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## Fitting Lay Ministries into a Theology of Ministry

### (2) Making a fit

So old is the classic threefold form of Christian ministry that its historical origins cannot be precisely determined. The fact that the titles and inter-relationships of bishop, presbyter and deacon are observable early in the second century does not tell us as much as the information appears to offer. The principal factor here is our lack of further information about the character of the congregation and of its operations. Nonetheless, it would seem to be wholly unrealistic to anticipate that, in the interests of making itself more pastorally relevant in the early stages of the third millennium, the Great Church of the West might refashion the order of its ministry in any way substantially different from the order it has inherited. Thus, it is not going to be reducing its three-fold ministry to a single univocal ministry with multi-functional operatives sustaining the congregations in their faith and works.

The church's ecumenical interests bolster this position. Among the Orthodox churches the threefold nature of the ordained ministry is simply not negotiable, and the Latin church would never threaten this link between the two traditions. Inside the West itself, the Latin church has also been taking encouragement from the ecumenical expressions of interest in establishing a level of accord on the issue of a threefold

ministry, a situation we have long been familiar with as a result of the Faith and Order paper *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, so soon after having restored the diaconate as a permanent office, the Latin church is not likely to consider pruning the ministry back to the pragmatically shaped two-fold model of bishop and presbyter that operated since the middle ages. Too much papal and conciliar authority along with theological reflection and ecumenical hope has been invested in this redevelopment of diaconate for any expectation of a reversal. In addition, ecclesiastical authorities simply do not like tinkering in such ways. Their preferred *modus operandi* is to leave things in place in the hope that gradual theologizing will reveal a workable solution or at least a face-saving compromise.

If it will not trim the model back, will the hierarchy attach add-ons to its ministerial constitution for the purpose of recognizing and accommodating contemporary lay ministries within the arc of official ministry? The previous article referred to recommendations to this effect.<sup>2</sup> Thomas O'Meara, who is probably the most widely read current writer on ministry, has reflected deeply on the rationale for extending ordination to anyone engaged in pastoral ministry,<sup>3</sup> while Edward Hahnenberg, his

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<sup>1</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1982).

<sup>2</sup> William R. Burrows, *New Ministries: The Global Context* (Melbourne: Dove Communications 1980); Fritz Lobinger, *Like His Brothers and Sisters: Ordaining Community Leaders* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 1999); Winfried Haunerland, "The Heirs of the Clergy? The New Pastoral Ministries and the Reform of the Minor Orders.", *Worship* 75/4(July 2001) 305-20.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Franklin O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, revised edition (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1999) 219-24.

doctoral student, has recommended the introduction of grades of commissioning and ordination that will take account of temporary and permanent roles but will also sidestep the problems immediately raised by the prospect of ordaining women.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, we also encountered Bernard Sesboüé's opinion that the body of the church is not yet ready for a multiplicity of ordained ministries.<sup>5</sup> More significantly, a move in the direction of multiplying ordinations would be counter to the policy enunciated in Paul VI's Motu Proprio of 1972 *Ministeria quaedam*.<sup>6</sup> This was to curtail, indeed to eliminate, "minor" ordinations, a policy developed in the interests of heightening the profile of the "major" ordinations and at the same time intensifying their focus on the work of ministry. Further, the purpose of the more recent Instruction of 1997 *On Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, which was issued in the names of no less than eight Vatican Congregations and Councils, was precisely to advance the exclusive character of the responsibilities for ministry of ordained men.<sup>7</sup> Bestowing titles like "chaplain" and "co-ordinator" on non-ordained collaborators in ministry was banned, and the document

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<sup>4</sup> Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 2003) 176-209.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Sesboüé, "Lay Ecclesial Ministers: A Theological look into the Future," *The Way* 42/3(July 2003) 57-72.

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI, Motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam*, <http://www.romanrite.com/Churchdoc.html> (accessed June 5 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, Eng. trans. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications 1997).

adopted the restricted terminology of ministry apparent in the new Code of Canon Law, as described by Elissa Rinere, rather than the looser style that she identified in the usage within conciliar documents.<sup>8</sup> The current discussion under way in North America, as in the Collegeville Ministry Seminar,<sup>9</sup> appears to have taken little account of this specialist usage in the magisterial documentation, and this situation once again brings to the fore the question of what ministry is.

