

a master of today, Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., has repeatedly declared that contemplation is in 'la voie normale de la sainteté': some measure of contemplation is normal for all who are trying to lead a holy life. It may not be universal, but it is normal, to gaze quietly at God, even if only for a second, with a deep conviction of his presence. It is the *theôria*, or 'gazing', which the Greek fathers spoke of. St Teresa said that it is for the soul to 'gaze at him who is gazing at us' (*Vida* 13). And we are back with St Gregory of Nyssa at speaking with God, as Moses did, 'as a man is wont to speak to his friend'.



## THE SACRAMENTS: V—ORDER

LAURENCE BRIGHT, O.P.

THE sacrament of order is much less familiar to most people than the sacraments which have so far been considered. Every Catholic has been baptized, confirmed, has gone to confession; many are married or have assisted at a marriage; very few have taken part in an ordination. The priesthood is often falsely thought of as a special privileged state, remote from the Catholic community at large, and naturally there is little interest in the sacrament by which priests are made. We must therefore begin by getting an idea of the meaning of priesthood in relation to the whole Christian people.

A priest is a man who offers sacrifice to God. In the Old Testament we find careful regulations for the offering of ritual sacrifices of every kind by the official priests. But here at once we also find a warning against any narrow interpretation of the word 'sacrifice'. For the prophets speak strongly against sacrifices which are merely external; however exactly the holocausts are performed in accordance with the rubrics of the law, they are not pleasing to God unless they are true signs of an inward disposition of heart. We begin to see that sacrifice must extend to a total offering of self to God, beyond the symbolic offering of some possession.

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise' (Psalm 1, 19). It is this notion

of sacrifice which lies behind the classical Augustinian definition of it as 'anything done in order to unite us to God in one holy society'.

Corresponding to these two ideas of sacrifice in the Old Testament, the narrow and the wide, we have two ideas of priesthood—not necessarily with any sense of opposition. On the one hand there were the Levitical priests offering the official ritual sacrifice as representatives of the people, and on the other hand the whole nation itself, able to 'offer to God the sacrifice of praise' (Psalm xlix, 14). For the nation as such is seen in scripture as a holy people, holy because of its special call from God: set apart from other nations, alone able to respond to the holiness of God. In this sense the result of the covenant is to make Israel a nation of priests, offering their hearts and minds to him in true inward worship. 'If therefore you will hear my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my peculiar possession above all people, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation' (Exodus xix, 5-6). In the first sense it is natural to think of the Levites as mediators between God and the people, 'ordained for men in the things that appertain to God' (Hebrews v, 1). In the second sense it is also possible to see Israel as mediating between God and the other nations, though this is a more difficult idea and one for which there is not much evidence in scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Any tension between these two ideas was resolved at the coming of our Lord, for his sacrificial death was the outward sign of perfect inward conformity to the will of his Father—'he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross' (Philippians ii, 8). As the epistle to the Hebrews shows, there was no further need of a Levitical priesthood that 'served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things', for these things had now come about. In the Christian dispensation there is but one priest and one sacrifice. The word *hiereus* (priest) is used of no other individual but our Lord, not only in the New Testament, but in patristic writing until well into the second century. Yet because the tension between inward and exterior worship had been healed, it could continue to be used of the whole community, the new Israel, just as it had once been applied to 'Israel after the flesh'. The passage from Exodus

<sup>1</sup> For much of what follows I must acknowledge my debt to Père Congar's important book, *Lay People in the Church* (London, 1957).

that has just been quoted is taken up in St Peter's reference to the Church as 'a spiritual house, a holy priesthood', or again as 'a kingly priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Peter ii, 5, 9) and in the mention of us in the Apocalypse as 'a kingdom and priests to God' (i, 6). The explanation is given in the long argument of the epistle to the Hebrews, in which the high-priest of the old law, entering each year into the inner sanctuary alone, is contrasted with our Lord who entered the sanctuary of the heavens once and for all, not alone, but taking with him all the people. In more familiar Pauline theology, the Christian people can share in the priesthood that offers holy obedience to God, since together they form but a single body with Christ.

Yet we know that there is also a hierarchy of priests in the Church: what can be said of this? There is no need to be disconcerted by the lack of evidence for it in the early texts. Its existence is presupposed in the celebration of the Eucharist, of which these same texts speak plainly. The fact is that the first Christians were more aware than we of the representative (sacramental) nature of the eucharistic sacrifice. Just as the Eucharist only shows forth again the one sacrifice of the cross, and applies it to the faithful, so the earthly priesthood ordained to celebrate the sacrament merely shows forth again the priesthood of Christ. All the reality is from heaven. This is the sense in which the early apologists were prepared to deny that Christians had altars and sacrifices on earth, and in which the new functional terminology of *episcopos* (superintendent) and *presbyteros* (elder) was devised. We need not doubt that the rite of the laying on of hands, by which for example we read that Timothy was ordained (1 Timothy iv, 14) had the same significance that it has today. Our Lord instituted the sacrament of order at the same moment in which he commanded 'do this for the commemoration of me'. There is ample justification for the second-century introduction of the modern terminology of priesthood and sacrifice in connection with the official public worship of God on earth. But something has perhaps been lost in the blurring of the distinction between priesthood in this sense and that common to all, by which the people of God offer to him the sacrifice of a holy life, and which will alone remain in heaven after sacramental worship has come to an end.

