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THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

1968

- ~~An~~ approach to its study -

Preliminary considerations

The complex problem of the ministry of women is very often narrowed down to the radical question: "is it permissible for women, in this or that Church, to be ordained priests?" Usually this question is not put so distinctly in the Roman Catholic Church. Yet the same basic attitude might be denounced in the opinion which takes as starting point for a definition of the task of woman in the Church her juridical impossibility of being ordained to the priesthood. Thus the question of the ministry of women is replaced by the question (which is implicit therein, yet is not identical) of their status.

Several features of contemporary history might account for this approach in the study of the ministry of women. The analysis of them would be necessary for a thorough study of the whole of the question, but since this is not feasible here, let us at least acknowledge the primary importance that this question has assumed in all the christian denominations and, through them, in the ecumenical dialogue in our time. It is the acknowledgement of the scope of this matter that compels us to attempt to envisage it in a context as broad as possible.

As a matter of fact, the question, such as was put above or such as it exists, unexpressed, in certain currents of thought, is hardly discernible from the criterion of undifferentiated equality to man which has characterized the evolution of the Fundacao Guadalupe. Put in this way it immediately sets up prejudices at the very point of departure (the prejudice of a society and of a Church where the masculine is the only criterion) and it becomes too easily a source of passionate and sterile polemics.

Moreover, the deepening out of the Roman Catholic Ecclesiology, as well as the new light thrown on the nature of woman by the different sciences (psychology, sociology, biblical theology) compel us to change our approach, by replacing the question of the ministry of women in its whole setting. The main problem is not to know whether woman is allowed to have the same "opportunities" ~~than~~ man in the service of the Church; but rather to find out in which realms lies her genuine contribution as woman to the life of the Church and also to determine clearly the ministries that derive from those realms.

This research has to be undertaken in the frame of an ecclesiology which includes, in a way that becomes more and more obvious, an anthropology, i.e. an ecclesiology that, together with a definition of a Church engendering the christians for the Faith, gives also a description of a Church that is made up by the christians already living in Faith.

In so far as the christians make up the Church they bring into it their spiritual and temporal concreteness of well defined beings. In this definition the fact of being man or woman is fundamental and unavoidable. In fact, the anthropology that is in full swing in our time is not the anthropology of an abstract and asexual human being, but, on the contrary, that of a being that cannot exist but under one of the two hypothesis, either as man or as woman. (2)

The Church made up of men is thus a Church made up of men and of women. To know whom these men and these women are is therefore very necessary in order to determine which is their proper contribution and, consequently, which are their ministries. Such a Church made up of men and women must be a Church where every human being will be at ease in the full blossoming of his or her existential genuineness. It will be a Church where black ~~as well~~ or white, peasant ~~as well~~ of worker, man ~~as well~~ of woman will no longer exist, not because they will cease to be what they are, but rather on the contrary, because they will have been "assumed" in the Church just as they are, in their specific originality and in their basic equality of members of the Church.

The present essay attempts to follow along this line. In order to come to a precise and positive concept of the task of woman in the Church, one has to deepen out both the nature of her being and the nature of the Church. Thus in the first part of this chapter we will sum up very briefly the arguments which we regard as essential, both on the Church and on woman, at the same time inviting the reader to refer to the bibliography on both topics. We stress the fact of the paragraphs concerning the Church, in this first part, being more definite than those concerning woman. Certainly the study of the significance of the role of woman has not yet reached a thoroughly satisfactory synthesis. In a second part, we will try to point out to the practical consequences of these preliminary remarks showing the influence of historical elements therein. Yet we insist upon our study not being primarily a reflexion on an historical basis but the mere outline of a possible path of research.

ELEMENTS FOR THE DEFINITION OF THE MINISTRY

Fundação Cuidar o Fortalecer

Towards a wide concept of ministry

The whole of the contemporary ecclesiology points out to an essential statement : that of the existence in the Church "within herself, at the very heart of her unbreakable unity" of a duality of aspects. That duality expresses all her mystery and enlightens all her life.

The theologians have unfolded this duality of nature in several parallel expressions. The paulinian thought as well as the unanimous opinion of the Fathers lead them to envisage the Church in the indissoluble unity of a two-fold reality - the "convocatio" and the "congregatio", that is, the convocation of all the peoples and the community of those who have been convoked. Thus the Church is described both as the voice that summons up and, at the same time, as the voices of those that make up the community. She is both the whole of the powers that guarantee the "divine nature" of the convocation and the gifts that witness to the presence of the Spirit within the community. She is both the one who engenders to grace and the very life in grace. She is both the mother of God's children and the people of God's children. She is both the way to salvation and the family of those who have been saved. She is both the reunion of the means connected with the new economy and the reunion of the men living actually from that economy. She is both the calling to conversion and the assembly of those who have been converted to Christ and to His Gospel. She is both the structure that nourishes faith and sacramental life and the very flourishing of this faith and of this life. She is both the institution through which circulates the living water of redemption and the communion of those

that have quenched their thirst at this water. She is both the sacrament, the sign of realities to come and these realities already at work in this world.

Let us consider now, more closely, in this twofold reality, the way in which one of its terms is expressed : birth to grace; nourishment of faith and sacramental life, circulation of the living water of redemption, mother of God's children. That which, in a unilateral ecclesiology, is but the juridical machinery of the hierarchical institution is given back its traditional sense : Church, "mater omnes gentes"(5), the only "true mother of the living"(6)

For most of the Fathers and for the whole of the contemporary theology, the Church is the "New Eve", which is born from the side of Christ. (7) She envelops the whole of reality, is receptive to all that lives and stirs in the world. In the vision of the final coming of Christ the world will be reabsorbed in her virginal womb in order to become the new kingdom forever begun. That which, in the natural life, biological and historical, is continuity, "germinative interiority" (8) becomes, within the Church, the laborious process of cosmic gestation, the effort towards the liberation of the world in travail.

