

# **The Meaning & Nature of Diakonia**

## **Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**

Outstanding scholar, theologian, philosopher, polyglot and man of letters. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios sought to bring together in a holistic vision, several disciplines like philosophy, economics, political science, medicine, education, physics and theology.

Born in 1922 at Tripunithura, Kerala, the great scholar-bishop had his earlier stints in his homestate as a journalist and postal service employee. He proceeded to Ethiopia in 1947 accepting the job of a teacher there and in course of time became the Special Secretary to Emperor Haillie Sellasi. He had an exceptional educational career in Yale, Princeton and Oxford Universities. Returning to Kerala, he was ordained as a priest of the Orthodox Church. In 1967 Fr. Paul Verghese became the Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 1975, he was elevated as a bishop. Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios took charge of the Delhi Diocese of the Orthodox Church in July 1975.

Honours came unsought to Mar Gregorios. He had the good fortune to be the President of the World Council of Churches and the Indian Philosophical Congress. In 1988, he received the Soviet Land Nehru Award. His Grace travelled widely and showed an unusual intellectual courage to explore new paradigms in human thinking. He was visiting professor in several universities like the J. N. U. in New Delhi. The philosopher-bishop passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1996 and his mortal remains lie entombed in the Orthodox Seminary Chapel, Kottayam.

Including the posthumous publications, Mar Gregorios has authored more than 47 books. *The Joy of Freedom, Freedom of Man, The Cosmic Man, The Human Presence, Enlightenment East and West, A Light Too Bright* and the spiritual autobiography *Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery* are some of the most remarkable among these. Hundreds of his articles and lectures have been published in leading newspapers, and international magazines.

**The Meaning  
& Nature of Diakonia**  
(Bible Studies)

**Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**

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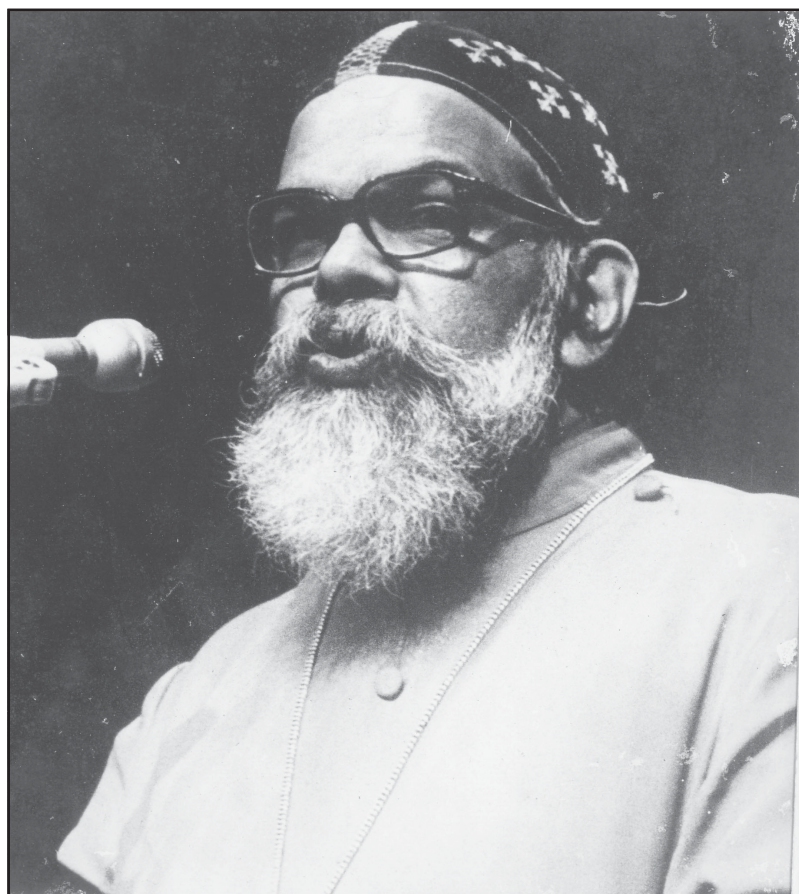
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First Web Edition: December 2015

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# 1

## To Serve and not to be Served

*Then the mother of the Sons of Zcbedee approached him along with her two sons, doing reverence to him and asking something from him.*

*Jesus asked her: “What do you want?” She says to him: “Please say that these two sons of mine will be seated one on your right hand and the other on your left hand, in your kingdom.”*

*Jesus responding said to them: “You do not realize what you are asking for. Are you capable of drinking the cup which I am about to drink?” They answer: “We are able.”*

*Jesus says to them: “Of course you will drink my cup; but to be seated at my right and my left - that is not for me to grant; it is reserved for those for whom my Father has prepared those places.”*

*The ten other apostles were quite annoyed with the Two brothers. So Jesus called all of them to him and said: “You know that the rulers of the nations like to lord it over the people and their leaders like to show off their power over other people. It should not be so with your people. But whoever wants to be great amongst you, let that person be a servant of the others. And if one wants to be the chief, let that person be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but on the contrary to serve and to give his life as the price of redemption for many others.”*

Matt. 20:20-28 (free but faithful translation)

The context of the sons of Zebedee episode is in Matthew 20: 17-19, and the parable which precedes of the house-holder who paid

the same wages to those who worked all day from sunrise to sunset, to others who came to work at 9.00 a.m., to yet others who were hired at noon, to some who started at 3 p.m. and even to those who worked only for one hour from 5 p.m. (Matt. 20:1-16). It ends with the curiously unjust principle that God can do with God's kingdom what God likes. The implication is that God's justice does not follow the principles we usually attribute to our concept of justice.

The parable of the kingdom ends with two statements difficult to exegete:

Friend, I am not unjust to you. Our contract was for one denarius. Take what is yours by contract and go. But it is my will that I will give to these last ones the same one denarius I give you. Am I not free to give what I want to give out of my own? Are you jealous about my being good to these people? Thus the last will be first and the first will be last (Matt. 20:13b-16).

It is important to remember this. God's justice follows principles quite different from ours.

It is also important that after having narrated this parable, so offensive to our sense of justice, Jesus was about to "go up" to Jerusalem for the great act of *diakonia* - that of laying down his life for others. Jesus calls the Twelve aside by themselves and discloses to them:

"Look, we are going up to Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be betrayed and handed over to the high priests and law professors; they will condemn him to death, and will again betray and hand him over to the gentiles, to be mocked, to be whipped and finally to be crucified; on the third day he will be resurrected" (Matt. 20:18-19).

Then comes the mother of John and James to plead for special privileges of power, authority and glory for her two sons. She has accepted the requirement that the way to the kingdom was through the cross, at least for the Son of Man, the Messiah. She believed that



the Lord Jesus would rise from the dead to rule over Israel. She and her sons were prepared to pay the price, that of drinking the Messiah's cup of suffering with him. She and they accept the Messiah as the crucified and risen Lord. And one of them, John, is the beloved disciple, a special favourite of our Lord. But she was being fair to her two sons, that both of them should have positions of special privilege, honour and power. She does not want to show any favouritism to one of her sons, as Jesus did. In fact Jesus did something quite special for that one son, the "disciple whom he loved"; Jesus at the cross practically took him away from his own mother and handed him over to Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary in turn to John (John 19: 25-27). John took Mary to his own house (19:27), where she must have lived with John's mother.

It was for this special son and his brother that their mother asked for special privileges. More or less legitimate, isn't it? At least fairly reasonable. Now, the reaction of the ten other apostles also seems eminently reasonable: "We all know that this young man John is a special favourite of the Master. We wouldn't quite be up to questioning the Master about it. Maybe he wants to groom John to be his successor! Who knows? Anyway they had no business dragging their mother into it; and asking for *two* special positions - that is too much. What do those guys think the rest of us are - mere suckers? We too have worked hard, faced much, suffered opposition, left our family and friends to follow the Master, haven't we?"

So went the discussion among the Ten.

It is in this ambience of power-seeking, ambition and jealousy in which all the Twelve are caught up that Jesus drops the bomb: "The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served."

We need to look at the leadership of the churches and the ecumenical movement to see whether we are really much better than the apostles. "We are all Christians (we say), committed and all that. We could all have made better careers if we had gone into secular jobs and vocations. We have made considerable sacrifice to come and serve the church or the ecumenical movement. We are not struggling for power, mind you. All we are asking for is a little recognition."

Nothing has been so divisive of the churches as the ambitions, the jealousies, the power struggles among Christian workers and leaders. Quite unconsciously we fall a prey to that perennial temptation of humanity in the world, the desire for power and position, for worldly glory and honour. And so long as that is our basic orientation, the church cannot be united. There can be neither true unity nor genuine community so long as each thinks of his or her own power and position. Humble diakonia is in fact a central principle of the unity of the church.

Matthew 27:55 tells us that the mother of the sons of Zebedee was one of the people who used their own money to serve Jesus. See Luke 8:1-3, where we are told that these women were serving Jesus as well as the needy out of their own wealth.

The mother of Zebedee was thus already engaged in diakonia when she asked Jesus for the special favour of positions of power and glory. Is that temptation still not with us - that in our very serving we seek power and position?

The missionaries of a previous generation were in that situation. They served the people of the mission field sincerely, and in so far as they did that they had a social position, power and prestige which they would not have when they went back to their own people.

The new missionaries of the interchurch aid empire are in a worse situation. Some of them are stationed among the people whom they serve, but most are only periodic visitors. And they are welcomed so warmly and specially by the people who locally handle their hand-outs. In return for their diakonia they get to sit on the right hand and on the left hand of the powers that be. And if they are not properly received and feted by project-holders, the projects may suffer. There is something radically wrong with that sort of diakonia.

Let me enumerate four necessary conditions of authentic diakonia. Later I hope to show how Jesus Christ is the true deacon, the server and the Son of Man who came to serve and not to be served. I hope the word study will make it clear that the model for Jesus' Messianic ministry itself was the four oracles in Second Isaiah about the Suffering Servant, the '*ebed-Yahweh*.'

