

Episcopal Consecration: The Legacy of the Schoolmen

One of the central points of the present Council's teaching on the episcopate concerns the sacramental nature of episcopal consecration. Before going on to treat of episcopal collegiality the Constitution *De Ecclesia* solemnly propounds this teaching, thereby closely linking the bishops' collegial role in the Church with the common sacrament which they have all received: 'This sacred council teaches that by episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Order is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry . . .' (art. 21). A previous article has already shown how this teaching of the Council truly reflects the tradition of the early Church.¹ Here the traditional title of the episcopate – 'the fullness of the priesthood' – takes on its full meaning. The episcopate is not just another sacramental order; it is the supreme order including all others: a sacramental consecration for the fullness of the ministry to which the Church commissions him in an eminent way as 'vicarius Christi' – as 'teacher, shepherd and high priest' (art. 21). The presbyter, on the other hand, is not commissioned through his ordination for a like ministry, but only for a lesser role as the minister 'secundi ordinis'. His ministry can be understood only in relation to that of the bishop, since his whole *raison d'être* is his dignity as ordained priestly helper of the bishop in his task of building up the Church of God.

The historian of dogma knows that the theologians of later centuries were not always true to this tradition of the early Church. As the theology of Order developed after the great patristic era, it was centred not around the episcopate but around the simple priesthood. The sacrament of Order became identified with presbyteral ordination, to which episcopal consecration was recognized as adding a special dignity, though this dignity was neither an order nor an essential part of the sacrament. This was the

1. Episcopal Consecration: the Fullness of Order, *Irish Theol. Quart.*, 32 (1965), 295–324.

teaching of almost all the scholastics. When one reads today the solemn declaration of Vatican II: 'This sacred Council teaches that by episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Order is conferred . . .', it must not be forgotten that for about eight centuries the contrary opinion was held by the great majority of theologians and canonists. It was possible for a theologian writing one hundred years after the Council of Trent to name and cite no less than eighty authors – among others Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure – who maintain that the episcopate was neither a sacrament nor an order.²

This peculiar tradition of the western Church – unknown in the East – has left a lasting imprint on our theology of the sacrament of Order. As formulated by the scholastics and developed in the post-Tridentine era it was a theology which centred around the priesthood. The *Tractatus de Ordine* as found in the theological manuals of the last century has practically nothing to say about the episcopate. This fundamental lack of orientation has been a great stumbling block to the development of a comprehensive theology of the sacrament – a deficiency only now being partly overcome by the work of the Second Vatican Council. In the present article an endeavour is made to outline some of the factors which played an influential role in this somewhat peculiar chapter of the history of dogma. In conclusion it is hoped to show that the teaching of the Council on the sacramentality of episcopal consecration is not just an isolated thesis propounded by the bishops as a kind of self-conscious compliment; but that in restoring its ecclesial dimension to the sacrament it helps to overcome a basic defect in the scholastic theology of Order – a defect due in great part to the too rigid and absolute distinction which the theologians of the Middle Ages made between the 'potestas ordinis' and the 'potestas jurisdictionis'.

I. THE TEACHING OF AMBROSIASTER AND ST JEROME

The scholastic teaching on the episcopate has its basic origin in a relatively late 'tradition' peculiar to the western Church and originating in the teaching of two Roman priests at the close of the fourth century – Ambrosiaster and St Jerome. Both advance the view that bishops and priests are basically equal. When one bears in mind the central role occupied by the bishop in the early Church – so eloquently witnessed to by the Fathers and the liturgical prayers of ordination – it is difficult to understand how this teaching comes to be so widely accepted. This was partly due to the prestige which Jerome himself enjoyed in the West, but even more so to

2. Cardinal RAYMUNDUS CAPISUCHIUS, *Controversiae Theologiae* (Rome 1670), Controv. 28 De Episcopatu, n. 2. Cited by J. UMBERG, *De Sacramentis*, 383.

the fate which later befell the writings of Ambrosiaster; they were transmitted to the West under the names of Ambrose and Augustine, and so his teaching on the basic equality of bishops and priests was understood to be the doctrine of the two greatest theologians of the western Church.

It does not surprise us to learn that this teaching of Ambrosiaster and Jerome was occasioned by a bitter controversy which raged in the Roman Church at the time between priests and deacons – the latter claiming equality and apparently even superiority over the former. There is consequently a strong polemical note evident in the writings of both authors, and more especially in the case of Jerome who was not the most restrained of controversialists. Both authors follow exactly the same line of argument in exposing the pretentious claims of the deacons: the priest is in fact equal to the bishop and therefore far superior to the deacon.

AMBROSIASTER

Ambrosiaster is first in the field, taking up the cause of the presbyters in a treatise which he significantly entitles 'De Iactantia Romanorum Levitarum'. He bases his whole thesis on a scriptural argument drawn from St Paul. It is clear from St Paul's epistles, he argues, that the 'episkopoi' and 'presbuteroi' of the early Church were of equal standing; the only thing which distinguished the 'episkopos' was the fact that he was the first or eldest of the presbyters: 'hic enim episcopus est, qui inter presbyteros primus est'. That they are really equal is clear from the fact that Timothy, who has been created a 'presbyter' by St Paul, is thereby empowered to ordain 'episkopoi'.³ If 'episkopos' and 'presbuteros' were identical in the early Church, then bishop and priest must be also equal today. If there is any difference, it is only a minor matter; in the first century it was precedence of age or appointment which determined who was the 'primus presbyter': now he is chosen for reasons of merit alone.⁴

In the light of recent exegetical and historical research it will be clear that this is a wholly unwarranted conclusion; the 'episkopos' of the fourth century is not the successor of the 'episkopos' of the apostolic Church, but rather the successor of the 'apostolos'.⁵ Identity of vocabulary is no adequate indication of identity of ministry. One cannot help thinking that, were it not for an accident of history, the thesis of this obscure Roman priest would have been known to subsequent centuries as a theological curiosity because of its remarkable singularity and complete divergence from the universal tradition of the early Church. His teaching, however,

3. *Comm. in Epist. B. Pauli: In Epist. ad Titum*, 3:8–10 (PL 17, 496).

4. *In Epist. ad Eph.* 4:11–12 (PL 17, 410).

5. Cf. art. cited above, pp. 297–303, esp. p. 298, n. 6 for bibliography.

won a very different significance when it was transmitted to the Middle Ages under the names of Ambrose and Augustine. The tremendous prestige which Augustine in particular enjoyed in the western Church won this teaching almost universal acceptance. Long before the Middle Ages St Jerome had added his approbation to the teaching of his contemporary, thereby assuring his thesis an even wider audience.

ST JEROME

As might be expected from the pen of Jerome, the polemical note is very marked throughout and serves in its own way to highlight the biased nature of the conclusion. In the letter to Evangelus we find a passionate outburst against the presumption of the Roman deacons and anybody who supports their claims. 'I hear', he says, 'that somebody has come to such a point of madness as to place the deacons before the priests – though these latter of course are bishops. For the Apostle clearly teaches that priests and bishops are identical. What then has come over the minister of tables that he should vaunt himself above those at whose word the Body of Christ is consecrated?'⁶ In order to leave no doubt at all about the superiority of the priest over the deacon, Jerome insists that bishop and priest are fundamentally equal, that the bishop is only a 'primus inter pares'.

On the whole Jerome's presentation of his case has always presented a considerable problem for the commentators. It is generally recognized that his position is not entirely free from contradiction, hardly surprising in view of the fact that his teaching runs directly counter to the whole tradition of the time. His analysis of the bishop-presbyter problem can best be reduced to three points.

(1) He does not agree with Ambrosiaster that the title 'episkopos' was reserved to the 'primus presbyter' in the early Church. There was no distinction at all either in power or precedence between the 'episkopoi' and 'presbuteroi' of the New Testament – the two names being applied indifferently to the same people: 'presbyter et episcopus aliud aetatis, aliud dignitatis est nomen'.⁷ These 'episkopoi-presbuteroi' were a college of elders in the community who looked after the administration and various needs of the local Church.

(2) At some point of time in the early Church it was decided that it would be a better guarantee against schism and disunity if one member of the college were elected to assume leadership and undertake the government of the Church. The presbyter so chosen became by his election automatically superior to the others in authority, although remaining their

6. *Epist. ad Evangelum* 146 (PL 22, 1192–3).

7. *Ibid.* (PL 22, 1195).

equal on the basic level of the sacramental consecration received in ordination to the presbyterate. That the bishop did not enjoy a higher sacerdotal status Jerome contends from the fact that originally no ordination was needed when a bishop was installed. He illustrates this from the practice of the Church of Alexandria from the time of the evangelist Mark up to the middle of the third century, where it was the custom of the presbyters to name one of their number as successor to the deceased bishop, and subsequently instal him in office. Jerome denies that there was any question of a new ordination, comparing the installing of the bishop by his fellow-presbyters to the choice of a general by an army or the election of an archdeacon by his fellow-deacons.⁸

(3) The bishop alone, however, has the power of ordaining. 'Quid enim facit excepta ordinatione episcopus, quod presbyter non facit?' Following on his determined insistence on the basic equality of bishops and priests, this seems a surprising concession. If bishop and priest are equal, how can the power of ordaining be an exclusively episcopal privilege? What Jerome seems to have in mind is that the ordaining of priests is reserved to the bishop *de facto* but not *de iure*. Elsewhere we find him enunciating a principle which lends support to this interpretation: 'ut enim accipit quis ita et dare potest' – one can always hand on to another what oneself has received.⁹ On this principle the priest too has the power of ordaining. The exercise of this power, however, is reserved to the bishop alone by ecclesiastical disposition for the same reasons as first gave rise to the office of the bishop – the need for greater unity and centralization in the government of the local Church, and as a guarantee against schism.

Jerome assumes all too easily that the 'episkopoi' and 'presbuteroi' of the epistles of St Paul correspond exactly to the bishops and priests of his own time. Like Ambrosiaster he argues from identity of terminology to identity of status – the bishops of today must be the same as the 'episkopoi' of the early Church. In support of his contention that bishops and presbyters are equal on the level of sacramental ordination Jerome finds only a solitary witness in the later tradition of the Church – the practice of the Church of Alexandria up to the middle of the third century. The majority of scholars are sceptical about the historical value of Jerome's testimony, but this may be merely due to the embarrassing nature of the evidence.¹⁰ Even if we do accept the custom at Alexandria, there is no reason why we should conclude with Jerome that bishops and priests are

8. *Ibid.* (PL 22, 1194).

