

A THEOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY FOR MISSION

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Now that we have begun to consider the nature of mission from a Biblical perspective, or shall we say Biblical perspectives, I would like to turn in this presentation to a more focused discussion of mission theology and what this mission theology would mean for the life and structures of the Church. So I have tentatively entitled this presentation: "A Theology and Ecclesiology for Mission." What I will do in the next forty five minutes or so is present a very brief sweep of mission theology over the last two centuries, followed by a further explication of the *missio Dei* as it relates to baptism and then conclude with a discussion of ordination. The operative assumption I will use throughout this presentation is that we need to have a clear theology of mission first before we can understand the nature and calling of baptism; and further it is only after we have a clear theology of baptism that we can begin to discuss the nature and meaning of holy orders.

A Brief Overview of Mission Theology

Mission in the wake of the Enlightenment made sense.¹ It was something that the churches of Europe and North America did. Conversion of "the heathen", the spread of churches, and the advance of Western "civilization" went hand in hand. The abuses (and contributions) of missionaries and the close connection between mission and imperialism in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania are well documented and need not be rehearsed here.² Throughout the nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth century the Western churches had their missions, *missiones ecclesiarum*. These missions, as dependent outposts of European and North American Christianity, sought to extend church models and cultural world views of the Enlightenment.

In the middle of the twentieth century, significant shifts in the theological and ecclesiological terrain of an emergent global Christianity began to shake the ground of missiological thought. Quakes occurred and fissures opened up between older established models of mission and new understandings of mission in the emerging post-colonial, post-modern world. Discussion in ecumenical councils turned from the role of the churches' missions

¹David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 262-274.

²For an overview of the Episcopal Church, USA and its foreign mission history see: Ian T. Douglas, Fling Out the Banner: The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church, (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996).

to wrestling with the nature of the mission of the Church, the *missio ecclesiae*.³ Mission was seen less as something done by voluntary associations of Christians, often as a side interest of the churches, and more as the central calling of the Church. Such theological shifts led individuals such as Emil Brunner to state: "The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning" and Stephen Neil to proclaim: "The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun."⁴

The predominance of this ecclesiocentric view of mission in the immediate post-World War II era was short lived. While the International Missionary Council promoted the coterminous nature of Church and mission, individual theologians and missiologists were beginning to look beyond the Church for the locus of God's action in the world. Increasingly the Church was seen as adjunct to God's salvific intervention in the wider struggles of the world. The *missio ecclesia* (the Church's mission) was to give way to the *missio Dei* (the mission of God.)

In his article "The Call to Evangelism," printed in the International Review of Missions in 1950, Johannes Hoekendijk led the charge against prevailing definitions of mission. He criticized church-centered mission theology as leading to a form of evangelism whose goal it was to maintain and extend the bridgehead of the Western Enlightenment church. Hoekendijk said:

To put it bluntly; the call to evangelism is often little else than a call to restore 'Christendom,' the *Corpus Christianum*, as a solid, well-integrated cultural complex, directed and dominated by the Church. And the sense of urgency is often nothing but a nervous feeling of insecurity, with the established Church endangered; a flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably past.⁵

In short, Hoekendijk argued that "Evangelization and *churchification* are not identical, and very often they are each other's bitterest enemies."⁶ Hoekendijk wanted to move mission from an ecclesiological to an eschatological point of departure. For him, the goal of evangelism, the goal of mission, was not to extend the Church as the *Corpus Christianum* but rather to participate with God in God's new creation, to work for God's shalom. Hoekendijk was the first of his generation to suggest that it was God's mission in the world to bring about God's shalom, God's Kingdom, God's Reign.

Most missiologists today would affirm that the mission of God, the *missio Dei*, is God's action in the world to bring about God's Reign. As we have discussed in our Biblical study, the trinitarian God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, has effected a new order, a new *shalom*; one in which all of creation can find new life and new hope. Unlike earlier proponents of the *missio Dei*, today's mission thinkers affirm that the Church, as the Body of Christ in the world, does

³The meetings of the International Missionary Council in Whitby, 1947, and Willingen, 1952 were particularly concerned with the missionary nature of the Church.

⁴Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 572.

⁵Johannes C. Hoekendijk, "The Call to Evangelism," International Review of Missions 39 (April 1950): 163.

