



HOLY ORDERS

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

What is this sacrament?

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: *episcopate*, *presbyterate* and *diaconate*. (1536)

Why a special ministry in the Church?

Christ is himself the source of ministry in the Church. He instituted his Church. He gave her authority and mission, orientation and goal: In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body. The holders of office, who are invested with a sacred power, are in fact, dedicated to promoting the interests of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God may attain to salvation. (874)

By virtue of Christ's authority

No one can give himself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the Gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his own authority, but by virtue of Christ's authority; not as a member of the community, but speaking to it in the name of Christ. No one can bestow grace on himself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorised and empowered by Christ. From him they receive the mission and faculty ('the sacred power') to act *in persona Christi Capitis* [in the person of Christ the Head]. The ministry in which Christ's emissaries do and give by God's grace what they cannot do and give by their own powers, is called a 'sacrament' by the Church's tradition. Indeed, the ministry of the Church is conferred by a special sacrament. (875)

The nature of the apostolic ministry

Its character as service - in the image of him who 'took the form of a slave for us'. (876)

It belongs to the sacramental nature of the ecclesial ministry to have a *collegial character*. The Lord Jesus instituted the Twelve. Chosen together they were sent out together in fraternal unity and fraternal communion. Every bishop exercises his ministry from within the episcopal college, in communion with the bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter, and head of the college. Priests exercise their ministry from within the presbyterium of the diocese, under their bishop. (877)

The sacramental nature of the priestly ministry has a *personal character*. Each one is called personally: 'You, follow me', in order to be a personal witness within the common mission, acting 'in his person' and for other persons: 'I baptise you...' 'I absolve you...'. (878)

The episcopal college and its head, the Pope

Christ instituted the Twelve 'in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them'. (880)

The Lord made Peter alone the 'rock' of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church, and made him shepherd of the whole flock. (881)

The *Pope* is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity both for the bishops and for the whole company of the faithful. He has full supreme power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered. (882)

The *college of bishops* has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head. (883)

The individual *bishops* are the visible source and foundation of unity with their own particular churches. As such they exercise their pastoral ministry over the portion of the People of God assigned to them, assisted by priests and deacons. (886)

The threefold apostolic office

The teaching office. Bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task 'to preach the Gospel to all men', they are heralds of faith, authentic teachers of apostolic faith endowed with the authority of Christ. (Cf. 888-892)

The sanctifying office. The bishop is the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood, especially in the Eucharist which he offers personally or whose offering he assures through the priests, his co-workers. The Eucharist is the centre of life of the particular Church. The bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and work, by their ministry of the word and the sacraments. (893)

The governing office. The bishops govern the particular Churches assigned to them ...by the authority and sacred power which they ought to exercise in the spirit of service which is that of their Master. (Cf. 894-896)

HOLY ORDERS IN GOD'S PLAN

The priesthood of the Old Covenant

The chosen people was constituted by God as 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. God chose one of the twelve tribes, that of Levi, and set it apart for liturgical service; God himself is its inheritance. A special rite constituted the priesthood of the Old Covenant. The priests are 'appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins'. (Heb 5:1) (1539)

This priesthood remained powerless to bring about salvation...which only the sacrifice of Christ would accomplish. (1540)

The Church [of the new Covenant] sees the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites as prefiguring the ordained ministry of the New Covenant. (Cf. 1541-1543)

The one priesthood of Christ

Everything that the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfilment in Christ Jesus, the 'one mediator between God and men'. (1544)

Melchizedek, 'priest of God Most High', prefigures the priesthood of Christ, who has by a single offering perfected for all time those who are sanctified, that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross. (1544)

The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once and for all; yet it is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The same is true of the one priesthood of Christ; it is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood: 'Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers'. (1545)

Two participations in the one priesthood of Christ

The ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate 'each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ'. While being 'ordered to one another' they differ essentially. (1547)

The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the baptismal priesthood, it is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads the Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament [of Holy Orders]. (1547)

In the person of Christ the Head...

