

To be a Christ to the Community: Challenges to Priestly Life and Ministry

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People need priests and priests need people. Spiritual leadership touches the most fundamental dimension of human beings. Human's innate nature of transcendence to reach God, needs the assistance of others who have already experienced and are empowered to help people to encounter God. Therefore, in all religions, priest is considered to be a mediator between humans and God. Priests take the sacrifices and prayers to God and bring his blessings and commands to the people. Thus, priesthood acquires its meaning and relevance from the need of the people to remain in dynamic and conscious relation to God, for the externalization of the ontological inter-relationship between God and humans.

God needs priests. It is a basic Christian theological principle that God does not relate with humans beyond, beneath, over and above the created realities. God always relates and communicates through the medium of creation and especially through humans, the crown of creation. Every human being is called to be a medium of God's relation with other humans and the world. In the final analysis everyone is a priest! The ultimate and definitive manifestation of the mediation between God and humans and their world is through Jesus Christ, both God and human. The absolute

mediation of Jesus Christ is expressed in the first letter to Timothy. "God wills all human beings to be saved and come to the knowledge of Truth and there is only one mediator between God and humans, the human Jesus Christ." (I Tim 2:4-5). In him the priesthood of all humans is summed up and perfected. In this eschatological time no other priesthood is valid except the priesthood of Christ. Therefore, any so called priesthood is a sharing in the priesthood of Christ. Any human being is a priest to the extent that person is a part of the reality of Christ. Any Christian is a priest by his or vocation to be incorporated into the Body of Christ through baptism. Any ordained minister in the Church is a priest through his human and Christian vocation as well as through the specific vocation to serve the people of God by making Christ present in the community that all can encounter Christ and grow in their divine vocation. Thus, Christian priesthood is a sacramental continuation of the priesthood of Christ and its meaning can be derived only from the fact that is an actualization of the mediating and reconciling mission of Christ in the world through the power of the Spirit.

1. Biblical Understanding of Priest as a Mediator

The meaning of priesthood and priestly functions in the Old Testament can be understood only in the background of the evolution of priesthood and the exercise of priestly functions in the other religions of the Ancient Near-East. In fact, the priesthood of the OT evolved in dialogue with the priesthood of other religions. Therefore, we can see a lot of similarities and dissimilarities with the priestly traditions in the OT and the religions of Ancient Near East. In all the Ancient Near-East religions priest was considered to be the official mediator between God and humans standing on the side of God bringing his plans and purposes for humans through oracles and commands, blessings and curses to the people as well

as standing on the side of people taking their prayers and sacrifices to God. It was believed too, that as official mediators they were graced with a divine power within or a charisma, because of the position they hold in the family, society or in the nation. Therefore, it was natural to believe that the heads of families, chiefs of clans or tribes or the Kings of the nations possessed the priestly power to offer sacrifices to God and communicate God's will to the people. They could be considered natural priests. At the same time there were also professional priests who became priests because they belonged to a priestly family or tribe, or they were ordained or commissioned or elected by the community to be their priest because the community recognized in some persons the manifestation of a certain power of the divine within. In all religions that existed before or contemporaneous with the OT religion had both natural and professional priests.

The OT account of the evolution of priesthood in Israel in terms of mediatorship shows that there were also both natural and professional priests in Israel. From the time of Abraham to David the natural priests performed cultic functions (Jdg. 13:19, 8;27 etc.). The professional priests were at the sanctuaries like Shiloh (I Sam.1:3f), Dan (Jdg 18:30), Gilgal (Jos4:19f) and Bethel (Jdg.20:26f) giving oracles and keeping the custody of the sacred objects like the Ark. From the time of David to Exile, the King became the natural priest, the mediator between Yahweh and Israel (Ps 2:6f and I Kings8:14f). David as a King was a natural priest offering sacrifice to Yahweh before the Ark (II Sam 6:114). The identity and function of royal priesthood is well expressed in the Psalm 110 which is later interpreted as referring to the eschatological Messiah who would be a priest forever. Though there is no consensus among the exegetes about the origin of the official priestly mediation in the OT all agree that in the course of time there emerged a Levitical class with the official mediating