The maternity of the Church contains thus two moments, one could say two possibilities : it is at work in the very act by which life is conveyed ; at the same time it expands, strengthens and becomes fruitful in the very tissue where that act finds its insertion, that is, in the duration which conveys to the act its full significance.

Here we are now facing the elements that are essential to the development of the theme with which we are concerned. The Church is both institution and communion, both structure and life. That structure and that institution themselves assume a quality that corresponds to the very nature of things. This concept helps us to grasp both the eschatological outlook that gives to present realities their final contents, and the enlarging of the juridical categories that only partly explain the very essence of the Church.

In such an ecclesiology the concept of ministry is made richer or rather, placed in its true context. The ministry cannot be understood just as a "sacred power"; as it very often still is.

According to the Old and New Testament, ministry, latin word for the greek "diakonia" is primarily a service. In the early Church, the ministries include a large variety of functions that correspond to the needs of the christian community and go beyond the frame of apostolate entrusted to the twelve. In his letters, very often St. Paul refers to them as activities or tasks regarding all the faithful (I Cor. 12,5 and Eph. 4,11-12). When seen in this context, the ministries do not have a technical or still less a juridical sense exclusively.

Moreover, these ministries are in close connection, in ontological connection even, one might say, with the charisms. They are not given as such but rather proceed both logically and ontologically from the charisms. The close and very deep relationship between the charisms and the ministries (9), acknowledged by the contemporary theology, helps to make clear that, the charisms being not "exceptional things", "the whole of the life of the christians as well as the operation of the institutions is utterly dependent thereupon" (10). This close relationship has just been emphasized in the Council, the stress being laid on the danger of "making believe that the hierarchy is but an administrative system, without relation with the gifts of the Holy Ghost present within the Church" (11)

Since the charisms are directed towards the building up of the Body of Christ, the ministries will be the manifold and almost countless functions that will aid to this growth. They will be as numerous as is necessary in order to guarantee the life of the Church in all her amplitude and to help her "grow in the works of grace, Faith and the Gospel".(12) They will make manifest, on the level of the organic life of the Church, the gifts and charisms at work in the inner life of her members.

The study of the ministries implies therefore the consideration of the totality of the Body of Christ and not only of the priestly power that is at work in the Body. Pope Pius XII meant it when in His Encyclical "Mystici Corporis Christi" He alludes to the totality of the Body of Christ and to the functions that assure the growth of this Body : "One should not think that that harmoniously distributed organic structure, as one says, of that Body which is the Church is perfect and definable through the degrees of Hierarchy alone... Whenever the Fathers of the Church refer to ministries, degrees, conditions, states, orders, functions of this Body, they do not only think of those that are constituted by the sacred orders. They also think of all those that having embraced the evangelical counsels, lead a life of work amid men or hidden in silence or still attempt to lead both at a time, according to their profession. They also think of those that, living in the world, devote themselves to the works of mercy for the soul or the body, and also of those that are united by a pure marriage".

In short, when referring to ministries, we understand by that every service or function, those of a non-institutional character included, that contribute to the growth of the Body of Christ. Our research on the ministry of women will take this line of argument.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Essential elements in the definition of woman

We cannot say that the anthropology which we need for a proper definition of woman is something accomplished. In spite of this, some fundamental lines can be drawn, of which theology cannot ignore the profound significance.

On the basis of tried out scientific knowledge one may state that the differentiation between man and woman is undeniable. This differentiation, moreover, is not to be confined to the mere aspect of capacities or qualities. It affects the entire being, his or her fundamental attitude, the way in which he or she is inserted in the world and the specific kind of relation-to-another that he or she creates therein(13).

The contribution of different branches of knowledge is decisive to enlighten the kind of relation that is specific of woman. Already in her biological as well as physiological structure the feminine being displays what one could call a preferential orientation in her way of existence : it is directed toward a possible physical conception, and this very possibility points out to an original relationship to the world and to all beings. (14)

In its close connection and fundamental interdependence with the bio-somatic structure, psychology proves that this relationship is a relationship of the whole being. In her way of existing in the world, woman sees and "experiences" this world as something that asks for her affectionate attention, her concern, her love (15). She establishes with the world a relationship of "concern-with-the-world" for the simple reason that she is sensitive to its value. Owing to this sensitiveness she is able to create a bond of continuity among the

events and thus to contribute, in her own way, to the shaping of history.(16).

A long-winded sociological study would be necessary to afford a larger scope to the above mentioned statements about the individual being. We have to admit that an ~~arduous~~ ^{personnal} and laborious research on the genuine form of expression of woman in social life is on the way in our time. That research brings out that once the stage of excessive feminism is overcome, a healthy reaction toward the discovery of an expression of service to community, under all its possible forms, will come about. This service and its official recognition by the great international issues (17) expressed, in a social terminology, the specificity of the feminine being in her relation to the world : an effective concern-for-the-world.

For a thorough definition of the collective being, a study of the images of woman within the society - a study which has scarcely been undertaken - would be one of great consequence. Certain images offered by contemporary literature (18) might lead to the statement that, whenever woman is ignorant of the "possibilities" of her being, inscribed within the frame of a motherly relation, she annihilates at one blow the possibility of normal and mature relations both with man and with the world and its realities. Whenever woman ignores or refuses the actualization of this potential possibility of her being, she becomes a sub-human being, from which sense of respect, capacity for objective and free judgement, attentiveness to the world and to others are altogether lacking.