We have still to see in what sense lay-people, as distinct from

the priesthood dedicated to liturgical worship, can be said to share in that work. Here St Thomas makes the interesting suggestion (*S.T.* III, 63, 1-6) that the character associated with certain sacraments, and which has already been discussed in connection with confirmation,<sup>2</sup> is given for the purpose of public worship. The grace which comes from the sacraments, depending on our inward dispositions, is for our personal life in the Church, but a permanent character is also given because we have also to play a part in her public life of worship. This character therefore represents our share in the life of Christ precisely as he is priest, a share given in different degrees by baptism, confirmation, and finally by ordination. A priest by his ordination character has the power to minister in the person of Christ, performing the liturgy which Christ instituted, and handing on its fruits to the rest of the community; but similarly a layman by his baptismal character has the power to assist at this celebration and to receive its fruits. The difference of degree in which we share in the priesthood of Christ leads us naturally to think of a hierarchy of function in the Church, such as the very name *order* implies. In speaking of the priesthood common to all we saw our share as coming from the fact that we form one body with Christ; from the present point of view we should see him as head of the body, having power and authority over it, and sharing that power and authority in unequal degrees. Though priests have to serve and minister in the Church on behalf of the people, they have authority from above, and stand in the place of Christ.

Other powers are of course included in the priestly office. The Bishop holds the place of an Apostle in relation to his flock; he governs, guards the deposit of faith, and preaches the gospel. He delegates these powers to his priests and in some degree to the laity (are we not all called to be apostles?). But such powers, in so far as they belong to the priestly office, flow from the power to celebrate the liturgy. We cannot separate faith and sacraments: the official place for reading and expounding the Gospel is at Mass. That is why the sacrament of order is given in the course of a solemn public celebration of the Eucharist by the head of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the presence of his priests and people.

This essential connection of the sacrament with the sacrificial aspect of worship explains why the power to give valid orders

<sup>2</sup> *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, February 1957.

can be lost by those who separate themselves from the Church. These articles are not meant to deal with matters of controversy, but the question of the validity of orders is of such importance in this country, and so often misunderstood, that something must be said about it.<sup>3</sup> As we have already mentioned, the external action or 'matter' of the rite is that which has been used from apostolic times for the handing on of spiritual power. The bishop lays his hands on the head of the man he is ordaining (in the case of the ordination of a priest, other priests, who form with the bishop but a single body, may also share in this action). As in the other sacraments, the minister must say certain words, the 'form', in order to make this action effective by defining its meaning. These words express the faith of the Church, which has received the supernatural meaning of the rite from our Lord himself. Now it is curious to note that it was only in 1947 that the Church declared the exact form of words, a part of the preface sung by the ordaining bishop, which was essential for the validity of the rite of ordination. Before that there was considerable controversy among theologians as to the exact point in the rite at which the sacrament was given. Indeed we know that historically a wide variety of liturgies has been validly used to ordain priests and bishops. In view of this, and of the fact that even the form as now known makes no explicit reference to the sacrificial function of priests, it might be supposed that any rite meant to set men aside for the ministry would be valid.

But in looking at the words used in any rite, we must remember that their meaning is a matter of human usage and convention. A rite may contain no explicit reference at all to the meaning of priesthood, and yet its historical context can show that it was clearly intended to ordain priests in the Catholic sense. On the other hand, a rite in which it is clear that the word 'priest' is being used in some sense contrary to the orthodox one cannot be valid. Where a rite has been deliberately changed from that in use in the Church, we have to consider its objective meaning, and look at what may loosely be called 'the intention of its framers' to see if it is valid or not. It was from this point of view that Leo XIII in his bull *Apostolicae Curae* condemned the Edwardine and subsequent Anglican ordinals. He said that the 'native character and spirit' of the Anglican rite was such as to make it impossible to

<sup>3</sup> Here my debt is to *Anglican Orders*, by Francis Clark, S.J. (London 1956).

suppose that it could be used in a Catholic sense.

In this connection it is perhaps worth discussing briefly the question of intention in the administration of a sacrament. The Church teaches that any minister must personally intend 'at least to do what the Church does'.<sup>4</sup> The reason is that the minister of a sacrament, though an instrument in the hands of God, acts as a human being, not as a machine (*S.T.* III, 64, 8). The sacraments would otherwise be mere magic. The minister need not believe in the efficacy of what he is doing: his personal faith is not in question, and we know that even pagans can give valid baptism. He may even declare that the effect of the sacrament he is giving is other than the Church says it is, but at least he must have the general Christian intention to do what she does. If he should explicitly reject what is an essential part of the Sacramental meaning, such as the very power to sacrifice in the case of orders, then this act of will contradicts and cancels out any general intention he may have had to do what Christ instituted. We must of course have clear evidence of this; *Apostolicae Curae* says that the Church judges intention only so far as it is externally manifested. In the case of Anglican ordinations, this judgment is not made about the intention of every bishop. Unlike the judgment about defect of form, which is general, it bears only on the key case of the consecration of Matthew Parker, on which all other Anglican ordinations depend. The evidence for the intention of his consecrators is given by the fact that they deliberately used a rite which had been substituted for the Catholic one, and which in its historical context can be seen to exclude the conferring of a sacrificial priesthood.

I am all too aware of a deep division in the manner in which I have treated the sacrament of order in this article: it is a long way from the general theological treatment with which I began, to the details of a sixteenth-century ordination. Yet the principle that emerges from this is surely a great one, the principle that sacraments are human things as well as divine, and that God asks for our co-operation rather than force our wills to continue his gift of divine life on the earth. The decision of the Church in the matter of Anglican orders must have been agonizing to make; she could not have decided otherwise without renouncing her guardianship of human dignity in face of God.

<sup>4</sup> *Saltem faciendi quod facit Ecclesia*, Trent, session VII, canon 14.