SHARED MINISTRY

By PAUL EDWARDS

THE OLDEST member of our community of three burst in at the back door. 'George has you two beaten into a cocked hat! He knew just how to speak to those boys. I enjoyed every word of it'. This enthusiastic appreciation, usually reserved by our veteran for his allotment's first spring vegetables, pleased me greatly. It was not too complimentary to my own and to my colleague's conscientiously prepared school sermons, but it was a hearty endorsement of my judgment, because it was I who had persuaded George, one of the lay staff, to preach at the pre-Christmas school mass.

George is head of the English Department, where he has had some signal successes. Trained both in theology and the robuster sort of public speaking by the Catholic Evidence Guild, he has always taken a lively interest in the religious education of the boys, and has generously made himself available for religious instruction at different levels of the school. An adept teacher, an able speaker, a committed and theologically competent teacher: surely, I thought, these were the ingredients of an effective preacher. And he proved me right, which was very gratifying. Yet, if I was right about George's ability to preach, was I technically correct in asking a layman to preach at mass? It is quite incorrect to ask a layman to read the gospel at mass, that I do know, for when saying mass for the Catholic Teachers' Federation once, I had looked round for the nearest thing to a deacon and plumped for the president of the local branch. Some weeks later I had to give the bishop my assurance that I would not in future ask anyone to read the gospel who was not in deacon's orders.

The deacon in the western Church is an extinct species which there have been contemporary efforts to revive. I shall be delighted if they succeed. I do not really count as authentic deacons those seminarists for whom the diaconate is the last step before the priesthood, one on which with rather self-conscious solemnity they pause for a few months and experience a little pastoral work before being ordained for the real thing. I myself was a deacon for twenty-four hours, the same length of time as I was a subdeacon.

I spent a much longer time in minor orders. These were conferred in strange little ceremonies, two a day on successive days. First of all I became a doorkeeper. The bishop bade us sound the bell to summon the faithful, open the door for them to enter and the book for them to listen to, and told us to keep out unbelievers; he also exhorted us to unlock the hearts of the people of God by the quality of our words and works. We were allowed to finger the church keys and were then led away by the archdeacon (really it was the rector of the seminary) to the church door, where we demonstrated our ability not only to open it, but also to shut it again. Then we were marched off to 'ring the bell'. We should have been tugging on a stout rope to start a distant bell to brazen clamour in its lofty tower. Instead they handed us the tweeest of little bells from which we woodenly extracted a paltry tinkle.

We returned to our places and prepared to be ordained readers. The bishop told us that a reader could read (read what, I never understood, because the subdeacon read the Epistle and the deacon the Gospel), bless bread and first fruits (I don't think any of us tried this), that when we read we should try to get it right, that our conduct should exemplify what our voices proclaimed, and that as we stood on a raised place to read, so our behaviour should give people something to look up to. This time we did nothing more complicated than touch the book.

Next day we became exorcists. I have some difficulty believing that the Church once had use for a large corps of such practitioners, and I would not have thought it a minor office to wrestle with demons. But there it was among the minor orders. This time the bishop warned us sagely to expel evil from our minds and hearts as well as from the bodies of believers. We touched the book of exorcisms and were ordained to exorcize, and went straight on to become acolytes. The bishop handed us a candle and a cruet and exhorted us to illumine the Church by our goodness, righteousness and truth. And that was all until the three days on which I became at intervals of twenty-four hours a sub-deacon, a deacon and a priest.

Should my description of these ceremonies seem a little flippant, believe me, I take them seriously enough. It is a pleasure to re-read the terse, vigorous Latin of the prayers and to savour the deft manipulation of metaphor by which they point their moral. More importantly, I make the following deductions. First, the Church used to have not just priests, but a plurality of ministries. Second, these

ministries were thought of as analogous to the priesthood, in that they were conferred by ordination, gave a definite rank in the Church, and entailed a clear and formal obligation to carry out definite tasks for the Church and to live worthily of those tasks. Thirdly, by the time I was a seminarist all these 'orders' had in practice been absorbed into the presbyterate.

I am reminded of that 'elderly naval man' who could justly claim 'in a singular minor key' to be

> At once a cook, and a captain bold,
> And the mate of the Nancy brig,
> And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
> And the crew of the captain's gig

because when after shipwreck there were 'neither wittles nor drink' he had kept himself alive by eating his nine companions. I can rightly claim to be a doorkeeper, a lector, an exorcist, an acolyte, a subdeacon, and a deacon, because, by the time of my priesting, the priesthood had in effect swallowed up the other six grades, leaving the Church in practice composed quite simply of priests and lay people. Of course, there was the pope in the Vatican and the bishop in his episcopal residence: both, however, remote figures. I saw the archbishop twice in my first seventeen years. To the Catholic in the pew the Church consisted of the priests who performed on the sanctuary or in the pulpit, and the people who watched and listened from their benches. It was rather like a football match or the theatre, with its very plain division into performers and spectators. Especially was it so at mass. The congregation, their responses being said for them by the server, were wholly silent and inactive. The priest presented them with 'the word' in the readings and homily, and with the 'Word' in the later part of mass. It was for the people to open their ears to the one and their mouths for the other, to play a purely receptive role. I suppose that for accuracy's sake I ought to acknowledge the activity of the server conveying, usually with exaggerated gravity, missal and cruets, and solemnly sounding his sacring bell.