In spite of the embryonic stage in which much of this research still is, it is possible to say that the nature of woman places her in a relation-to-another defined by a fundamental attitude of "availability" (19). This "availability" affording the basis for a relation made of loving concern as is clearly displayed in the maternal relation.

These statements are then taken up again by theology. First of all, in the unequivocal assertion of the differentiation between man and woman ; secondly, in the definition of the elements of that very differentiation.

In this connection it has been said that "one of the constants (of God's work) seems to be the creation in pairs, in a sort of complementary dualities.... Among these dualities-within-the-unity, the main one is, no doubt, the distribution of humanity in man and woman" (20). Already thirty years ago, an outstanding thinker like Edith Stein could write : " I am convinced that mankind develops along the line of a sort of double species, made up of man and woman ; that the character of the human being, in which no single trait should be lacking in either one or the other of the parts, is made manifest in a twofold way ; and that the whole structure of the being makes this specific duality known" (21). The teachings of the Church corroborate this belief : " God not only granted existence to woman ; the feminine personality in both her physical and psychological structure responds to a particular design of the Creator" (22).

This differentiation is taken up again at the light of a biblical anthropology that ascribes to the elements of a natural anthropology their significance in the plan of God.

The remark is very often made that the commandment of fruitfulness (Gen. 1, 28a) common for both man and woman is going to assume a special stress after the fall. The punishment inflicted to Eve after the fall is going to affect her in that which is the very key of her destiny : her maternity. (Gen. 3,16) is

unanimously interpreted by Tradition (23) as a punishment inflicted to Eve historically first, and then, in her, to all women. This common destiny implies, so to say, the acknowledgment of an existential situation that is common to all women and exclusively proper to them.

It is much more difficult to know whether this existential situation has a decisive meaning in the history of salvation. We cannot say that absolutely undisputed proves concerning this matter do actually exist. We will just mention what could eventually be conducive to it.

The whole catholic tradition has dealt with Gen. 3,15, persuaded as it was that this line responded to the intention of the Jahvist writer who would have wished to set forth "the primordial prototypes of the momentous problems of the time" (24), and thus to direct the thoughts of the people toward the understanding of the promise of the Messiah. One is led to look upon Gen. 3,15 as a reference to the messianic role of woman on account of her maternity (25). This gives new strength to other passages from the Jahvist narration where woman plays a decisive role in the transmission of the inheritance.

Recent studies make it possible to disclose the scope of maternity in the history of salvation through the Old Testament. First of all, the individual cases that are self-speaking: Anna (1 Sam. 1,4-20; 2, 1-5), Ruth (Book of Ruth), the mother of the Maccabees (II Mac. 7, 1 and fol.). Even those women who have got no children, in the very moment when they assume a decisive role in the life of the people become "mothers in Israel" (26), as is the case with Deborah (Judg. 5, 7). Those who accomplish crucial deeds at a turning point of the life in Israel and therefore gain victory are called "blessed among women" (Judg. 5,24; Jud. 13, 18). At the threshold of the New Covenant, Elisabeth will address this same word to Mary (Luk. 1,42). In her and through her the irrevocable redemption of the people of God is fulfilled.

Moreover, it is God himself who conducts maternity. This is noteworthy throughout the history of the chosen people. Eve rejoices for having become mother "with God" (Gen. 4,1) (27). And a whole line of "mothers-with-God" (maternity flourishing where barrenness existed before), such as Sarah (Gen. 17, 16), Rebecca (Gen. 25, 21), Rachel (Gen. 29, 22), Elisabeth (Luk. 1, 13) will finally come to an end in the Blessed Virgin: "The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the most High will overshadow thee" (Luk. 1, 35)

The role of motherhood goes much beyond the individual cases, that of Mary included, covers the whole history of salvation and becomes the pledge of the birth of the new times (Is. 67,7; Mic. 4, 9-10). In the apocalyptic vision of St. John the woman, the new people of God, the Church (Ap. 12, 1-9) bears a son, the Messiah, the perfect Christ. The new Israel, the new Jerusalem that will come down, sent by God, from heaven, is, indeed, "our mother" (Gal. 4,26)

Maternity is thus, in God's design, the tissue through which a new economy of grace seems to be disclosed, ⁽²⁸⁾ the ground along which salvation advances. (29). A blessing rests upon it, even beyond sin. The reason for that blessing is that in maternity "what will be the way to redemption finds its outline", that is, "a fruitfulness which cannot exist unless it is looked upon as subordinate and therefore dependant" (30).

Thus the natural orientation of woman toward a relation-to-another is enlarged and assumes a very profound significance when regarded at the light of the Mystery of Salvation. Since this Mystery is accomplished in time and gives rise to a history, one can say that the whole significance of this relation-to-another hinges on the relation "maternity-historical reality".