⁶*Ibid.*, 171, Italics in original.

have a central role to play in the salvific work of God. The Church is called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate with God in God's mission of reconciliation, redemption and liberation. Although having a unique and central role in God's plan of salvation, the Church does not have exclusive rights on participation with God in God's mission. Thus many advocates of the *missio Dei*, especially missiologists from religiously plural contexts, see the possibility of cooperation with people of other faiths in God's universal mission. The South Indian theologian S. J. Samartha emphasizes:

In a religiously plural world, Christians, together with their neighbors of other faiths, are called upon to participate in God's continuing mission in the world. Mission is God's continuing activity through the Spirit to mend the brokenness of creation, to overcome the fragmentation of humanity, and to heal the rift between humanity, nature and God.⁷

And so we find, once again, that the Church's calling to participate with God in mending the brokenness of creation and healing the rift between humanity, nature and God is affirmed in the Catechism or "Outline of the Faith" found in the back of the Book of Common Prayer. As I have already noted, to the question: "What is the mission of the Church? the answer is given: "the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."⁸ The ecclesiocentrism of this missiological affirmation cannot be denied, the theological underpinnings of this statement, however, are consistent with *missio Dei* theology. The Episcopal Church has gone on record that the mission of God, as manifested in the Church as the Body of Christ, is no less than the eschatological restoration of all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Echoing what we started this morning, the mission of God, the mission of Jesus, and the mission of the Church is one of reconciliation and redemption. Jesus was sent by God "to bring good news to the poor. . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19) God's mission, manifested in Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is not static but a centrifugal force of movement outward.⁹ Jesus demonstrated in word and deed that the Reign of God, realized in the sending of God's son, must continue to expand to the ends of the earth. "As you have sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world." (John 17:18) Two by two, Jesus' disciples are sent to bear his mission, God's mission, in the world. Being sent in God's mission has as much efficacy for the baptized today as it did in apostolic times.

The Episcopal Church, Baptism and Mission

For over a century and a half the Episcopal Church has affirmed that baptism incorporates the faithful into the mission of God. The General Convention of 1835 proclaimed boldly that the Church was to be first and foremost a missionary society. All Episcopalians, by virtue of baptism and not voluntary association, were members of the Domestic and Foreign

⁷S. J. Samartha, One Christ - Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 149.

⁸The Episcopal Church, The Book of Common Prayer (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 855.

⁹See: Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

Missionary Society.¹⁰ Participation in God's mission therefore is at the heart of the baptismal call. Baptism is thus a commission, co-mission, in God's mission. Just as God sent Jesus into the world, and Jesus sent his disciples to the ends of the earth, we too are sent in mission. The imperative is clear.¹¹

A key question then is how do the baptized participate in Jesus' mission, in God's mission? What are the various ministries the faithful are called to exercise as they seek and serve God's reconciling and redemptive activity in the world today? The 1979 Book of Common Prayer with its central emphasis on baptism provides some useful tools to help answer these questions.¹² Following the creedal affirmations in the Baptismal Covenant are five different questions that speak to the fullness of life in Christ. These questions outline five different priorities, or types of ministry, that each person promises to pursue as a member of Christ's body. The five different "ministries" are: worship, forgiveness, proclamation, service, and justice making. Each has a profoundly missiological imperative. Each has a role to play in God's mission.

The first affirmation in the Baptismal Covenant is the promise to continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. Coming together in the eucharistic community, the members of the Body of Christ are nourished with the word and sacraments. Gathering around the common table, each individual is united with God and each other in Christ. Restored and renewed as the Body of Christ, the Church is empowered anew to go out into the world in God's name. Worship is basic to a life in mission.

God's mission of reconciliation and redemption presupposes that the world is a divided and sinful place. It is human nature to turn against God and one another in selfish pursuit of individualistic desires. The sins of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism infect relationships and separate humanity from the love of the Creator. Environmental degradation and disrespect for God's created order threaten "this fragile earth, our island home"¹³. In the Baptismal Covenant, each person is called to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever one sins, repent and return to God. The assurance of forgiveness by God for the sins of the whole world holds out the promise of new life in a restored, reconciled creation. Forgiveness is basic to a life in mission.

Christians believe that God has done a new thing in Jesus Christ and affirm that the story of Jesus is Good News for the world. Through the centuries, the Church has taught that in Christ all people can be restored to unity with each other and with God. The third imperative of the Baptismal Covenant is to proclaim by word and example this Good News. Naming Jesus as the

¹⁰Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in a General Convention 1835 (New York: Swords, Stanford and Company, 1935), 130-131.

¹¹With the development of a centralized national program of education, social, service, and missions in 1919, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society became the incorporated appellation for the "national church." Today the name remains the legal title for the corporate work of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

¹²Book of Common Prayer, 304-305.

