible anguish for her, like a sword piercing through her whole faith. However, just as she never lived or suffered anything privately for herself, but *loco totius humani generis* [in place of the entire human race], her interior sacrifice becomes the fruitful center of all existential sacrifices suffered in the Church (indeed, in humanity) at any time in the past or the future. We can go further: it is Mary's introduction into the heart of the Church that first truly conforms all of the Church's sacrifices to hers and gives the Church its definitive, concrete motherhood towards its children.

We said above that ministerial office (as a *sacrificium externum*) necessarily (Jn 21) requires the *internum* too. If this is so, then we may safely conclude that even the fruitfulness of the "spiritual fatherhood" that priests exercise in relation to the faithful draws essential nourishment from Mary's *sacrificium internum*, which has now entered into the fabric of the Church (hence the feminine images in Gal 4:19 and 1 Thess 2:7).

Mary, under the Cross, does not have to represent the love of the Father, as does the Son, but stands only for the creature, which, together with all other creatures, *she is*. It is therefore unthinkable that Mary could exercise ministerial office in the Church or speak the words "*hoc est corpus meum*" [this is my body] or "*ego te absolvo*" [I absolve you]. After all, this body was once in her body, and she was in accord with God's absolution all along. These words can be meaningfully said only when the one pronouncing them represents *another*.

3. With respect to the Church, however, it becomes clear that both aspects of the Son's being and sacrifice can be made present in it; standing opposite to each other, they must at the same time be intrinsically interrelated. For just as the Son makes present the Father's authority in the world, the Son cannot be made present in the Church without the aspect of christological authority, which, because the Son represents the Father as male, can fall in an organic way only to men.

In natural generation, the man is humiliated by the insignificance of his contribution. In like manner, Peter and the other official representatives of the Lord are humiliated by being installed in office after having fled and denied him during the passion ("Peter was grieved": Jn 21:17). Peter will again and again have to request and borrow the *sacrificium internum* from

the (feminine, marian) Church. It is true, of course, that his appointment to the ministry also implies a total expropriation for the sake of the Church and humanity. Nevertheless, he, the Pope, will again and again have to rely on Mary in order to perform his ministerial service of Christ and God in the fullness of the Church.

Finally, while stressing the analogy between the man-woman relationship and the relationship between the outward and the inward priesthood (and the analogy is fully grounded in the New Testament), we can note that the two priesthoods are inseparable. It is only by inwardly sharing in Jesus' sacrifice under his Eucharistic Cross that Mary's holiness is perfected and personal holiness can grow to maturity in other members of the Church. After all, Jesus does not sacrifice himself for himself, but for us, and the priest does not celebrate the Eucharist for himself, but for the Church and the world of which he is a member. It follows that the Church's personal and feminine faith cannot attain its (socio-psychological) fulfillment in the Church herself, but only in being drawn into the once-only sacrifice of Christ.—Translated by Adrian Walker □