9. *Dialogus contra Luciferanos*, c. 9 (PL 23, 105).

10. Ambrosiaster also refers to this practice of the Church of Alexandria, *Quaestiones Novi et Vet. Test.*, q. 101 (CSEL 50, ed. A. Souter, p. 196); also *Epist. ad Eph.* 4:11–12 (PL 17, 409–10). There is also another witness: ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ, *Annales* (PG 111, 982).

really equal. It seems probable that the present distribution of the hierarchy of Order into the descending degrees of episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate, which has universally prevailed in the Church since the third century, was not always the case in the early formative years of the Christian Church. The practice of the Church of Alexandria as cited by Jerome may well represent a transition stage between the earlier arrangement when the 'presbuteroi' ruled the local Church as a collegiate body and the later emergence of the so-called 'monarchical' episcopate. It would be a mistake to seek to apply the present-day rigid norms of sacramental discipline to an earlier time of transition – a time when the Church was still seeking to determine and give concrete expression to her essential structure. The essential feature in the elevation of the presbyter to the episcopal chair of the Alexandrian Church would not have been his selection by the presbyters, but rather his acceptance and recognition by his fellow-bishops in the neighbouring Churches. But whatever its explanation, this unusual practice of the Church of Alexandria is a solitary piece of evidence which can scarcely warrant the rejection of a tradition to which the universal Church of the early centuries bears eloquent witness, viz. that the bishop is established by a solemn consecration which the early Church understands as sacramental in the same sense that presbyteral and diaconal ordination are sacramental – by the conferring of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands.

Through the influence of Jerome and Ambrosiaster this universal tradition of the early centuries was obscured, and it was a very different teaching which came to be generally accepted in the western Church of the Middle Ages. Before going on to trace the influence of this error on the later centuries, it is well first to see the real implications of this teaching. For St Jerome bishop and priest are equal because they are equal in sacramental power – equal on the level of that basic 'sacerdotium' received directly from God in ordination to the presbyterate. If the bishops are in any way superior, it is not in "sacerdotium" but only in 'regimen', i.e. in authority over the Church – a secondary kind of power which, as Jerome sees it, is not given with the sacrament of ordination but is disposed of by the Church just as she decides: 'Episcopi noverint se magis consuetudine quam dispositionis dominicae veritate presbyteris esse maiores'. Here we have the first expression of a clear distinction between sacramental power and ecclesiastical authority, a distinction which later came to be expressed in terms of 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis'.

In contrast to the whole tradition of the early Church, authority is no longer seen as a charismatic power given directly by God within a sacramental context; it is now seen as something divorced from the sacrament and therefore something which can be conferred outside the sacrament.

Once loosed from the sacramental context which alone indicated its true nature, purpose and manner of exercise, Church authority and Church law will take on more and more the garb of the profane, differing little in structure, meaning and methods from the political authority and law of the state. Where the bishop's role becomes one of merely external government of the local Church, it becomes impossible to find any basis here for the sacramental character of his episcopal consecration. The sacrament of Order becomes identified with ordination to the presbyterate, thereby losing its ecclesial dimension, no longer seen as providing the sacramental basis for the 'ordo episcoporum' in the Church. The sacramental order of the presbyterate, isolated from an episcopal and therefore ecclesial context, is no longer seen essentially as acceptance and admission into a 'presbyterium' – the college of presbyters whose common duty it is to work together with the bishop for the building up of the Church. The presbyter is no longer defined in terms of his position within the hierarchical communion, but more and more in terms of the individual cultural powers which he possesses – the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, the power to forgive sins and confer the other sacraments. In this way the theology of the sacrament of Order develops apart from a theology of the Church. The regrettable consequences for both are best seen by tracing the influence of Jerome's teaching on the centuries which followed.

II. THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

I. INFLUENCE OF JEROME'S TEACHING ON THEOLOGIANS FROM FIFTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURY

Here it must suffice to indicate a few of the landmarks which show how the theologians of the early Middle Ages accepted the pseudo-tradition emanating from Jerome and Ambrosiaster.¹¹ The first echo of their teaching is found as early as the fifth century in the writings of a priest of southern France – *De Septem Ordinibus Ecclesiae*.¹² This work was also a polemic – a defence of the rights of priests, not against the deacons this time, but against a despotic bishop. The propagation of Jerome's teaching was further served when this writing passed down to the West under his own name. The same teaching is to be found in the writings of Pelagius, also in the fifth century.¹³ Jerome's thesis enjoys the backing of another theologian of the Roman Church, John the Deacon, writing in

11. For a more extensive study of the question cf. A. LANDGRAF, *Die Lehre der Früh-scholastik vom Episkopat als Ordo*, *Scholastik*, 26 (1951), 496–519; also J. LECUYER, *Aux origines de la théologie thomiste de l'épiscopat*, *Gregorianum*, 35 (1954), 56–89.

12. PL 30, 148–62.

13. PELAGIUS, *Comm. in 1 Tim. 3*, cited by A. Landgraf, art. cit., 280.

the sixth century.¹⁴ In the next century St Isidore of Seville is a notable landmark.¹⁵ All these recognize the basic equality of bishop and priest; if confirmation and ordination are reserved to the bishop, this is only for reasons of discipline. The authority of St Isidore of Seville helped all the more to guarantee the acceptance of a teaching now universally believed to have the backing of three great Fathers of the western Church.

From the eighth to the eleventh century this teaching is accepted by almost every major theologian of the era—Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, Amalarius, Peter Damien, to mention but a few.¹⁶ Nearly all refer back to Jerome and many repeat his very words. Hervaeus of Bourg-Dieu writes: ‘Constat ergo apostolica institutione omnes presbyteros esse episcopos, licet nunc illi maiores hoc nomen obtineant’.¹⁷ Peter Damien (†1072) argues as follows: since the presbyters offer the holy sacrifice and nothing can be greater than the sacrifice of the altar, there is no difference between the priesthood of the bishop and that of the priest.¹⁸ As we shall see presently this line of argument – the identification of the Christian priesthood with the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass – was the chief consideration which led the scholastics to deny the sacramental status of the episcopate. Gilbert de la Porree (†1154) concludes from the epistles of St Paul: ‘Unde manifestum est eosdem esse presbyteros et episcopos’, and goes on to explain that the emergence of the bishop as a guardian of unity was a later arrangement of the Church, not essentially altering the basic equality of bishops and priests.¹⁹ An unknown canonist of the same period clearly distinguishes the two domains of sacred power – the one sacramental relating to the conferring of the sacraments, the other administrative relating to the ordering of things in the Church. In the former bishops and priests are equal, though the conferring of certain sacraments may be reserved to the bishops; it is in the latter alone – the field of purely external administration – that the bishops are superior: ‘Praesunt iudicii potestate et institutionis et praecepti’.²⁰ The word ‘jurisdiction’ is not yet in use, but it is clear that we find here clearly expressed

14. *Epistola ad Senarium* (PL 59, 397–408).

15. *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, lib. II, c. 5 (PL 83, 781). The same teaching is echoed by the Council of Seville over which Isidore presided in 619 (Mansi 10, 559).

16. ALCUIN (735–804), *Comm. in Titum* 1:5 (PL 100, 1013); RABANUS MAURUS (776–856), *In Titum* 1:5 (PL 112, 660); *In 1 Tim.* 3 (PL 112, 603–4); AMALARIUS, *Liber Officialis* II, 14, 2 (ed. Hanssens, 230); PETER DAMIEN, *Opusc. VI*, cap. 15 (PL 145, 118). Both Landgraf and Lecuyer (art. cit.) mention a long line of exegetes and theologians who follow Jerome in his interpretation of St Paul.

17. *Comm. in Epist. ad Phil.*, c. 1 (PL 181, 1281).

18. *Loc. cit.*

19. *Comm. in Epist. ad Phil.*, c. 1. Cited by Landgraf, art. cit., 502.

20. Cited by Landgraf, art. cit., 506.

what later theologians mean when they understand the episcopate as an office of jurisdiction.

With this teaching we stand already on the threshold of the twelfth century and the scholastic era. Before going on to examine the teaching of the scholastics on the episcopate, it is first necessary to examine another feature of the Church's life in the early Middle Ages which influenced the theological understanding of the sacrament of Order – the widespread practice of the so-called absolute ordination.

2. ABUSE OF ABSOLUTE ORDINATION IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

The distinction between 'sacerdotium' and what came to be known as 'iurisdictio', which the canonists were working out in theory, was very radically reduced to practice in the life of the Church in the widespread acceptance of the so-called 'ordinatio absoluta' – the ordination of bishops and priests without attachment to any Church. This practice we find expressly condemned as early as the Council of Chalcedon. In the early centuries of the Church absolute ordination would have been unthinkable; the early Church clearly understood the sacrament of Order as the commission of the ordained to the service of some particular Church. Particularly in the case of the bishop the association with a local Church was considered as given with his consecration. It belonged to the very notion of bishop to be the head of a particular Church, a conviction still reflected in the practice of the Church today in the consecration of auxiliary bishops who always bear the title of a see. It is of no little significance to hear that Pope Leo I refused to recognise as a bishop one who had been consecrated without allocation to a diocese, even though he recognized his power to ordain validly.²¹

In the case of the ordination of presbyters and lesser clergy allocation to a particular Church, while universal in the early centuries, never got quite the same emphasis as in the case of the bishop. As is clear in the liturgical prayers of the early Church, it is rather the idea of service to and co-operation with the bishop which prevails as the 'titulus ordinationis'. Later transference of priests from one Church to another became common; it is noteworthy that the liturgy tends to see the priest as the helper of the order of bishops – 'cooperator ordinis nostri' – not just the helper of one bishop seen in isolation from the others.²² But in all cases – whether episcopal consecration, ordination to the priesthood or the conferring of

21. PL 54, 1203. Cf. v. FUCHS, *Der Ordinationstitel von seiner Entstehung bis auf Innocenz III* (Bonn 1930), 130 ff.

22. Cf. J. COLSON, Fondement d'une spiritualité pour le prêtre de 'second rang', *Nouv. Rev. Théol.*, 73 (1951), 1054: 'L'ordre presbyteral n'est pas le prolongement d'un évêque seul mais de l'épiscopat ecclésial tout entier participé collégalement par cet évêque'.

a lesser order – it belongs to the understanding of the sacrament in the early Church that it consecrates a man for service in this particular Church or with this particular bishop – and in and through them to the service of the whole Church and whole episcopal college.