function. The mediating function of Levitical priesthood is mentioned in Dt.33:8 -10: a) Mediating the knowledge of God's will through the Ephod and the Urim and Thummim (I Sam 14:41f); b) Instructing on the meaning of Law to the people; c) offering sacrifices. From the time of Exile to Jesus there was a further evolution in the mediating functions of the priesthood. The natural priesthood expressed through the royal priesthood ended with the Exile as the monarchy was no more. The professional priesthood became a cultic priesthood as its mediating function was expressed through offering sacrifices. Interpreting and teaching the Law or religious instruction, which was also a priestly function, was taken over by the Scribes. At the time of Jesus Jewish priesthood was reduced to a cultic priesthood with only an ascending mediatory function that of offering sacrifices to Yahweh.

Unlike the priesthood of other religions where only individuals were mediators or priests, the OT reveals that the whole community - Israel (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6) and the later the Church (I Pet 2:9) - is a priestly people. They were a kingdom of priests. Their mediating function was to experience the faithfulness and covenantal love of Yahweh and proclaim it to the nations so that the entire world could encounter the true God. However, Israel failed in its priestly function of mediating God's love to other nations by considering themselves as a chosen people without recognizing their priestly function. Only a remnant remained faithful to Yahweh.(Is 11.11-16) and the early Church believed that Jesus, the eternal priest, was from the holy remnant of Israel.

II. Jesus Christ, the Priest

The New Testament confesses that Jesus Christ is the only priest. The cultic priesthood of the OT was abolished by Jesus who was a lay person according to Jewish religious standards.

But the early community recognized in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, the absolute fulfillment of all human priesthood because in Jesus Christ, the mediation between God and humans reached its climax. Ontologically, he is the only one Person in whom God and human meet in the maximum possible way, which the Church expressed as hypostatic union using Greek categories of thought. The early Church encountered him as the only mediator between God and humans (I Tim. 2:5) fulfilling once and for all the mediating function of priests. Thus, Jesus was encountered, recognized and confessed as *the* priest because he effected through his life, death and resurrection, the reconciliation between God and humanity (II Cor 5:18).

The Apostolic community experienced, recognized and interpreted the death of Jesus as a reconciling and redeeming sacrifice using the OT symbols of Blood of the Covenant (Mk: 14:24; Rom 3:25, Eph 1:7), the Paschal Lamb (I Cor 5:7; Joh 19:36, Rev. 5:9) etc., or using the theological formula "for you" ("to give his life as a ransom *for many*," Mk 10:45); "This is my body which is given *for you* (Lk 22:19).

In the Letter to the Hebrews a systematic theological explanation is given how Jesus is a priest and how the sacrifice of his life on the cross becomes the 'once and for all' perfect sacrifice that makes all other sacrifices obsolete and meaningless. Now on only Jesus is the Priest. The sacrifice he has made on the cross abolished all other sacrifices and cult. Hence no other priesthood is valid other than that of Christ and no other sacrifice is valid other than that of the 'once and for all' sacrifice of Christ. Jesus is both natural priest because of his divine sonship (Heb 1:2) and professional priest because he was commissioned or ordained by the Father (Heb.5:5; 7:20). His perfect sacrifice is his self-gift to the Father on the cross. Thus, as Jesus is constituted as the priest for ever in the power of the Spirit, all priesthood after Christ is

meaningful only because of its union with the priesthood of Christ. The Christian priesthood, both the common priesthood of the people (I Pet 2;9) and the ministerial priesthood of those who are called to serve the priestly people is a participation in the priesthood of Christ. Thus the early community believed and proclaimed Jesus Christ as priest, prophet and king for ever.

The priesthood of Christ abolished all cultic priesthood and ritual sacrifices. Any valid sacrifice is a sacramental re-membering of the sacrifice of Christ where Christ himself is the priest who offers the sacrifice of himself and into him and into his sacrifice all the believers are formally incorporated. He is the victim and the Priest who offers the victim, namely, himself, all humans and the entire creation. In him everything is united in heaven and on earth. The 'once and for all' mediation between God and humans is achieved. There is no more separation between God and humans except that is willfully done by humans by turning against God.