### WHAT IS MINISTRY?

Accordingly, before any advance can be made on the question of where lay ministries fit among ordained ministries, we need to revisit the issue of whether ministry is a baptismal charism, and thus an inherent capacity of any Christian, or a pastoral function restricted to those who are ordained. Since all are agreed, however, that ministry in the church today is the ministry which important passages about pastoral activities in the New Testament name as *diakonia*, we must take a lead from the thinking there.

In looking to this Greek source, we do need to leave behind the broad associations clustering today around the English word “ministry”. These all arise from legitimate uses of the English word, but they are not necessarily of a uniformly theological weight. That is to say, if Paul were writing today about life in the church, he would not apply the *diakon-* words across such a broad range of activities as we do in speaking of ministry.

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<sup>8</sup> Elissa Rinere, “Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ‘Ministry’ to the Laity,” *The Jurist* 47(1987) 204-27; see also her “Canon Law and Emerging Understandings of Ministry,” in Wood, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 68-84.

<sup>9</sup> Susan K. Wood, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2003).

And yet the much narrower range of his applications of the *diakon-* words are indubitably about the kind of ministry that is essential to the establishing and sustaining of the life of a church. Indeed, one can go so far as to say that a church needs no more ministry than what Paul intended to denote by way of the *diakon-* words.

Paul's principal statement about ministry/*diakonia* is in the section 2 Corinthians 2:14-6:13. Over more than three chapters Paul mounts a spirited apologia for the authenticity of his own apostolic status in the face of visiting critics of his work. While the title of apostle is fundamental to his self-understanding, as he indicates in the address of each of his letters in such phrases as "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (2 Cor 1:1), in his defense of this apostleship he does not once call upon that primary title. Instead, in the course of reviewing the activities his calling has engaged him in and of urging the Corinthians to reflect on their experience of the process he initiated, Paul consistently designates his essential task as *diakonic* in character. Thus we read of his "competence from God" to be a minister (*diakon-*) of a new covenant (2 Cor 3:6); of a ministry (*diakon-*) that dispenses the Spirit of God, justification and glory (3:6-9); of the divine mercy that engaged him in this ministry (*diakon-*) (4:1), which is "the ministry (*diakon-*) of reconciliation" (5:18). His role in delivering this heavenly message constitutes him an "ambassador" for Christ (5:20).

A reading of the passage in the light of the rhetoric that Paul works within here reveals – even in translation – how Paul's concept of ministry supposes an engagement in a process whereby a divine word is committed to the accredited minister and passes entire, under the minister's proclamation, to the recipient who in turn is conscious of communing in that word with the divine. This is the point of Paul's appeal to "the conscience" of everyone (4:2), for Paul is challenging his readers to recognize that their very experience of his ministry among them in Corinth is their best guarantee of the

authenticity of his ministerial activity as compared with their experience under the methods of others who have arrived among them.

Because the *diakon-* words were deeply entrenched in Greek religious discourse – Hermes was the minister/*diakon-* par excellence - they served Paul's purpose here to perfection.<sup>10</sup> Paul could take for granted that the terms were recognizable among Greek-speakers as having singular semantic values, including those attaching to the notion of mediating message from heaven to earth, and for this reason he played upon their potential to the full, confident that the audience would register every nuance. This is why he can at one move change from ministry/*diakon-* terms to the ambassador term (5:20). Either as ambassador or minister Paul is an accredited spokesperson for a deity who delivers a word which is the deity's own. Indeed, as he concludes the passage, Paul easily reverts to his preferred terms. At 6:3-4 we read (NRSV):

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way; so that no fault may be found with our ministry (*diakon-*), <sup>4</sup>but as servants (*diakon-*) of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships...

NRSV's sense is not that "we have commended ourselves as servants of God" but (to borrow Ralph Martin's rendering) "we commend ourselves as ministers do."<sup>11</sup> (This reading is required because Paul uses the Greek accusative for "ourselves" but a

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<sup>10</sup> John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press 1990) 203-205; *Are All Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 44-50; "The Mediatorial Aspect of Paul's Role as *Diakonos*," *Australian Biblical Review* 40(1992) 34-44.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph P Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco, Texas: Word Books 1986) 172.

nominative for “ministers/*diakono*”. Compare Victor Furnish: “as ministers of God should”;<sup>12</sup> similarly Bultmann,<sup>13</sup> and commonly, except in translations of the New Testament.)