¹³Ibid, 370.

Christ and ordering one's life around this truth is at the heart of proclamation. Proclamation is basic to a life in mission.

The Baptismal Covenant's affirmation that Christ is present in all persons emphasizes the connectivity and oneness of the incarnation. Serving this Christ by loving one's neighbor as oneself is a key imperative of those who share life in Christ. In the Great Commandment (John 15:12-17) Jesus exhorts his followers to love one another as he has loved them, even to the point of laying down one's life for another. Seeking and serving Christ, with neighbors near and far, offers new hope for a restored and reconciled human community. Service is basic to a life in mission.

Christians are called to confront the powers and principalities of this world that undermine the full humanity of individuals. God's mission of reconciliation and redemption stands in opposition to the structures of oppression that enslave and marginalize the poor and the weak. God is a God of liberation and freedom. As participants in God's mission, the baptized promise to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. Justice making is basic to a life in mission.

Worship, forgiveness, proclamation, service, and justice making are all central to God's mission in the world. Every follower of Christ, through baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit, is called, individually and corporately, to pursue these five ministries equally. Unfortunately, the confusion over the nature of mission and the undifferentiated linking of the terms mission and ministry often result in one of the five ministerial imperatives becoming the *sine qua non* of mission. For example, individuals of a more conservative or evangelical position might emphasize proclamation as mission. Evangelism and naming the name of Jesus to those who are unreached with the Gospel constitutes real mission. Those of a more liberal or progressive theological stance might hold up struggles for justice and peace as the fundamental Christian calling. The Church should be primarily about transforming unjust structures that oppress and enslave. Both of these positions are misguided for they elevate one aspect of the Baptismal Covenant at the expense of the others. The point is that God's mission of reconciliation and redemption requires the baptized to give equal attention to a life of worship, forgiveness, proclamation, service and justice making.¹⁴

It is important to emphasize that the point of departure for participation in the *missio Dei* is baptism. Baptism is where the calling to a life of mission originates, not ordination. The work of mission, the work of the Church, belongs to the *laos*, as the people of God. It is not the exclusive domain of one group of people or the other. Over time the Church has ordered specific roles to support the work of the people in God's mission. Within Anglicanism, the offices of bishop, deacon and priest fill particular leadership and service functions. There has been a recent tendency, however, to add a fourth order, that of the laity, to the three historic offices. The aforementioned Catechism, for example, outlines the four separate and distinct ministries of laity, bishops, priests and deacons.¹⁵ I believe that such ordering of the *laos* is misguided for it equates what God has called all the baptized to do in God's mission (the five baptismal ministries described above) with that of particular offices ordained by the Church. I see such “ordering” of the laity as resulting in the clericalization baptism. Ministry and orders are not the same. Ministry belongs to all the baptized whereas the orders of bishop, deacon and priest have been

¹⁴ Example of Trinity School for Ministry “Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” and EDS “Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

¹⁵ Book of Common Prayer, 855-856.

setup by the Church to support the *laos* in their life in mission. As such the orders of bishop, deacon and priest are secondary to, and in service of, the calling of all the baptized to participate in God's mission of reconciliation and redemption.

Reconsidering Holy Orders in Light of the Missio Dei

A discussion of the offices of bishop, deacon and priest, or presbyter, will help to clarify the distinction between the calling of all the baptized to a life of mission and the supportive functions of the three historic orders therein.

As Episcopalians it is appropriate to begin with a consideration of the office of bishop. In 1835 the General Convention, the same convention that affirmed that membership in the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was based upon baptism and not voluntary contributions, articulated a new understanding of the episcopate. General Convention stated that if the Church is first and foremost a missionary society and if every baptized person is called to a life of mission, then the bishop is to be the chief missionary or mission leader. The role of the bishop is to lead the Church forward in mission, to go ahead of the people to extend God's healing community and to motivate the faithful to full participation in God's mission. Emphasizing the missiological nature of *episcopé*, the General Convention of 1835 inaugurated the missionary episcopate. The Church stated that any new work of the Church, be it in an overseas mission field or on the Western frontier, be initiated with the leadership of a missionary bishop. And so the 1835 General Convention elected the first two missionary bishops of the Episcopal Church, Jackson Kemper for the Northwest and Francis Lister Hawks for the Southwest. In 1844, William J. Boone was elected the first foreign missionary bishop for the see known as Amoy and Other Parts of China. The revolutionary idea of the bishop as first and foremost the chief missionary or mission leader has been perhaps the single greatest contribution of the Episcopal Church to the development of the modern Anglican Communion.¹⁶