The widespread practice of absolute ordination in the early Middle Ages ran directly counter to the early Church's understanding of the sacrament, separating and in most cases completely isolating the sacrament from the pastoral ministry. The origin, growth and persistence of the abuse can be associated with the influence of three outstanding features of the Church's life in the same era: (1) the growth of monasticism; (2) the proprietary church system; (3) the influence of the Irish missionary monks.

(i) *Influence of Monasticism*

In the first monasteries none of the monks were priests. The life of the monk stood out in contrast to that of the priest as a life of withdrawal from the world, a life of asceticism and isolation from pastoral problems. Since none of the monks were priests, a priest had to be supplied from the neighbouring Church to offer Mass with the community. With the growth of monasticism, however, many priests felt themselves drawn to the monastic life and received permission from their bishops to give up their pastoral duties and enter the monasteries. There they were subject to the rule of the community just like the non-ordained monks, and took a vow of obedience to the abbot. As a result of this development it was inevitable that the office and understanding of the priesthood gradually underwent a certain modification. In the monastery the priest is no longer the leader and teacher of a community as his ordination envisages; his priestly ministry is now reduced to a purely 'liturgical' one. The spiritual leadership of the community is in the hands of the abbot, who is usually not a priest.

The close relationship of co-operation and dependence between bishop and priest so much to the fore in the consciousness of the early Church is inevitably weakened by this phenomenon of the priest-monk who now finds himself immediately subject to the spiritual authority of another – the abbot of the monastery. The failure to distinguish the essential pastoral role of the cleric from the ascetic calling of the monk was one of the chief reasons for the emergence of the 'ordinatio absoluta' in the early Church towards the end of the fourth century. The absolute ordination of priests and other clerics was expressly forbidden by the Council of Chalcedon, and those so ordained were forbidden to exercise their spiritual powers and

functions.²³ The ruling of the Council did little to halt the practice; with the growth of monasticism it became widespread in the East, and we find it quite a common feature of the life of the western Church in the eighth and ninth century. By the beginning of the twelfth century it has become a widespread practice.²⁴

(ii) *Influence of Proprietary Church System*

The proprietary church is a common feature of the feudal system prevailing up to and beyond the Middle Ages. The right and privilege was accorded to the feudal lords to have churches and houses of worship for their own private use and to appoint clergy of their choice as ministers of these. By the beginning of the ninth century the great majority of churches were in the private hands of the feudal lords and barons.²⁵ It was they who appointed the clergy – allocating them their office and duties; ordination was reserved to the bishop. This arrangement naturally provided the most fertile ground of all for the multiplication of absolute ordinations. The result was that the ecclesial dimension of ordination was to a great extent lost to the consciousness of the Church; the sacrament came more and more to be considered in isolation as the conferring of certain sacramental powers, divorced in theory and practice from a specific pastoral commission in the Church. Here we have already in practice the complete separation of the power of order and the power of jurisdiction – one pertaining to the bishop, the other to the local lord.

The development of the proprietary church system also implied a further change of accent of no little consequence for the later development of the theology of the priesthood. The priest was no longer, as in the early Church, chosen by the faithful and ordained primarily for their service, being in turn supported by them. The priest is now chosen and appointed by the lord of the manor directly for the ministry of his own private chapel. It is his appointment to the chapel which is primary; the idea of service to the faithful becomes secondary and falls into the background.²⁶ From the outset it is the chapel and no longer the community which occupies the central place. The service of the chapel is the whole reason for his appointment and also the source of his income from the feudal lord. Where the priest is appointed to serve a chapel and not primarily a community, it is not surprising that before long the chapel tends to become the only

23. Council of Chalcedon, can. 6.

24. Cf. v. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 103–18; w. UELHOF, art. Weihetitel, *LThK*, Bd. X, 983–4.

25. Cf. w. m. PLOEHL, art. Eigenkirche, *LThK*, Bd. 3, 733–4; v. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 151–95; r. SOHM, *Alt-katholisches Kirchenrecht*, 222 ff.

26. Cf. v. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 138–51.

sphere of his priestly activities. Both in theory and practice the priest of the proprietary church was little more than a minister of cult.

(iii) *Influence of the Irish Church*

Another factor which played a significant role in the widespread acceptance and practice of absolute ordination remains yet to be described. This was the influence of the peculiar pattern of Church organisation introduced to the mainland by the Irish and Scottish monks who poured into Europe from the seventh century onwards. It must be remembered that the so-called 'Irish-Scottish' Church lived in almost complete isolation from the rest of the Church for almost two centuries following on the missionary work of St Patrick. One result of this isolation was the development of a peculiar pattern of Church organization – a form of organization whose basic structure was monastic rather than episcopal.²⁷ The centre of the local Church was the monastery and the leader of the local community the abbot. Sometimes he was a bishop himself but more usually he was a priest. In the latter case there was always a bishop or even a number of bishops attached to the monastery whose duty and function it was to ordain priests and other clerics according as the needs of the community required it. This meant that in the Irish Church of the sixth and seventh century episcopal consecration was not necessarily associated with the leadership of a local community. Episcopal consecration seems to have been understood simply as the power to ordain without any necessary attachment to a local Church or grant of jurisdiction.²⁸ The absolute ordination of bishops, in fact, was the commonly-accepted practice – this accounting for the apparently great number of bishops to be found in Ireland at that time.^{28a} It is of interest to note too that episcopal consecration was conferred by a single bishop – a practice still in vogue in the Irish Church in the beginning of the twelfth century.²⁹

It must be remembered that this was the only form of Church organisation and Church practice known to the great number of Irish and Scottish monks who crossed over to the mainland in the seventh and eighth century and spread down through France, Germany and Switzerland. The abuse of absolute ordination, as we have seen, was already known in the continent as early as the fourth century; however, there can be little doubt

27. Cf. L. GOUGAUD, *Les chrétientés celtiques* (Paris 1911), esp. 60–108.

28. Cf. J. B. BURY, *The Life of St Patrick* (London 1905), 181: 'A new and narrow conception of the episcopal office prevailed, and when it was recognized that bishops need not have sees, there was no reason to put a limit to their number'.

28a. Cf. v. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 196–7.

29. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *Epist. ad Muriardachum Hiberniae Regem* (PL 159, 179), cited by v. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 197; also L. GOUGAUD, *op. cit.*, 203–5.

but that it became the widespread practice it did largely through the Irish monks who accepted it as a principle not only for the priest but also for the bishop. In the ensuing clash between the two patterns of Church organization it was the continental which was eventually to win through. It seems very probable, however, that the very different system maintained and fought for by the Irish monks for nearly two centuries in France and Germany left its mark on the contemporary and later the scholastic understanding of the episcopal office. It was through these missionary monks that the idea of a bishop without a Church and without jurisdiction first became known on the continent. That this concept won a great measure of acceptance is clear from the ensuing institution of the 'chor-episcopi' in the western Church.³⁰ These were bishops who had been absolutely ordained and therefore attached to no particular Church, but who were taken into service by the local diocesan bishop to assist him with the care of his diocese and to substitute for him in his absence. The first 'chorepiscopi' were almost certainly the unattached bishops among the Irish monks. Once the idea was accepted on the continent, the diocesan bishop simply chose a priest from among his own clergy and consecrated him bishop in order to avail of his services.

The 'chorepiscopi' were an accepted part of Church organization for more than two centuries, from the middle of the eighth century up to the beginning of the eleventh, during which time they were officially recognized and legislated for by Pope Zacharias.³² The recognition of the 'chorepiscopi' as a regular feature of the Church's life meant in practice the complete dissociation of episcopal consecration from episcopal office, the dissociation of the episcopal power of order from the office of leadership. It is not surprising to hear that it was a common feature of the time to find these episcopal powers vested in two different people. After the death of Boniface his disciple Gregory was appointed bishop of Utrecht; he choose, however, to remain a simple priest, allowing the 'chorepiscopus' Aluberht to substitute for him in the conferring of orders and other such episcopal functions.³³ When the Irish monk Virgil became bishop of Salzburg in 745, true to the Irish monastic tradition he ruled his diocese as abbot of the monastery of St Peter. He remained a simple presbyter for more than twenty years, having the service of one of his own Irish monks Dub-dá-Crich (Dobdagrecus) as a 'chorepiscopus'. He finally accepted episcopal consecration only in 767.³⁴

30. Cf. P. LINDEN, art. Chorbischof, *LThK*, Bd. II, 1080-1; TH. GOTTLÖB, *Der abend-ländische Chorepiscopat* (Bonn 1928).

31. Cf. v. FUCHS, op. cit., 217.

32. *Ibid.*, 213.

33. TH. GOTTLÖB, op. cit., 80.

34. *Ibid.*, 82-3; cf. L. BIELER, art. Virgil, *LThK*, Bd. X, 805-6.

The 'chorepiscopi' will have disappeared from the scene by the twelfth century. Their eventual eclipse was due largely to the influence of the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, a forgery of the ninth century, which declared them to be no more than simple priests and denied the validity of their ordinations.³⁵ It must be remembered, however, that they – bishops without Church or jurisdiction – were recognized and accepted as part of the Church's life for more than two centuries. Their existence represents a chapter in the history of the Church which did little to enhance the dignity and office of the bishop. It served only to substantiate further that complete dissociation of sacrament and ruling power which we find accepted by the scholastics.

III. THE TEACHING OF THE EARLY SCHOLASTICS

The influence of Jerome's teaching is clearly seen in the works of systematic theology which begin to appear at the beginning of the twelfth century. In the theology of the sacrament developed by the early scholastics the whole accent falls not on the bishop, but on the priest. It is the presbyterate which is the fullness of the priesthood, the lower grades of diaconate, subdiaconate, etc., being lesser sacramental participations in that fullness of the sacrament which the presbyter alone receives. These are called orders, but the presbyterate is the supreme order. Episcopal consecration, however, is not really part of the sacrament, and therefore the episcopate is not an order but only a 'dignitas in ordine' – just one among other similar 'dignitates' such as the archdiaconate, archiepiscopate, patriarchate, etc.

