

# MINISTRY

IN BIBLIOTHEOLOGICAL-CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE ----- ELLIOTT #2097

This Thinksheet was prepared for the Conveners' Orientation at the *Craigville Theological Colloquy III*, Craigville (MA) Conference Center, Sept.30 - Oct.2, 1986. Gabriel Fackre, the other orienter, provided materials to context the Colloquy historicotheologically: what are we doing / trying to do in the perspective of the world Church today, and in particular of the historical and contemporary reality of the United Church of Christ? My backgrounder looks at some scriptures\* pertinent to our Colloquy theme, The Ministry of the Whole People of God, as both productive and illuminative of basic affirmations of faith/order/life/work vis-a-vis "the one apostolate of the Church" (p. 34, Vatican II "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 18 Nov 65," USCatholicConference, Improved Translation 1967; hereafter, DAL; the affirmations below, however, are mine--not derived from this or any other source; I put the convictions in this form because it seems appropriate to the tasks of the Conveners-and-Groups and of the Colloquy as a whole).....\* On this thinksheet are only a few references, the most common ones in discussions on the theme. Herewith are two backgrounders to this backgrounder: #453 ("some word-reflections on MINISTRY") and #697 ("some scriptures on LEADER" in the Bible). These two Thinksheets, covering the biblical contexts of ministry, may be useful to your prayerful preparatory perusal of Scripture on our Colloquy theme....

WARNINGS: (1) Yield not to the temptation to lay teaching on your group! Observe faithfully the guidelines--one riverback being the group's responding to the immediately prior presentation, the other being the "Group Draft" as goal; (2) Yield not to the temptation to use my "Affirmations" as, in any way, content for your group: they are meant only as background thoughtstarters for you personally.

## A F F I R M A T I O N S

- 1. The divine ELECTION of "the whole people of God" is the control concept over any doctrine of divine SELECTION of individuals/groups within the whole people of God. The former is the genus, the latter only a species or subcategory.** Something more is being said than the obvious fact that a religious community draws its leadership from within itself and that, to render the selection sacrally impressive, the choice is said to be made by the god. The biblical more is that the whole community constitutes the collective leader of humanity toward the unity of "all things" in the praise of God, toward the cosmic shalom: Gn.12.3; Is.41.20;42.1,4b-7;43.10-13;44.2-5;49.1-3,6f,22,26bc;51.4f;52.13-15;55.5;56.6-8;60.3; 1P.2.9f. (Christian locus classicus).
- 2. All true ministry is mission, apostolic action.** It's easy to fall into the error that since "ministry" is Latin for "service," its essence is helpfulness responsive to human need. But the essence of ministry is action in response to the fact that God's people are "sent" (Latin, "miss."; Greek, "apostol.") as e-miss-aries of the Good News (Greek, "evangel.") of oncoming shalom (Hebrew, the total prosperity of God's creation, including the whole person in the whole human community) centering in God's glory (the praise-worship of the Source and Destiny of "all things"). **Israel & Church are "sent" as vanguards of shalom-glory.** How we, collectively and individually, treat our fellow-humanity is under the judgment of (1) the character of God visible through Moses and Jesus, and (2) the consequent quality of life to be lived when the Kingdom (Sovereignty-Realm) of God "comes" and the Will of God is "done on earth as it is in heaven"--the quality (says the Sermon on the Mount) our lives by grace can now have in anticipation (and consequent disjunction from the self-interested calculations of "this age").
- 3. Since mission-ministry is of, for, and through "the whole people of God," again (as in Affirmation #1) the cleric/laic distinction is secondary--and, further, dangerous because of its tempting God's people to over**

**split the hyphen, assigning "mission" to clergy and "service" to laity.** I recall this warning from Letty Russell while I was teaching with her a doctoral seminar; she came up with "laergy" to dramatize the inseparability of laity and clergy here. (It's a double doublet: (1) the "synergy," working together of clergy and laity; and (2) "la"ity + cl"ergy.")

**4. The "ministry of the laity" is, like "the ladies' auxiliary," both descriptive and pejorative; let's, rather, say "the laity (& the clergy) in ministry."** DAL's "the apostolic activity of the people of God"(p.1) and "the one apostolate of the Church" restores the unity of the mission-ministry and leads straight on to the present Liberation Theology affirmation of the equal (cleric/laic) initiative in church-and-spiritual formation (as in Leonardo Boff's ECCLESIOGENESIS: THE BASE COMMUNITIES RE-INVENT THE CHURCH, Orbis/86). ("Lay theological education" parallels the "ministry of the laity" as a phrase failing to protect the church against the temptation to consider the laity in ministry as inferior to the clergy in ministry--as I discovered when NYTheol.Sem.'s Dean of Lay Theological Education!) DAL, p.1, gives these reff. as instances of the laity in ministry: Ac.11.19-21; 18.26; Ro.16.1-16; Phil.4.3.

**5. Ironical chiasmus:** Preexilic Judaism was hieratic-prophetic but, with the loss of land & temple (& therefore priestcraft), became laic, as it is to this day; but Christianity, basically a conversional (nonbiological) religion & so nondynastic-laic, has leaned toward priestcraft (on the OT model!) and is restored to ministry (laic/cleric) wholeness only under reform pressures (eg, the Protestant Reformation & Vatican II). But in both religions of the only biblical faith, and everywhere else, incursions of **Spirit**, when abiding, cool down into **institutions**, with their internal-&-external mission-ministry requirements necessitating assigned functions (these "clergy" seen as Spirit-chosen, partly to keep institution from overwhelming Spirit). It's a teeter-totter & trade-off. **The NT exhibits this necessary process in its earliest stages and in this is model rather than prescription for church order-ing (bene esse). As for the church's order (esse), this is under the continuous guidance of the Spirit, whose giving of "gifts" (eg Ro.12.1-8, channeled through the gift of "yourselves"; 1Cor.12.1-31a) + their being lived out in mission-ministry, including the pragmatic best situational church order-ing, = the church's "full being" (plene esse).** (The 2nd  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Eph.--ie 4-6, which begins with a "gifts" statement--shows all this process as it was being worked out in Paul's churches the generation after him--in, of course, my opinion, following the Goodspeed school.)

**6. On mission-ministry & the church, the NT is not lawbook but picture-book.** Here are, of the 50 some, the main ones through which the **Spirit** guides us: **THE PEOPLE OF God** 1P.2.9f; **THE NEW CREATION** 2Cor.5.17-20; **THE FELLOWSHIP IN FAITH** Jn.17-14-26; **THE BODY OF CHRIST** 1Cor.10.14-31; 12.7-12.

**7. The "laos" both does and does not include God's whole people.** It does in the first-level, **SPIRIT** meaning; it doesn't in the second-level, **INSTITUTION** meaning, where it's the antonym of "cleros" (the clergy as distinct from the laity--as in the phrase "pastor and people"). Because the confusing double meaning is in our early Christian sources, we're as stuck with it as we are, in English, with "right," meaning both correct and the opposite of left. So don't sweat it; but use it for its simple lexical pointing to the two-levelness of the church's order-ing.

**8. As a "protestant" (both senses) movement, early Christianity (Jesus + NT) persuades to openness toward **Spirit** & suspiciousness toward **institution**--a reversal that puts leadership on bottom (eg M.10.42-45).**