A more important exception to lay passivity took place outside the mass, and normally outside the church building. For instance, my own religious formation owes less to any priest or priests than to five spinsters and a widow. These were the people who taught me between my fifth and my eleventh birthday. Educationally I am an over-privileged person; a long list of talented and highly qualified

people have done their best to instruct me. There were honours graduates at the grammar school, a couple of Oxford prize winners in my early days at the seminary, dons with a national reputation when I was an undergraduate, and doctors of theology and canon law when I was preparing for ordination. But the prize for getting things into the head of Paul Edwards belongs to those midwives of learning who saw me through my first six years of schooling. They taught us in cramped classes of fifty from dry textbooks with a few black and white illustrations, and a few wall charts and diagrams they had made themselves. But I was going to the public library for full-size books when I was seven; I understood how to manage a decimal point when I was nine; I was taught how to parse English unerringly, and equipped with an outline knowledge of english history which my own 'A' level history pupils never seemed to have. Do not imagine that I was some sort of prodigy. Sometimes we were divided into three groups according to ability and I was always in group B. I never made group A. I found my level in life quite early on!

The cream of these ladies' energies went into teaching religion. We learned the narrative of Christ's life very quickly. I have clear memories of the teacher holding up a series of pictures of events in the life of Christ, and although we had never seen these particular illustrations before, we recognized every incident. According to the custom of the time, we learned a great deal of catechism by rote, much of which was quite sterile; but the explanations of the Apostle's Creed, the Sacraments and the Commandments were well done. Our teachers gave us a respectable grip on Bible history and taught us about many of the saints; and they prepared us for communion and confession. Later, when I was at the secondary school, I once listened to the widowed teacher leading the first communicants in a thanksgiving prayer, which was obviously her own work. Even then I observed and appreciated the simplicity of language and directness of expression. A good deal of devotion was instilled into us: penances during Lent, devotion to Our Lady during May, prayers for the souls in Purgatory during November. With children from lapsed families, none of this may have been effective for long, but the children of observant families received a solid and comprehensive grounding in their religion.

Responsibility for the doctrinal knowledge, moral criteria and devotional habits of the parish was to a considerable extent in these women's hands. They were exercising a key ministry. No bishop had

commissioned them, blessed them or prayed over them; nor had he ritually handed them a textbook and a blackboard duster. Technically they were just 'good laywomen'.

In those years of my childhood, educated Catholics were thin on the ground; but there were a number of 'good lay people' other than teachers who served the Church well. The Catholic Evidence Guild re-enacted at the Pier Head St Paul's proclamation of the *kerygma* on the Acropolis, the citizens of Liverpool sometimes expressing their incredulity with rather less urbanity than the Athenian *dilettanti*. The members of St Vincent de Paul Society, often themselves quite poor, gave the poorest of the parish their solicitude and their small alms. There were choirmasters, M.C.s and collectors. They were 'laymen' being helpful; and no one would have associated them at all closely with the clergy, although an occasional M.C., wearing his sanctuary expression and full liturgical battle-dress, might have foxed an outsider. A layman might be conspicuously devout and give himself unsparingly to Catholic Action; another might relish rubrical niceties and ecclesiastical gossip; but they remained on their own side of the great gulf which stretched between the laity and the clergy.

Charles I, who had lost a civil war and three kingdoms, and was about to lose his life without having ever learned anything about tact, stated baldly on the scaffold, 'A subject and a sovereign are clean different things'. 'Clean different' were clergy and laity in my youth; nor has the situation changed very much. The priest served full time and thus got his living. (Let me leave out of reckoning priests teaching full time in schools, or I shall have too much disentangling to do.) The layman had a job 'in the world'. The priest had his special uniform and was never seen out of it, while the laity dressed like the other human beings around them. The priest had had several years training. The laity were amateurs. My schoolmistresses were not amateurs at teaching, but their training in religious doctrine would have occupied only a fraction of their two-year course. The priests were celibate and lived in large presbyteries, which, with their gothic architecture and forbidding furniture, seemed to be continuations of the victorian churches on to which they abutted. It is interesting that one might have spoken of a priest's house, but not of a priest's home. A priest's home would, if anything, mean his former family home. In the plural, a Priests' Home would suggest a place in which retired priests waited for their reward. The busiest part of the priests' week is, of course, the week-

end; the busiest part of the year, Christmas and Easter when others relax. It is an upside down sort of life a: negative image of normal living. In such circumstances, even the most apostolic and church-haunting layman could easily be distinguished from the denizens of the presbytery.