One of the earliest references to this distinction between 'ordo' and 'dignitas' we find in a commentary on St Paul's epistles probably written by a disciple of Gilbert de la Porrée.³⁶ Bishops and priests belong to the same order; the difference between them is not on this level of order or sacrament but only in that the bishop holds a higher office or dignity. The difference between bishop and priest is the same as that between deacon and archdeacon, i.e. a distinction of office based on mere ecclesiastical institution. Here the exegete is repeating Jerome's interpretation of St Paul; there was no difference between bishops and priests in the beginning: the distinction was later introduced by the Church for practical reasons. It is the same teaching expressed in the same technical vocabulary that we find in the *Summa De Sacramentis Fidei* of Hugh of St Victor (†1141): 'Concerning the question of orders it must first be remembered that some are to be distinguished according to the different grade which

35. Cf. V. FUCHS, *op. cit.*, 228–9.

36. A. LANDGRAF, *art. cit.*, 502.

they hold, e.g. deacon and priest, others according to the authority ('potestas excellens') which they hold within the same grade, e.g. deacon and archdeacon; for these latter hold the same grade on the level of the sacrament but they do not enjoy the same authority on the level of the ministry . . . in the same way the priest and bishop (hold the same grade) on the level of the sacrament, but they do not hold the same authority on the level of the ministry. . . . The distinction of grades in sacred orders is one thing, the distinction of "dignities" within the same grade is quite another'.³⁷ Later he states his position clearly: 'The seventh grade is that of the priests. This grade includes different dignities within the same order. For the prince of priests, the bishop, is higher than the priest; above the bishop in turn we have the archbishops, and above them the primates; above the latter in turn some would place the patriarchs . . .'.³⁸ For Hugh of St Victor, then, the episcopate and priesthood belong to the same sacramental 'ordo' or 'gradus'. The priesthood is the last and highest sacramental order including all the others. The bishops hold only a higher 'dignity', 'authority', 'office' within the same order just in the same way as archbishops and primates are in turn higher than the bishops.

The position of Gratian is not quite certain.³⁹ In the mass of decrees which he brings together and comments upon there are clearly two traditions represented: (1) the older tradition which never recognized an equality between the two classes of priests – the bishop being the 'sacerdos primi ordinis', the real 'pastor ecclesiae', the presbyter the 'sacerdos secundi ordinis' ordained to help the bishop and holding a subordinate position; (2) the tradition beginning with St Jerome, whom Gratian quotes extensively, which denies the institution of the episcopate by Christ and affirms the basic equality of bishops and priests. Gratian does not succeed in reconciling these two conflicting traditions of the western Church. Both are clearly represented in the *Decretum* and he does not attempt to decide between them, though there are definite indications that he favoured the position of Jerome, considering bishops and priests as equal on the level of 'sacerdotium'. We find e.g. one passage in the *Decretum* where he limits the 'sacri ordines' to two – diaconate and presbyterate – on the grounds that these were the only two known in the early Church.⁴⁰

The influence of the *Decretum Gratiani* on the canonists of the Middle Ages was comparable to that of Peter Lombard on the theologians. It is

37. HUGH OF ST VICTOR, *Summa de Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, II, 2, c. 5 (PL 176, 419).

38. *Ibid.*, II, 3, c. 5 (PL 176, 423).

39. Cf. L. ORSY, Bishops, Presbyters and Priesthood in Gratian's *Decretum*, *Gregorianum*, 44 (1963), 788–826.

40. *Decretum Gratiani*, pars I, dist. 40, c. 4, ed. Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, I (Leipzig 1879), 227.

not surprising then to find many echoes of Jerome's teaching among the later canonists. By the second half of the twelfth century the distinction between the priesthood as a sacramental 'ordo' and the episcopate as a 'dignitas' or office of authority within the same 'ordo' has become widely accepted. In his *Summa Decretorum* Rufinus (†1192) repeats the teaching of Hugh of St Victor: 'Episcopatus enim et huiusmodi non proprie sunt ordines, sed dignitates', and gives as explanation that there were no such distinctions in the beginning, that the apostles themselves were but presbyters and that therefore there could be no higher order.⁴¹ Johannes Faventinus repeats the same teaching, the essence of which is also to be found in nearly all the canonists of this period – Simon of Tournai, Simon of Bisignano, Sicard of Cremona, Magister Bandinus and Magister Gandulphus.⁴² A possible exception here is that of Huguccio who holds for a distinction between bishops and priests from the beginning, but who does not discuss the question whether the episcopate is a separate sacramental order.⁴³

It is the same teaching and terminology which we find in the famous *Libri Sententiarum* of Peter Lombard (†1159). In Book IV he defines what he means by 'order': 'If it be asked what is meant by order, it may be defined as a sign or sacred thing through which a sacred power is given to the ordained together with an office'. There are seven such orders corresponding to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; the seventh and highest order is the order of priests to which the bishop also belongs because the episcopate is not itself a sacramental order but rather the title of an office in the Church: 'Sunt et alia quaedam non ordinum, sed dignitatum vel officiorum nomina. Dignitatis et officii nomen est episcopus'.⁴⁴

Of all the early scholastics none had a greater influence on the century which followed than Peter Lombard. When we find the later scholastics practically unanimous in denying the sacramental character of episcopal consecration, we must remember that this was a thesis carrying the authority of Peter Lombard, Gratian and Hugh of St Victor, a tradition claiming the support of three great fathers of the western Church – Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine. But the later scholastics did not accept this tradition without question; the important role assigned to the bishop in the whole tradition of the Church, the liturgical splendour of episcopal consecration and the obvious parallel with the sacramental orders of diaconate and presbyterate, the fact that the bishop alone held the power

41. RUFINUS, *Summa Decretorum*, ad dist. 21. Cited by G. FRANSEN, *Études sur le sacrement de l'ordre*, ed. J. Guyot (Paris 1957), 270.

42. All cited by A. LANDGRAF, art. cit., 506, 511.

43. HUGUCCIO, *Summa Decreti*, c. 24. Cited by F. GILLMANN, *Zur Lehre der Scholastik vom Spender der Firmung und des Weihesakraments* (Paderborn 1920), 11.

44. PETER LOMBARD, *Libri Sententiarum*, IV, d. 24, qq. 9, 10.

of confirming and ordaining – all these compelled the scholastics of the thirteenth century to seek an explanation why the episcopate could not be regarded as a sacramental order. The explanation which dominates is one we have already seen coming to the fore in the eleventh century: the priest offers the holy sacrifice of the Mass; but nothing can be greater than this; therefore the bishop cannot be said to hold a sacramental order over and above that of the priest. Or as the scholastics were to formulate it: priesthood means the power to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist; on this level episcopal consecration does not add anything to what the priest already has; therefore it cannot be part of the sacrament of Order. It is hoped to show in turn: (1) how this argument is presented and developed by the scholastics right up to St Thomas; (2) how it influenced the whole subsequent theology of the sacrament by simply identifying priesthood with the power of consecrating bread and wine at Mass – in marked contrast to the tradition and liturgy of the early Church.

IV. THE SACRAMENT OF ORDER IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY THEOLOGY

Stephen Langton (†1228), writing at the turn of the century, refuses to recognise the episcopate as an order. There are only seven orders, he says, corresponding to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The episcopate cannot be an order above that of the priesthood since the priest can consecrate the Eucharist and there can be nothing greater than this: ‘Non dicitur episcopatus ordo; non enim maius potest facere quam corpus dominicum consecrare’.⁴⁵ The argument from the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is taken directly from Peter Lombard, who may have taken it originally from Peter Damien.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that not all his contemporaries accept Langton’s argument – precisely because it entails the exclusion of the episcopate as a sacramental order. Guy of Orchellis (c. 1215) is the first scholastic to teach that there are nine orders, including both episcopate and archiepiscopate.⁴⁷ In support of his argument he refers to the anointing of the bishop’s head with chrism during his consecration, concluding that a character is imprinted just as in baptism and confirmation.

William of Auxerre (c. 1225) also opts for a nine-fold division of order. The presbyterate is a sacramental order because the presbyter receives the

45. Cited by LANDGRAF, art. cit., 515.

46. PETER DAMIEN, *Opusc.* VI, c. 15 (PL 145, 118).

47. Cited by A. MCDEVITT, *The Episcopate as an Order and Sacrament on the Eve of the High Scholastic Period* (Rome 1959), 7. The value of this work – also published in *Franciscan Studies*, 20 (1960) – lies in bringing to light many hitherto unpublished texts from the first half of the thirteenth century.

power to consecrate the Eucharist, but it is the bishop who confers this power on priests and so his is a higher order.⁴⁸ William recognizes, however, that the other view is the more commonly accepted one. Besides he makes the archiepiscopate the ninth and highest order, because it is the archbishop who – by reason of his office ('*ex deputate officii sui*') – usually consecrates bishops. The archiepiscopate is a sacrament, then, because the archbishop becomes through his elevation the *ordinary* minister of episcopal consecration. The question naturally arises then whether the bishop is also no more than the *ordinary* minister of presbyteral ordination. The author would seem to imply this in another passage where he maintains that a simple priest could, in case of necessity, consecrate both a bishop and an archbishop.

The century between Lombard and Aquinas saw a new development in the theology of the sacrament of Order – the elaboration of a theology of the sacramental character. By the beginning of the thirteenth century it was generally recognized that this character or mark pertained to the very essence of the sacrament. The name of Alexander of Hales represents a significant landmark here; it was his teaching on the nature of this mysterious character that laid down the broad lines of a theology of the sacrament of Order which all the theologians of the high scholastic period were to follow. Commenting on Book IV of the Sentences (c. 1225), he repeats the definition of order given by Peter Lombard: '*Ordo est signaculum quoddam, quo spiritualis potestas traditur ordinato et officium*', and goes on to comment that according to this definition the episcopate too would seem to be an order.⁴⁹ His comment is significant showing how much Alexander and his contemporaries were occupied with this problem of the episcopate and its relation to the sacrament. Influenced by the wholly contrary tradition prevailing in the western Church, Alexander denies that this can be possible. Therefore he ventures to formulate his own definition, clearly influenced by the desire to show why the episcopate is not an order, or, as he says himself, 'in order that one may see more clearly what is an order and what is not'. His definition makes direct relationship to the Eucharist the criterion of sacramental order: 'Order is a sacrament of spiritual power for some office which is directed in the Church to the sacrament of communion'.⁵⁰

Here we find clearly formulated the basic reason why the episcopate is not a sacramental order conferring a character: the episcopate is not directly related to the Eucharist. The connection between the sacrament of Order and the Eucharist we have met already as early as the eleventh century, but Alexander is the first theologian to define the sacrament

48. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

49. *Ibid.*, 11 (*Glossa in Libros Sent.*, IV, d. 24, n. 2).