In fact "maternity is not a simple relation of origin, as is the case with paternity. It implies an identity, a previous insertion. It rests on the basis of a community, one might say, on the basis of a unity of which the terms have a full specific existence, the necessary condition that renders autonomous existence possible. It is on account of this that maternity shows up the historical condition. In itself, a simple chain of events, even though coordinated by a strict causality, is not history. A series of beings, even linked by a paternal relation, would not make up an historical being in every sense of the word. The "historicity" presupposes more than just that: not only a settled succession from the future to the present but a certain pre-existence in embryo of the future within the present. Not that the future as such is pre-contained therein but that there is a first existence, both preparation to the autonomous existence and necessary to it. Hard as it may be to define and to disentangle, the concept of maternity is what we call this relation. Maternity is a germinative interiority. Maternity is the differentiation, taking place in time, of a being which started by being not identical with another one but rather interior to it. The reason why mankind, after the fall, remained capable of being redeemed, is that it remained blessed owing to this very possibility of maternity contained within herself. The original blessing thus present in the heart of the very sinful condition of man has sprung up and has finally prevailed over it. For this blessing was, in last analysis, God's design of being inserted in history that had been shaped in this way. (31)

Woman is therefore linked, in her whole being, to the shaping of history; she affords the very tissue of it, the possibility of a germinative interiority, and in so far as she guarantees its vital core, she affords the possibility for the design of God, His own insertion in history. (32)

Is it permissible therefore to speak of a particular gift of God to woman? It seems to us that all the elements that have been referred point out to the following hypothesis: that God has ascribed to women a "charism" that is intimately linked and implied in their very condition as women. That which, on the level of nature, is apprehended as a preferential orientation, becomes, on the level of the realities of the spirit, a charismatic gift and consequently, a mission to be fulfilled, a ministry to be accomplished.

TENTATIVE APPROACH TO A DESCRIPTION OF

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

The ministry of women in the Church can be now described, in an attempt to integrate all the elements that have just been stressed. This ministry rests on a previous gift that woman seems to have: the capacity to establish what we might call a motherly relationship with the others and with the world. This capacity finding its foundation in nature, it assumes however a central role in the unfolding of the Plan of salvation and supplies the most important contribution to the study of this ministry. According to the reality of the Church, the ministry has to be considered both in the Church-as-an-institution (and, in her, conformably to her twofold aspect of act and duration) and in the Church-as-a-communion.

The ministry in the Church-as-an-institution

Let us primarily envisage the ministry that is accomplished by woman in her whole being and not only by this or that aspect of her activity or of her personality.

Through her maternity, through her motherly relation to the world and to the beings, woman puts at the disposal of the Body of Christ - in its process of accomplishment throughout history - the substance of the world. Through her, a chain of "historicity" links the events that define, at every moment, the becoming of the world. The maternity which, in the Old Testament, prepared the fulness of times, restarts her process of preparation after having reached its historical as well as personal summit in Mary. It is now poured out over all women, under forms that cover the whole of creation; and it shall be made manifest again when a woman, wearing the sun for her mantle, shall have born the fulness of the messianic times and when all men shall reach "perfect manhood, that maturity which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ" (Eph. 4,13)

Woman supplies the Church with the human conditions for her very "historicity". What in her is the link between one generation and the next, safeguard of permanent values, ceaseless transmission of a reality that is incorporated to the depths of her being (33) that is the very background, the very tissue, the very duration where the efficacious signs of grace may find their insertion. The concept has often been dealt with - on account of her self-same being and previously to any specific contribution, woman is supposed to stand, in the Church, for the safeguard of the essential human values.

The main emphasis - in what regards her intervention in the history of the world and of the Church - should not therefore be laid specifically in the realm of the outward activities or of the exercise of power. On the contrary, in an ideal and balanced civilization where practical difficulties would no longer exist concerning the equality of rights of man and woman, the intervention of woman in history, and so much the more that woman would be free to be herself, should bear the mark of that "germinative interiority" which allows history its accomplishment. (More than thirty years ago already Gertrude von le Fort (34) supported a similar opinion when she developed the theme of the veil as the sign or the symbol of the presence of woman in history and in culture.)

The same dominant traits that are to be found in the Church, mother of all the living (" chaste, fruitful, universal, venerable, patient, attentive, loving, discerning, ardent, wise, strong mother") (35) are potentially present in the motherly attitude of every woman (36). It would be, no doubt, a fruitful study to see how these traits mutually correspond and, therefore, ^{which significance} the maternal relationship of woman towards all beings can have ^{when seen in panorama} in correspondence with the unfolding of these attributes of the Church through her historical development. We shall ~~not~~ confine ourselves to the consideration of two of these various aspects which, in one way or another, afford a basis to the "historicity" both in space and in time.

Thus it is that maternity is made manifest in time under a sign of fruitfulness. Through this fruitfulness the stream of grace finds its way. Countless instances might give evidence of that fruitfulness of which the influences are not always easy to detect. As a matter of fact, the only sociological study that is feasible is the one concerning the influence of the feminine religious congregations, which have been, up to the beginning of our century, the only women groups within the Roman Catholic Church. What has called forth the increase in numbers of these feminine congregations being exactly this very concern for the concrete, for the immediate needs of men and the peoples. Moreover, if it is true that the fecundity of most of these congregations has found expression, first of all, in clear-cut aims in the realm of the works of mercy it is also true that the existence of some of them has had a fruitfulness of

a universal scope in the Church of their own time. Such was the case, for instance, with the Clarists or the Dominican sisters who were extremely influential in the movement towards poverty in the XII century (37).

Yet to narrow down the contribution of woman to the institutional expressions with which history makes us acquainted, would be to minimize it. The situation of woman in the past centuries does not enable us - this or that individual case excepted - to be aware of the expressions which feminine fruitfulness assumed within the very texture of the 'Church': the real fruitfulness of mothers of families of all times, of all single women living with their relatives and, owing to the size that family circles usually had at that time, creating the best conditions for the Gospel to permeate.