The import of this grammatical nicety is that Paul is modeling himself upon pre-existent expectations of what an authentic minister/*diakonos* is. And what that is he proceeds to delineate in the following verses (6:4b-10), particular features being exposure to physical dangers from travel in strange places and restraints imposed by those opposed to his message (“beatings, imprisonments, riots”), but also his own qualities (“patience, kindness”) and endeavors (“labors”). At the centre of this profile of the minister/*diakonos* is the “truthful speech” of the spokesperson and “the power of God” enabling the minister/*diakonos* to be faithful to his mandate in the midst of such disabling possibilities (6:7; Martin refers neatly to this catalogue as an “Identi-kit picture”).

#### MINISTRY UNDER MANDATE

What emerges from Paul’s apologia is that in delivering the gospel against such odds and in sustaining a church the minister that Paul depicts is operating under a mandate. In Paul’s own case the mandate is under Christ or God, and the mandate imposes a responsibility upon the minister different from responsibilities that might exist among members of a believing community. In fact, I believe that this differentiation between the mandated minister and the believing member of a community is the essential factor determining Paul’s analysis of gifts in the church (1 Cor 12:4-7). Having argued this

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<sup>12</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1984) 343.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1976) 171.

reading more than once elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> I note here only the difference it makes to our understanding of the charismatic endowment of the church.

When Paul states that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4), he issues a programmatic or generic statement about each church, namely, each church is replete with gifts of the Spirit. He implies in fact that the gathering is church only in so far as it lives and acts within the Spirit. When Paul proceeds, however, to two further statements about “varieties of services” and “varieties of activities” (12:5-6), his intention is to divide the generic set of gifts into two groupings of specific gifts, namely, those to do with “services” and those to do with “activities”. The first grouping, designated in NRSV “services”, Paul designates *diakonai*, by which he means the mandated apostolic activities or ministries that he would soon describe in 2 Corinthians and to which he had already alluded in 1 Corinthians when identifying the functions of Apollos and himself (1 Cor 3:5, “Servants/*diakono*i through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each.”)

In emphasizing the consistency of Paul’s patterns of thought and expression in all matters relating to apostolic ministry/*diakonia*, I draw attention to Andrew Clarke’s

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<sup>14</sup> John N. Collins, *Are All Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 125-30; “The Mediatorial Aspect of Paul’s Role as *Diakonos*,” *Australian Biblical Review* 40(1992) 34-44; “Ministry as a distinct category among charismata (1 Corinthians 12:4-7),” *Neotestamentica* 27/1(1993) 79-91; “A Ministry for Tomorrow’s Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33/2(Spring 1995) 172-73; *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new* (Leominster, UK/Harrisburg, PA: Gracewing/Morehouse 2002/03) 81-84.

attempt to downgrade the *diakonic* terminology when discussing the same material.<sup>15</sup> In gospel narrative he recognizes lowly connotations attaching to instances of the *diakon-* words and proposes that these values should apply to the *diakon-* words Paul introduces into his discussion of ministerial activities. This reading would see Paul placing “a significant emphasis on the servile nature” of his ministry.<sup>16</sup> Such a proposal is acceptable, however, only in so far as it is a legitimate hermeneutical exercise to transfer values of the *diakon-* words as they occur in a context of narrative or ethical instruction in the gospels to the same words as they occur in the different level of discourse upon which Paul operates in his discussion about apostolic ministry. Paul’s ministerial discourse creates its own context and imposes its own semantic contours on the *diakon-* words there. In addition, these contours coincide precisely with stylistic and semantic characteristics evident in other Christian and non-Christian rhetoric about the delivery of messages to and from heaven and about the mediation of effects (e. g., light and sound) from one environment to another.<sup>17</sup>

#### MANDATED MINISTRY IN LUKE

Writers later than Paul in the New Testament evidence the same sense of a mandated ministry within the church. We see this at Ephesians 4:12, where, contrary to understandings represented in translations and most commentaries, the ministry/*diakonia* is not predicated of the “saints” but of the teachers given to the church

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans 2000) 233-47.

<sup>16</sup> Clarke 245.

<sup>17</sup> Collins, *Diakonia* 203-05; “The Mediatorial Aspect”.

by Christ on high.<sup>18</sup> This is the ministry/*diakonia* whose mandate the writer urges Timothy to fulfil (2 Tim 4:5).