50. *Ibid.*, 12 (*Glossa*, IV, d. 24, n. 2).

expressly and exclusively in terms of this connection. The Eucharist is the absolute criterion of order; only if an ecclesiastical office has a direct bearing on the Eucharist can it be called an order and part of the sacrament. It is the same criterion of order we will find accepted by almost all the great scholastics of the thirteenth century up to and including St Thomas. Alexander names all the seven orders giving their relation with the Eucharist and declaring each to be a part of the sacrament. The episcopate, however, since not *per se* directed to the Eucharist is neither order nor sacrament. This is surely an anomaly, and the most remarkable feature of the scholastic teaching on this question – a position we shall find also maintained by St Thomas: all the minor orders, ostiariate, lectorate etc. are sacraments, but the episcopate, despite its importance for the life of the Church and despite its long liturgical tradition, is not a sacrament but only a sacramental. That the scholastics did not and could not see the paradoxical character of this conclusion seems a mystery to us today. It does help to show how unquestioningly they accepted their own principle of the Eucharist as the touchstone of sacramental order.

How does Alexander explain the bishop's power of confirming and ordaining? Here his position is not quite clear, but he seems to agree with St Jerome that the basic sacramental powers given by the sacrament of Order are common to bishops and priests. For certain reasons, however, the Church has reserved the use of certain powers, chiefly those of confirming and ordaining, to the bishop, thereby giving him a certain 'dignitas' over and above that of the priest.⁵¹

William of Auvergne (c. 1228) returns to the old distinction between 'ordo' and 'dignitas': priesthood ('sacerdotium') is one 'ordo' with two grades of 'dignitas' – presbyterate and episcopate. If one claims that the episcopate is a distinct order, then one must also accept that the archbishop, the primate, the patriarch and the pope all have a special sacramental order, which is unthinkable.⁵² This argument, which we also find in his contemporary Roland of Cremona (c. 1232),⁵³ helps to show that the episcopate was seen primarily as an office of authority in the Church no different essentially from that of archbishop or primate. It is not surprising then that William classifies episcopal consecration as a sacramental.⁵⁴

Hugh of St Cher (c. 1230) does not contribute anything new to the debate. He reports both opinions, favouring somewhat hesitantly the nine-fold division of order – with tonsure, not the archiepiscopate, as a ninth order.⁵⁵ Philip the Chancellor is very much influenced by the teaching of Alexander of Hales. He gives us a definition of order commonly accepted

51. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

52. *De Sacramento Ordinis*, c. 13 (Gulielmi Alverni Opera Omnia, Paris 1674, 553).

53. Cf. A. McDEVITT, *op. cit.*, 22.

54. *Ibid.*, 20.

55. *Ibid.*, 21.

in the schools of his time – the ‘*definitio magistralis*’ as he calls it – one which is clearly but a re-wording of that of Alexander: ‘*Ordo est officium et potestas spiritualis ordinata ad opus ultimum*’.⁵⁶ The ‘ultimate work’ is a reference to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Since this greatest work is the privilege of the priest, then the priesthood must be the last and highest order. Since the office bestowed by episcopal consecration – even though given forever – is not directed to the Eucharist, the episcopate is not an order. Like Alexander, Philip offers no clear teaching concerning the origin and nature of the bishop’s power of ordaining.

Guerric of St Quentin is important because he gives us a new reason for the exclusion of the episcopate from the sacramental orders. The sacrament of order differs from the other sacraments in that it not only signifies and confers grace but also makes the recipient a means of transmitting grace to others – the order of priesthood directly, the diaconate and minor orders more remotely.⁵⁷ Since episcopal consecration does not make the bishop in any way a channel of grace for others, it cannot be called a sacrament. It is only an office which is conferred, not an order – an office which is of ecclesiastical institution. Guerric, then, just like Alexander of Hales, does not regard the bishop’s power of ordaining as an argument in favour of the sacramental nature of the episcopate. It is by virtue of his ordination to the priesthood that the bishop holds the power of ordaining; what he receives in episcopal consecration is the office of exercising the power which he already has as a priest, and that as ordinary minister. Since episcopal consecration does not give him the power to ordain but only allows him to exercise a power already there, it cannot be called a sacramental order.⁵⁸

Richard Fishacre (c. 1245) regards the presbyterate as the highest of all orders because of the presbyter’s power over the Body of Christ in the Eucharist: ‘*Supremus est gradus sacerdotum, in quo conficitur corpus quod est excellentissimum mysteriorum humanorum*’. Episcopal consecration does not confer a character because it is not directed to the Eucharist; it is closely associated with the sacrament of order, but is more properly called a sacramental.⁵⁹

With Guerric of St Quentin and Richard Fishacre we are already on the threshold of the high scholastic era. The teaching of the great scholastics does not differ essentially from that of their forerunners. St Albert the Great teaches that there is no sacramental order above that of the priesthood; the episcopate must be regarded as an office of jurisdiction: ‘*Nullus potest esse ordo post sacerdotium sed jurisdictionum officia sunt . . .*’.⁶⁰ Bonaventure accepts the criterion of order first clearly enunciated by

56. *Ibid.*, 26–7.

59. *Ibid.*, 32–4.

57. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

60. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, a. 5.

58. *Ibid.*, 30–2.

Alexander of Hales – that a sacramental order is constituted by its direct relation to the Eucharist. The presbyterate is therefore the highest order because the presbyter enjoys the greatest power over the Eucharist – ‘potestas conficiendi’. Since episcopal consecration does not confer any power over the true Body of Christ in the Eucharist, but only an office or dignity in the Church just like that of archbishop, patriarch or pope, the episcopate is not an order nor does it confer a character. He goes on to add that this has always been the traditional and common teaching: ‘Hoc sensit magister Hugo, hoc enim sensit magister Sententiarum . . . hoc etiam tenet communis opinio quod in episcopatu character novus non imprimitur’.⁶¹

It was this same teaching which St Thomas inherited as the ‘tradition’ of the Church. It was but typical of the greatest of the scholastics that he felt the shortcomings of a theology of order which relegated the episcopate to a mere office of jurisdiction. If his teaching on the episcopate is sometimes obscure and not always perfectly consistent, it was because he was divided between two loyalties – his own growing consciousness of the central and basic role of the bishop in the Church, and on the other hand his reverence for the ‘traditional teaching’. If in the final analysis St Thomas refused to recognize the episcopate as a sacramental order, it was due to his reluctance to break completely with this accepted teaching of the schoolmen from the Magister Sententiarum right down to his own teacher Albertus Magnus.

V. THE TEACHING OF ST THOMAS ON THE EPISCOPATE

The *Summa Theologica* does not contain a *Tractatus de Ordine*. For St Thomas’s teaching on the sacrament we are dependent on his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Some of his later works also deal explicitly with the episcopate, notably the two *Opuscula*: *De Articulis Fidei et Sacramentis Ecclesiae* and *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*. Like his predecessors and contemporaries he denies that the episcopate is a sacramental order: ‘Tota enim plenitudo huius sacramenti est in uno ordine, scilicet sacerdotio (i.e. priesthood) . . .’^{61a} In support of his position he brings forward a number of arguments:

(1) The ancient tradition of the Church that there are seven and only seven sacramental orders: ‘The episcopate is not a new order, but only a grade within order, for otherwise there would be more orders than seven’.⁶²

61. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, a. 2, q. 3.

61a. *Summa Theologica, Suppl.*, q. 37, a. 1, ad 2.

62. *Opusc. de Perf. Vit. Spir.*, c. 21.

(2) For a further argument he appeals to the traditional practice of the Church. Every sacramental order contains the orders below it and so is not dependent for its validity on the previous reception of these orders. But this, he claims, is not true of the episcopate; no one can be validly consecrated bishop unless he is first a priest. Therefore the episcopate is not a sacramental order.⁶³

(3) It is easy to see that St Thomas attached a good deal of importance to these arguments, but it is equally evident that he is not quite satisfied. Neither argument gives any indication as to what constitutes the essence of a sacramental order. In the *Commentary on the Sentences* he poses himself the question why there are seven orders and only seven. He rejects a number of suggested answers including that of Peter Lombard who sought to link up the seven orders with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. St Thomas rejects this as inadequate, pointing out that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given in some measure with the reception of each order.⁶⁴

Following Alexander of Hales he finds the essence of sacramental order in its relationship with the Eucharist. Orders are sacraments from their relationship to the greatest of the sacraments; therefore it is in accordance with this that their number must be decided. He goes on to outline in detail in what the relationship of each order to the Eucharist consists. The priest alone is empowered to consecrate; then we have three ministries directly concerned with the sacrament itself – ‘in ordine ad ipsum sacramentum’: diaconate, subdiaconate and the order of acolyte. There are also three concerned with the preparation of those who are to receive the sacrament – ‘in ordine ad suscipientes’: the orders of porter, lector, exorcist. St Thomas details the duties of each and shows how it has a bearing on the Eucharist.⁶⁵

Throughout this lengthy passage on the nature and meaning of the various sacramental orders we will search in vain for any mention of the episcopate. St Thomas goes on to explain this exclusion: ‘Order can be understood in two ways; firstly, according as it is a sacrament; and in this case, as was said above, every order is directed to the sacrament of the Eucharist. But since the bishop does not have a power superior to the priest in relation to the Eucharist, the episcopate is not an order’.⁶⁶ Replying to the objection that the bishop has the power of conferring order and confirmation and that therefore the episcopate should be recognized as an order, he says: ‘Order, considered as a sacrament impressing a character, is specially directed to the sacrament of the Eucharist,

63. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, q. 3, a. 2.

64. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, q. 2, a. 1.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, q. 3, a. 2.

67. *Ibid.*

in which Christ himself is contained, because through the character we are configured to Christ. Therefore, although in his promotion some additional spiritual power is given to the bishop in reference to some of the sacraments, this power does not have the nature of a character; hence the episcopate is not an order if we use order in the sense of sacrament'.⁶⁷

It is evident that for St Thomas the words 'character', 'order' and 'sacrament' are all interchangeable – the touchstone of one and all being the relation of the order in question with the Eucharist. To the episcopate he refused the name of sacrament, character and order because 'the episcopate does not add anything to the presbyterate in relation to the real Body of Christ (*corpus Christi verum*), but only in relation to the mystical Body (*corpus mysticum*)'.⁶⁸ It is to this argument that he returns again and again to justify this surprising exclusion; through his episcopal consecration the bishop receives an indelible power, not however over the *corpus verum*, the Eucharist, but over the *corpus mysticum*, the Church; therefore the episcopate is not a sacrament.

But unlike so many of the great schoolmen who preceded him – Peter Lombard, Hugh of St Victor, Albert – Aquinas is insistent that the episcopate is not a mere office of jurisdiction: '[The bishop] has an order and not simply jurisdiction like the archdeacon . . . the power of order is an abiding one just as is the case in the other orders'.⁶⁹ It is clear that St Thomas distinguishes here two different uses of the word 'ordo'. He goes on to explain: 'If it be said that the episcopate is not an order, this is obviously an error if it be taken absolutely . . . for the bishop has an order in relation to the mystical Body of Christ, i.e. the Church, over which he holds the chief and quasi-royal charge. However, in relation to the true Body of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist, he has no order above that of the priest'.⁷⁰ For St Thomas, then, the bishop is constituted a leader in the Church in a certain permanent way through his episcopal consecration: 'In promotione episcopi datur sibi potestas quae perpetuo manet in eo . . . per eam . . . ordinatur . . . directe ad Corpus Christi mysticum'.⁷¹ He envisages a certain basic relationship as being established between the bishop and the mystical Body, something different and more enduring than jurisdiction: 'In the Kingdom of the Church the bishop alone is anointed because he principally holds the responsibility of ruling; archdeacons or parish priests are not consecrated when they take up their charge because they do not hold it in any principal way . . .'.⁷² It is for

68. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 7, q. 3, a. 1.

69. *Opusc. de Perf. Vit. Spir.*, c. 24.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

72. *Opusc. de Perf. Vit. Spir.*, c. 24.

this reason that the sacraments of order and confirmation are reserved to the bishop since it pertains to the office of the ruler to appoint people to special duties.⁷³

At first sight all this would seem to mark off episcopal consecration as a sacramental order: the commission to an office in the Church given through a consecration conferring certain indelible powers. St Thomas himself sees the force of this argument but he says that something more is needed: 'In his promotion the bishop is given an abiding indelible power; it cannot however be called a character, because through it the bishop is not brought into a direct relationship with God (viz. through Christ present in the Eucharist) but only with the mystical Body of Christ'.⁷⁴ Always it is on this same principle that St Thomas refuses to recognize the episcopate as a sacramental order. The basic distinction which he makes between power over the real Body of Christ and power over the mystical Body is the dominating idea running through his whole theology of the sacrament.

Such then is the teaching of St Thomas on the place of episcopal consecration in relation to the sacrament of Order. More than any of the scholastics he is conscious of the important place of the episcopate in the structure and life of the Church, and attributes special significance to the liturgical consecration which establishes him in office. But theology is not written in a vacuum, but within the living tradition of the Church, always being influenced and to a marked extent formed by this tradition. More than anything else it was the acceptance of the 'pseudo-tradition' originating from St Jerome and so widely accepted in the West that gave its peculiar orientation to the scholastic theology of the sacrament – resulting in a theology built around the priesthood rather than around the episcopate. This theological synthesis finally perfected by St Thomas was based, as we have seen, on a certain fundamental 'a priori' principle accepted without question by the theologians of the thirteenth century. It can be contended with some reason today that this principle of scholastic theology is no longer acceptable, and that therefore the theological concepts of bishop and priest elaborated in the Middle Ages and still found in the theological manuals need to be re-examined. It is to an examination of this 'a priori' principle underlying the scholastic theology of orders and so much of the contemporary understanding of the priesthood that we now turn.

73. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2.

74. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

VI. DEFECTS IN SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT OF ORDER

1. ORDER AND THE EUCHARIST

Every sacramental order is directed to the sacrament of the Eucharist . . . therefore the episcopate is not a sacramental order (St Thomas).

This basic axiom of the scholastic theology of order is a purely speculative and 'a priori' principle which the theology of the Middle Ages takes for granted but which no theologian attempts to prove. The tradition of the early Church cannot be said to offer any clear confirmation of such a principle.⁷⁵ There is something strangely artificial in the manner in which this principle is pressed into service to explain the exclusion of the episcopate as an order and to justify the traditional teaching on the number of orders.⁷⁶ It is difficult for us today to understand why the scholastics should insist that every ministry in any way related to the Eucharist – no matter how remote and insignificant the connection be (e.g. some of the minor orders) – must be a sacramental order. One can only think that it was a reflection born of the edifying but sometimes exaggerated awe with which the Middle Ages regarded the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As Karl Rahner points out,⁷⁷ it seems to have been forgotten that the reception of the sacrament accorded the layman a far greater privilege and intimacy with Christ than that given e.g. to the deacon in the dispensation of the sacrament.

2. CORPUS CHRISTI VERUM AND CORPUS CHRISTI MYSTICUM

The episcopate does not add any power to the priesthood in relation to the real Body of Christ, but only in relation to the mystical Body. . . . Since the bishop does not have a power superior to the priest in regard to the Eucharist, the episcopate is not an order . . . (St Thomas).

The clear distinction drawn by the scholastics between the 'corpus Christi verum' and the 'corpus Christi mysticum' is the fundamental basis for the parallel distinction elaborated in the Middle Ages between the 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis' – the distinction between power over the Eucharist and power over the Church. The basic objection against

75. Cf. B. BOTTE, *Études sur le sacrement de l'ordre*, ed. J. Guyot (Paris 1957), 32–5.

76. It is known today that there never has been a fixed tradition in the Church regarding the number of orders. The eastern Church has never known more than six with the episcopate always included. In the western Church the number of orders was variously estimated at six, seven, eight or nine up to the eleventh century.

77. K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, V (Einsiedeln 1962), 320.

this particular chapter of scholastic theology is not against the place of importance given to the Eucharist as such, but rather against the importance which is given to the Eucharist considered as an end in itself, divorced from its ecclesial essence and meaning. Eucharist and Church are not two separate or separable realities but belong essentially together and cannot be understood in isolation from one another.

For the Fathers and the early medieval theologians any kind of distinction or opposition between Eucharist and Church was unthinkable. 'In the thought of all Christian antiquity', says Henri de Lubac, 'Eucharist and Church are linked together. This relationship gets a very special emphasis in the writings of St Augustine, and the same is true of the Latin authors of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. For them as for Augustine . . . the Eucharist is related to the Church as cause to effect, as means to an end, as a sign to the reality which it signifies'.⁷⁸ De Lubac shows clearly how this inseparable unity of Eucharist and Church was the common conviction of theologians up to the first half of the twelfth century; many texts could be quoted: 'It is our earnest conviction that, when we partake of his Body and Blood, we are thereby changed into his Body';⁷⁹ 'Eating the Body of Christ is nothing else but becoming the Body of Christ';⁸⁰ 'If they eat the Body of Christ, they become the Body of Christ'.⁸¹ Both Eucharist and Church are simply called the Body of Christ; the clear-cut distinction between the Eucharist as his *real* Body and the Church as his *mystical* Body is one which will be worked out by the canonists and theologians of the thirteenth century. The controversy concerning the Real Presence which began with Berengar of Tours in the second half of the eleventh century no doubt played a significant role here; over against the Body of Christ in the Eucharist which was called 'real', the Church is now called the 'mystical' Body – in marked contrast to the usage of earlier centuries when it was the Eucharist which was seen as the 'mystical' or sacramental Body of Christ which was given for a single purpose – that through it mankind might be assimilated and built into the *real* Body of Christ, the Church.⁸²

With the sacramental Body identified as the *real* Body of Christ in contrast to the Church, the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is considerably weakened. It is no longer always understood within its christological and sacramental context (as the community of those incorporated into Christ through the Eucharist), but comes more and more

78. HENRI DE LUBAC, *Corpus Mysticum* (Paris 1949), 23.

79. Fulbert de Chartres (†1028) (PL 141, 202), de Lubac, 97.

80. William of St Thierry (†1148) (PL 184, 403), *ibid.*

81. Gerhoh of Reichersberg (†1169) (PL 193, 780), *ibid.*

82. H. DE LUBAC, *op. cit.*, 39–46.

to be regarded as a sociological reality – the Church which can be compared with a body or organism. St Thomas e.g. does not always seem to understand the term ‘mystical Body’ in association with Christ but often interprets the expression as an analogy with the *natural* body: ‘Tota ecclesia dicitur unum corpus mysticum per similitudinem ad naturale corpus hominis . . .’.⁸³ It is only very seldom that St Thomas uses the expression ‘corpus Christi mysticum’, especially in his later works; he usually refers simply to ‘corpus mysticum’ and in his *Summa* he deliberately chooses the expression ‘corpus ecclesiae mysticum’.⁸⁴ This development marks the trend which the ecclesiology of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was to take; as the eucharistic dimension of the Church falls more and more into the background, the original biblical and patristic concept of the Church as the ‘corpus Christi’ is succeeded by the sociological concept of the Church as the ‘corpus christianum’, the society or corporate body of Christians. The Church is now seen primarily as a corporation where the juridical and institutional aspects assume the place of first importance, while the sacramental basis and structure of the Church are all but lost to view.⁸⁵

In this way the inseparable connection between the Eucharist and the mystical Body was lost to the consciousness of the Church, which led, as we have seen, to the development of an ecclesiology entirely divorced from a theology of the Eucharist. The consequences were no less unfortunate for the theology of the Eucharist, which developed apart from a theology of the Church and so lost its real centre, no longer being seen as the *sacramentum ecclesiae*, the sacrament of Christian fraternity.⁸⁶ The liturgical renewal and theological research of the last half-century have highlighted the essential ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist, thereby showing the inadequacy of a scholastic theology which tended to isolate

83. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 1. For other refs cf. DE LUBAC, *op. cit.*, 128, n. 62.