Therefore, in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ all humans and human history are involved. There cannot be any more cult or sacrifices except the sacramentally renewable sacrifice of Christ. Every cult is subordinated to the building of authentic communion among humans and God. Every authentic cult can only be the expression of the communion between God and humans and humans among themselves established in and through the one and only Priest, Jesus Christ. In him all human priesthood receive its meaning and purpose. Priesthood is for the building up of communion among all that exists. The Christian priesthood achieves its meaning and relevance only by actualizing and continuing the 'communion-building' function of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a transition from a cult-centred priesthood to community-centred priesthood is, thus, the core of the NT understanding of the priesthood.

II. Living Christ, the Priest and Leading as Christ, the Priest

It is the vocation of every Christian to live the priesthood of Christ. Therefore, the NT gives much importance to the common priesthood of all the faithful. At the moment of baptism one is incorporated into the Body of Christ and becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. Both the incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit make an ontological transformation of the believer into a new creation. (II Cor 5:18). This is the foundation of the common priesthood of the people. I Pet 2:9 explicitly states that Christians are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that they may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. The priestly function of the people of God is to offer up sacrifice of praise to God and at the same time they should not neglect doing good (Heb 13:13.). They should become a 'living sacrifice' of themselves (cf. Rom 12.1). Therefore, to become like Christ in offering oneself to God and others with self-emptying love, is the vocation of every Christian believer.

When such an identification with Christ reaches its fulfillment one can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives through me" (Gal 2:20). Therefore, to live Christ because of one's incorporation into Christ by baptism and by constant self-offering of oneself is the Christian vocation but leading others through a specific vocation as Christ did is a different charism, given only to a few. Unfortunately, the statement of the Vat II (*LG* 10) on the difference between the common priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood is still couched in philosophical categories that obscure the deep meaning of both the mystery of the common priesthood and the

ministerial priesthood. ¹ It is, indeed, necessary to see the purpose of different charisms in the same Christian vocation in order to understand the specific function of those who receive the particular charism avoiding the temptation to ascribe higher or lower value, high degree or low degree of importance to any of them as done in the secular society.

Charisms are different. A charism given by God to someone is not for the sake of that particular person but for the building up of the Body of Christ, namely, or the Church. (I Cor 12:4ff). But leading others, especially, the believers, like Jesus Christ because of one is divinely called to do this function, is different from the divine vocation to be incorporated into Christ through baptism. The configuration with Christ at baptism is different from the configuration with Christ through the sacrament of Orders. Through the charism of ministerial priesthood God gifts to some persons whom he has called and chosen the leadership role of Christ in the community of the faithful. The charism of serving the community through ministerial priesthood as being the leader to the community is radically different from all other notions about leadership in the society.

Firstly, it is a self-emptying servant-leadership like that of Jesus. Secondly and most importantly, it is making present Jesus Christ's priestly, prophetic and pastoral service to the community through the person and the priestly function of the minister so that the community can encounter Christ and be transformed by him. Therefore, ministerial priesthood is not just a representation of Christ but an actualization of the mediation of Christ through the person and priestly functions of the minister. At the conferring of

¹ *Lumen Gentium*,.10, The common priesthood and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood 'differ essentially and not only in degree'.

the sacrament of priesthood on a person who has been already gifted with the charism of leading the community, the ecclesial community through its legitimate head, the Bishop, seals 'the good work God had begun in that person' permanently. Then on, whatever he is and whatever he does for the increase of authentic communion among the people of God, he acts in Christ's name.

At the reception of the sacrament of ministerial priesthood he is configured to Christ in a way that is different from his baptismal configuration to Christ by which he or anyone who is baptized may be called another Christ, *alter Christus*. Often when this term is used for a priest, it is understood in a very narrow sense that he is only a cultic functionary. However, even in the Eucharistic celebration or in the cult, a priest does not substitute Christ. He makes Christ present for the community. Every baptized is another Christ. A priest is both another Christ and can act in the person of Christ only for Christ's sake and for the sake of the community!