The four necessary conditions of an authentic Christian diakonia are the following:

- a) the willingness to suffer with those whom one serves and to give of oneself;
- b) humility as opposed to superiority about oneself, and respect as opposed to condescension towards those to be served;
- c) not using diakonia as an occasion for domination, privilege and rank;
- d) willingness to identify with the served to the point of laying down one's life for their sake.

a) Authentic diakonia should involve more than the giving of money or goods or services, more than the "sharing" of resources and personnel. It demands taking upon oneself the suffering of others. It demands laying aside the sense of self-sufficiency of the server, in order to feel and take on the sense of helplessness and need experienced by the served. The foreign missionaries of an earlier generation were better placed in this regard than the new interchurch aid and donor agency missionaries. The latter do not live among the people they serve, and only from a distance feel the pinch of the need of the poor. Their representatives in the field - those who handle "projects" and "programmes" - are usually much better paid than routine church workers, serve out of their abundance and live lives far removed from that of the poor whom they are to serve.

We need a diaconic structure based in the people of the local church, rather than in the donor agencies or the project-holder networks they have created in their "field." Only then will the church in the locality be able to exercise its diakonia function, largely financed from the resources of the local church people, and largely involving the local Christians themselves suffering with and serving the poor.

The present money-and-project based interchurch aid should thus become more marginal, in order to permit the local church to exercise its diakonia of suffering with people and giving of oneself.

b) Attitudes are all-important in authentic diakonia. The server must respect the served. If diakonia comes out of attitudes of superiority it generates the most unpleasant and unhealthy reactions

from the served. If service makes them feel inferior and dependent, such service cannot be regarded as Christian, for instead of mediating the healing love of Christ, it simply generates resentment and negative feelings of wounded pride. Christian service has no right to anticipate feelings of gratitude or ties of obligation and dependence. The present attitudes create resentment in other cultures, for they force them to sell their dignity for the sake of paltry sums of money that people desperately grab.

c) Diakonia is today often used as a means of domination by creating relations of dependence. Interchurch aid does not quite do what international aid does - namely use aid to capture markets and to exploit people in such a way that many times more than the aid flows back to the aid-giving economy through unjust trade relations. But interchurch aid is used in much the same way as international aid to create “spheres of influence” and areas of economic, political and cultural domination and dependence. This is particularly true of bilateral interchurch aid, but ecumenical aid is not much different, in so far as it represents aid from a sector of the Western Consortium which dominates and exploits two-third world economies.

d) Willingness to lay down one’s life for the sake of those served seems to be an acid test of authentic Christian diakonia. At present this seems an extremely remote possibility in the context of international interchurch diakonia. It makes much more sense in the context of the service of a local church to the people around or the people of that nation. Diakonia involves the element of confronting the oppressors of the people whom one wants to serve. This can hardly be done by international interchurch aid, but can be done more effectively by the churches in a locality mutually supporting and reinforcing each other in the struggle against injustice. At this point outside aid can at times be very counter-productive.

If Christ our Lord is the model for authentic diakonia, as we shall see later, then a diakonia which involves no cost to oneself, beyond “sharing money or personnel”, can hardly be authentic.

## 2

### **‘Abodah - Diakonia - Leitourgia: a Word Study**

*If the diakonia of death, inscribed on tablets of stone, came with such glory that the children of Israel were unable to look on the face of Moses because of the glorious splendour of his face, steadily fading though it was, how much greater must be the splendour of the glory of the diakonia of the Spirit?*

*If the diakonia of judgment and condemnation has such glory, how much greater must be the glory of the diakonia of righteousness? The first glory, which was partial and measured, is eclipsed by the far greater glory of that which came after. The first was a fading glory; the second, an abiding glory, is much greater indeed.*

*Since this is our trustful hope, with great boldness we advance, unlike Moses who had to put a veil over his face, so that the children of Israel would not see that this glory tended to fade. Their understanding became hardened and inflexible. For to this day, every time the reading of the Old Testament takes place the veil remains over their minds. The veil is unlifted, for only in Christ it can be removed. Yes, even to this day whenever Moses is read, the veil is over their very hearts. For only when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

*Now that Lord, to whom we turn, is the Holy Spirit. For there is freedom and liberation where the Spirit of the Lord is. And all of us, when we turn with unveiled faces to the glory of the Lord, in us is reflected the same glorious image of God, and we are transformed, from one degree of glory to a higher one, as that glory is transmitted from the Lord the Spirit.*

*So, it is this diakonia that we have received, which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on us. So we do not lose nerve. But we renounce hidden and shameful ways. We no longer conduct*

*ourselves with deceit and cunning and dishonesty. We do not falsify the word of God. But in the open manifestation of the truth, without any mask or veil on our face, we present ourselves as we are to everyone's conscience and in the sight of God (2 Cor. 3:7-4:2).*

*Now regarding the diakonia which is for God's holy ones in Jerusalem, there is no need to say much... The diakonia of this liturgy is not merely to fill up the gaps in their physical needs, but it is a liturgical service, which will well up in many eucharists to God in that community. This diakonia is the demonstration of your own glorification of God; it is an integral part and logical consequence of your acknowledging the gospel of Jesus Christ, and of the generosity of your communion in sharing with them and with others. They in turn in their prayers on your behalf will, glorify God and give thanks because the grace of God has so overflowed to them from you. O what a wonderful, inexpressible gift we have from God! Thanks be to him (2 Cor. 9:1, 12-15).*

The Hebrew word 'abodah', meaning work, service, cult, etc. and its derivatives occur more than one thousand times in the Old Testament. The word 'ebed' alone meaning "servant" occurs 870 times in the Hebrew Masoretic text. The Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament however does not even in one instance translate the word 'ebed' by *diakon*; 340 times it is translated *pais* or child; 327 times it is translated *doulos* which later came to mean a slave. In 46 cases the translation is *therapon* or one who takes care of someone; in 36 cases it is *oiketes* or domestic servant.

It may surprise us to know however that when our Lord says that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, the expression clearly in his mind is the Old Testament concept of 'ebed-Yahweh' or 'Servant of the Lord.' In fact this Old Testament expression "Servant of the Lord" is decisive for coming to an understanding of the New Testament concept of *diakonia*. We have therefore to dwell a little on the evolution of this expression 'ebed-Yahweh' and the related 'abad' and 'abodah.'

'Abad' in the book of Exodus (mostly J passages) is worth looking

at, because it defines the purpose of Israel's calling, and therefore the calling of Jesus Christ and his church.

In Exodus 7:16, Yahweh is speaking to Moses:

“And you (Moses) shall say to him (the pharaoh):  
 “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews sent me to you, to say: “Commission (*shalach*, the root from which *shaliach* or apostle comes) my people (‘*ammi*) so that they may offer ‘*abodah* to me (*yaabdu*).”

The Septuagint, translates this thus: *exaposteilon ton laon mou hina moi latreusei*. Now *latreia* and *latreuo* are the Septuagint words for cultic worship. The same expression coming from Yahweh through Moses and addressed to the Pharaoh is repeated in Exodus 9:1, 9:13 and 10:3. In the English RSV it occurs also in 8:1 and 8:20, but I do not find it in the Hebrew or Greek texts.

Repeatedly thus, the purpose of the Exodus is clearly stated: that the people of Israel are to go out of Egypt in order to render ‘*abodah* or *latreia* or worshipful service to Yahweh. This is the original vocation of Israel - to be a worship-offering servant.

After the first four plagues hit Egypt (Nile-water turning into blood, Exo. 7:20; the plague of frogs, 8:6; the plague of gnats, 8:18; great swarms of flies, 8:24), Pharaoh changes his mind and says to Moses and Aaron: “Go, make your sacrifice to your God within the country itself” (8:25). Clearly the Pharaoh understands that the people want to make a sacrifice to their God; but he wants them to do it in Egypt. The fifth, sixth and seventh plagues still did not change Pharaoh's mind. Only after the locust plague finished off what was left by the hail-storm, there was a change of heart, first in Pharaoh's servants who plead with Pharaoh: “Let the menfolk go so that they may offer ‘*abodah*’ (*ya abdu*) to “Yahweh their God” (10:7). Pharaoh agrees to let just the men go. Moses insisted that all had to go - the little ones and the cattle included. ‘*Abodah*’ was to be offered not just by the menfolk. It was the whole of Israel, with all their cattle, that is to offer ‘*abodah* to Yahweh. The cattle are needed for the ‘*abodah*’ (10:26) for the sacrifice which forms an integral part of Israel's service to God.

I want to draw our attention to an element overlooked in our Old Testament studies. We have a conception of the Old Testament as centred around the Law on the one hand meaning mainly the Ten Commandments, and the prophetic call for righteousness on the other. Then by introducing a supposedly Pauline contrast between the Law and the Gospel, we write off the Law. But liberal Protestantism is anxious to retain the element of *mishpat* or prophetic justice as an essential element of Christianity. It does not very often notice the contradiction between the rejection of works - righteousness on the one hand, trusting only in justification by faith, and on the other hand demanding works - righteousness creating social justice.

My point here, however, is something else. Why do we see so much of the prophetic call to justice and so little of the '*abodah* or cultic-sacrificial service, with which the Old Testament is saturated? In order to get a balanced view of Christ's diakonia we need to take seriously this '*abodah* element which was central to the life of the Jewish people.

Moses is a prophet - in a sense the prophet, an *ebed-Yahweh* par excellence of the Old Testament. He was a prophet because he had stood before the Lord on the top of Mount Sinai and had received the word directly from the Lord. The standing before the Lord made Moses' face to shine. Exodus 34:29b says: "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God." But that shining has to be renewed every day, by his going into the Tabernacle of Meeting, and facing God, doing '*abodah* to Yahweh (Ex. 34:31-35). Moses received from Yahweh not merely the Ten Commandments. Read Exodus again, about "the thing which Yahweh commanded you to do." We have the six days for the ordinary work, which is also called '*abodah* and then on the seventh day, as the Sabbath Israel is to do the '*abodath-Yahweh*, ceasing from ordinary '*abodah* in order to devote themselves entirely to the Lord's '*abodah*. The whole of Exodus chapters 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 to the very end of the book, the commandment of the Lord is about the '*abodah* of the tabernacle. And all the people, men and women, cooperated.

