

OFFICE AND CHARISM: REFLECTIONS ON A NEW STUDY OF MINISTRY

In his recent book, Bernard Cooke traces the broad outlines of the history of Christian ministry, with special emphasis on the changing patterns of understanding and practice of the episcopate and presbyterate in new cultural contexts. This serves as background for his own theological reflections on how Christian ministry should be understood within the scope of the whole economy of salvation and what forms it should take in the twentieth century.¹

His development of the theology of ordained ministry focuses on the relationship of office to charism. This is characteristic of the modern discussion of ecclesiastical office which originated with A. Harnack² and R. Sohm.³ Especially within the last twenty-five years, Catholic biblical scholars and systematic theologians have begun to rethink this relationship within the context of ecclesiology. As a result of this research, Catholic theology generally takes for granted a twofold structure of church: (1) a vocation and gift structure in which all Christians share; (2) a special witness and servant structure associated with permanent ministries. Permanent charisms, required for this latter structure, are presumed to be present in a degree necessary to maintain the life of the Church. This presumption is grounded on the conviction that they belong to the essence of the historical Church and so are maintained in existence by the active presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁴

¹ Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

² *Die Lehre der zwölf Apostel* (TU 1/2; Leipzig, 1884) 145 ff.; Engl. trans., *The Constitution and Law of the Church of the First Two Centuries* (New York, 1910) 236 ff.: The author rejects any intrinsic connection between charismatic and administrative ministries in the Pauline writings. E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (SBT 32; London, 1961) 183-84, cautiously approaches Harnack's position, since he suggests that in the New Testament traces can be found of a distinction between purely administrative, regulated ministries and those bestowed by the Spirit.

³ *Kirchenrecht* 1 (Berlin, 1892): from his systematic treatment of the subject he concludes that office and charism are opposed, since Spirit and law are not reconcilable. H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, 1969) 295-96, also posits a radical opposition between office and charism. E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 41; London, 1964) 83, takes a position between Harnack and Sohm: the Pauline doctrine of charism exists alongside the affirmation of law. Hence no distinction is made between spiritual and technical ministries; authority resides in the concrete act of ministry.

⁴ H. Küng, *The Church* (New York, 1967) 388-444; *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N. Y., 1976) 484-85, adopts a systematic distinction between temporary and permanent charisms which is based on the Pauline writings. A slightly different approach is taken by G. Hassenhüttel, *Charisma: Ordnungsprinzip der Kirche* (Freiburg, 1969). He employs a historical-literary distinction between charism and helper structure in which

At the same time, Catholic theology recognizes that those called and qualified for permanent ministries have not always remained conscious of their place within the manifold gifts of the Church. The lack of awareness of the essential vocation and gift structure in which all Christians share accounts to some degree for the development of the clerical-lay structure in which ecclesiastical office was absolutized in practice and thus given *de facto* authority over all charisms. In its turn, this structure itself, as it gained universal acceptance, legitimized the subordination and/or suppression of lay charisms. Understandably, therefore, a great deal of effort is currently being expended to call attention to the extent to which the historical realizations of permanent ministries have failed to maintain a healthy tension within the twofold structure of church and to offer remedies to correct this situation, which still exists.

Cooke's analysis of the relationship of office to charism employs the systematic distinction proposed by H. Küng between temporary and permanent charisms within the basic charismatic structure of church. The office structure is considered to be a substructure within the charismatic.⁵ He begins with a consideration of the active presence of the risen Lord, who is enabling source of the Church's ministry and whose historical ministry is paradigmatic for its style of service. His presentation is developed along the following lines:

1) Initially, the Church's ministry was correctly understood as a sharing in the prophetic, noninstitutionalized ministry of Jesus (43, 49).

2) Permanent ministries were assigned because of personal qualifications and established to meet pressing needs of the communities (43-44).

3) Since various charisms flow from the prophetic character of the Church as a whole, it is incorrect to postulate a comprehensive "pastoral charism" (199).