In this respect Luke is of particular interest for the churches of today. His narrative of the re-constitution of The Twelve after the death of Judas opens with Jesus mandating “the apostles” (Acts 1:2) to be witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (1:8), and develops with Peter advocating a replacement for Judas “in this ministry/*diakonia*” (1:17). In due course the eleven pray over the two qualified candidates (1:24-25):

“Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take the place in this ministry/*diakonia* and apostleship...”

After the casting of lots, Matthias was duly accepted as “chosen” by the Lord to enter into ministry.

In a remarkable development later in Luke’s narrative, Paul himself, another like Matthias who had not received a mandate for ministry with the Eleven from the risen Lord, expresses to the Ephesian elders at the end of his career in Asia (Acts 20:24) his prayer to “finish my course and the ministry/*diakonia* that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.” By the careful deployment of this ministerial codeword, Luke indicates that the founding apostolic mandate was extended in the case of Paul by heaven’s intervention – the Lord designated Paul “an instrument whom I have chosen” (9:15) - and, in the instance of Matthias, by the church’s own devices.

The mandate of Paul and the Twelve was, as Luke named it, “the ministry/*diakonia* of the word” (6:4). And this was the mandate that the church as a body, after due consideration and in consultation with the Twelve, brought the Seven under in the midst of prayer and through a commissioning ritual (Acts 6:1-6). That we subsequently hear of the Seven Hellenist men only as evangelists – in the persons of Stephen (Acts 7) and

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<sup>18</sup> Collins, *Diakonia* 233-34; *Are All Christians Ministers?* 17-34.

Philip (8:5; 21:8) – must suggest that their original mandate in Jerusalem was not the physical care of the Hellenist widows but the nurturing in them, through their own language, of the word of God.<sup>19</sup>

#### MINISTRY VERSUS PROPHECY

Each of these three scenarios of the ministries of the Twelve, the Seven and Paul places at centre stage a mandate from the Lord or from the church that is constitutive of the respective ministries. Minor details of this characteristic of early church life are observable in regard to other individuals as well, as in Phoebe, the church's delegate to Rome (Rom 16:1), Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15), Archippus (Col 4:17), Tychichus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:18), and, I would suggest, Onesimus (Phm 13), although in such cases commonly used translations might not lead us to think so. An ecclesial mandate is also clearly in evidence in relation to the ministry/*diakonia* mentioned in Paul's references to the Asian collection for Jerusalem (Rom 15:22-29; 2 Cor 8; 9) and in Luke's references to the Antiochian delegation to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; 12:24-25). Certainly such sources would not lead us to suspect that the early Christian groups were reliant on charismatic inspirations within their own midst before ministry arose among them. The known ministers among them had been sent. That is the point of the ministerial terminology they elected to use.<sup>20</sup>

That prophecy was also a feature of early Christian praxis and is recognizable as charismatic in the modern sense is clear from Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 14, but prophecy in this sense was, nonetheless, an intra-church phenomenon for the enrichment of the community and with inbuilt controls as recommended there by Paul.

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<sup>19</sup> Collins, *Are All Christians Ministers?* 36-40; *Deacons and the Church* 47-58.

<sup>20</sup> See the chapter "Emissaries in the Church" in Collins, *Diakonia* 217-26.

There is no indication that it was the basic instrument of evangelization. That prophets appear here and there in the broader narrative (Acts 6:27; Rom 12:6; Eph 4:11; Didache, etc.) does little to inform us of their role and significance for the development of the early churches, and the very obscurity speaks rather of a practice and process that was soon superseded.

### MINISTRY AND THREEFOLD ORDER

All we eventually know of the established ministries structured into the early church is what we can construe of the threefold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon that entered history. Because in due course – but before the accommodations of the fourth century – this threefold order established itself as the instrument of the church's growth, one course open to us in our desire to work from an authentic tradition towards a reformation of contemporary church order is to trace a connection between ministerial processes we have identified in the New Testament and the established threefold order. Those few original ministerial processes were sufficient to found and to sustain Christian groups that saw themselves in a dynamic relationship both with the past and with a future into which they envisaged the tradition expanding.