Our century is, in that respect, altogether different. Women are gathered in all possible kinds of groups which meet both the fundamental needs of the family of men and the spiritual demands of the contemporary world. Their existence alone witnesses of that concern-for-the-world attitude on a scale that goes beyond that of the individual or of the family. The novelty of this type of influence does not allow yet for a clear grasp either of the whole of its scope or of the conditions in which that influence may be displayed (38).

The ecclesiastical authority itself ascribes to the presence of woman this fruitful quality, which consists in carrying further the operation of grace. Isn't that the reason why contemporary missiology refuses to baptise the candidate whose familiar conditions to persevere in faith are lacking? The importance attached to women in mission countries, specially in what regards her role as mother, is a clear sign of that acknowledgment (39). The Church is more and more aware that woman brings into the christian community, in embryo, of mission countries, an element of stability, of permanence, of continuity, which is the sociological reflection of her proper nature in accord with the motherly concern for others. In some centuries, the missionary activity of the Church was the work of men, one might say that, in our time, the presence of woman as an essential element of the establishment of the Church is an undisputed fact.

This awareness, moreover, is to be intimately connected, so to say, with that which is the most tangible sign of maternity in space - its universality-. In the apostolic times, women took an active part in evangelization. According to Paul's writings, these women became so influential as those men who collaborated with him (Rom. 16, 1-13; Phil. 4, 2-3). They are called, in the same manner than men, helpers, collaborators. Of them Paul says that they have worked hard for the Lord.

In the Middle-Ages, the influence of women in the conversion of the pagan peoples is undeniable. In the modern times, after the pioneer endeavours of the XVII century, this universality finds expression in a wide flourishing of missionary congregations for women, in the XIX century. (41) Not only the already existing congregations were geared toward missionary work, bringing into it their specific activities (in the realm of teaching, care for the sick, etc) but also new institutes were born of which the proper aim was the work in mission countries.

In our days, the participation of women in the missionary efforts of the Church has assumed an unexpected importance. The promotion of woman, her social emancipation, enabled women to put at the disposal of the missionary Church their gifts and capacities in the exercise of well defined and unreplaceable tasks in the city of men. In the mission countries in the strict sense of the

word, new possibilities of action are open - lay women take part in the evangelization, taking advantage of a social situation where a total freedom of action is acknowledged to them. Different groups send out young women in mission countries, both according to modern patterns of lifetime commitments and according to the pattern of a temporary contract. In those countries which are still undergoing a process of development, their contribution is manifold: medical as well as sanitary work, social programmes of community development work, educational activities for young people and adults, collaboration with the local press and with communication departments. In those countries where the Church is still in a missionary stage, on account of her situation of minority in a pagan environment, but where the elementary needs of the people have already been satisfied, the contribution of these women lays rather in the realm of culture and of those activities that derive from it. They will attempt to express through a spiritual creativeness, the fundamental capacity for Redemption that exists in the world and in the different cultures and civilizations.

In what concerns this missionary endeavour, the women of the XX century follow along the tradition of women of the apostolic communities. Before any other task, they hold the evident and undeniable charge of religious instruction which is accomplished outside the frame of the official teaching in a church. They take a part in the kerigm, that is, in the announcement of the Gospel in a non-christian environment. This role has become particularly important today, as the entire Church is now aware that the worlds to be converted are not only those frontier-limited worlds, covering geographically well-determined zones but rather all human spaces where Christ is not known - in short, the Church has become acutely aware of her diaspora-situation (42). Just as was in apostolic times, the presence of woman in a Church in diaspora will assume concrete forms in the carrying out of tasks that are the prolongation of the kerigm: work with catechumens, catechism at all degrees, even spiritual guidance of women.

In this broad concept of the Church's missionary situation, the presence and work of women in mission countries (in the strict sense of the word) will mainly depend upon the profound conviction of belonging to a world for which one is responsible and of belonging to a church with no frontiers. Mission becomes thus not so much an individual vocation but rather the striking concretization of the universality of the catholic situation. The growing awareness of this reality in many young women now-a-days is a sign of the deep challenge it addresses to the woman's capacity for universality.

To a certain extent, even the way in which the announcement of the Gospel is made can bear the mark of the fundamental attitude of woman. This whole subject would require a further careful study and it is perhaps too early for it. In spite of this, what we can say for sure is that the essential characteristic of woman's attitude is the creation of a living atmosphere through which christian values may be expressed and fully grasped. The creation of such an atmosphere will be then the specific feminine way of sharing in the concern of the Church, "mother of the living" for the world which does not know Christ. While contemporary philosophy discovers the "feminine" as a fundamental value, (43) one becomes more conscious of the need of poles, where the values that are implied in the feminine are utterly carried out. It has thus been said that, besides the signs of the work of man through which the masculine side of the human is to be disclosed, and that are at the very root of progress, the modern world, for its essential balance, claims to have what we could call the "chez-soi" (44), which could be achieved by multiplying in the world, the situations of open-hearted receptivity, of collectedness, of

loving affection, without which society cannot subsist. Moreover modern catechetics(45) do nothing but convey a new strength to the aforesaid statements when they refer to an eventual previous "experience" of the kingdom through which the christian values may be apprehended in their vital synthesis as a powerful aid to the "process" of conversion and the committed insertion in a living faith(46).

The ministry of women in the Church-as-an-institution, therefore, occurs at a deeper level and more ontological, too, than the one at which clear-cut activities do. In addition to this, whenever this ministry takes form in concrete functions, it proves to be fairly diversified and covering a wide display of aspects. To discern, in all these aspects, what should be ascribable to the "powers" of the Church is a task which is far from being easy. Neither history nor the present state of things give us very conclusive information. Moreover, these powers being rather entangled in the concrete situation of the exercise of certain functions, it is not possible for us to mention them in a systematic way. We will consider, for the sake of the clarity of the statement, those powers that derive from the Church's royal, sacerdotal and prophetic functions, at the same time qualifying certain members of the Church in regard to others (47).