4) More basic distinctions should be made in the matter of specialized ministries traditionally assigned to the pastoral office. They should be awarded to those who are personally qualified (209-14). The concrete form of these ministries should change to meet the special needs of the Church in new situations (204).

the latter is not viewed as necessarily given with the Christian community. Hence he approaches the position of Harnack (354-55). He stresses the appointment by the Spirit (234) and the necessity of pastors recognizing the authority of charismatics (358).

⁵ Cooke seeks support in the Pauline writings (40). But he overlooks the context of the only passages in which charism is directly related to a gift intended for the building up of the Church: Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31. It is at least questionable that 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12, hortatory in nature, should be interpreted under the aspect of a real or possible constitution of church (Cf. U. Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt: Die paulinische Charismenlehre auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen Gemeindefunktionen* [Wuppertal, 1972] 237 ff.).

5) Official installation into permanent ministries is required to enable the charismatic to function, and so charism cannot be simply contrasted with office (198).

6) The essence of ordination lies in the public designation of the candidate for office. It bestows the ability to act as public witness of the Church's faith (198-99).

7) The leadership group in the Church includes those who govern the ordinary conduct of the community. But there is no intrinsic reason why those who govern in this way should have all leadership functions. Hence the function of special apostolic witness can exist apart from this form of governing (211-12, 642-43).

8) On the other hand, there is an intrinsic connection between liturgical leadership and special apostolic witness: the ministry of word and sacrament cannot be separated (*ibid.*).

9) Those who are incorporated into the liturgical-leadership college through ordination share in the college of special witness (642-43).

10) Episcopal consecration is a second-step initiation into the witness college, which is not coextensive with the liturgical-leadership college (643).

11) The witness college possesses a certain eminence within the liturgical-leadership college. Hence it is intrinsically appropriate, though apparently not necessary, that a member of this college initiate new members into the liturgical-leadership college (*ibid.*).

12) The liturgical leader exercises a basically prophetic function. He witnesses to the faith of the Church as leader of the local community and as member of the college of liturgical leaders. In so doing, he communicates Christ to the community (645-48).

13) The liturgical leader is not mediator between Christ and the community. Rather he is medium in which revelation and response take place: his activity is Christ's word to the community, the community's word to Christ, the word of Christ and the community to the Father (648-49).

History teaches us that the essence of the various special ministries presently gathered under the umbrella concept of pastoral office cannot be simply identified with the particular forms they have taken in the institutional Church. A historical development in the concrete forms of specialized ministries is discernible. This leads to the conclusion that further changes can and should take place in view of a more effective ministry. Moreover, such changes should be determined, as in the past, not by abstract biblical or dogmatic principles but by taking account of the signs of the times: the pastoral needs of the Church. Consequently, Cooke's approach, which is critically conscious of the historical conditions of the concrete forms and practices of pastoral office, and which

leads him to attempt to establish criteria for the present realization of effective specialized ministries, cannot simply be rejected.

In addition, his concern to show that ecclesiastical office cannot be identified with charism in an unqualified way reflects the underlying persuasion of the authentic whole tradition of the East and West. It is true that this tradition relates authority to office grounded on episcopal ordination and commission and not to a charism sporadically manifested. But it also stresses the need for vigilance in the exercise of office—as the gospel demands. In other words, it connects office and charism in a unity full of tension.

More popular theological explanations often give the impression that charism is unconditionally bound to the exercise of office. Historical experience, on the other hand, points to the interpretation of office and charism forming a unity supporting each other. New Testament texts such as Lk 22:32 favor this view: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers." This pericope describes an unmistakable tension in which the task and promise are set within the context of a denial of Jesus.

Cooke performs a useful service by pointing out the perils of linking office with charism in a tensionless unity. In so doing, he shows the same awareness which Vatican Council I manifested in its deliberations over the office of Peter. In that Council it was defined that the unity of the Petrine office and charism exists for particular acts and under definite conditions. It was not defined that papal decisions are absolutely binding from the mere fact that they are juridical decisions of the pope. Still less did the Council affirm that these decisions are true because of a juridically ascertainable act of ratification of the whole Church. Rather, the authority of these decisions is ultimately based on fidelity to the gospel, tradition, and living faith of the Church. The quality of infallibility of these decisions is intrinsically connected with charismatically illuminated efforts to secure their fidelity to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic sense reckons with the fact that office and charism, in spite of their inner ordering, stand in a state of tension to each other. This is understood to be the normal case in the pilgrim Church. Hence it insists on the need for prayer of the Church for the office bearer, and of the office bearer himself, as well as the various personal and institutional efforts to secure correspondence between office and charism and the gift of the Spirit bestowed at ordination.