What the threefold order was attempting to maintain in the church was due observance of the Lord's mandate to witness to his word. Prior to its emergence, Pauline ministry had already demonstrated that churches developed through activities centered on the ecclesial implications of the ministry/*diakonia* of the word. Mission for witness was central to the apostolic endeavor that the New Testament called ministry/*diakonia* (as it underlay also the prophetic activity just alluded to). How bishop and presbyter were understood to function as instruments of this elemental responsibility of the church is not difficult to surmise. It was as holders of the word and teachers of the community, and in both capacities an essential connection was with ritual, in particular

with entry into the Christian body through baptism and with proclaiming the mystery of the Lord's death and abiding presence in the assembly. Determining the respective roles of bishop and presbyters in these small congregations is beyond the scope of the present article and is of less import than their shared focus on the word of God, evident still in the remains of later apses which had provided chair and benches for the presider and the presbyterate.

When and for what purpose the diaconate attached itself to this order is not at all clear, nor is it clear that its role within the Roman church of the fourth century – so strongly criticized in the anonymous pamphlet “On the arrogance of deacons”<sup>21</sup> – was connatural with its origins. One constant in the documentary evidence is the linguistic affinity between the *diakonos* and the *episkopos*. Indeed this appears in both early and later writings in the New Testament (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13), and speaks at once of a strong relationship between a superior or senior figure of a community and an associate executive, but to what precise purpose other than the support of a Christian community we have difficulty determining.

#### THE DEACON'S MINISTRY

The strong relationship between deacon and bishop remained, however, and accompanied the future development of the office of deacon until its effective demise. So obvious is the relationship that it is futile to attempt to find the rationale of the early deacon instead in works of charity, even if these were to be understood as operations in the name of the bishop. Nowhere in ancient sources is it possible to establish an innate correlation between diaconate and works of love, and likewise nowhere in Christian

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<sup>21</sup> “De iactantia Romanorum leviticorum” in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 50(1908, Johnson Reprint 1963) 193-98.

sources are there grounds to argue that the deacon's title makes of the deacon a symbol par excellence of Christ the Servant, which would appear to be the preferred understanding in most modern theology,<sup>22</sup> including that of the International Theological Commission.<sup>23</sup> My book *Deacons and the Church* – which is to be distinguished from the more recent book by Owen Cummings of the same title<sup>24</sup> - attempted to expose the inadequacy of this approach.

Because in recent years the question of diaconate has occasioned much discussion of its availability for women, a particular theological evaluation by Gerhard Müller warrants comment. He has argued that the close association of deacon and bishop has established an inherently sacerdotal orientation of the diaconate, a consequence of

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<sup>22</sup> Hervé Legrand, "Le diaconat dans sa relation à la théologie de l'Église et des réception et devenir du diaconat depuis Vatican II," in André Haquin and Philippe Weber, eds, *Diaconat XXXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Brussels: Lumen Vitae/Cerf/Novalis/Labor Fides 1997) 13-41; Theodore W. Kraus, *The Order of Deacons: A Second Look* (Hayward, CA: Folger Graphics 1997) 112-15; Dorothea Reininger, *Diakonat der Frau in der Einen Kirche* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag 1999) 629-31; Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church: How traditional roles can serve the Christian community today*, Eng. trans. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 2003) 25-28; Paul M. Zulehner, *Dienende Männer – Anstifter zur Solidarität: Diakone in Westeuropa* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag 2003) 27-43.

<sup>23</sup> "Il diaconato: evoluzione e prospettive" *La civiltà cattolica* 154/1 (February 2003) 310.

<sup>24</sup> Owen F. Cummings, *Deacons and the Church* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press 2004). For my *Deacons and the Church* see note 14.

which would be the ineligibility of women for ordination as deacons.<sup>25</sup> The argument would appear to lose much of its relevance, however, when we consider that sacerdotal understandings of bishop and presbyter developed only subsequently to the association of deacon and bishop. Of course the early conviction that the deacon was ordained “not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry [*diakonia*]” (cited in *Lumen Gentium* 29)<sup>26</sup> adds substance to this critique of Müller,<sup>27</sup> and strongly suggests that we look elsewhere than to charity for an explanation of the relationship. What the linguistic factors point to is, in fact, a diaconal role that consists in a relationship of agency between deacon and bishop. The deacon would emerge as the associate executive already referred to. And of course, outside of the Christian tradition, the whole literary history of the *diakonos* as agent – of heavenly prime movers as of political and military officers – is immediately relevant to this understanding of deacon and bishop.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of the deacon as an agent in sacred affairs takes on a greater relevance when we link it with the fact that the deacon receives a sacramental ordination, especially since we must view this fact in the light of the permanency of the

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<sup>25</sup> Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Priestertum und Diakonat: Der Empfänger des*

*Weihesakramentes in schöpfungstheologischer und christologischer Perspektive* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag 2000) 35-36.