"All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything to the '*abodah*



which Yahweh had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as their free will offering to Yahweh” (Ex. 35:29).

And what is the whole book of Leviticus about? We are blind to this because of the anti-clericalism and anti-ritualism bequeathed to us by the French Revolution and the European Enlightenment. Leviticus is totally the book of *‘abodah*. And we cannot understand *diakonia* without the background of the Old Testament *‘abodath-ha-mishkan* (the *‘abodah* of the tabernacle - Num. 3:7) or the *‘abodath-ohel-moed* (*‘abodah* of the tent of meeting).

In fact, in the Old Testament the contract or covenant, the *berith*, is characterized by two central relationships between two unequal partners. The senior or superior partner covenants to show *hesed*, or steadfast, unflinching, dependable love and mercy to the junior or inferior partner. The latter on the other hand keeps the covenant alive, reminding themselves, through the *‘abodath-heikal* or service of the temple, that service, that *Gottesdienst*, was the characteristic expression of the covenant, just as the eucharist is the covenant expression for Christians - the blood of the covenant shed on Calvary. “As often as you do this, you show forth the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

We need first to understand, in grappling with the concept of *‘abodah-diakonia*, that we cannot limit it to preaching the word and doing social action. There is another element, when we all turn to the Lord in the ritual action of the eucharist. The greatest meanings, not exhaustible by words, are contained in this ritual act of the church. The eucharist is the church’s *‘abodah-diakonia* par excellence, which empowers us and qualifies us to speak and act, just as Moses had to go back into the presence of Yahweh, in order to be able to face the people, time and again.

Numbers 4:47, in the English translation, conceals the centrality of *‘abodah*. What we read as “to do the work of service”, reads in the original Hebrew: “*la’abod ‘abodath - ‘abodah*.” The tribe of Levi functions on behalf of the whole congregation. The *‘abodah* of the tabernacle belongs to the whole people and not just to the priests.

Twice the expression is repeated in Numbers 3:7 and 8: “the people of Israel minister at the tabernacle” (see also Num. 16:9, 18:6, 1 Chron. 28:20-21).

It is this *'abodah* of the tent that would make the people of Israel a true *'ebed-Yahweh*, who can also become the light of the gentiles. And it is in this context that we should read 2 Corinthians 3:7-42.

In the new diakonia of glory, as contrasted with the old diakonia of judgment, there is a new temple and a new *'abodah*. That was what Stephen the first martyr began speaking about when he was hooted and booed and finally stoned - the temple not made with hands (Acts 7:44-50). This is the temple about which our Lord spoke on the occasion of cleansing the Jerusalem temple. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). It is the temple of his body that he spoke about (John 2:21). It is this temple which is “my father’s house” (John 2:16) in which there are many abiding places (John 14:2), the place which he went to prepare for us (John 14:2, 3). This is the temple about which St. Paul spoke: “Do you not know that you (plural) are God’s temple (singular) and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). This is the temple, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole edifice is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built up into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20-22). This is the temple to which Peter invites us: “Come to him, that living stone, rejected by men, but in God’s sight, elect and priceless: and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:4-5). This is the temple of which the author of Hebrews speaks as the “greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” (Heb. 9:11).

The prophetic and the cultic are not opposed to each other. The cultic is the true matrix of the prophetic. Much of our prophetic speaking and social action suffers from this lack of a face that shines with the exposure to God. The truly prophetic will spring out of the truly cultic, when we learn how to tend this growing edifice of the new temple.

The WCC will be making a big mistake, whether in Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development, or the Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, in women's work or youth activities, in the training of the laity or in ecumenical leadership training, if we overlook this aspect of the face-changing inner transformation wrought by participation in the Spirit's edifice-building activity. If the body of Christ is not built up by the gifts of the Spirit, there can be no Christian diakonia.

But this is not just a matter of singing new hymns to new music. We have inherited this verbal fixation from our Enlightenment background. We will need to come to terms with symbol and ritual if we are to experience face-changing worship. We will have to shed our anti-cult, anti-ritual prejudices inherited from a neo-platonic non-incarnational spirituality and false opposition between the material and the spiritual.

In the 33rd and 34th chapters of Exodus, there is a somewhat amusing request from Moses to Yahweh: "Please show me your glory (*kebodeka*)" (33:18). And Yahweh replied: "I will parade before you all my goodness (*kol-toobi*); I will proclaim before you my name 'Yahweh'; I will show grace to those to whom I want to be gracious; I will exercise mercy to those to whom I want to be merciful." "But", Yahweh continued, "you are not capable of seeing my face. For no human being can look at it and survive." And again Yahweh said: "Here, there is a standing place for you. You stay there on yonder rock. And as my glory passes over you, I will set you up in a ravine in the rock. I will stretch my hand and cover you, until I pass over you. Then I will remove my hand; then you shall see my back, but my face is not to be seen."

Moses had to come back the next morning, and Yahweh did as he had promised. What Moses saw was but the tail of the trail of the glory of Yahweh, which had passed on. And yet his face shone from that exposure. The same Moses had been caught up in the glory of the Lord earlier (Ex. 24:15-18), when that glory came down as a cloud on Mount Sinai and Moses actually entered the glory of the Lord, by entering that cloud.

If our diakonia has to become authentic we will need to do some of the things Moses did, purify and sanctify ourselves, fast for forty days and nights and finally enter the cloud of the Shekinah of Yahweh. That is where the transforming vision takes place - in that cloud of unknowing.

The church as the 'ebed-Yahweh, as the true deacon of God, will need to learn to enter the cloud of God's presence and experience God's self-transforming glory - in the new temple, the spiritual house of the church. It is only from that temple that true diakonia can emerge.

### 3

## **Diakonia - Building and Tending the Temple of God**

*And he (Christ ascended) gave gifts - to some to be apostles, to some prophets, to others the gift of being evangelists, to others to be shepherds and teachers - all this for the purpose of equipping the baptized holy ones for the work of diakonia, i.e. for the upbuilding (oikodome.) of the body of Christ. The purpose is that all of them together may grow up into a single one - in the unity of faith and of unitive knowledge of the Son of God. Thus all are to become one mature humanity (a full-grown human person) whose measure is the fullness of Christ. This is in order that this new humanity should no longer be babies tossed about and pushed around by all the various winds of teaching that spring from the cleverness of human beings in their astute intellectual effort leading only to self-deception. What we are all expected to do is to be true in love, so that all grow towards him and in him; for he, Christ, is the Head. It is from him as controlling element that the whole body is coordinated and linked together in harmony, through the mutually connecting joints provided in the body, and through each part fulfilling the function assigned to it. The same Head ensures that the whole body grows and builds itself up through love (Eph. 4:11-16).*

*So keep in mind that you were once gentiles according to the flesh-perspective, called the uncircumcized by those who were circumcized in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without Christ, alienated from the polity of Israel, the chosen of God. You were strangers to the covenants of hope,*

*and so you had no hope; you were godless in the world.*

*But now, you who were then far (from God's presence and from God's chosen people) have in Christ Jesus been brought in to be near, brought in by the blood of Christ. He, Christ, is our peace-offering who makes both gentiles and Jews one, tearing down the wall that separated them into fragmentation and mutual hostility; by his own crucified flesh he cancelled all the dogmatic commandments of the Torah, in order to create One New Humanity out of the two after making peace between them. And both are now reconciled to God in one body by the cross which kills all enmity. Then he came and proclaimed to you the good news of peace and reconciliation - peace to you who were far and peace to you who were already near.*

*It is through this crucified and risen Christ that we both now have access, in one Holy Spirit, to God the Father. Since we have this access we are no longer strangers or resident aliens, but full citizens of the polity of the Holy Ones, and therefore members of the family of God. We are built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as chief cornerstone. In Jesus Christ the whole edifice (pasa oikodome) is growing in a coordinated and harmoniously inter-related way; this edifice is Christ's body, a holy temple in him; you are also built in and incorporated into this temple, so that the whole temple becomes the presence and, dwelling of God by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:11-22).*

These two passages from the Ephesian epistle bear witness to a developed understanding of the Christian message by the mature apostle Paul - mellowed by suffering, frustration and struggle but rejoicing in hope in the midst of tribulation.

This more mature thought of the doughty apostle to the gentiles needs considerable probing before we modern children of the European Enlightenment and inheritors of a distorted one-sided rationality can come to terms with it.

Our present concept of diakonia is often more the product of this rationality than of a mature Christian understanding. In order to come to terms with the biblical understanding of *'abodah-diakonia* we need to get two rich biblical symbols in focus - the symbol of (a) "the tent of God in which the shekinah of Yahoveh abides", and (b) "the up-building of the Temple made without hands."

These are both symbols central to the Bible and to the diakonia of Jesus the Christ. They together constitute the central symbols of the incarnation of the Son of God.

The Hebrew word *'shekinah'* comes from the verb *shaken* or *shakan* which means "to settle down, to dwell, to rest, to lie down, to abide." As for Yahweh's dwelling, it is in eternity - not in time or space. Isaiah 57:15 speaks of the "High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy." Yahweh tells us where God dwells (same verse): "I dwell in the High and Holy and also in one who is bruised and lowly-in-spirit to lift up the spirit of the lowly and to lift up the heart of the bruised."

God's "natural habitat" is thus dialectical - on the one hand in the inaccessible heights of holiness beyond time and space, and on the other in the bruised and the broken-hearted.