Perhaps the reader may by now be beginning to feel himself or herself an unwilling and slightly claustrophobic habitué of a Liverpool irish ghetto during the inter-war years; so I shall now transport everyone on my magic typewriter to first-century Jerusalem for a glimpse of the first christian community. St Luke describes it thus:

> And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.[1]

The Twelve have preached; those whom they have convinced they then form into a community, into a body which shares in a most comprehensive fashion, which comes together physically into the same place, which shares in the Apostles' teaching, which pools its goods, which worships together. Here the essential nature of the Church is seen very plainly. It is active in two directions. It acts outwardly by offering a knowledge of and belief in Christ to those outside itself, and those who are convinced accept Christ by joining this community and contributing to its vigour. The other activity, a multiple one, is interior. The Church, the christian community, must cherish its own interior communal life. The believing Christian needs to improve his understanding of Christ's teaching and its implications ('they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching'). He should relieve the privations of other Christians ('to all, as any had need') and he needs to worship with the other Christians. It is worth observing here that the Mass contributes not merely to one, but several of these community activities. It should bring the local community together and should keep them aware of the larger Church; the readings, the homily, the wording of the liturgy, should enhance their comprehension of the christian message and encourage

[1] Acts 2, 42-47.

their readiness to relieve the needy; and it is, of course, the principal act of common worship.

The Church serves or 'ministers' to the world by continually offering it Christ's revelation and redemption. The Christian serves or ministers to the world if he can take part in this mission of evangelization. He serves or ministers to his fellow Christians by helping them to maintain and develop their sense of unity and their understanding of Christ's message, by giving material aid where it is needed and by contributing to their common worship. St Paul describes the rich diversity of such ministry in the early Church. I quote the whole passage to show that diversity:

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.[2]

With miracles, prophesies, healings, and speaking in tongues apparently commonplace, a first-century christian Assembly sounds very different from the 9.30 mass at St Theresa's. It sounds more like one of those parties where everyone has to do a turn of some sort, be it sing a song, tell a story or do a trick. And with literal justification you could call the Holy Spirit the life and soul of the party. If you think I exaggerate, listen to St Paul: 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation'.[3] There were plenty of qualified performers. 'God has appointed in the Church first Apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues'.[4]

If you are unfamiliar with the passage you might ask, 'Where are the priests?' I have tried to answer that question elsewhere.[5] On

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[2] 1 Cor 12, 4-11. [3] 1 Cor 13, 26. [4] 1 Cor 12, 28.
[5] In *The Theology of the Priesthood* (Cork, 1974).

this occasion I have quoted the passage to show the numerous and various contributions to the communal life of the Church made by the members of the early communities. From such passages, the conclusion has been drawn that 'the totality of the gifts of the Spirit is given only to the totality of believers': a rather daunting expression to my ears of a very stimulating insight. I prefer to render it at greater length. As in our bodies good eyesight does not wholly offset deafness, nor are well-developed leg-muscles able to do the work of a defective digestion; and as in an orchestra the weakness or absence of one section cannot really be remedied by the other sections playing more vigorously, so there is an irreplaceable loss to the Church, to the Body of Christ, unless all parts fully discharge their own function or play their own role.

To be wholly honest, I have to admit that we must not argue too glibly from the activities of the early Church to the essential nature of the Church. Prophesying, speaking in tongues and miracle-working are no longer routine activities. Perhaps they were part of the fire-work display at the Church's Gala Opening, admittedly one which ran for some decades, to be replaced by something much more restrained, controlled and, as it were, professionalized. Yet I suggest that if anyone wants to say that the Spirit now operates on quite different principles, the onus of proof lies on him. Certainly, when the ministries of the Church became more organized and formalized, they remained quite numerous and diverse, as the sevenfold steps of ordination, previously described, bear witness.

At present there is an attempt to re-establish the permanent diaconate. As the Vatican Council, in its document on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, treats the diaconate at almost the same length as the priesthood, somebody ought to show that it exists! Here and there nuns have been invited to become 'parish sisters', and 'lay' people have been specially commissioned to distribute the Eucharist. The reason sometimes given for these 'innovations' is that there is a shortage of priests. This placates those clergy who regard all forms of ministry as a sacerdotal monopoly, and those members of the laity who have been reared in the same outlook, and think that in a time of priestly scarcity they may have to reconcile themselves to something inferior.