III. Priest : as *alter Christus* and *in Persona Christi* – Being a Christian and being a Priest

The Vatican II locates the ministerial priesthood within the context of ministry to the people of God. One is an ordained minister for the building up the community of the Church by preaching the Gospel, shepherding the people of God and celebrating the divine worship as the priest of the NT rather than a privileged position to have authority to celebrate the Holy Mass. The ministerial priesthood shares the office of the unique mediation of Christ and announce the word of God. However, "it is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful (*synaxis*) that they

exercise in a supreme degree their sacred functions; there acting in the person of Christ.”² Though in the Eucharistic celebration the minister is *acting in the person of Christ (in persona Christi)*, the term *alter Christus* or another Christ is avoided by the Fathers of the Vatican II. Probably the reason for this is, to demystify the notion of ministerial priesthood that had acquired an exaggerated cultic understanding borrowed from Jewish and pagan models of priesthood. The NT avoids the term *hiereus* (Gk.) and *sacerdos* (Lat.) for its ministers of the word and the sacraments and uses the secular terms like *apsotoloi* (apostles) *episkopoi* (overseers), *presbyteroi* (elders) for its officials who are to continue the pastoral office of Christ through their diakonia (service). The Vat. II recaptures the early Church’s understanding of the ministerial priesthood. It overcomes the polemical understanding of the Council of Trent in the context of Counter-Reformation which devalued priesthood.

For the Council of Trent priesthood was completely centred around the Holy Mass as sacrifice. Consequently, the understanding of priesthood was defined and determined by the understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the priest’s function in relation to it. Comparing the Mass to the Last Supper and to the Cross, the Council of Trent says, “There is one and the same victim, one same offerer who offers himself through the ministry of priests and who then offered himself on the cross; it is only the manner of offering that is different.”³ Further, the Trent referring to the sacrament of the Eucharist affirms, “The form of this sacrament is the words of the Saviour with which He effected this sacrament; for the priest effects this sacrament by speaking in the person of Christ.”⁴

² *Lumen Gentium*, No.28

³ Joseph Lácuyer, *What is a Priest?* (New York: Hawthorn Books Publ.,1959) p.12.

⁴ *Denzinger* 32nd ed. No. 1321; Neuner-Dupuis, 3rd ed. , No. 1510.

Already from the time of Cyprian the notion of identification between Christ and the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist was gradually developed. Cyprian writes, "He alone fulfils the office of the priest in the place of Christ who does what Christ did, nor does he offer to God the Father in the Church the truth and fullness of sacrifice except in so far as he offers as he sees that Christ himself is offered."⁵ In a fourth-century commentary on the first Epistle to Timothy, the author known as Ambrosiaster affirms that the priests are the substitutes or the vicars of Christ.⁶ For Hesychius of Jerusalem a priest is the image or the figure of the Saviour and the Saviour is present in the priest in a certain manner. According to Cyril of Alexandria the priests have for their 'magnificent and holy vestment Christ himself. Eusebius of Caesarea preaches that Christ dwells in his ministers and continues to offer through them. For Gregory Nazianzen priest is like a ring bearing the seal of Christ and Christ acts through him.

With such a host of saints and fathers of the Church developing the notion of identifying the priest with Christ in the sacred ministry of serving the Church and due to the mystification of the Eucharist and resultant sacerdotalism that developed from 4th century onwards the Council of Trent had no difficulty in defending the position of the Church concerning its sacrament of the Orders. In this line of thinking there emerged another term of obscure origin but closely related to the theological reflection that has gone before on the relationship between the priest and Christ in the writings of Pius XI and Pius XII, the priest as another Christ or *alter Christus*.

Although the term *alter Christus* is not used in the declarations of the Second Vatican Council, the ontological

⁵ St. Cyprian, *Epis.* 63; Joseph LÁcuyer, p.10.

⁶ Joseph LÁcuyer, p.11.

transformation that is effected through the sacrament of orders to be the medium of Christ to fulfill his mediating function as the Head of his Body, the Church, is clear in its teaching. The official priesthood in the Church, according to Vat. II, is of divine origin and it is to bring about Christ's presence in the Church⁷ and "to act in the person Christ, the head."⁸ However, the undue emphasis of the council of Trent to centre its understanding of the priesthood around the Eucharistic sacrifice is avoided by recapturing the NT notion of ministering to the community as leaders through the proclamation of the Word and pastoral governance along with the celebration of the divine worship. No wonder then, the term *alter Christus* which may further continue to influence a cultic understanding of priesthood at the expense of the equally important dimensions of prophetic and pastoral ministries, do not find a place in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Christian priesthood is God's gift to the Church to act in the person of Christ or *in persona Christi Capitis*.