Both dwellings or "presences" of God are God's *shekinah* or *shekinath* (plural). This is not transcendence and immanence as we too easily talk about in theology. It is God's dialectical dwelling. It is not a question of spatio-temporal transcendence as a going-beyond, nor is it immanence in the spatio-temporal sense. It is presence, dwelling, settling down, resting and abiding - God's *prosopon*, God's *shekinah*, God's face or personal presence - the *penei* - *Yahweh* or *panai* of Exodus 33:14 ("My presence will go with you") and Psalms 41:14, 42:12, and 43:5 in the Hebrew text.

This "personal presence" or indwelling of Yahweh the Holy One

is what makes Israel holy. Holiness fits in with the dwelling of God, and it is the dwelling of Yahweh that creates the Holy of Holies. “Make yourselves holy and be ye holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, 45). It is God’s *dwelling* that makes a person, place or thing holy - not, as many commentators say, *being set apart* for the exclusive use of God. The holiness of Israel did not come from their being set apart for Yahweh’s use - it is the presence and indwelling of Yahweh that made the people of Israel holy. In our relationalistic age we think of holiness in functional terms. But the biblical witness interprets holiness in terms of the presence and indwelling of God.

If Christians are “saints” or ‘holy’, it is not because they are set apart for God, but because God indwells them, because God’s presence is in them.

Once this central aspect of God’s indwelling is fully grasped we can move on to the tent or temple symbolism in the Old and New Testaments. The tabernacle or worship tent for which detailed instructions were given to Moses on Mount Sinai by Yahweh is the heart of the symbolism of God’s abiding in and among humans.

Exodus 40:1 tells us about the erection of the “tabernacle of the tent of meeting” on New Year’s day (first day of the first month). This J passage speaks of the *mishkan ohel-moed* (see also Ex. 39:32) - literally the “abode of the tent of meeting at set time.” It is also called just *ohel-moed* (the tent of appointed meeting) (Ex. 27:21; 40:22, 24) where the symbolism demands that a lighted lamp of pure gold should permanently be burning (Ex. 27:21), and the table with the “bread of the presence” (*lechem-ha panim* - literally “bread of the faces”, Ex. 35:13; 39:36) should be perpetually there. The light and the bread are both symbols of the presence of God.

There were other symbols of the presence - the golden altar for offering incense (Ex. 39:38, 40:5), the anointing oil with which all the tabernacle and its utensils were anointed (40:9), symbolizing the presence and sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit; the bronze altar for sacrifices; the laver for washing (40:7), the priests’ vestments, especially the “holy crown of pure gold”, marked “Holy to Yahweh” (*godesh leyahweh* - 39:30), and Aaron himself, anointed with the



holy oil, becomes a symbol (40:12ff.).

The central symbol was the “ark of the testimonies” (*aron ha-  
edoth*), the acacia wood box, 45” x 27” x 27”, covered with solid  
gold inside and outside, with a solid gold lid 45” x 27” (Ex: 37:1ff.).

A summary of the total complex of symbols is given in Hebrews  
9:1ff. This summary is probably based on the Exodus account but  
gives us the additional information that inside the “ark of the covenant”  
(*kiboton tes diathekes*), there were also, in addition to the two slabs  
with the ten commandments which the Exodus account mentions,  
also a golden pot of manna and Aaron’s rod which budded (Heb.  
9:4).

The great symbol is perhaps the lid of the ark - called *Kapporeth*  
(atonement) in Hebrew and *Hilasterion* (mercy-seat) in Greek. This  
symbol is associated with the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus  
Christ, who is called the mercy-seat (Rom. 3:25). This is, in a sense,  
the presence of God par excellence - in forgiveness, mercy, atonement  
and reconciliation.

As I have said, we are children of Enlightenment rationality, word-  
oriented rather than symbol-responding. So we have inhibitions in  
responding to this very rich symbol system to which Moses gave the  
highest importance. The two tablets of the Torah found their place  
within this symbol-system, inside the ark of the covenant, and not  
independently of it. It was at Yahweh’s explicit and detailed command  
that the symbol-system of the tabernacle was set up. The book of  
Exodus devotes 16 chapters to the tabernacle and its  
arrangements (25-40).

The tabernacle and its successor the Temple in Jerusalem continue  
to occupy a central place throughout the Old Testament. The priests,  
the Levites, and the Temple play as important a role in the Old  
Testament as the prophets do. The Temple occupied the locus of  
loyalty for all Israelites wherever they lived, and all Israelite males  
were under statutory obligation to “appear before the Lord” three  
times a year, for the major festivals (Ex. 34:23).

The tabernacle was later set up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 1 Sam. 1:21)

and Shechem (?) and in Baale-Judah (2 Sam. 6:2), or Kereath-Jearim) 1 Chron. 13:6) until David brought it to his new city Jerusalem, where it for a while rested in a tent (2 Sam. 6:17, 7:2, 1 Chron. 15). Solomon built the house for the ark of the presence (1 Kings 6). The building of this three-storey temple of cedar and hewn stone, as well as its elaborate dedication, again receives lengthy treatment in the Book of Kings. This temple, unlike Moses' Tabernacle, was built with forced, not voluntary, labour (1 Kings 5:13ff.); 30,000 workers had to be conscripted, in addition to 70,000 transport labourers and 80,000 hewers of stone, under 3,300 superiors. The description extends to several chapters in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 5-9) and in the Book of Chronicles (1 Chron. 13-17, 21-25, 28-29, 2 Chron. 2-8 etc.).

King Jehoshaphat, several generations later, repaired the temple (2 Kings 12). Jehoshaphat was one of the few kings of Judah and Israel about whom the scripture says: "Jehoshaphat did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days" (2 Kings 12:2) and credit is given to his priest-adviser, Jehoiada. The same is said of Hezekiah who repaired the temple (2 Chron. 29).

The third repair job of the Temple was undertaken by King Josiah, the great reformer (2 Kings 22, 2 Chron. 29, 34:8ff. etc.). It was in the process of repairing the Temple that the scroll of the law of Moses was rediscovered, leading to a new religious renewal (2 Chron. 34:14ff.).

It was this twice-repaired temple that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed, burned and razed to the ground (2 Kings 25). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are devoted to the rebuilding of the Temple and its walls.

The prophetic witness, such as in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, also makes frequent reference to the Temple. So do some of the minor prophets. For example Haggai's prophecy centres around the rebuilding of the temple. So does that of the prophet Zachariah (cf. 1:16; 4:9; 5:12ff., 8:9, etc.).

However, parallel to this demand for the symbol-structure of temple and priesthood, there is also the demand for social and personal righteousness. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the cultic and

the prophetic are opposed to each other in the Old Testament. The prophetic testimony may make light of fast and sacrifice, but it never says anything against the symbol structure of the Temple. In fact the prophetic testimony reaffirms that symbol structure.

We are mistaken in reading back our Enlightenment rationalism-ethicism into the prophetic testimony of the Old Testament. Our anti-clericalism and anti-cultism are inherited, not from the New or Old Testaments, but from the European Renaissance-Reformation-Enlightenment syndrome.

The Temple is at the heart of the Old Testament. It is the service of the Temple that is pre-eminently called *diakonia* or 'abodah' in the Old Testament. One whole tribe (the Levites) from among the twelve tribes of Israel is set apart for the work of the service of *diakonia* of the Temple.

The Temple symbolism begins to reveal more of its meaning content in the New Testament. And to this we now turn in order to clarify the meaning of *diakonia* for Christians.

### **The temple in the New Testament**

Let us first consider the testimony of our Lord himself. We see that this testimony goes back to the infancy narratives.

In the Lucan narrative, the Temple is the locus of the annunciation to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, the fore-runner of the Messiah (Luke 1:8ff.). The entry of Jesus into the Temple as an eight-day old infant is also given prominent treatment (Luke 2:22ff.). Anna, the 84-year old prophetess, was a permanent resident of the Temple, so to speak (Luke 2:37). Joseph and Mary, living in Nazareth, took Jesus every year to the Temple for the feast of Passover (2:41), and at the age of 12 Jesus stayed in the Temple, forsaking his earthly guardians. When the parents finally claim Jesus, he says to them: "Did you not know that I must be in *my father's house*?" (Luke 2:49).

This expression "my father's house" used by the 12-year-old Jesus seems to occupy a central place in Jesus' understanding of his own role as Messiah.

In the Johannine account, the first major teaching act of Jesus after the wedding in Cana is the cleansing of the Temple. “And he said to the sellers of pigeons: Take away these from here. Do not make my Father’s house a trading house” (John 2:16).

This “my Father’s house” takes some significant shifts in meaning in the Johannine account. When the Jews asked the question: “What authorizing sign do you show us for this?”, the answer was: “Tear down this Temple and in three days I will raise it.” The evangelist goes on to say: “This he said in relation to the *temple of his body*” (2:21).

This trans-metaphorical identification of the Temple and Christ’s incarnate body takes on further meaning-shades with the last great discourse in the Johannine account.

In *‘my Father’s house’* many are the abodes. If it were not so, would I have said to you that I am leaving in order to make ready a place for you? So if I leave and prepare a place for you, I will naturally come back and receive you to myself, so that where I am there you can also be (John 14:2-4).

This indeed is the purpose of the incarnation - to prepare the place of the new temple for us. The death of Christ and his resurrection and ascension, as well as the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, are all to be seen as stages in “preparing the place”, or “building the Temple” of Christ’s body.

This seems to have been the point of our Lord’s words: “Dwell in me, and I in you” (John 15:4). Here however the image has shifted from that of the body to that of the grapevine.

The Temple-body metaphor is central in the first Christian martyr’s testimony. In Acts 7 we have the text of Stephen’s speech, probably recorded by St Luke or St Paul as eye-witnesses. Stephen starts with God’s appearance to Abraham and the experience of the people of Israel, but soon shifts to the Temple metaphor. In 7:44 the theme of the “tent of witness” becomes central to his speech. It was made according to a design given by God.

