

Yesterday (10Apr84) an ordinand to whom I'm advisor read to our UCC association's Committee on the Ministry a devout and brilliant ordination-statement. More than any I'd ever heard before, it was committed to and in-formed by "the ministry of the laity" (with pastor-teacher as trainer of the troops in healing and in the struggle for justice and peace). I applaud this perspective as (1) a double corrective, viz., to the ordained "doing" the ministry and to the provincial tendency of the clergy-centered church to be a world unto itself rather than God's servant in the service of the world; and (2) more faithful to NT's christocentricity (all the servants equal under and in Christ) than is any form of clericalism; and (3) as of my own heart and history (including laity schools in Greater NYC with NYTSeminary as base)...This thinksheet reflects and continues a conversation I had with the ordinand on the way home from the meeting.

1. Not all "doing religion" is "ministry," so our context is too narrow even after we've read this thinksheet's title as many ways as possible. Here are, apart from ordination, some claims on and (should be) of clergy (i.e., the ordained):

(1) The inherent devoutness of our species. In the whole of God's creation as known to us, we seem to be most worthy of being called "the worshiping animal" (the angels outworshipping us, but not being animals). Any religious group will somewhat (however un/consciously) see its leader(s) as priest(s) of this natural religion--as, night before last, Johnny Carson was priest to the Oscars. This the primordial layer of priest-prophet-king is obscured (1) by Christianity's radical desacralizing of nature and thus also of natural religion, and (2) by the erosion of reverence in modern secularistic society (society being a jungle without reverence, and thus our public schools being jungles: the heart of the "prayer in the schools" controversy). What is this life if, full of care, "We have no time to stand and stare?" (W. H. Davies). Though all anthropologies are (necessarily) under paradigmatic distortion, anthropology is our primary base for understanding natural religion (and of the folks I've known, Wach and Eliade have been the most helpful to me here, though neither ever taught in the ticky-tacky little box called "Anthro").

(2) The over/under syndrome afflicts clergy who are unaware of their natural-religion function, as UCC clergy--in contrast to cultists!--tend to be. We UCCers teach AGAINST the natural piety of reverence for the priest (but worship only of the god), and FOR pastor/people egalitarianism (nobody here but just us chickens or foxes). The failure to draw on the powers of natural religion goes a long way to explaining why liberal religion (not just liberal theology) is dying out. No matter how we may kid ourselves, we never outgrow ou need for nature-priests. Holy, holy, where went the holy? Out of our "mainline" churches and into various forms of guruism (including the Southern Baptists, who teach priest-reverence) and eroticism (Christine Brinkley now getting \$100,000 per day as a model) and familism (Jane Fonda) and spiritualism (Shirley MacLaine) and macho (rough, Nicholson; smooth, Reagan) and commercialism (Mad Avenue). In the Declar. of Indep., Jeff. speaks of "nature, and of nature's God." Ecologically, we're beginning to recover nature; but we must rediscover, and appropriate to our Faith, nature's priest.

(3) In any particular religion, the priest combines (1) serv-ing the Numen (the divine, however conceived--indeed, whether or not conceived as the divine, i.e., god/goddess) with (2) modeling this service and (3) leading in this service (thus, servus servorum "servant of the servants" and primus inter pares "first among equals"). This I observe from the perspectives of many lifelong studies: clergy who ful-

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fil these functions within their roles have power (for good or ill, depending on the quality of the particular Numen and the integrity of the particular priest). In our social-leveling society, it's all chiefs and no Indians: husband is not over wife in any sense ("partnership" being the control-word), teacher is ("alongside," not in any sense "over") not over student, priest is not over people. From the psychosocial point of view, what's tragic here is the chaotic flaccidity: what is being attempted is not structure but antistructure, viz., "not-over-ness." Said Dostoevsky, a virtue extended far enough becomes a crime; egalitarianism in American society has now been extended far enough to become at least a damned shame. In the coffeehour last Sunday I confronted some of my fellowmembers who'd said of the sermon, "That was only his opinion"--of a matter on which the proper division was knowledge/ignorance. It's what the British would call "bad form" to use knowledge/ignorance for analysis, for it's vertical: knowies on top, dummies on the bottom. It's an offense against cleric/laic equality, which often becomes laic superiority: "I have a right to my opinion, and the preacher has no right to...." Overpreaching "the ministry of the laity" in a superegalitarian society tends to wipe out priestcraft in the churches--and push the people into worshipping other priests (in the case of that coffeehour conversation, nice-guy Reagan, to cross whom is, for millions of Americans, lese majesty--a syndrome brilliantly exposed in Barbara Tuchman's THE MARCH OF FOLLY, instance Vietnam).

2. Baptism, in the full context of Christian initiation/commission, wasn't something Jesus and Paul were much "into." Like the Eucharist, it's both unitive and divisive of clergy/laity. Along with all else these "Sacraments of the Gospel" symbolize, they provide public demonstration of the superiority (formal, by functional) of clergy over laity. This, within the doctrine of the mutual superiority of laity and clergy (are not the laity superior, e.g., both in having worldly positions and in providing the clergy's physical support?). For order, joy, peace, and effectiveness in church and world, we need to create a "consent of the governed" verticality in our present flatland of church, home, society. It's a task we should expect an ordinand to take on.

3. I rejoice that Bible study is coming back in big even in sophisticated congregations. As the "normal" leaders in this, clergy need to be freed to become freer in, with, and from Scripture--to be (good sense) authorities on the Bible and, as such, over the laity (while, as among the baptized, alongside them, listening/speaking--the primary position of all in true Bible study). (WARNING: Spoon-feeding teaches little but the shape of the spoon.) As minister of the sacred, clergy are to exhibit/teach the sacrality of the Book, the "book-religion" feel we inherited from Judaism, into whose Book (the Hebrew Bible) sacrality collapsed, in AD70, both from priestcraft and from the land (both being lost that year to the Romans). (Barbara Tuchman again: "The home I grew up in taught me that the most wonderful thing a human being could ever do is to write a book." So, Jewish excellence in scholarship.) Another important effect of lay access to the Book: the laity, from AD70 on (in English, from Wyclif on), became their own priests and the possessors of their own lands: the relation of eye and book is radically individualizing. The pastor-TEACHER swims with/against the stream here.

4. Since (Tillich's) "the protestant principle" is active from the beginning of Christianity to the present day, wise Christian clergy learn to live skilfully with the paradox that (1) they are natural-religion priests (thus, my Junior Confirmation, at puberty) and that (2) the emergence of Christian leadership is charismatic, of the Spirit, as well as historic, of the Church (thus, my Senior Confirmation--#1824).