In the Declaration dealing with the question of admitting women to the ministerial priesthood the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, in 1976, reiterated the Church's constant teaching that "the bishop or the priest in the exercise of his ministry, does not act in his own name, *in persona propria*: he represents Christ, who acts through him" Further, the Declaration affirmed that, "The supreme expression of this representation is found in the altogether special form it assumes in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source and centre of the Church's unity, the sacrificial meal in which the People of God are associated in the sacrifice of Christ: the priest, who alone has the power to perform it, then acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ,

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, No. 21; *Sacrosanctum Concillium*, No. 7.

⁸ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, No.1.

but *in persona Christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration.”⁹

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II presents the identity of the one who is called to ministerial priesthood to continue the mission of the Christ *in persona Christi*. “In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd. ...In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church *in the name and person of Christ*¹⁰ the head and shepherd.”¹¹ Further, Pope John Paul II affirms that “ This is the ordinary and proper way in which ordained ministers share in the one priesthood of Christ. By the sacramental anointing of holy orders, the Holy Spirit configures them in a new and special way to Jesus Christ the head and shepherd; he forms and strengthens them with his pastoral charity; and he gives them an authoritative role in the Church as servants of the proclamation of the Gospel to every people and of the fullness of Christian life of all the baptized.”¹²

This intimate relationship of a priest to Christ is the foundation of his relationship with the Church. “The priest’s relation to the Church is inscribed in the very relation which the priest has to Christ, such that the ‘sacramental representation’ to Christ serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church... In virtue of his participation in the ‘anointing’ and ‘mission’ of Christ, the priest can continue Christ’s prayer, word, sacrifice

⁹ Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, October 15, 1976, N0.5.

¹⁰ Italics mine.

¹¹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No.15

¹² Ibid.

and salvific action in the Church. In this way, the priest is a servant of the Church as mystery because he actuates the Church's sacramental signs of the presence of the risen Christ."¹³

It is the vocation of every Christian to be another Christ or *alter Christus*. But it is the charism given to some in the community to live and act *in persona Christi*. Therefore, reserving the term *alter Christus* for those who are in ministerial priesthood and loading it with cultic notions would not do justice to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the identity and mission of those who are called to ministerial priesthood. All who are graced with the sacrament of baptism are *alter Christus* through the incorporation into Christ and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They have to grow into full stature of Christ according to Paul (Eph 4:13). The function of the ministerial priesthood is to act *in persona Christi* to assist the people of God through word and sacraments. It is through their ministry that the people of God grow in their vocation to be *another Christ* unfolding themselves as members of the Body of Christ as well as transforming the world into God's kingdom through their self-emptying service. Therefore, the NT ministerial priesthood is for the building up of the community which is the Body of Christ through incarnational leadership, by being a prophetic facilitator of communion and, a mystic and compassionate healer.

Incarnational Leadership

In the past, due to the mystification of the Eucharist, excessive sacerdotalism and clericalism, a cultic, moralizing and policing model of Christian ministerial priesthood, blurred the real image ministerial priest as the servant of the community. Wherever any service is professional and wherever any minister is a master,

¹³ Ibid., No.16

temptations are too strong to 'land it over' the people (cfr. Mt 20:25). The ministerial priesthood had often succumbed to such temptations too easily. An attempt is made in the second Vatican Council to re-capture the NT understanding of Christian leadership as pastoral and prophetic. Therefore, a minister in the Church must strive to manifest through his life and ministry the one who "came to serve and not to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45) and who washed the feet of his disciples (cfr. Jn 13: 4-16). Such an attitude of Jesus must find expression in the life of a priest. Pope Celestine I forbade priests and bishops wearing any clerical dress that separated them from the people and he insisted that they must be identified through their virtue and not by the dress they wore¹⁴. They are chosen from the people of God, to be with the people of God and to be there for the people of God. Incarnational leadership demands a priest to struggle with his own fear of insecurity and losing his false identity to discover his authentic identity in the process of becoming "all things to all" (I Cor 9:22).