By 7:48 Stephen made the *tour de force* which cost him his life. He openly said that God does not dwell in temples made by human beings, temples of brick and mortar. It was heard by the pro-temple majority in his audience as an indictment of the Jerusalem Temple. Immediately after saying that “Solomon built for God a house”, he stated that the Most High does not dwell in “manufactured” entities. He was about to speak of the “un-manufactured temple” of the body of Christ, when his audience ostensibly became enraged and started booing.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says (3:5):

“Moses was faithful in the whole house of God as a servant; but Christ was faithful in his house as a Son; whose house we are.”

The whole epistle seeks first to point to the symbol system of the Temple and then to the reality which is signified by that symbol system.

The theme is ubiquitous in the New Testament. The first epistle of Peter exhorts Christians to become living stones built into the living Temple of the body of Christ - “the spiritual house” (4:17).

We see the teaching very clearly in St Paul’s writings:

Don’t you know that you (plural) are God’s temple (*naos Theou*) and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone tries to break apart God’s temple, God will break him apart. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you (plural) are (1 Cor. 3.16-17).

Again:

what, do you not know that your (plural) body (singular) is the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which body you have from God, and is not your own? Your body was purchased at a great price. Glorify God therefore in your body (1 Cor. 6:19).

Also:

what common foundation (*sunkatathesis*) has the Temple of God with idols? We are the (living) Temple of the living God (2 Cor. 6:16).

It is in the context of these affirmations that we have to look at the Ephesian passages for our study. It is the service (*'abodah, diakonia*) of this Temple that constitutes true diakonia.

### **Oikodome as diakonia**

The living temple, which is also a growing temple, needs building up. We Christians are baptized for this diakonia. On the one hand, we are to grow with the living temple; on the other, we must help the living temple to grow.

It is this process that the New Testament calls *oikodome*. This is the central task of the church, for which the various gifts or *charismata* of the Spirit are given to the church (Eph. 4:11). No charisma of the Holy Spirit is given for the private enjoyment of the recipient.

1 Corinthians 12 is the *locus classicus* of the discussion on the charismata of the Holy Spirit. And the *charismata* are the key to *oikodome* or upbuilding. One of the questions put by the Corinthian Christians to the apostle Paul was about the comparative values of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit - especially the gift of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues. And St Paul gives an unequivocal answer to their question in 1 Corinthians 14:5:

“The one who prophesies is greater than the one speaking in tongues, except when it is interpreted, so that the church receives upbuilding.”

On what basis does St Paul give such a judgment? What is the criterion of apostolic assessment? It is given in 1 Corinthians 14:4:

“The speaker in tongues edifies (*oikodomei*) oneself. The one who prophesies upbuilds (*oikodomei*) the church.”

In other words the criterion of assessing the comparative advantages of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit is simply the degree to which they build up the Temple of God, the body of Christ, the church. If a gift serves only to build up oneself, it is not to be so highly estimated. All gifts are given for the purpose of upbuilding the whole edifice.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good or common usefulness” (1 Cor. 12:4).

In the apostle’s mind, the *charismata* and the *diakonia* are coordinated, along with the energy for the operation or *energemata*. All three are given in the plural. There are various gifts, various services and various operations, but behind all of it is the same Holy Spirit doing the *oikodome* or upbuilding of the living temple of God.

“There are distinctions among the *charismata* (gifts), but the Spirit is the same One. And there are distinctions among the *diakonai* (services), but the Lord (who serves) is the same One. And there are distinctions among the *energemata* (the operational energies), but it is the same God who energizes all these operations in all” (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

All three are geared to the upbuilding of the Temple of God. The various *diakonai* or services are all dependent on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and on the energizing power of God which operates through the various services.

The difficulty with much that goes by the name of *diakonia* in the church is precisely this dissociation from the *charismata* and the *energemata*. When *diakonia* becomes simply a matter of efficient organization unempowered by the *charismata* and the *energemata*, dissociated from the *oikodome* or upbuilding of the body of Christ, it can no longer be Christian *diakonia*. It becomes another service operation like those in the world and those run by governments and voluntary agencies.

It is hence very important for the World Council of Churches as well as for the member churches to go back to the roots of *diakonia* in the ‘*abodah*’ of the Old Testament, in the ‘*abodah*’ of the Suffering Servant, and in the *diakonia* of upbuilding the living Temple of God, so that it may bear fruit for the glory of God.

The more interchurch aid becomes a set of donor agencies and aid-receiving projects, the less it will be related to the upbuilding of the life of the living Temple of God.

This has actually happened. It happened before in the life of the missionary movement when it became independent of the life of the “sending church” and became a matter of voluntary organizations called “missionary societies.” But at least at the other end the missionary societies kept in touch with the nascent church and received nourishment from it.

We have now a situation where donor agencies and project-holders have only a very limited relationship to the communities of faith at home and abroad. The old missionary empire which functioned as a para-church beside the official churches is now replaced with an interchurch empire largely alienated from churches in aid-giving and aid-receiving countries.

Unless interchurch aid diakonia is reintegrated with the life of the worshipping communities in all countries, it cannot be recipient of the true operations of God geared to the upbuilding of the church.

### **Oikodome for diakonia**

Diakonia is an essential aspect of *oikodome*, and should always keep the latter in mind. But *oikodome* or upbuilding itself is for diakonia. This is the dialectical relationship between the two.

Upbuilding of the church for its twofold ministry is the central task of the World Council of Churches. One is aware that this way of looking at the church’s task is unfamiliar to the Reformation tradition. Strangely enough, it is unfamiliar also to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions.

Yet it is an eminently biblical approach. It is the central idea in the writings of the apostles John, Paul and Peter in the New Testament, as we have shown. The reason why it does not appeal to many modern Christians can be traced to the prejudice against church and clergy inherited from the European Enlightenment rationalism.

*Oikodome* or upbuilding of the church is always *for* and *by* its double diakonia: the service of God in worship on behalf of the people of the world and the service of fellow human beings in the name of God. As the church truly fulfills its double mediation - the prayers and aspirations of the world to God, and God’s grace and love and



mercy and compassion as well as the gospel to the non-Christian world - it will be built up.

It is as the church fulfills its royal priesthood as mediator between God and God's world, interceding, participating in Christ's self-offering to God the Father, and in God's self-giving through Christ to the world, that the church's unity is built up.

This twofold diakonia is implied in the very basis of the WCC, though perhaps not the element of upbuilding or *oikodome*. If the diakonia concept in the Reformed and Lutheran tradition can be redeemed and made to have both its senses, that is, towards God and towards humanity, the twin aim of the WCC would be better served - unity and service. Diakonia as worship of God and the upbuilding of the church for its double diakonia have been the two central emphases for which the WCC has been groping for some time now. If it can grasp this now, and transform its programme and structure accordingly, these could lead to the much-needed renewal in the World Council of Churches and in the church of Jesus Christ in general.

For it is the Spirit of God who is living in us and working through us. And the greatest gift of the Spirit is love - *agape*. There is no gift as potent as *agape* for the purpose of *oikodome*. Love builds up.

## The Diakonia of the Suffering Servant - the Royal Priesthood

### The diakonia of the Suffering Servant

*My effort is not to place any obstacle in anyone's way, in any way, so that the diakonia may in no wise be faulted. No, on the contrary, we as God's deacons (or, as stated in 5:20-21, as ambassadors on behalf of Christ) want to present our credentials to you - in great and patient suffering, in afflictions, in want, in narrow escapes, in calamities, in beatings, in imprisonments, in toil and turmoil, in sleeplessness and hunger - but also in clean dealings, in full knowledge, in patience, in goodness, in the Holy Spirit, in unfeigned love, in the word of truth, in the power of God, clad with the armour of righteousness on the left and the right; taking glory and dishonour alike; in bad repute as well as good; treated as imposters or as honest, as unimportant or as recognized, as dying, and yet we live; as tormented but we do not die; as weeping and yet we are full of joy, as poor but making many rich, as having nothing, yet owning all (2 Cor. 6:3-10).*

We need constantly to repeat to ourselves that behind the New Testament concept of diakonia there are two distinct but related Old Testament concepts - the calling of Israel for the service of God (*'abodath-Yahweh*), and the Old Testament model of the Suffering Servant of the Second Isaiah oracles as the true executor and fulfiller of that diakonia - the *ebed-Yahweh* who suffers on behalf of others and by whose stripes they are healed.

This is the context in which Jesus Christ the true servant . (*ebed*) says constantly: "The Son of Man must suffer and be killed" (Matt. 16:21). Peter's avowal that this should not happen (16:22) draws the

Lord's most severe rebuke that it is no less than a Satanic temptation: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (16:23). If our diakonia today becomes too comfortable, painless, riskless, unopposed, we will need to check whether we have fallen into the great temptation.

It is in the same context that St Paul speaks to the Corinthians about his own credentials as an ambassador of God. Those credentials are threefold:

- a) constant suffering, affliction and humiliation;
- b) total openness to all in unhypocritical love;
- c) the capacity to take acceptance and rejection, approval and disapproval, with the same equanimity and rejoicing.

When I think of the church's diakonia in my own country, I find this rarely to be the case. Our credentials as a Suffering Servant in India are highly defective. Not only the official church, but even the action groups do not produce these credentials. Even Mother Teresa, who is a tremendously successful Christian deacon, ambassador and servant to the poor, can hardly produce the credentials which St. Paul is talking about.

On the other hand there has been at least one suffering servant, with these credentials, whom I have encountered in India, in my own life-time. But Mahatma Gandhi was not a baptized or believing Christian. He came to the people as a suffering servant of God, with all the three credentials. He walked into the village of Noakhali, where Hindus and Muslims were shooting and stabbing each other, in 1947. Clad in a loincloth, without sleep and without eating, with just the old man's walking stick in his hand, this frail and fragile servant walked into Muslim homes and Hindu homes, saying to the Muslims: "I am a Hindu; kill me if you want to kill a Hindu, but do not kill others." To the Hindu household, brimming with the same passionate and murderous hatred as the Muslim household, Gandhi walked in and said: "I am a friend of the Muslims; kill me first, but do not kill others."