Nevertheless, the same instinct takes for granted more than an occasional coincidence between office and charism. The presumption of an inner connection between office and charism is grounded on the belief that the service of office is taken up and exercised in the name and commission of Jesus Christ, who works in the Church. Thus pastoral

office, which is bestowed in sacramental ordination, is viewed as an enduring sacramental expression of the truth that Christ alone is the active Lord of the Church and builds it up through the service of pastors. The affirmation of the unity of the office of Peter and the charism of infallibility, for the case where the existence and truth of the Church is at stake, is completely consistent with this conviction and its most dramatic expression.

It is evident that both hirelings and true shepherds are found in the pastoral office. The hirelings diminish the sign value of this ministry; they test the faith of the community. At the same time, they bring to mind the truth that the fruitful exercise of office as a possibility depends on the acceptance of Jesus Christ and his way of the cross.

Cooke argues for a fundamentally prophetic specialized ministry which necessarily implies a permanent state of tension between office and charism. This leads him to conclude that there are not two ways by which Christ's personal saving presence is realized through the activity of the ordained ministry. The personal presence of Christ is mediated to the community through the ordained minister only by way of personal and objective proclamation of the faith of the Church. There is no official activity of the minister to which Christ binds his presence and which operates independently of the exercise of the faith of the Church.⁶

Since Cooke interprets specialized ministries as basically prophetic, ordination gives the ability to act as public witness of the faith of the Church. The logic of this position, because of the peculiar relation of the ordained minister to word and sacrament, leads to the more general thesis that all the modes of presence of Christ in the Church are modes of exercise of the faith of the Church. He does not develop this theme systematically, but it can be done in such a way as to support his view of ordained ministry as public witness of the Church's faith.⁷

It can also be argued convincingly that Cooke's view harmonizes with the theology of the episcopate and presbyterate found in the ordination rites of the East and West of the first millennium. These rites present the bishop and presbyter as being incorporated into a pastoral office of the Church which involves the functions of governing, teaching, and liturgical leadership carried out by expressing the faith of the Church.⁸

⁶ Examples of official activity which have been viewed in the tradition of the Catholic Church as functioning independently of the exercise of the faith of the Church are the following: (1) the power to consecrate bread and wine; (2) the power of a bishop to ordain a candidate without dependence on an ecclesiastical context (absolute ordination); (3) the power to reflect the will of Christ in all juridical decisions.

⁷ Cf. B. Langemeyer, "Die Weisen der Gegenwart Christi im liturgischen Geschehen," in *Martyria, Leiturgia, Diakonia*, ed. O. Semmelroth (Mainz, 1968) 286-307.

⁸ H.-J. Schulz, "Das liturgisch-sakramental übertragene Hirtenamt in seiner eucharistischen Selbstverwirklichung nach dem Zeugnis der liturgischen Überlieferung," in *Amt und Eucharistie*, ed. P. Bläser (Paderborn, 1973); D. Eissing, "Ordination und Amt der Presbyters," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 98 (1976) 35-51.

Scholastic theology was not content to define the ordained minister simply as a public witness of the faith. Rather, the bishop and presbyter are viewed as having special ontological powers inherent in their persons which qualify them to act as public persons. These powers are understood to make possible the celebration of certain sacraments and afford some assurance that less fixed exercises of office, teaching, and juridical decisions are authentic expressions of the faith of the Church and so of God's will for the community.

This traditional theology of "character" has undergone some modifications in recent years,⁹ but it includes an insight which must be integrated into an adequate theology of ordained ministry: that Christ himself is the living source of this ministry and continually acts through it to confirm the brethren; that despite the hirelings he will not allow it to become a sign which radically contradicts the victory he has attained.