George Washington Doane, Bishop of New Jersey and the prime mover behind the changes in mission theology of the 1835 General Convention, said it best when he preached the sermon at the consecration of Jackson Kemper as the first missionary bishop. Doane said:

In strictness, as every minister of Jesus is a *Missionary*, so are the Bishops, as His chief ministers, *eminently* Missionaries - *sent out* by Christ Himself to preach the Gospel - *sent* to preach it in a wider field - *sent* to preach it under a higher responsibility - *sent* to preach it at greater hazards of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and under the circumstances more appalling of arduous labor and of anxious care, - to fulfill, in a single word, that humbling, but most wholesome precept of the Savior, 'whosoever of you shall be the chiefest, let him be the servant of all.' (italics in original)¹⁷

¹⁶See: Robert S. Boshier, "The American Church and the Formation of the Anglican Communion, 1823-1853" The M. Dwight Johnson Memorial Lecture in Church History, 1962, (Evanston, IL: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1962).

¹⁷ George Washington Doane, "Sermon at the Consecration of Jackson Kemper," September 25, 1835, in Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, ed., Documents of Witness: A History of the Episcopal Church, 1782-1985, (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994), 108-109.

As the mission leader, the bishop shares with the apostles in providing oversight for the Christian community while at the same time advancing and challenging the Body of Christ to move forward into an unbelieving world. The examination of the bishop in the ordination service underscores the continuity of today's *episcopé* with that of the early church. It says up front that "A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings."¹⁸ This first declaration does not say the bishop's primary charge is to care for the needs of clergy or to run diocesan programs. Rather the bishop is to take the lead in proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and the truth of Christ's resurrection in the real world. The sphere of influence for this leadership is the secular world of lords and kings, not of saints and angels. Bishops are called to proclaim Christ's sovereignty in the halls of political and economic power where unity, reconciliation, and redemption of all people take a back seat to individualism, greed, and exclusion. A bishop who does not see the world as her/his diocese will not be a bishop whose point of departure is the *missio Dei*.

The Bishop's outward orientation does not mean that she/he neglects the needs of the Church, its people or its ordained leaders. For the bishop is also called "to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor for the entire flock of Christ."¹⁹ In these services to the household, the bishop becomes a point of reconciliation and unity; within the diocese, across diocesan or denominational boundaries, and over time. The authority of the *episcopé* resides not in the individual bishop, no matter what her/his charisma or leadership skills or lack thereof, but rather in the office of the bishop as a point of unity for all the baptized. The episcopate thus represents the catechetical statement that the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with. Even in the more mundane, daily, churchy functions of the bishop, the episcopate, rightly understood, is still profoundly missiological.

The bishop's calling, to the world and to the church, is thus to be a **mission leader**. As such she/he proclaims to the world the promise of new life and reconciliation in Christ's resurrection. At the same time the Bishop points toward the unity of Body in the Church catholic. This bi-directional call, to the world and to the Body of Christ, is not easy. In both spheres, the bishop must seek and serve God's reconciling, redemptive mission. If she/he does not, then the authority and power of the *episcopé* is lost. Without a primary commitment to God's mission the bishop cannot be *the bishop*.

The next office to consider is that of the deacon. To some this might appear to be out of sync as orders are generally understood in a linear fashion from bishop, to priest, to deacon; or in the processes of ordination from deacon, to priest, to bishop. The problem with such an ordering is that the bishop is usually placed at the top, the priest under the bishop and then the deacon at the bottom. This becomes even more problematic when the laity is added as a fourth order because we all know where they inevitable get placed (below the diaconate). A corrective to this difficulty is to understand the three offices of bishop, deacon, and priest not as linear and successive but rather as three separate and distinct orders. A separate and distinct understanding of orders does not presuppose that an individual can not be called to all three offices in the course of her/his active work in the Church. This, in fact, is the dominant model at work in the Episcopal Church today. It is important, however, not to codify the progression from deacon to

¹⁸Book of Common Prayer, 517.

¹⁹Ibid.

priest to bishop, for I believe the three offices are not mutually dependent nor successive. Seeing them as such supports a hierarchical, or perhaps even patriarchal, view of the Church where bishops are at the top and lay people are at the bottom. To correct this view the Episcopal Church should consider ordaining individuals to serve in one or more of the offices of priest, deacon and priest without necessarily serving in the others.²⁰ The Church should not forget that great bishops like Ambrose and Gregory served faithfully without first being ordained deacon and priest. Considering the office of deacon after that of bishop counteracts the linear, hierarchical, successive understanding of holy orders. At the same time there are sound missiological reasons for bringing these two offices into closer proximity.