In a more or less approximative way, we can say that within the Roman Catholic Church woman is categorically excluded(48) from the priesthood in what regards the accomplishment of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, whereas a participation (fairly changeable though) in the powers of teaching and government is acknowledged to her.

In what concerns teaching, three degrees are usually envisaged(49): the pastoral degree, the doctoral degree and the degree of exhortation. The pastoral degree is intimately connected with the power which is given at the priestly ordination and is therefore refused to women. This interdiction, however, is less heavy of consequences than it might seem at first sight, given the way in which the teaching according to a pastoral degree is carried on within the Church(50).

The doctoral degree, denied by Saint Thomas to women seems to depend on sociological factors alone. In a society where woman has attained her juridical majority and where she is engaged in all aspects of human activity, nothing can be opposed, on the level of principles, to her carrying on this power of teaching. The Hierarchy itself is more and more encouraging this participation of woman in the official teaching of the Church. The foundation of the Regina Mundi Institute in Rome, which is devoted to the advanced theological formation of women in religious congregations (now-a-days also open to lay women) has been conceived with this prospect in view. In certain countries, likewise (Germany, for instance) women take a degree in theology mainly with the aim of giving religious instruction. In the frame of lay apostolic movements a whole work of theological formation is being carried out, very often entrusted to responsible lay people. In women groups and sometimes even in mixed groups, women hold the charge of a teaching which goes much beyond a mere teaching of exhortation(51). It is not an utopian idea to think of women delivering a doctoral teaching, though sporadic, in the Seminaries.

However, if in certain environments some reservations are still made to a full acknowledgement of the doctoral degree for women, the same does not happen with the teaching of exhortation. We should not underestimate, on the ground of an euphoric promotion of woman within the Church, the consequential role which is connected with this kind of teaching and of which the scope can never be utter

ly apprehended. What is at stake is the teaching given by woman in the circle of her own family, of her parish, of the small local communities where she finds her insertion. The new emphasis given to these realms of life as important parts of "public life"(52) will doubtlessly aid to give new relief to this teaching, which is so traditional in the Church and so vital for her.

In what respects the power of government, the most striking instance is that of religious communities where the Superior, on account of the prerogatives which she holds, gets a true "participation in the ecclesiastic jurisdiction". It is true that, in our time, the internal government of these communities is rather changed from which it was in the Middle-Ages. Notwithstanding this, the Superiors still have a very important role in the concrete exercise of the government of the Church over this million of subjects, the nuns. A realistic view of things will naturally lead to the statement that "nothing can oppose to the fact that they, who are actually charged by the Church to help their subjects to reach to perfection and to practise, in her behalf, the works of mercy, should not receive from the Church, all the necessary powers thereto" (53).

It is perhaps too early still to apply the above mentioned statement-without at least adjusting it-to the lay apostolate groups which have cropped up in the last forty years. However, the commitment in the lay apostolate implies also an acknowledged desire of sanctification and of cooperation in the works of mercy of the Church, that is, in her proper apostolate. The apostolate shares in the apostolate of the Church only insofar as it is concerned with spiritual life. Pope Pius XII meant it when he said that "spiritual life is the very core of the christian apostolate, rather than the problems of internal organization or those of influence in the milieu".(54) The concrete situations of those responsible within the groups when confronted with this concern for the spiritual life of all the members could not be envisaged in all their scope and significance outside the frame of a real participation in the government of the Church. Nevertheless one might not yet define their status in a suitable way.

Still greater difficulties are to be met as soon as we endeavour to find out what should be assigned to women concerning the exercise of the priestly power.

A very pertinent study(55) has shown that the exclusion of women from the eucharistic celebration has its roots both in the Tradition and in the Scripture with a "striking conclusiveness". We shall sum up the essential contents of that study. On the one hand, the Didascalia of the Apostles stresses that, in spite of the presence of several women among those who gathered around Christ, the question has never been put in terms of either including them in the institution of the College of the twelve or of granting them the powers that are linked to it. On the other hand, the study of the Treatise of Epiphanius gives evidence of the veracity of these assertions with scriptural proofs. As a matter of fact the Old Testament does not show us any example of women offering sacrifices and in the apostolic times, in spite of the rights that women held of prophesying or of assisting in the functions of worship, it was not permissible for them to serve as priests.

The selfsame study emphasizes that the function of assisting to priests and bishops in the carrying out of certain acts of worship was very important for women in apostolic times. The author of the study is even convinced that all masculine minor orders should have had their feminine correlative orders without any principle hindering it. However they have never achieved the same degree of institutionalization in Occident as they did in Orient.

These functions of assistance are in close connection with the needs, the concrete conditions in which the ministry was carried out (as is the case with the baptism by immersion) and the prevailing general atmosphere (the Western antifeminism at the time of Tertullian). Such an assistance comprises, in the apostolic times, very different tasks: assisting the Bishops during the baptism of women, keeping the door in assemblies (watching over the group of women, helping the community to move forward), right of pouring out the wine into the chalice, of reading aloud the Gospel whenever the priest was absent, of incensing the holy book, of mounting the pulpit, of administering the communion to women and children, of assisting sick women (to which they might eventually administer what could be called the embryo of the present Extreme Unction.)