84. *Ibid.*, III, q. 8, a. 3 and 4.

85. Cf. A. WEILER, Church Authority and Government in the Middle Ages, *Concilium*, September 1965, 67: ‘This trend of thought led from the originally liturgical and sacramental concept of the mystical Body to the sociological reality of Christ’s Body, the Church, whose institutional aspects received most attention in order to fit in with the juridical categories of “corporatism”. . . . The Church, whose unity had been seen as based on the Eucharist, then became a *regnum ecclesiasticum*, a *principatus ecclesiasticus*, *apostolicus* or *papalis*. The emphasis shifted from Christ as Head of his own mystical Body to the Pope as Head of the Church’s mystical Body (*corpus ecclesiae mysticum*). . . . The traditional, patristic and Carolingian view which linked the Eucharist to the Church . . . was pushed into the background to make room for a view which concentrated on the relationship between the Pope and the Church in this respect’.

86. Cf. J. RATZINGER, The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality, *Concilium*, January 1965, 28.

the *corpus verum* from the *corpus mysticum*.⁸⁷ For the *corpus verum* is given precisely for the building up of the *corpus mysticum*. The Church which celebrates the Eucharist is built up by that same Eucharist. The Church is essentially the community of those who are united with one another through sharing the one Body of the Lord in the Eucharist.

The dynamic interrelationship of Church and Eucharist finds frequent expression in Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy: 'The Eucharist is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church . . .' (art. 2). 'The Liturgy is at once the summit towards which all the activity of the Church tends, and at the same time the source from which all her power flows'⁸⁸ (art. 10). The Constitution on the Church speaks of 'the Eucharist . . . by which the Church continually lives and grows' (art. 26), and understands it as building and forming the mystical Body: 'Really partaking of the Body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. "Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread". In this way, all of us are made members of his body, "but severally members one of another"' (art. 7). The Eucharist is clearly understood as the sacrament of that Christian brotherhood which is the essence of the Church: 'The mystery of the Lord's supper is celebrated, that by the food and blood of the Lord's Body the whole brotherhood may be joined together. . . . For the partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume' (art. 26).

Once the basic unity of Church and Eucharist is accepted, the clear division of the powers of the ministry into power over the Eucharist (*potestas ordinis*) and power over the Church (*potestas jurisdictionis*) as elaborated by the scholastics becomes rather questionable. Power over the Eucharist and power over the Church must rather be seen as merging into one another and constituting an indivisible unity. An obvious example is that of the role of the priest at Mass. A theology which had lost consciousness of the real ecclesial significance of the Eucharist saw the priest's power of celebrating the Eucharist purely as a power of order – the power of changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. But the

87. Summing up St Paul's teaching on the Church as the Body of Christ, E. Schweizer says (art. $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ in Kittel, *ThWNT*, Bd. VII, 1070): 'Strictly speaking, it is impossible to make any distinction between the crucified Body of Jesus, the Body of the glorified Lord, and the Body of Christ which the community is. One can see it only from different points of view. The glorified Body of the Lord is also the Body of the Cross still active and operative amongst us, and it is through being incorporated into this Body that the community is the Body of Christ'.

88. Cf. also art. 7, 47, 48.

tradition of the Church has always seen the priest basically as the one who presides over the eucharistic assembly – a position presupposing not only power over the ‘*corpus verum*’ (*potestas ordinis*) but also power over the ‘*corpus mysticum*’ (*potestas jurisdictionis*).

On the other hand, when we turn to the bishop, it becomes quite clear that his particular role in the mystical Body is one closely associated with the Eucharist and, therefore, on the scholastic principle, not only a ‘*potestas jurisdictionis*’ but also a ‘*potestas ordinis*’. The local Church or diocese really constitutes one single eucharistic community presided over by the bishop; the bishop is a symbol and source of the unity of his community in that it is he who presides over the several eucharistic assemblies within his Church – either personally or represented by his priests who form a collegial body around him for this very purpose.⁸⁹ But it is not only within his own local eucharistic community that the bishop is symbol and source of unity. Through the collegial nature of his office he also promotes the unity of the whole Church. Episcopal consecration gives him admittance to the ‘*ordo episcoporum*’, committing him to work in communion with his fellow bishops for the growth and unity of the people of God. He is destined for the charge of a particular Church, but it is precisely here that his role is collegial since it is through him and through his union with the college that this particular Church is drawn into that wider communion of Churches which constitute the one visible catholic Church.

This is the real meaning of episcopal collegiality. Through their communion with one another the bishops symbolize and help to bring about the communion with one another of the several eucharistic communities over which they preside. Once the episcopal office is seen in its collegiate dimension as serving the unity of the Church in this way, it becomes clear that the episcopate falls well within the scholastic definition of order formulated by Alexander of Hales and later accepted by St Thomas: ‘Order is a sacrament of spiritual power for some office which is directed in the Church to the sacrament of communion’.⁹⁰ It is no longer possible to exclude the episcopate, as the scholastics did, on the grounds that the bishop’s office has no direct relationship to the Eucharist but only to the Church. It must rather be said: it is precisely because the bishop’s office is directed towards the growth and unity of the mystical Body, that it is also directed towards the Eucharist and therefore pertains to the sacrament of Order. For the real purpose and meaning of the Eucharist is not that I receive the Body of the Lord just for myself, or that Christ comes as the

89. Cf. *De Ecclesia*, art. 26: ‘The bishop . . . is the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood, especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered . . .’.

90. Cf. above.

guest of my soul, but rather that I am drawn into union with the other members of the Church through assimilation into the one Body of the Lord; the Eucharist is the sacrament of our mutual union through union with Christ.⁹¹ It is the role of the bishop in the Church to serve this unity in communion, firstly, by presiding over his own eucharistic assembly either personally or through his priests, and, secondly, by assuring the intercommunion of his Church with the other Churches and the universal Church through his own communion with the other bishops and their head, the Pope. From this it becomes clear that the episcopal office is no mere external 'potestas regendi' or power of jurisdiction. It is a charismatic office springing from the very nature of the Church as a *communio communionum*, as the plurality of eucharistic communities in close communion with one another.

3. POTESTAS ORDINIS ET POTESTAS JURISDICTIONIS

Potestas ecclesiastica duplex est: ordinis et jurisdictionis. Ordinis potestas ad verum Christi Domini corpus in sacrosancta eucharistia refertur. Jurisdictionis vero potestas tota in Christi corpore mystico versatur.⁹²

Once the essentially collegiate structure of the episcopal office is clearly seen, it becomes obvious that in the episcopate sacrament and law, 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis' interpenetrate and are basically inseparable. This is the teaching of the Council which names two basic roots of collegiality which together constitute an indivisible unity: 'One is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of episcopal consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college' (art. 22). In the sacramental root, episcopal consecration, the idea of communion is already contained since episcopal consecration gives the recipient admission to the episcopal college, deputing him to work in communion with his fellow-bishops in the building up of the Church. The second condition is not really distinct from the first, but represents rather its factual fulfilment, whereby episcopal consecration is realized in its full significance. The sacrament and the 'potestas

91. Cf. J. RATZINGER, art. cit., 28.

92. *Catechismus Romanus*, pars II, c. 6.

93. J. Ratzinger (art. cit., 28) argues that if the scholastic distinction between 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis' be taken without reservations, then the inevitable conclusion must be that collegiality has nothing to do with the essential functions of the episcopal office, since neither the power of order nor the power of jurisdiction (as understood by the scholastics and western theology since the thirteenth century) can be taken in a collegial sense.

jurisdictionis' are not really distinguishable; they interpenetrate and complement one another.⁹⁴

It was this endeavour of the Council to get back behind the Middle Ages to the basic unity of sacrament and law as conceived in the early Church which really brought to light the sacramental and collegial dimension of the episcopal office. In linking as it does the sacrament of episcopal consecration and episcopal collegiality the Council is confirming the basic unity of 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis', viz. that the visible structure of the Church is not separable from its inner sacramental nature but really flows from and should be determined by it. The fusion of sacrament and jurisdiction throws a new light on the real meaning and significance of both; the sacrament is no longer seen in an isolated context as the grant of specific powers and graces to an individual, but is seen in its essential ecclesial setting, being given its place in the structure and constitution of the Church. A new light is thrown, too, on what we so inaptly call the 'potestas jurisdictionis', 'potestas regendi', 'power of government' etc., and which is basically the expression of that communion and brotherhood of the various eucharistic communities with one another and with their head – that *fraternitas christiana* which is the very essence of the Church at all levels.

The separation and isolation from one another of 'potestas ordinis' and 'potestas jurisdictionis' has marked the theory and practice of the western Church since the thirteenth century.⁹⁵ This clear-cut division of the powers of the ministry – based, as we have seen, on the scholastic distinction between *corpus verum* and *corpus mysticum* – reduced the episcopate to an office of external administration and government, and represents the real reason for the scholastic denial of the sacramental character of episcopal consecration. Loosed from its sacramental roots and its collegial dimension, the 'potestas regendi' of the bishops no longer reflects the structure of the Church as a *communio communiorum*. It differs little in its nature and manner of exercise from profane governing power, tending like the latter to become more and more centralized and leading to a concept of ecclesiastical law which differs in scarcely any way as regards purpose and structure from that of the state.

It is significant in itself that the word 'jurisdiction' [*ius dicere*] was taken over directly from profane law. The word was used only very

94. In his address to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate in 1957 Pius XII had already noted the close bond linking jurisdiction with the sacrament of Order: 'Les pouvoirs d'ordre et de juridiction restent étroitement liés à la réception du sacrement de l'ordre à ses divers degrés', *AAS*, 49 (1957), 924.