The fact that he succeeded in Noakhali shows only the power of love. The fact that he was shot down by a Hindu at a joint prayer meeting of people of all religions confirms the truth that love does not always succeed, but that the true vocation of the Suffering Servant is

to love to the point of laying down one's life for others.

Christians, I must say to the shame of my own community in India, should have seen, but did not acknowledge, their Lord as Suffering Servant, in this exceptionally free and dedicated "non-Christian", who held to the truth as his breast-plate and manifested the love of God in laying down his life that others may live.

Draw what lessons you can from this episode of a man of another faith fulfilling the role of the Suffering Servant in our time. I cannot compare a Camillo Torres or an Albert Schweitzer or a Livingstone with Gandhi. They too suffered in serving, but their credentials seem to me to have been incomplete.

### **The royal priesthood**

*So, put away all evil and all deceit, all hypocrisy and malice, and all slandering; be like just born babies, desiring only the unadulterated spiritual milk, in order that by it you may grow to the maturity of salvation. You have tasted the Lord, that he is good.*

*To him approach; he is the living rock, rejected and set aside by human beings, but elect and precious in God's sight; and yourselves as living bricks, be built up (oikodomeisthe) as a spiritual temple (oikos pneumatikos), for the holy priestly ministry of offering up the spiritual sacrifices, pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in holy scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion an elect rock. A cornerstone that is precious indeed. And one who believes and abides in that rock shall never have occasion to be ashamed."*

*To you who believe the rock is honourable; for the unbeliever, it is a stone thrown away by the builders; this same rock has now become the head cornerstone; a stone that others step on and stumble. They stumble because they do not believe in the word; that is their destiny.*

*But you are the elect people, the king's priesthood, the holy nation, the people for possession by God, whose job it is to proclaim abroad the heroic acts of the One who called you out of darkness into his wondrous light. Once you were no people, now you are the people of God; once outside the pale of mercy, but now the recipients of God's mercy (1 Pet. 2:1-10).*

We come now to meditate on the Royal Priesthood, based on 2 Peter 1-10, and its background in the Old Testament, Exodus 19:5-6:

“Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be a special people for me among all the peoples of the world. They all belong to me; the whole earth is mine. But you, Israel, shall be to me a priest-kingdom (*mamleket-kohanim*) and a holy nation (*goy-qadosh*).”

This vocation of Israel was never fully understood by Israel. Neither do we, the Christians of the world, who have inherited the vocation of Israel, fully comprehend its meaning and scope.

All peoples and nations belong to the Lord, the Israel of Moses and the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans from whom Abraham came, the hundreds of nations in the United Nations and those outside it like Switzerland. In the time of the calling of Israel, there were probably thousands of nations and peoples. From among these thousands of peoples or *goyim*, Yahweh calls one nation, and that too a slave nation without a king or an address, without even an organized structure of cohesion, to be a special nation, a consecrated people, a *goy-qadosh*, to be a priest-kingdom, a *mamleket-kohanim*, a *basileon hierateuma*, *ethnos hagion*, a holy people totally consecrated to God.

A special nation consecrated for what? - to be a priest-nation on behalf of whom? Israel was chosen from a community of nations to be the priest of that community of nations, i.e. on behalf of all the nations of the earth - to be the light of the nations - to stand on behalf of the nations before God as their priest, and to bring the light of God

to the nations, so that the nations may walk in that light.

Hebrews 5:Iff. defines the function of a priest:

“For every archpriest taken from among human beings is appointed to stand before God on behalf of those human beings, in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for their sins, dealing patiently and gently with the ignorant and the deceived, fully aware that he himself is fallible and weak; for he has the obligation to offer sacrifices for the sins not only of the people, but also for his own sins. He does not take upon himself somehow the honour of a priest, but has to be called by God himself, as for example Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify himself to become an Archpriest; but rather it was He who said to him: “My Son you are. Today I have given birth to you” (Ps. 2:7), and elsewhere: “You are a priest for ever, belonging to the order of Melchisedek” (Ps. 110:4).

The author of Hebrews goes on to say that Christ became an archpriest by suffering, by loud cries and tears. The Suffering Servant, the *ebed-Yahweh* is also the high priest of Yahweh. Although he was a Son, yet he “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

The notion of this royal priesthood was not fully assimilated by the early church, perhaps due to the peculiar social conditions in which it operated. Yet some elements it did incorporate in their liturgical symbolism. The eucharist liturgy embodies some of these concepts. It is an offering on behalf of the whole creation, not just on behalf of the church.

Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 split this “a priestly kingdom” into two separate notions - priests *and* a kingdom.

To him who loves us and has released us from our sins by his own blood, and has made us a kingdom, priests to God his Father, to him be glory and power for ages of ages (Rev. 1:5-7).

“And they sing a new song, saying:  
worthy art thou to take the book

And to open its seals  
 For Thou wast slain  
 And by Thy blood  
 You have bought for God  
 From every tribe and tongue  
 From every people and nation  
 And made them for our God  
 A kingdom and priests  
 And they shall rule on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

But the basic idea is there, much more clearly than in the Pauline Corpus or Johannine writings. The book of Hebrews and first Peter have not lost sight of this classic insight that it is the church that has been ransomed from all peoples and nations - not just individual Christians. And they have been ransomed - this is even more important - not for their personal salvation as individual souls, but to save as a priestly kingdom - a new nation, a corporate entity whose main task is to pray and intercede for nations and peoples, offering up continually the sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving and intercession on their behalf.

Anti-clericalism was an essential thrust of the Protestant Reformation, justified perhaps by the domineering position of the medieval European clergy in economics and politics, in intellectual life and in culture as well. But that uncritical anti-clericalism has distorted Protestant understanding of the scriptures, especially of the Old Testament. The tendency has been to see the prophetic as the normative element in the Old Testament, and by virtue of another distortion, the prophetic understood in terms of preaching (Gospel, *Verkündigung*) as normative for understanding the New Testament.

Anti-clericalism should not blind us to some very simple facts in the Old and the New Testaments:

1. In the original brief description of Israel’s commission, i.e. Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments are immediately followed by the command to build altars for sacrifice: “You shall make an altar of earth for me, and you shall sacrifice on it your fire-offerings and your peace-offerings... in every place.”
2. Before the Ten Commandments, and the commandments on

altars and tabernacles, the succinct characterization of the people of God (in this case, Israel) is not in terms of their prophetic or preaching vocation to the world, but their vocation to be a priestly kingdom, a holy nation standing as a priest in the presence of God, interceding on behalf of the whole earth.

3. The revelation given to Moses on Mt Sinai did include more than the Ten Commandments. Yahweh also revealed to him the pattern of the tabernacle that was to be built. In Exodus 24, Moses built an altar below Mt Sinai before going up to receive the two tablets with the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 25 the first thing Yahweh says to Moses is that the people should make an offering, a sacrifice (*Therumah*), to Yahweh of all that is needed to build and decorate the tabernacle of God's presence: "Let them make for me a holy place (*miqdosh*) that I may dwell in their midst (*shakanti betokem*) - a holy place according to the plan I am going to reveal to you" (Ex. 25:8-9).

Protestantism, with its basic prophetic-preaching emphasis, stands to gain a great deal if only its scholars would pay more attention to the centrality of the Tabernacle/Temple and Priest/ Sacrifice, in the Old Testament, as well as in Christ's teaching about his own mission. Here is where Faith and Order in particular, and the World Council as a whole, have a special task cut out for them, if they want to be faithful to Christ's great mission on behalf of the whole of humanity. To preach to the world is one thing, but if that preaching were to have some real power, it must come from a community deeply rooted in the mystery of the tabernacle, the presence of the Christian community not only as the people of God, but also as participating in Christ as High Priest of the world, the community of faith as Christ's body sharing in this earthly reality of a priestly kingdom.

Any kingdom of God studies we will undertake in the near future, in connection with social ethics or Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation will have to see a major aspect at least of this kingdom of God in the notion of the priestly kingdom, offering up eucharistic sacrifices to God on behalf of all nations.

In Christ's own self-understanding the Jerusalem Temple occupies



a central point. The cleansing of the Temple, “my Father’s House”, is symbolic of the cleansing of a new people to be the Temple of God. It is this same “my Father’s House” which, if destroyed, God would rebuild again another, one “not made with hands”, in which Christ prepares abiding places for his disciples - the “my Father’s House” in which there are many mansions.

The Temple-Cult-Priesthood-Sacrifice aspect, despised by Rationalism and Enlightenment, and therefore by European biblical scholarship, will have to find its place again at the centre of WCC studies, especially Faith and Order, Church and Society, and World Mission, if the WCC is to pass beyond being a bourgeois, Protestant, Enlightenment organization of vintage European culture and have real appeal for not only the Orthodox, but also for the broad masses of Christians in all lands who are not yet completely brainwashed by the European Enlightenment.

A kingdom of priests witnessing to the kingdom of God, a priestly nation standing as priest for the nations - this is a more appropriate self-understanding for the Christian church in the world than the present ideas of proclamation and mission.

## **Conclusion**

The royal priesthood or priestly kingdom is a very rich idea indeed. The whole work of the WCC may be resumed under a single phrase - *oikodome* or upbuilding for the royal priesthood. If the church in the world is not to belong to any particular nation or culture or religion, but is to become a genuinely integrated nation chosen from all nations and located in all nations, then we must overcome the ideas of mission born in Charlemagne’s Christendom and the Medici papacy - ideas which came to be effective in Protestantism only with the rise of the North European imperial expansion. The WCC’s task, it seems to me, is clear. It is not for itself to become the structure for the unity of world church, nor to create the structure which would unite all churches. Its task is to become a central coordinating body to make sure that the church in each nation is built up and equipped to fulfill its function as the local unit, local manifestation, of the only holy nation and royal priesthood that is the church of Jesus Christ, and to keep

each local church aware of the fact that its being is not defined by the bounds of the nation in which it is located, but by its being an integral part and local manifestation of the fullness of the one holy nation and royal priesthood of all nations and all ages.