The exegesis of St. Paul's writings concerning women in liturgical assemblies is far from being completely clarified. To the purpose of solving the controversy regarding the seemingly opposite texts of Paul (on the one hand, I Cor. 11, 4-5, which grants to women the possibility of an official role in the assemblies and, on the other hand, I Cor. 14, 34-35, interdicting to women "to speak" in the assembly) the same Author admits that two different activities are here at stake. Thus "to speak" refers to the preaching of the word to the assembly "in a solemn tone and underlying the sacred, worship-like character of the preaching" - an expression which is taken up by St. Paul in I Tim. 2, 11-12, where the Apostle forbids women "to teach". On the contrary, the activity envisaged in I Cor. 11, 5 is that which essentially belongs to the prophet, that is to say, to pray in a loud voice - exegesis which is confirmed by I Tim. 2, 8-9. This distinction is clearly drawn in the Didascalia of the Apostles, which mentions both the interdiction of teaching in the assemblies and the participation in the prayer of the assembly.

The difficult question remains to discern the part which, in the teaching of Paul, was shaped by the customs and the prevailing mentality of his time - and therefore destined, in the first place, to his contemporaries - and the part which had, on the contrary, a universal scope. The interdiction of "speaking", in the frame of what is stated in I Cor. 14, 37, saying that it is a commandment of the Lord, is harder to explain. Even if this last verse concerns the whole of the order in the liturgical assembly, the verse concerning women could not be easily excluded. It seems difficult therefore to give a relative contents to such a decision of Paul.

It is necessary, however, to call attention to the fact that Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians "tries to justify one after the other all his determinations, considering them in a wider doctrinal setting, and making them appear as a corollary of a fundamental principle" (56). Paul indeed makes the commandment which he has received from the Lord rest on the basis of the order of creation. He unfolds this order in Eph. 5, 31, making of it the context to his most profound revelation on the meaning of the differentiation in sexes. This argument amounts to say that the distribution of functions between man and woman is a consequence of the order of creation in the original design which presided to it: "that of disclosing the image of the relationship of God and redeemed mankind" (57).

Moreover Paul, (and this renders the exegesis still more difficult,) not only links this original order to the new order but also makes the fact of sin interfere explicitly therein (I Tim. 2, 14). The word "submission" which he uses several times in connection with women - I Cor. 14, 34, in the context of liturgical assemblies as well as in Eph. 5, 32 and Col. 3, 28, in the context of conjugal relations - is all imbued with the punishment inflicted to woman after the fall (Gn. 3, 16) in relation to her husband. This submission proper to the conjugal

gal relation applied to very different circumstances such as the liturgical assembly should be responsible for most of the exegetical difficulties. Let us note that the Teaching of the Church seems to be aware of this dominance when she applies, as a support for the unity of marriage, expressions which have been used by Paul in the context of the liturgical assembly (58). This however does not exclude, on the contrary, the unanimous interpretation both of the theology and of the teaching within the Roman Church, which sees in Paul's statements the formal interdiction for women to have access to the sacerdotal power, in all its amplitude.

If one admits the distinction which has been drawn in the above mentioned article one should study the contents of prophecy, side by side with the meaning of the interdiction "to speak" in the assembly. In the apostolic times, where this role is seen mainly in the deaconesses (59) it is a prerogative both of women and of men. On account of its having given place to abuses, the Church has been careful enough to fix boundaries to it. The widows will play this role on the IInd century. In the primitive Church they will become an ecclesiastical order, and therefore go beyond the strict sense of the way they are called. This can be seen in the famous expression of Ignatius of Antiochy "the virgins called widows". Their main task is that of teaching women and also the very spiritual task of oblation, praying for those who are in great trial, which demands of them (I Tim. 5, 9-10) a serious life of asceticism and perseverant prayer. Later on, the institution of the Virgins, with the beginning of feminine monachism, will cause the institution of the widows to disappear. These latter will mostly maintain, from the IV up to the XIX centuries, the prophetic role assigned to women in the early christian communities. The history of the religious life of women is paradoxically studded with attempts to convey new impetus, to this prophetic role in its lay expression following along the line of the women in apostolic times (60). The social and juridical situation of woman however has practically hindered all these attempts to reassume their original direction.

If by prophecy St. Paul means primarily prayer, it is clear that this role has been played for centuries first of all in the feminine monasteries where the nuns - specially the contemplative, held the charge of the singing of the choir, thereby accomplishing an official task in the prayer of the Church. Our time has however brought about many changes in this regard. On the one hand, the very concept of official prayer of the Church has been enlarged, owing to the provisions of the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy of the II Vatican Council. On the other hand manyfold experiences of a community prayer, more and more based on and nourished by the Bible, and more and more in accord with the very conditions of the life of the christians, are being made. These changes will doubtlessly bring fresh possibilities to women in this so essential realm of the life of worship.

The ministry in the Church-as-a-communion

It is in the Church-as-a-communion that the role of man and woman can be more distinctly seen. The Church as the communion of the saints possesses a masculine and a feminine character (61). On account of her masculine character (Eph. 4, 13) "we shall reach perfect manhood, that maturity which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ" - the Church forms the total Christ, the new man that all christians must put on (Eph. 2, 15). Moreover, that is just what the liturgy means, - in its unfolding of the mystery of the communion of saints - when it applies to men those attributes of sanctity that derive from the masculine character of the Church. On the other hand, the Church is also the woman (II Cor. 11, 2) - "I have betrothed you to Christ, so that

The woman-as-virgin, whose liturgical praise is always done under the theme of the celebration of the betrothal with Christ, is the sign, in the Church-as-a-communion, of the final communion, when Christ will be "brought to fullness" in all. She accomplishes, in her personal life and in an exclusive way, that which every soul and the whole Church as such are called to accomplish at a final stage. She takes as a way for her life that which, for the whole of the Church, will be her eschatological end.