A Prophetic Facilitator of Communion

The prophetic vocation of a priest is to challenge everything that disfigures human beings who are created in the image of the Triune God, the God of absolute communion. All systems and ideologies that divide humans in the name of race, religion, gender, class, caste, language, nationality, rites, denominations etc. and everything that created conditions that do not promote communion among people must be prophetically denounced. A minister of Jesus Christ must constantly challenge himself to transcend the human-made barriers and recognize the worth of humans who are called to live in communion with God, other humans and nature.

¹⁴ Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, PL 50, 431.

There are priests, realizing that their commitment as a minister of Jesus Christ, who go beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community and organize all people to repair dilapidated temples and mosques of their locality. With prophetic courage a minister of Christ must promote the values of the Kingdom. Such a commitment to the Kingdom values demand that he must be, first of all, a facilitator of communion among all believers in Christ whatever be their particular rite of worship and tradition or whatever be their denominational affiliation. Secondly, he must promote communion among all humans of good will, whatever be their religious convictions and also among those who do not hold any religious convictions. In fact, no one should be excluded from his priestly care and concern. Thirdly, as a facilitator of communion he needs to promote human beings' right relation with nature which mirrors the glory of God.

A Mystic and a Compassionate Healer

By his Christian vocation to *alter Christus* and by his charism of ministerial priesthood to live and act *in persona Christi*, a priest cannot but be a mystic. He must be a person who manifests in his life and activities that his being is in the heart of God and his action is a loving response to God's command. This, I believe, is meant when it is said that a priest must be a man of prayer. One cannot be a sacrament of Christ's presence unless one is attuned to God's Word and sensitive to God's presence at all times and at all places. Therefore, a minister of Christ must train his faculties to grow in contemplation. It implies that a priest needs to find time *to be* with the Lord so that he can go out to preach and to heal with *authority* (cfr. Mk 3:13). What can hold together the various activities of a priest and make them effective is only his *being* with the Lord. This would make him to be patient with himself and with others.

A priest is, indeed, a wounded healer. A priest must make his own wounds, his vulnerability, his loneliness, his failures, his experience of rejection, lack of support and encouragement, his fears, his insecurity and so on a source of his healing ministry in reaching out to others who need his presence and care. Such an awareness of his own situation, instead of leading him to self-pity, makes him more sensitive and compassionate to those who need his attention and healing. Com-*passion* means to suffer with. A priest who can suffer with those who suffer, whatever be the cause of their suffering, brings about a healing which can be understood only by recognizing a priest as the one who has freely committed to be an officially appointed extension of God's own compassion. Embodying in his own life the compassion of God as Jesus did, makes a priest an authentic minister of reconciliation and forgiveness. The challenge of a priest is to be an effective witness of genuine humanness which manifests God's own glory.

Conclusion

All religions recognize their priesthood as a means to encounter the divine. They are official mediators between God and humans. The originality of the Biblical understanding of priestly mediation is that it is done not only by individuals but also by the community of Israel as a whole and finally through Jesus Christ in whom God and humans meet once and for all because he is both God and human. The early Church encountered Jesus Christ after his resurrection from the dead as the one who reconciled them to God. For them he was the only priest, only mediator and his death on the cross was interpreted as the only sacrifice and his last supper with his disciples as the anticipation of the ultimate self-giving on the cross. Now on, there is only one mediator, one priest. Any authentic priesthood after Christ is only a participation in the

priesthood of Christ. In his very person and in what he did by giving himself up on the cross he reconciled the world to God. His priestly ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to the whole community of the disciples and it is collectively realized in the common priesthood of the people and individually realized through those who are given the charism of ministerial priesthood. All disciples have to grow into the full stature of Christ and become another Christ or *alter Christus*. The function of those who are called to ministerial priesthood is to be and to act in the person of Christ, the head or *in persona Christi capitis* to serve the building up of Body of Christ or the community of believers as its leaders. To lead others to grow in their vocation as another Christ is the charism given to some that it makes them act in the person of Christ. In and through them Jesus Christ continues his mission in the power of the Spirit until "God may be all in all" (I Cor 15:28).