It is that great mystery of the church's unity with Christ and his eternal sacrifice on the one hand, and with the Christian churches and persons of all nations and all ages that is time and again enacted in the eucharistic act of the church. Once our constituency and leadership grasp this deeper sense in which the eucharist is not only the enactment of Christian truth, but also the source-spring of all Christian activity in the world, the WCC will have a new lease on its life. For then the royal priesthood and priestly kingdom will begin to become a reality once again in the churches - the priestly task of interceding and sacrificing on behalf of the nation and the kingly task of laying down one's life that others may live - the way Christ the king showed us on the cross.

## **Christ's Ministry to the World**

The understanding of the nature of the Christian church, its ministry and sacraments, can be said to constitute the major area of disagreement between the three main traditions of Christianity in the world today, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. The ecumenical dialogue has revealed large areas of agreement. The Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry study (BEM) sponsored by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches is as yet uncompleted. It has resulted in a striking consensus on a basic study document (the Lima document) to serve as a starting point for the discussion, and has been received with approbation in many churches. There have been reservations in that approbation, but the document has already served to foster a new discussion.

### **The nature of the church**

What is the church? That question is still answered in radically different ways by different schools of Christian thought. It is possible to conceive it as an institution or as a voluntary organization of Christian believers. So conceived, a sociological approach may bring out several phenomenological features of the churches as they exist today. But our question is theological, and therefore the answer may not conform to the sociological phenomenon observed by us. The sociological features would of course provide a challenge to the theological answer given by the various traditions. Explanation will need to be provided where the sociological reality differs from the theological conception. We cannot here attempt that. My purpose is to seek to answer the theological question in a way that could help the formulation of the church's ministry as it ought to be today.

### *Christ's own teaching*

The church was only very briefly mentioned by Christ himself. He left no elaborate instructions as to what its ministry ought to be, or about how it is to be governed. What Christ said, however, as reported by the Gospel according to St Matthew (no other gospel

mentions it directly) is full of meaning, and it seems best to start there. Matthew's use of the word *ekklesia* in 16:18 is the key; his further use of it in 18:17 may be safely set aside as referring to the Jewish *kahal*.

“He (Christ) says to them (the apostles): And you, who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered and said: You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus said to him in reply: Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Yona, for flesh and blood did not reveal (this) to you, but my Father who is in the heavenlies. And I say to you that you are *Petros* (rock), and upon this rock I will build (*oikodomeso mou*) the church for myself; and the gates of Hades shall not resist it. I will give you (singular) the keys (plural) of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind (as obligatory) on earth shall be bound in the heavenlies, and whatever you unbind on earth shall be unbound in the heavenlies” (Matt. 16:15-19).

Many exegetical questions arise from these words. We shall not be able to answer all of them here. The most controversial of these questions would be whether this power was given to Peter alone, or to all the apostles together, or to the whole church. Similarly the second controversial question is whether the apostle Peter forms by himself the foundation of the church, or whether the foundation is Christ (see e.g. Rom. 15:20-21; 1 Cor. 3:11; especially Peter's own testimony in 1 Pet. 2:3-10). The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that it is to the whole church that the power of the keys has been given; the keys are symbols of the authority to unbind and release people from the power of sin and death and also to initiate into the kingdom of God.

We are more concerned here with the task of the church, the purpose for which it was founded by Christ. Its function is already indicated in the words of our Lord: it is to lay siege to Hades, which is the kingdom of sin and death. As the church proceeds to the attack, the gates of Hades, however powerful, shall not prevail against the church's onslaught. The gates will give way, so that the prisoners of sin and death can be released and let out.

If there are two keys of the kingdom, the first one is to open the gates of Hades and the second to open the gates of the kingdom of God. The first one is the power to forgive sins and to give life; the second is to make people initiates of the kingdom, children of God, knowing and committed to God's purposes.

If these are the two purposes of the church, if these are the two things which the incarnate Christ accomplishes, then the church's ministry is to participate in Christ's ministry to the world. The church has no ministry of its own except to participate in Christ's ministry. This point, however, needs to be further reflected upon. Christ's ministry is wider and ranges farther than the ministry of the church. The church participates in that ministry, but has no monopoly of it. Theoretically the two should be identical, since the church is Christ's body. In fact, however, this eschatological identity of Christ and his church remains only partially fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is still guiding the church into all truth, and therefore into full obedience. In the highpriestly prayer of John 17, Christ prays:

“And now no longer am I in the world, (i.e., as incarnate), but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Father most holy, maintain them in that name of Yours which You have granted me, in order that they may be one even as we are” (John 17:11).

In other words, the capacity of the church to participate in Christ's ministry is proportional to the bearing of God's holy name, which means being Godlike as Jesus Christ was. Only as the church approximates Christ's Personality will it become truly one and fully participant in Christ's ministry. The unity of the church is a primary aspect of that personality, and division in the church becomes a denial of Christlikeness. Christ was and is one in his unity with the Father. The church also has to become one in itself, with Christ, in union with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. That is the eschatological nature of the church. Our participation as church in Christ's ministry is conditional on our free fulfilment of that eschatological nature.

Christ's prayer continues:

“Not regarding these alone do I request, but also

regarding those believing in me through their words, so that all may be one, as You, Father, are in me and I in you, so that they also may be (one) in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent me” (John 17: 20-21).

It is only in unity with the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit that the church can fulfill its ministry. It is this unity with the Triune God and in the Triune God that makes possible genuine unity of the church and therefore the fulfillment of the ministry of the church. Disunity is a violation of the true nature of the church, an infringement of the church’s eschatological nature, of its conforming to the nature of Christ. The failure of love leads to disunity, for God is love and the church has to reflect that nature. It is love that the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts; without love, there is neither church nor ministry. Failure to love lies at the root of the failure in the church’s ministry. Where there is no love, the Spirit of God is not at work; the church may work all day and all night, and yet it may catch nothing (John 21:3). Sociologically it may be growing, in numbers, wealth and institutions; but it is all hay and stubble that the fire will destroy.

Alas, the church’s ministry is too often measured in terms of activism and institutionalism. Actions, words and institutions are legitimate instruments of the church’s ministry. But they should spring from love, for God is love. This is where the sociological method may be inadequate for measuring the successes and failures of the church’s ministry. God’s love was what Christ manifested in his incarnate ministry. The church’s ministry is to continue that manifestation.

According to the Johannine account the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles by the Resurrected Christ for the church’s ministry:

“So, the disciples, seeing the Lord, were filled with joy. So, Jesus says to them again: Peace to you. As the Father has delegated me, so send I you. And saying this, he breathed on them, and says to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you remit anyone’s sins, remitted they shall be for them; and if anyone’s sins you enforce,

enforced they shall be” (John 20:20-23).

The Church’s apostolic ministry is thus a continuation of Christ’s ministry, to be fulfilled in union with him by the Holy Spirit. Its Christological and pneumatological aspects define its content, and to these we turn now.

### **Christ’s ministry and ours**

In the interest of brevity we will not go into the details of Christ’s threefold ministry, as the High Priest who is the eternal archetype of all priesthood, as the prophet who brings the fullness of God’s word to us, and as the Shepherd-king who sits eternally on the throne of David. We will only seek to sketch the outline of the three aspects, the priestly, the prophetic and the shepherdly. We should warn, however, that under-playing any of the three aspects would lead to a distorted understanding of Christ’s ministry as well as ours. The temptation can be very strong indeed.

#### *The priestly ministry*

The fundamental nature of Christ’s priestly ministry is dealt with in detail in the Epistle to the Hebrews; it may be distasteful to the modern rational mind, but should not on that account be despised or ignored. Even in our interpretation of the Old Testament we succumb too often to this temptation when we see the prophetic as central and the cultic or priestly as peripheral. On Mount Sinai, Moses was given more than the two tablets of the Law. He was shown also the design for the tabernacle (Ex. 35:4ff.) The whole book of Leviticus is full of rich symbolism about the cultic observances enjoined by Yahweh. It is the most tragic thing about modern rationality that it has lost all sensitivity to ritual and worship, wherein truths much deeper than the discursive are signified.

Jesus Christ did not bequeath to us any writings of his own; but he gave us the eucharist, wherein the heart of the Christian ministry is communicated to us. The eucharistic act is the central and most fundamental aspect of the ministry of the church, and the neglect of it for the sake of greater emphasis on preaching and witnessing has been a tragic distortion in the life of the church.

Jesus Christ gave himself in sacrifice to the Father, once for all, on the cross of Calvary. He rose again, victor over sin and death. That sacrifice and that victory are what we celebrate in the eucharist. But we do not do so in any individualistic way. We do it as the community of the Spirit, as Christ's body. In that act we are united with Christ and are conformed to Christ. United with him, we offer ourselves to God as a community, in trusting sacrifice. In the eucharist, Christ gives us his own body and blood so that we may be sustained by it and grow to be Christlike. God entrusts God's self to us so that we may truly become a God-bearing community. It is this union with God that constitutes the foundation of the Christian ministry and is itself the most important part of our ministry, since without it our ministry cannot be Christian ministry.

A priest is always one who stands before God on behalf of others, interceding for them, offering their sacrifices. Jesus Christ is the one and only High Priest, the archetype of all priesthood. He did not offer the sacrifice of himself for his own sake, but for the sake of the world, to reconcile the world to God. In our eucharistic ministry or Christian priestly ministry, we can only participate in Christ's ministry, by offering ourselves to God on behalf of the whole creation and on behalf of the whole of humanity. It is this aspect of the eucharist that often gets neglected, even in those traditions like the Catholic and the Orthodox where the eucharist is still acknowledged as central. The whole church, participating in Christ's priesthood, offers itself on behalf of the whole world, not just on behalf of itself.