The offering of her life is the most complete expression of the sacrifice that is implied in the sacerdotal role. This sacrifice is fruitful because it is redemptive and it will be redemptive through the fruits of ~~the~~ motherhood. It is not a limited offering, not a particular sacrifice, but rather the guarantee of an inexhaustible maternity. "It is for the sake of consecrating themselves entirely to the birth of the new creation, in which the old creation is to be saved, that the virgins do renounce to prolong and to increase that one. In the total giving of themselves to the work of the new birth of a humanity ransomed in Christ, they make of their virginity not a refusal of love but an act of supreme love." (64).

The life of the virgin is therefore, in itself, an irreplaceable prophetic as well as kerygmatic witness, as she expresses well that "the figure of this world passes away", while the things of God are for eternity. Through her total gift to Christ, the deepest significance of the royal dignity over the world will be fulfilled. The essential poverty and the extreme obedience help to witness to the total belonging to Christ and the free renouncement to all the created. By means of it, the power of Christ over all things is reinforced "it is all for you, and you for Christ, and Christ for God" (I Cor. 3, 22-23).

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Final remarks:

Two remarks should still be added.

First of all we will notice the "fluidity" (65) of the ministry of women, its anti-institutional character, so to say, which might even seem disconcerting. Different factors could account for this fluidity. Perhaps the major factor is the entanglement which has occurred at all times of history between the ministry of woman in itself, within the Church, and the social status of woman (66). Only when the social status of woman will no longer be the object of prejudices then the ministry of woman within the Church will be more distinctly drawn.

This fluidity is also the outcome of an endeavour which is rather scattered, therefore lacking a collective character. On the one hand and owing to social circumstances, the mothers of families were connected with their families and not among them. On the other hand, something like an activity of women within the city was not regarded favorably. We should not be astonished that the religious congregations alone have displayed distinct and recognizable feminine ministries throughout the past centuries. They were, in fact, the only women groups susceptible of being studied sociologically.

Only in our time the feminine world gathers together, and its behaviour as a whole may be the subject of research. The fact that its status is being "purified" of the prejudices of centuries and that the choice of its interests as well as of activities becomes more conscient and more free, conveys to the whole of this behaviour a very profound significance in the clearing up of the "preferential orientations" of woman, and, as

regards the Church, of her proper ministries.

The second remark concerns the undeniable presence of the dialectic character of history in every study of the ministry of women. On the one hand we have the salvific design of God on the world, the gifts that, in this design, belong to woman, the mission which is entrusted to her; on the other hand we know that redemption is, at the same time, the fruit of a "painful and vivifying experience of human liberty" (67) an unceasing conquest and choice (68) of the entire being, to be done and undone all through life. In this conquest and in this choice takes place the continuous tension between the refusal of a nature fallen on account of sin and the receptivity of a child of God whom the redemptive power of the Cross has made free and available.

This dialectics between sin and the Cross which is characteristic of the history of salvation does not go without repercussions regarding the intervention of woman in ~~her~~ ^{the} history. Both individually and collectively woman is, in spite of the scope of ~~her~~ ^{of salvation} ministry, a fallen nature in need of redemption. Her ministry will always reflect this fundamental immanence. While for man-masculine, this immanence is more suitably expressed in his relation to the world of labour, for woman it is her relation of a maternal type that is attained.

In the same way that in the world of labour, harmony will not be found until the work of men will have been integrated in the creative power of God and become subject to it, in the full acknowledgment of his role of mediator through work, so in the same way harmony should be found between God's design and the free choice that woman makes of her relation-to-the-world which is, for her a condition for a personal fulfilment and for a communal influence.

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- (16) : GERTRUDE VON LE FORT
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- (17) : Note the following passage in:"La participation de la femme dans la vie publique", report from the Seminar held at Adis-Abeba, December 1960, sponsored by the United Nations:
"...les femmes elles-mêmes peuvent contribuer à la solution des problèmes éducatifs et en particulier des problèmes financiers par l'entremise des pouvoirs publics, et notamment des autorités locales, et par celles des organisations non gouvernementales et des associations bénévoles. En agissant ainsi elles participent en fait à la vie publique."

It is also very enlightening, in this regard, the intervention of the delegate from Poland in the 352nd meeting of the 15th session of the Commission on the Status of women, of the U.N., in which the request was made that an International Institute for Research be set up for the study of "the function and the services really fulfilled by women".

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- (30) : BOUYER
op. cit. pg.215
- (31) : BOUYER
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- (32) : It is not meant here that woman alone shapes history. That would be
to fall from the exaggeration that denies its role in history into
another exaggeration equally false. In order to re-establish a ba-

lanced view of things, we should envisage history in its dynamic growth, in its "quanta" of development, that is, in the elements of progress, of innovation that derive rather from a relation of origin, a fatherly, masculine relation.

- (33) : EDITH STEIN
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ing to make of its centers a real pole from where christian values
radiate and by using them as a proper apostolic contribution of wo-
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- (50) : The preparation of the sessions of the II Vatican Council, has
shown the way in which the bishops listen to the faithful once
decisions are being prepared, thus accomplishing that community
of thought and of life that distinguish the people of God.
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within the frame of groups existing in latin countries. In these
countries, women do not have such an acute awareness of their
"promotion" as they do in other places, thus accepting, as natu-
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