Alongside the theology of "character," the Catholic tradition of spirituality as applied to ordained ministry stresses the duty of the office bearer to strive to be personally conformed to Christ. It does not lose sight of the fact that the ideal minister in the Church is one who witnesses fully to the word of God by his mouth and the whole of his existence (2 Cor 1:3-4; 4:6; 11:23-24). Christ is recognized as the only minister in whom charism and task perfectly coincide. All others are urged to strive in faith for the realization of this ideal. And this theology also teaches that the ordained should be confident of an effective ministry in the measure that they accept in faith the possibilities open to them with their particular gifts.

The traditional assignments given to pastors in the Catholic Church are judged by Cooke to be unrealistic. He points out how absurd it is to expect a priori that a person will be able to excel, or even be reasonably competent, in all fields of pastoral ministry. Traditional Catholic theology, to say nothing of the average member of a parish, supports him in this opinion. Catholic theology only affirms that one who has been called by Christ through the Church can be confident that he will normally have the ability, as faithful disciple, to exercise fruitfully those activities for which he possesses the necessary charisms.

Cooke correctly states that the absorption of all ministerial functions of the Church into the pastoral office is inconsistent with the charismatic nature of the Church. Through the Spirit, who inspires ordinary and extraordinary ministries, all members of the Church have a pastoral responsibility: a servant function directed toward the good of the whole community. The community as a whole has the responsibility for

⁹ H.-M. Legrand, "The 'Indelible' Character and the Theology of Ministry," in *The Plurality of Ministries*, ed. H. Küng and W. Kasper (*Concilium* 74; New York, 1972) 54-62.

the creative application of the living tradition inherited from Bible and tradition to a given concrete situation. Spokesmen for this tradition must be the ordained ministers, but also the faithful involved in the world who are able to offer their knowledge and experience.

The concept of tradition as a creative, spiritual inheritance of the past which is possessed by the whole Church sheds light on the importance of charismatically qualified ordained ministers. They should be leaders who can interpret this tradition in such a way that it becomes a *creative and renewing power* in the given historical situation. At the same time, they should be sensitive to the fact that this tradition is *shared by all*. The proper application of the living tradition by the ordained ministers is conditioned by their grasp of the *sensus fidelium*; for the Spirit also exercises through them a creative role in guiding the whole Church to new formulations of doctrine and practice.

Vatican Council II, following Vatican I, does take account of the importance of the *sensus fidelium*.¹⁰ Yet perhaps it insists too much, without sufficient qualification, on the function of the ordained ministry to represent Christ the Head of the Church vis-à-vis the community. This theme correctly stresses that the ordained are not delegates of the community, that their ministry derives from Christ and is supported actively by Christ and the Spirit. But without an unequivocal explanation, the notion of the minister as representative of Christ the Head of the Church can give the impression that the ordained minister automatically represents Christ in the exercise of ministry from the fact of ordination. In fact, however, the actual relationship of the ordained minister to Christ in the exercise of office is problematic, as Cooke correctly states.

From the viewpoint of Catholic theology, one must affirm that the authority of Christ is encountered in the authority of the office bearer: the ordination rite represents this sending in the name of Christ. Furthermore, this *exousia* of the office bearer, this right and freedom to act, makes possible the ecclesial confession of faith in Christ on the part of the community. However, because it is a matter of faith in Christ, not in the office bearer, the community has the responsibility to test the minister. This is implied in the faith, in the freedom (*exousia*), of the People of God—in the same faith and freedom which make possible and necessary the acceptance of the true minister of Christ.

If the minister is understood as representing both Christ and the Church in the measure that he represents the faith of the Church of which Christ is the living source, the tension between charism and office, recognized by Catholic theology, can be accounted for. This point

¹⁰ A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville, 1975) 363: Constitution on the Church 12.

of view harmonizes with one of the theologies of ordained ministry found in the documents of Vatican II. It is the one adopted by Cooke. To a certain extent he has worked this out systematically. But a more precise presentation is needed. The modes of presence of Christ in the Church must be related to one another within the scope of a theology of faith as form of life and act. Only in this way can one get at the very nerve of the question which plagues Cooke: the relationship of faith to institution.¹¹

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¹¹ As an example of how this might be done, cf. E. Kilmartin, "Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ," *TS* 36 (1975) 253-60.