This priestly ministry does not belong to the ordained clergy alone. At baptism all Christians were initiated into the Christic high-priesthood. All baptized Christians, clergy and laity, men and women, and also children, participate fully and without reservation in Christ's priesthood, as members of his body, the church. The eucharistic act is an act of the whole church, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. And by the whole church we should understand not only all baptized Christians living on earth now, but also the departed faithful, who by baptism were united with Christ and do not fall off from that union at death. Each local church has to be aware of this larger dimension of the church in its priestly ministry. In offering ourselves again and again in



the eucharist, we keep in mind not only the whole church in space, but also the whole church in time. To be united with Christ means also to be united with the whole body of Christ in space and time. Even in the older traditions which symbolically express this larger dimension by commemorating the departed, this awareness has to be strengthened by good teaching, because our tendency is to be aware only of the local congregation in worship.

Any programme for the renewal of the church's ministry in our time should stress not only this catholic dimension of it, but also its vicarious or intercessory dimension. The church does not worship in order to gain something for itself. It is like Christ's self-offering, a sacrifice on behalf of others. Others include not only the whole of humanity, but also the whole created order, both organic and inorganic. As we take the fruit of the vine and the bread of powdered grain, both mixed with water, and lift it up to God, we are offering the whole creation which sustains us and supports us in life.

The ministry of prayer and intercession is part of the church's priestly ministry in Christ, who continues to this day in interceding for us with the Father (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34). The Holy Spirit is also continuously interceding, through groans expressing our unspoken aspirations (Rom. 8:26, 27). Intercession for non-believers, for the coming of more justice into societies, for peace in the world, and for the biosphere that sustains our life, for summer and winter in due time, for science and technology becoming true instruments of humanity's emancipation and not of exploitation and oppression, for our political, economic, social and cultural institutions, for the weak and the poor, for the oppressed and the under-privileged, for the sick and the handicapped, for the lepers and victims of AIDS - all these are integral parts of our priestly ministry. And intercession has to spring from love, from understanding and compassion, from genuine sympathy and identification. The church thus has to become a source-spring of blessing and love for all, not of judgment and condemnation, not of hatred and cursing. The recovery of this ministry of prayer and intercession will be a major element in the renewal of the church's ministry.

### *The prophetic ministry*

The churches of the Reformation have been stronger in emphasizing this prophetic ministry. But a fuller understanding of its nature can help all of us in all the traditions to seek a more comprehensive renewal of this ministry. There are two aspects of the church's prophetic ministry which have to be held in balance with each other - one addressed to the church and the other to humanity or the state or other institutions in society.

The New Testament speaks of the church as being founded on the "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20) and the apostle Paul lists among the gifts of the Spirit given to the church first apostles, then prophets (1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 3:5, 4:11, etc.). These references are certainly not to Old Testament prophets, but to an office in the early church which seems to have become subsequently defunct. In 1 Corinthians 12-14 there is an extended discussion on the comparative merits of speaking in tongues and prophesying both of which are among the gifts of the Spirit.

The New Testament prophet speaks to the church for its edification (1 Cor. 14:3-5). The purpose of New Testament prophecy is to build up the body of Christ through words of teaching inspired directly by the Holy Spirit. The prophet in the New Testament church does not speak to the state or to the outside world in order to criticize their activities. There was indeed much to criticize in the way the Roman imperial administration functioned, but the New Testament prophet was concerned about building up the life of the church. This ministry of *oikodome* of the church needs to get special attention if the ministry of the church is to be renewed today. We need to face the cynical comment of non-Christians that Christians will do better if they cut down on the propaganda of mission and spent more energy on the product of the gospel, namely the quality of Christian life. We must refrain from an extended discussion of this concept of *oikodome* of the church, which is primary and basic, both for worship or priestly ministry and for the mission or shepherdly ministry to the world.

A short formula for the renewal of the Christian ministry would be: "oikodome for the royal priesthood." Oikodome literally means

house-building. Even this task of building up the body of Christ is a common task of all Christians, not just of the clergy. The ordained clergy have of course a special responsibility in this regard, but no monopoly of it. In fact they can accomplish their task only with the full cooperation of all believers. The point to note here is that building up the body of Christ is not an end in itself, but oriented to the royal priesthood, to which all Christians are called. It is to all Christians that the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9:

“But you (plural) are an elect race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession, in order that you may declare the mighty acts of him who called you out from (the domain of) darkness into his marvellous light.”

This kingly priesthood refers back to the calling of the Old Israel in Exodus 19:5-6:

“And if surely you will listen to my voice and will keep my covenant, you will become for me a cherished people above all the nations of the earth, for the whole earth is mine; and you shall become for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

It is clear from the context in the Old Testament that the Old Israel was not called for its own sake, but to serve as a priestly nation in the community of nations, a nation that constantly stands before God offering the sacrifice of the nations and interceding for them. Israel forgot this vicarious nature of its calling most of the time. The Christian church falls prey to the same temptation much too often. It is the community of nations for which the church is the priest, in union with Christ. Forget that, and the Christian ministry is already betrayed. In the Old Testament the Hebrew expression *mamleketh kohanim* meant simply a kingdom or nation among nations or kingdoms, a kingdom especially chosen to be the priest for the community of nations. In the New Testament the Greek expression *basilikon hierateuma* takes on a new significance. The Book of Revelation says that our Redeemer “has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (1:6) or more explicitly, in 5:9-10:

“Worthy art Thou to receive the Book and to open its seals for Thou wast slain, and by Thy blood has purchased for God out of every tribe and people and nation, and made them for our God a Kingdom and priests, and they shall reign upon the earth.”

The same idea is repeated in Rev. 20:6 where also priesthood and reigning kingship are associated. It is to this kingly or royal ministry that we shall now turn.

### *The ministry of the king-shepherd*

What could a kingly ministry for the church mean in our time? It is fascinating to observe how the institution of kingship is fast passing out of history. It is particularly noteworthy for us in India. Till 1947 we had 526 maharajahs and rajahs. And almost overnight, there was not even one. And the same goes for the people of Israel. For centuries they had no king. Then in the days of Samuel, the people insisted on having a king like the other nations. Yahweh told them that they needed no king, since Yahweh himself was the King of Israel. The people kept on insisting (1 Sam. 8:1-20), and with dire warnings Yahweh gave them their first king, Saul. The kingship in Israel ended with the Babylonian captivity, but the people were promised a new kind of king, the messianic Son of David, the good king. When Pilate asked Jesus whether he was a king, the reply was ambiguous. Christ himself preferred the title Shepherd or Pastor. Moses was a shepherd, David was a shepherd. Christ himself does not say, in John 10, that he is the good king. Instead he says: I am the Good Shepherd, the Bon Pastor.

Jesus did not deny the title “King of the Jews.” But where is that title inscribed? On the top of the cross of Calvary. It is from the cross that Jesus rules, with power over sin and death, but also over all creation.

In John 10, Jesus himself gives the definition of the good king or the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. This is the church’s ruling power over the world, the power to lay down our lives for the sake of humanity and the world. This is our true jurisdiction, our true magisterium, as those united with the crucified One.

We shall here briefly enumerate the three qualities of the Good Shepherd as Jesus outlines them in John 10. These are specifications of Christ's ministry to the world and therefore of ours in union with him.

First, the Good Shepherd knows his sheep intimately by name. The sheep trust him, and when he calls they respond, for they recognize his voice (John 10:3). This is the relationship that the church also should have towards the whole world, a relationship of intimate mutual knowledge and a complete trust in the church. Alas, we have made such a mess of that relationship by our dominance and self-regarding that the world no longer trusts us, nor responds to our voice. The recovery of this trust will come only when the church becomes prepared to lay down its concern about itself and genuinely and sincerely cares for the world. Central to the renewal of the ministry of the church is the winning back of this relationship of trust, which will not happen through any amount of preaching and professing a love which does not really exist. When the church hates any group of people, be they people of other religions or other ideologies, the church loses its credentials as Good Shepherd.

Neither anti-Americanism nor anti-communism goes with the character of the church.

The second quality of the Good Shepherd is that at his behest, the doors of the sheepfold are opened and the sheep are able to go out and find pasture. The shepherd does not bring the sheep's food into the sheepfold, but leads them out and goes before them to where the green pastures and the still waters are. This is the church's most important ministry - to open doors that confine people in oppression, injustice and exploitation, to lead the nations to where they can find the just societies of green pastures and the still waters of peaceful and secure national and international situations. The church does not hand out justice and peace to the nations. It is from a relationship of trust that the church should be able to lead the nations away from their confinement in injustice, war, oppression, exploitation, terrorism, and environmental decay.

The third aspect of the ministry of the Good Shepherd is perhaps

the most characteristic of Christ, and possibly the most uncharacteristic of the Christian church. As the sheep move towards freedom and justice, the wolves come. And like hire-lings, when we see the wolf coming we leave the sheep and flee (John 10:12). The Good Shepherd, on the other hand, struggles with the wolves and if necessary lays down his life for the sheep. Oppose openly and effectively the oppressive structures of the world, and the wolves will advance on us to tear us apart and snatch the sheep away. I will not try to identify or even exemplify the wolves today. But they are there for all to see, aggressive, sly and cruel, ravenous with greed. If the church takes up a fight with the wolves it will lose much of its privilege and power, financial and otherwise. So we keep silent, hypocritically leaving it to God to bring justice and peace in the world.

### **Conclusion**

We have dealt with, in bare and inadequate outline, the threefold ministry of Christ and therefore of the church, as high priest of the world, as prophet of the world and as shepherd of the world. *Oikodome*, or building up of the body of Christ, is in order that the church may be able to fulfill this threefold ministry to the world. The ordained ministry has to be understood both as the agency commissioned by God to help the church fulfill this ministry and as a visible, sacramental, conciliar presence of Christ the High Priest, Prophet and Shepherd in the community of the Spirit.

Both the ministry of the whole church and the special ministry of the specially ordained, have to be understood both charismatically and pneumatologically, as well as in concrete historical and existential terms.

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