<sup>26</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Eng. trans. (Dublin: Dominican Publications 1977) 387.

<sup>27</sup> See also Phyllis Zagano, *Holy Saturday: An argument for the restoration of the female diaconate in the Catholic Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 2000) 65-68.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, *Diakonia* 133-49.

diaconate. Being no longer the step to priesthood or episcopacy that it was for most of its history nor a career path, it must answer to the church for the sacrament through which it has come about. In one sense the Second Vatican Council expected much of the new diaconate as “a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy” (*Lumen Gentium* 29) and in assigning it roles in “the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel, and of works of charity” (ibid.) These assignments, however, were never more closely described,<sup>29</sup> and the result has been that a diversity of diaconates co-exist in today’s church – but in those places only where bishops have felt confident enough about its role description to institute some form of it.

#### DEACONS AND LAY MINISTRIES

The new situation of a church inadequately resourced to meet its pastoral responsibilities in terms of word and sacrament is now making a nonsense of recent developments. On the one hand, the diaconate has been restored as a major initiative

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<sup>29</sup> The list of eleven functions in Paul VI’s General Norms of 1967 is representative only and was not presented as constituting the pastoral role of deacons. In the light of concluding remarks above, however, we can read here a full pastoral program for a team of deacons in any parish. See Appendix 1, General Norms for Restoring the Permanent Diaconate in the Latin Church, in Patrick McCaslin and Michael G. Lawler, *Sacrament of Service* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press 1986), pp. 135-136 (number 22). The account of “The Diaconal Ministry” in the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 1998), pp. 100-118, marks no advance on this; in acknowledging the “different forms” diaconal ministry takes, the directory eschews any attempt to draw up a definitive description of diaconal ministry, its listings mainly clarifying what is canonically permitted.

for the renewal of the church's vitality but remains underresourced and indeed dysfunctional (see evidence in the overview by Sherri Vallee<sup>30</sup>) – I direct this comment at the institution and not at individual deacons, who so often embody the highest ideals of the gospel – while on the other hand a raft of lay ministries has taken shape in response to genuine pastoral demands and yet these new ministers have no assured future in the church. In the unlikely event that the rundown in priest numbers is reversed, what prospects would lay ecclesial ministers look to?

In the face of any such conundrum, the new ecclesial situation actually carries the key to its resolution. Instead of introducing a new tier of hierarchical order to accommodate the new ministers, the ecclesial authorities could extend to the new ministers an invitation to receive sacramental ordination as deacons. Of its nature, which is within the field of agency in the name of the gospel, the diaconate is a commodious and versatile facility that for far too long most ecclesial authorities have misunderstood and underrated. The most honest contemporary attempt on the part of a major church to move in this direction has been in the report *For such a time as this: A renewed diaconate in the Church of England*.<sup>31</sup> The sad history of this report, however, in the General Synod of November 2001, where it was sidetracked in the name of pre-

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<sup>30</sup> Sherri L. Vallee, "The Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate: A Blending of Rules" *Worship* 77/6(November 2003) 530-52.

<sup>31</sup> Church of England Working Party of the House of Bishops, *For such a time as this: A renewed diaconate in the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing 2001).

existing lay ministries (specifically, the Anglican Lay Readership)<sup>32</sup> stands as one more warning to advocates of innovation in the church's order to do their homework closely. To cap the attractiveness of this innovation within the Roman Catholic Church in its increasingly dire situation, the theology of diaconate - in the light at least of the ancient *diakonia* - generates no impediment to the ordination of women.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Peter Owen's report "General Synod of the Church of England – November 2001 Group of Sessions 12 to 15 November 2001," 25 November 2001: "...there was concern that distinctive deacons, as described in the report, seemed very little different from readers and other lay ministers. Synod was asked to commend the report for study and ecumenical responses but declined to do so; instead the report was returned to the Archbishops' Council so that the roles of Readers, pastoral assistants and Church Army Officers could be examined as well." (Accessed online <http://anglicanonline.org/news/articles/2001/CofEsynod1101.html> June 5 2004.)

<sup>33</sup> For comments on the versatility of the diaconate see the closing observations of Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald in *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press 1999) 193-98; also my paper at a conference on Women Deacons in Hobart, November 2002, "Making Better Use of Deacons" at <http://www.ocw.webcentral.com.au/John%20Collins.htm>.