95. The citation above from the Catechism of the Council of Trent (cf. n. 92) shows how the scholastic teaching on *ordo* and *jurisdictio* had been taken over as the official teaching of the Church in the sixteenth century.

hesitantly by the canonists in the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century.⁹⁶ By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, the word is fully accepted both by the canonists and the theologians, and is generally used in the sense of 'potestas regiminis' – the social power of governing the Church. We see the climax of this development in the fourteenth century, e.g. in the canonist Hervaeus Natalis (†1323) who sees 'jurisdictio' as the 'potestas praecipendi, prohibendi et judicandi' which pope and bishops exercise in the Church just in the same way as kings and princes do in the political sphere.⁹⁷ It was difficult to find in this 'potestas regendi' – a ruling power which did not differ in name, or apparently very much in nature, from its profane counterpart – any sacramental or charismatic feature which could be understood as a basis for the sacramental nature of episcopal consecration.

Because the charismatic dimension of the episcopal office was in great part lost to the consciousness of the western Church, the office of the bishop came to be seen by many theologians and canonists as something of merely ecclesiastical origin – an executive office invented by the Church out of the practical need of providing for the external government and administration of the local Church. Hervaeus Natalis sees the reason for the Church's institution of the episcopate in the fact that the Pope cannot possibly be shepherd to all the faithful personally and for this reason summons the bishops as his collaborators!⁹⁸ On the whole the scholastics of the thirteenth century see the episcopate as an office of *jurisdiction*, i.e. of external government entirely dissociated from that sacramental and charismatic dimension which characterised the episcopal office in the early Church. 'The episcopate is not a sacramental order', says Guerric of St Quentin, 'because it bestows on the recipient no power of conferring grace on others'.⁹⁹ 'The episcopal consecration does not confer a character', maintained Aquinas, 'because through it the bishop is not directly concerned with God . . . but only with the mystical Body'.¹⁰⁰

96. Gratian e.g. does not use the term except in a few exceptional cases and even then not in the technical sense of 'potestas regendi' as understood by canonists today. Cf. M. VAN DE KERCKHOVE, *La notion de juridiction chez les décrétistes et les premiers décrétalistes (1140–1250)*, *Études Franciscaines*, 49 (1937), 420–55.

97. HERVAEUS NATALIS, *De Jurisdictione. Ein unveröffentlichter Traktat des Hervaeus Natalis über die Kirchengewalt*, ed. L. Hödl (Munich 1959), 14–15.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 26, 1.20–25: 'Ex ipsa natura humana impossibile est, quod Papa de omnibus Christifidelibus sine aliquo medio se intromittat corrigendo vel confessiones audiendo, et sic de aliis. . . Ergo necesse est esse aliquam mediam potestatem qua Papa regat fideles; sed haec est potestas episcopalis et etiam potestas aliorum praelatorum priorum et abbatum'.

99. Cf. above.

100. *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

To find the great scholastic theologians of the thirteenth century describing the episcopal office in this way suddenly brings home to us the great transformation which has taken place in the understanding of the episcopal office between the patristic era and the high Middle Ages. One has only to recall the image of the bishop as he emerges from the writings of Ignatius, Cyprian and Augustine, the bishop of the whole liturgical tradition of the early Church – the image of the Father, the vicar of Christ, the pastor of his people, the high priest of his Church, the centre and focal point of the college of presbyters, the visible expression of the unity of his Church and also its point of communion with all other local Churches and the *ecclesia universa*.

4. SACERDOTIUM ET SACRIFICIUM

We know from the liturgical rites and prayers of the first centuries that the early Church did not consider bishops and presbyters as being primarily ministers of cult.¹⁰¹ Nowhere in the New Testament are the ministers of the Church called 'priests' (ἱερείς). It is clear that the sacred writers, conscious of the specifically Christian character of the Church's ministry, choose not to use a word associated with the very different sacrificing 'priesthood' of the gentile religions, or the purely cultual 'priesthood' of the temple. The liturgical prayers of the early Church do use the word 'priest' and 'priesthood',¹⁰² but the presiding and teaching role of bishop and presbyter are even more prominent than the liturgical element. The dominating idea is still the New Testament concept of διακονία – the service of the community, the building up of the Church by word and sacrament.

It was only in the Middle Ages with the distinction introduced by the scholastics between 'corpus verum' and 'corpus mysticum' that the Church's priesthood came to be defined exclusively as a power related to the sacrifice of the Eucharist. We have already seen the consequences which this regrettable chapter of scholastic theology had for the theology of both Church and Eucharist, as they developed in isolation from one another. As the ecclesial significance of the Eucharist was to a great extent lost to consciousness, the priest in turn was no longer seen in that same ecclesial context as the one who assembles and presides over the eucharistic community, serving the growth and unity of the Church.

101. Cf. B. BOTTE, *Études sur le sacrement de l'ordre*, ed. J. Guyot (Paris 1957), 13–35, 97–124.

102. It would be interesting to examine the early documents of the Church to endeavour to determine to what extent the early Church's understanding of the ministry has already been influenced by extraneous non-Christian concepts of *priesthood* current in the Hellenistic world of the time.

The priest's role at Mass now came more and more to be seen as consisting purely in the accomplishment of the sacrificial act, in the consecration of the bread and wine – something which the priest performed alone in virtue of the power of his priestly character without any immediate relation to the assembly. It was in this power alone – the power of offering the sacrifice, the power of changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ – that the whole essence of the priesthood came to be concentrated. This conviction is clearly reflected in the shape which the liturgical ceremony of ordination to the priesthood takes on during the Middle Ages. It is now no longer the laying on of hands but the '*traditio instrumentorum*' which dominates the ceremony of ordination – being regarded as the essential rite of the sacrament and the act by which the character of orders is imprinted. It is only in the tenth century that we first get a mention of this '*traditio instrumentorum*' – the handing over of the chalice and paten to the priest – as part of the liturgical ceremony of ordination to the priesthood; it is not found in any liturgical sources until the twelfth century.¹⁰³ It is significant that by the thirteenth century the handing over of the chalice has come to be regarded by all the great scholastics as the essential rite of the sacrament and the act by which the character of order is imprinted.¹⁰⁴

The scholastic tendency to define the essence of the priesthood in terms of the priest's power to consecrate bread and wine in the Mass – in terms of his '*potestas conficiendi sacrificium*' – led inevitably to a rather narrow and impoverished concept of the Christian priesthood which differed considerably from the image of the Church's ministry which emerges from the New Testament and the tradition of the early Church. The ministry instituted by Christ to serve and build up the Church is no longer fully grasped in the Middle Ages in its basic Christian sense as a service of the community. It tends rather to be understood essentially as a cultual ministry, a priesthood defined in virtue of its power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. It must be admitted today that Luther and the reformers did have at least some valid grounds for complaint in the accusation which they levelled against the Catholic Church of the sixteenth century – that her ministry had become a sacrificing priesthood, truer to pagan patterns rather than its New Testament origins, a ministry concerned with the appeasement of an angry God through sacrifice rather than with the service and building up of the community through the preaching of the word.¹⁰⁵

103. Cf. J. BLIGH, *Ordination to the Priesthood* (London 1956), 137.

104. Cf. Albert the Great, *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, a. 38; BONAVENTURE, *Comm. in Sent. IV*, d. 24, p. 2, a. 1, q. 4; ST THOMAS, *Comm. in Sent. IV*, q. 2, a. 3.

105. Cf. H. B. MEYER, *Luther und die Messe* (Paderborn 1965).

The biblical and patristic research of recent times has shown that the real meaning of the priest's role in the Mass is not the consecration of bread and wine seen in a kind of splendid isolation, but more basically a service rendered for the growth and unity of the assembly through the preaching of the word and his leading of the community in the great eucharistic prayer. For the ultimate goal of the Eucharist is not the changing of bread into the Body of Christ; what is done in the species is a sign of that more meaningful conversion which should be taking place in the assembly. The real purpose of the Eucharist is not the changing of bread, but the changing, the conversion, the incorporation of the assembly – and ultimately of all men – into the Body of Christ. Nobody has put it better than St Augustine: 'If you are the body of Christ and his members, it is the mystery of *yourselves* that is laid upon the altar. It is the mystery of *yourselves* which you receive. It is to what *you* are that you answer "Amen". For you will hear "The body of Christ" and you will say "Amen"'.¹⁰⁶

Order is essentially related to the Eucharist, said the scholastics. This may be perfectly true, but it does not mean that the priest is to be understood as a sort of agent for transubstantiation or sacrifice. The role of the priest in the Mass is to build up the mystical Body of Christ through word and sacrament, through the preaching of the Gospel and the sacrament of the Eucharist. But when we examine that sacrament more closely, the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, we find that it takes place through the great eucharistic prayer in which the priest leads the people, a prayer which is at the same time the preaching of the Gospel. For what is the Canon of the Mass in its origin and essence but the proclaiming of the 'magnalia Dei in Christo' – 'Qui pridie quam pateretur . . . hic est enim calix sanguinis mei . . . qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum'? The Church's *priesthood* remains essentially linked with the Eucharist – but it is not the Eucharist understood as mere transubstantiation or purely cultual sacrifice. It is rather the Eucharist understood as the Word of God in the original biblical use of the term, the *dabhar Jahweh* which is proclaimed here in word and sacrament, and which summons, constitutes and sustains the Church.

It is here ultimately that we touch on the essence of the Christian priesthood – a vocation of service to mankind in the proclamation of the word of God, a missionary commission to build up the Church through

106. ST AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 272 (PL 38, 1247). Cf. G. DIECKMANN, *The Eucharist Makes the People of God*, *Worship*, 39 (1965), 467: 'In the Mass we priests say "Hoc est enim corpus meum", and that *corpus* signifies not only Christ, but also our people being transformed into Christ'.

preaching and sacrament. 'My priesthood is to preach and announce the Gospel; this is the sacrifice which I offer'. The words are not Martin Luther's but those of a great Father and Doctor of the Church, St John Chrysostom.¹⁰⁷ It may be that the Holy Spirit is leading the Church today to a return to this more dynamic concept of the Christian ministry current in the early Church. At any rate it is encouraging to note that the Council's Decree on the Priesthood marks a significant departure from the scholastic theology of the theological manual in that it no longer takes as its starting point the priest's power of offering sacrifice. The text centres rather around the idea of the priesthood as a ministry of service to the Church, and through the Church to mankind.

107. *In Epist. ad Rom.* 15:16 (PG 60, 655).