There are many models of the diaconate in effect throughout the Episcopal Church. Some dioceses have a very well developed diaconal ministry with fine educational and deployment resources for their deacons. Other dioceses have a more *laissez-faire* attitude toward the diaconate, especially where deacons are inherited from previous episcopates or are transferred in from other dioceses. In such cases the diaconate is usually considered secondary to the priesthood and their role in the diocese is either tolerated or completely invisible. And finally there are some dioceses that do not have a fully functioning diaconate but only the transitional office of "junior priests on their way to full orders". It is clear that there is no one model of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church today. There are however, some excellent resources available to dioceses who want to take seriously the diaconate. The North American Association for the Diaconate and their many fine publications is a particularly rich resource for a renewal of the role and place of deacons in today's church.²¹

Now most of us know Diocese of Massachusetts has redesigned the ordination processes in the diocese over the last five or so years. As part of this review, the Diocese has embraced the office of deacon separate from deacons who will be ordained priests. The embrace of a fully functioning diaconate in the Diocese of Massachusetts has not been an easy task since it requires a departure from established practices and understandings of the diaconate in the diocese where the only deacons ordained were those on the way to priesthood. Meanwhile, the handful of deacons who served in the diocese, having been ordained elsewhere, were referred to as "permanent" or "non-transitional" deacons. Such nomenclature, however, was misguided for it made the transitional diaconate normative and "real" deacons the aberration. Over the last few years the diaconate in Massachusetts has been restored as a full order in and of itself. The diocese's ordination handbook delineates the difference between individuals called to lifelong service as deacons and those persons who are called to the priesthood but must first serve, by canon, as transitional deacons for about a year.²² This emphasis on the diaconate as a unique and

²⁰It is interesting to note that in a recent advertisement from the Nominating Committee to Elect a Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, "all four orders of ministry are encouraged" to apply for the office. The Living Church, May 25, 1997, 17.

²¹See: Peyton Craighill G., ed., Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present and Future: Essays from the Philadelphia Symposium, 1992, (Providence, R.I.: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1992).

²²Commission on Ministry of the Diocese of Massachusetts, The Ordination Process for the Diocese of Massachusetts (Boston: The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 1997), 8-9.

full order in and of itself has begun to liberate the diaconate from its associations with the priesthood.

The emerging diaconate program in the Diocese of Massachusetts does, I believe, have profound missiological rationale. The articulated role of the deacon in Massachusetts is primarily that of a communicator, an interpreter of the Gospel to the world and the world to the Church, if you will, a **mission interpreter**. By virtue of their work or their way of life, a deacon embodies the meeting place of the church and the world. Her/his work is primarily connective.²³

The examination in the ordination service charges the deacon to "make Christ's redemptive love known, by word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship."²⁴ As such a deacon is a "bold community agent who is expressly Christians where she/he lives and works. Most likely, the deacon already has deep links within a community by virtue of her/his employment or lived experience."²⁵ Through a life of service, particularly to the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely, a deacon brings the healing love of Christ into a broken and hurting world. In other words, the deacon is called to model how to be the Church in the world, without hesitation or apology.

While called to model the Church in the world, a deacon is also called "to interpret the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world to the Church."²⁶ The deacon confronts the church with the injustices and conditions of the world, and brings those concerns into the center of the eucharistic gathering. "A potential deacon may well be a person who is already engaged in a social ministry; working in an area in which the church needs to know what is happening. For example, her/his work might involve youth, public housing, racism, legal advocacy, community organizing, education, to name only a few such areas."²⁷ In her/his life of service the deacon discovers the realities of the world and brings them back to the gathered Body of Christ.

The deacon's liturgical functions should be an icon of her/his communication and interpretive calling. In the eucharistic assembly, the deacon functions not as a quasi-priest but rather as an interpreter and communicator proclaiming the Gospel, assisting the people in bringing the needs of the world before God in prayer and offering, and leading the assembly into love and service in world.