In the service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. The priest acts *in persona Christi Capitis* [In the person of Christ the head].

The priest, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration, is truly made like the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself. Christ is the source of all priesthood: the priest of the old law was a figure of Christ, the priest of the new law acts in the person of Christ. (1548)

The presence of Christ in the minister is not to be understood as if the latter were preserved from all human weaknesses. (1550)

This priesthood is *ministerial, a service*. It is entirely related to Christ and to men. It depends entirely on Christ and his unique priesthood. The sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a 'sacred power' which is none other than that of Christ. (1551)

In the name of the whole Church

The priesthood represents Christ the Head before the assembly of the faithful, but also acts in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice. (1552)

'In the name of the whole Church' does not mean priests are delegates of the community. Christ worships in and through his Church. The whole Church, the Body of Christ, prays and offers herself 'through him, with him, in him'. It is because the priesthood represents Christ that it can represent the Church. (1554)

THE THREE DEGREES OF THE SACRAMENT

'The divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees - bishops, priests and deacons'.

There are two degrees in the ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the *episcopacy* and the *presbyterate*. The *diaconate* is intended to help and to serve them. *Sacerdos* denotes bishops and priests but not deacons.

Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of priestly participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called 'ordination', the sacrament of Holy Orders. (1554)

Episcopal ordination - the fullness of Holy Orders

The fullness of Holy Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration, the acme of the sacred ministry. (1557)

The episcopal order has a collegial nature. Several bishops take part in the consecration. A special intervention of the bishop of Rome is required for lawful episcopal ordination, because he is the supreme visible bond of the communion of the particular churches. (1559)

The ordination of priests - co-workers of the bishops

The function of the bishops' ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of priesthood and be co-workers of the episcopal order. (1562)

Through [the sacrament of Holy Orders] priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head. (1563)

Priests are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and to shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship *as true priests of the New Testament*. (1564)

It is in the *Eucharistic assembly* of the faithful that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred office: there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the new Testament, that namely of Christ offering himself once and for all a spotless victim to the Father.

From this unique [Eucharistic] sacrifice their whole ministry draws its strength. (1566)

Priests only exercise their ministry in dependence on the bishop and in communion with him. They form one priestly body in the diocese under their own bishop. (1567-8)

The ordination of deacons - 'in order to serve'

Deacons are ordained 'not unto priesthood, but unto the ministry'. (1569)

Ordination configures them to Christ, who made himself the 'deacon' or servant of all. It is their task to assist the bishop and priests in the celebration of the Eucharist, the distribution of Holy Communion, assisting and blessing marriages, in the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching, presiding over funerals, and in the various ministries of charity. (1570)

WHO CAN CONFER THIS SACRAMENT?

It is for bishops as successors of the apostles to hand on the 'gift of the Spirit', 'the apostolic line'. Validly ordained bishops validly confer the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders. (1576)

WHO CAN RECEIVE THIS SACRAMENT?

Only a validly baptised man (*vir*) validly receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (*vir*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible. (1577)

No one has the right to receive the sacrament. It can only be received as an unmerited gift.

Candidates to the priesthood are called to remain celibate 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'. [Except in the Eastern Churches]. In the East as in the West a man who has already received Holy Orders can no longer marry. (1578; 1580)

THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT

This sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit. (1581)

By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet and king. (1581)

Holy Orders confers an *indelible spiritual character*, and cannot be repeated, or conferred temporarily. (1582)

Since it is Christ who acts, the unworthiness of the ordained minister does not prevent Christ from acting. (1584)

The grace of the Holy Spirit proper to this sacrament is configuration to Christ as Priest, Teacher and Pastor. (1585)

IN BRIEF

- **Since the beginning, the ordained ministry has been conferred and exercised in three degrees: that of bishops, that of presbyters and that of deacons. The ministries conferred by ordination are irreplaceable for the organic structure of the Church: without the bishop, presbyters and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church. (cf. St Ignatius of Antioch) (1593)**