

THEME 1

IN-DEPTH STUDY

According to Karl Rahner (O'Meara 1999, 160), the grace received at baptism confers the right, the task and the inner strength to help the Church to fulfil herself. In today's society more and more faithful are awakening to the call to live their faith concretely through service, to connect faith to life, and to serve the Church and the world in some specific service, whether full-time or part-time. The different ministries that emerge in the Church today can have various levels of intensity:

- = Some ministries are exercised in a rather limited and temporary way (for example, readers, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, as well as occasional volunteers who care for the sick, the poor, or children).
- = Then there are ministries that are exercised regularly, part-time (once a week) and those that take place full-time.

There are also different roles in the ministry, which must be coordinated:

- = at the centre of all the ministries of the Christian community are the ordained ministers who have the task of leading the community and empowering the faithful to exercise their specific ministries; to preside over liturgical celebrations and coordinate the activities of the community.
- = Together with the ordained ministers, in the Christian community there will be a central ministerial team, full-time ministers by vocation - religious and laity - who live out of their work and who have been prepared through study and practice, acquiring professional competence. However, their ministry should not be seen as a job or a prestigious position, but as a long-term commitment to a public ministry. This is the case with services considered essential or very important in the life of the Christian community and which require a sense of vocation and a systematic, scientific and spiritual preparation. This generally leads to a radical vocational choice, characterized by a long-term, full-time commitment. Such ministries have a permanent character and require qualities of leadership, an appropriate lifestyle and a accountability to the Church.
- = Each ministry should include some form of public preparation and mandate. Some ministries have less intensity or duration; nevertheless, they make an important contribution and every member of the Church will, at some point, find himself involved in some of these services.
- = The presbyter and bishop are responsible for developing the vision and practice of ministries and animate the faithful to deepen their ministerial identity. This means improving the ministerial service of the baptized, inviting them into service, facilitating their ministerial formation and coordinating ministries, directing the whole of the ministries of the Christian community.

It is important to note that ministries that require less preparation and time are no less, or to a lesser extent, ministries, since they are still a service and an instrument of God's grace. The essence of ministry is not determined by quantitative or qualitative differences in service, but by the fact that it is a participation in the very ministry of Christ. As John Paul II stressed in the post-synodal exhortation *Christifideles laici* (CL 21), "The ministries which exist and are at work at this time in the Church are all, even in their variety of forms, a participation in Jesus Christ's own ministry as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. Jn 10:11), the humble servant who gives himself without reserve for the salvation of all (cf. Mk 10:45)".

In any case, what is needed above all is great human maturity because humanity is the visibility of the invisible. In the past, the divinity of Jesus has often been emphasized to the point of diminishing his

humanity. Instead, it is important to recover a Christology that looks to the fullness of humanity. Then it takes a great human experience and preparation in leading the community. Traditionally the competence of the priests was entrusted above all to scholastic dogmatic theology, with a little philosophy as an *"ancilla"*, a little pastoral theology, but it was above all on how to administer - note the word administer - the sacraments. Today it is necessary to systematically develop skills and experience on how to accompany transformed and transforming communities.

As a continuation of Jesus' mission, ministries are characterized by total dedication, self-denial and service to the poorest and most abandoned. From a Christian perspective, ministry brings the enrichment of Christ's presence, attitudes and mission in society, mediated by the minister's communion with Christ, as it is especially evident in self-giving so that others may have life and life to the full. From this point of view - no matter how much preparation and formation a minister may have - the ministry remains a modest, enabling task, aware that his or her strength and effectiveness go beyond their personal capacities, preparation and endowments, even though all these are very important.

Further readings:

Domingues, F. (2006). "Presbitero e missione", in *Ministeri per la missione*, Redemptoris missio: rivista di pastorale e formazione missionaria, Nuova serie, anno XXII, N. 2 luglio - dicembre, pp. 20-29.

John Paul II. (1987). *Christifideles laici* (The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People).

McBrien, R.P. (1987). *Ministry. A Theological, Pastoral Book*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

McBrien, R.P. (1989). *Catholicism*. Reprint. London: Geoffrey Chapman 1981, 657-659; 667-675; 842-848.

O'Meara, T.F. (1999). *Theology of Ministry*. Revised ed. New York: Paulist Press, 139-167; 182-198.