The role of the deacon is similar to that of the bishop in that the locus of activity for the deacon is both in the world and in the Church. The deacon is called to service directly under the bishop for she/he shares in the episcopate's bi-directional engagement with the world and the Church. Where one is a leader, the other is the servant, the interpreter of the Church to the world and the world to the Church. Thus, like the bishop, the deacon's calling has a profoundly missiological component. In service to the world and the Church, the deacon attempts to heal the divisions that exist between people and communities. As communicator and mission

²³Ellen B. Aitken, "The Diaconate in the Diocese of Massachusetts," Unpublished study paper for the Diaconate Subcommittee of the Commission on Ministry, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, January, 1997.

²⁴The Book of Common Prayer, 543.

²⁵Aitken.

²⁶The Book of Common Prayer, 543.

²⁷Aitken.

interpreter the deacon empowers Christians in their calling to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ while working to effect reconciliation in the wider world.

The last of the three offices to consider is that of the priest, or perhaps we should say presbyter, the original root word for priest. I like to use the word presbyter instead of priest in order to make clear the difference between this particular order and the “priesthood of all believers” effected in baptism. (Also follow the leads of our sisters and brothers in Christ in the Church of South India.)

Of the three orders, the role of the presbyter is distinguished from that of bishop and deacon by location or direction. Whereas the bishop and the deacon have a bi-directional calling, to the world and to the church, the presbyter is primarily oriented to the lives of the baptized. Her/his context begins with the church, the household, the community of the faithful. Through word and sacrament, the presbyter serves to build up, support, and empower the people of God in their lives of mission. As such the presbyter is a mission catalyst, **mission motivator**, whose vocation it is to help the people find and take their place in God's work of reconciliation.

A comparison of the examination for ordination of the priest (presbyter) with that of bishop and deacon emphasizes the more ecclesiological starting point of the priestly calling. The first line of the bishop's examination articulates the authority by which she/he serves while the deacon's examination immediately emphasizes the servant nature her/his office. The opening of the priest's (presbyter's) examination, however, does not focus on the individual but rather presents an exposition of what the Church is. It states "the Church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit" and that "all baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world." Within the community of the Church, the presbyter is "called to work as a pastor, priest and teacher, and to share in the Church's councils." The conclusion of the examination reiterates the primacy of the community of the baptized in the priest's calling. "In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people (the baptized) from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and the life to come."²⁸

The presbyter is called to minister to the body of Christ through word and sacrament. She/he is called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and teaching, to love and serve the people among whom they work, and to administer the sacraments as instruments of God's healing and reconciling grace. In all of these activities the primacy is on empowering the baptized to take their place in God's mission as they live lives of worship, forgiveness, proclamation, service and justice making. As a mission motivator, the presbyter both assists with the gathering of the body for nurture and education while at the same time challenging the people to own their baptismal promises as they go out into the world in Christ.

The fact that most presbyters spend the majority of their time catalyzing the baptized to a life of mission, does not mean that they live lives separate from the world, its pains and its ills. If the presbyter lives exclusively within the church, she/he cannot fully support the baptized in mission. She/he will be too out of touch, too isolated, too disconnected. The primacy of priestly attention to the baptized does not separate her/him from encounter with the world. Rather the presbyter's support of the Body of Christ will, by necessity, be informed by and engaged with what she/he encounters in the street as she/he works alongside of the baptized in God's mission.

So the bishop as **mission leader**, the deacon as **mission interpreter**, and the priest/prsbyter as **mission motivator** all find their orders, their role, in the way that their offices serve and advance the *laos*, the baptized, as they go about God's mission of restoration and reconciliation.

²⁸The Book of Common Prayer, 531.

A Final Note About Frontiers

One final note on the nature of a life in mission must be sounded. Stephen Neill, the great Anglican missionary bishop in South India and mission scholar, is credited with saying: "once everything is mission, nothing is mission." Following Neill, one could argue that the position advocated in this reflection is that all that Christians do constitutes participation in God's mission. One might say that the sexton opening the doors of the church on Sunday morning is as much a part of God's mission as feeding the hungry in a homeless shelter or proclaiming Christ in a far off country. The mark of mission, however, is not defined by activity or geographic location or holy orders but rather by the process of crossing frontiers from the known to the unknown, from the safe to the dangerous, from the comfortable to the uncomfortable.

Mission thus involves risk. It means risking oneself, one's control, and ultimately one's faith. Discovering God anew in those who are radically different and in unforeseen places is at the heart of mission. Moving beyond parochialism and provincialism in lives of worship, forgiveness, proclamation, service, and justice making, the baptized risk themselves for the sake of God's reconciled creation. The work of the ordained, whether as mission leader, mission interpreter, or mission motivator, is to lead, support and catalyze God's people as they seek to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. Thank you.