It is the thesis of this article — and the reader may be relieved to learn that it has one — that non-sacerdotal ministry requires no such justification. It is the priestly 'closed shop' that needs to justify itself, if it can. As we have seen, it will find no support in the early

Church. A sacerdotalist might claim that the clergy are trained for their apostolate. So should a permanent deacon be; so are many teachers of religious doctrine; and 'parish sisters' are eager for courses, training days and exchanges of experience. Then a die-hard 'hiero-monopolist' — to coin an ungainly term for a theological monstrosity — might urge that the priest is ordained for his work. So too, of course, is a deacon, explicitly receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders. So too were the doorkeepers *et al*, if not sacramentally, as I was at such pains to describe. If a doorkeeper could be ritually ordained, who could forbid the ritual sacring of a devoted Head of the religious education department? He or she is going to spend more hours per week expounding the mysteries of salvation than any of the parish clergy.

Having said 'he or she' in that last sentence, I had better return to I Corinthians 14, there to face a difficulty which, when I was making use of the chapter before, I was quite conscious of skirting. Having said 'When you come together each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue of an interpretation' (v 26), Paul goes on to make the point 'the women should keep silence in the churches' (v 34). So there was one great exception to the rule of universal participation in these charismatic *ceilidh*. Paul seems to relegate the christian women to that spectator's role which was later to claim the great bulk of the male members of the congregation as well. 'According to the strictest party of our religion I have lived a Pharisee', said Paul of himself, and even an easy-going Jew could not, I think, have conceived of a woman priest or a woman rabbi. In both temple and synagogue the women had their place apart. The women did not go into the Court of Israel, nor near the raised platform on which sat the elders of the synagogue. Paul's pre-conceptions seem quite outraged at the thought of christian women emerging from the ritual silence which every Jewess observed. Then why is he complaining that they are praying (which implies audible speech) and prophesying without their veils on?[6] But I must not argue from a single inconsistency. I think that the more interesting evidence is to be found in the last chapter of Romans: 'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord . . . for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well'.[7] ' . . . Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you'. ' . . . Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena

[6] Cf 1 Cor 11, 5. [7] Cf Rom 16, 1-12.

and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord'. In Philippians, he says of Euodia and Synteche, 'help these women, for they have laboured side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers'.[8] What did this hard work, these labours consist of? Cutting first-century sandwiches and washing up afterwards? I doubt very much indeed whether Paul would ever have described such chores as labouring 'side by side with me in the gospel'. In context, the work of these women sounds as important as that of any man, save perhaps the leading missionaries such as Timothy and Apollos. I suppose that I shall die not knowing precisely what form their distinguished labour took; but I shall live convinced that they were in some way evangelistic and certainly deserved the title 'ministry'. Indeed it would be quite legitimate, if decidedly precious, to translate the phrase about Phoebe, 'ministress of the Church at Cenchreae'. Reared though Paul was in the male monopoly of the synagogue and temple, he was quite obviously very successful at eliciting the co-operation of women Christians for important and respected work in the Church.

The Church of the nineteenth and early twentieth century also attracted very large numbers of women to its service. Women's orders and congregations flourished as never before. When I was first teaching, there were in this country seven catholic grammar schools for girls to every one for boys: an indication of the scale of the sisters' contribution to education. My primary school mistresses, like most other catholic women teachers in the country, had been trained by nuns and owed much of their piety and of their accurate knowledge of catholic doctrine to them. But the Church of the period, with far less excuse than St Paul, made only a limited, restricted use of the talents, energies and self-sacrifice of these battalions of devoted women. Few of them studied theology at any depth, so they were able to make little intellectual contribution. Theology after all was for priests! So was pastoral work; while sisters, so general prejudice seemed to dictate, should live devoutly, quietly and humbly within their enclosed convents, of which their schools, orphanages and hospitals might be liberally taken to be extensions. Assessed under the categories which I introduced in the context of the Apostolic Church, their contribution to Catholics' knowledge of their religion at the primary and secondary level was considerable, as was their achievement in orphanages and hospitals

[8] Phil 4, 3.

in relieving privation. Generally segregated from 'the world', they could do little to evangelize it (although they may have been allowed more scope in the foreign missions); largely separated even from their fellow Catholics, they had few opportunities for pastoral work. A wise and experienced nun might be approached by former pupils or pupils' parents for what we now call 'counselling', and an approved nun might even be entrusted with the instruction of converts. It was in worship that this condition of near purdah was most obvious. When the Catholics gathered for Sunday Mass or Benediction, nuns were rarely present; they had their own chapel and their own services.

I am glad to have lived to see most of these restrictions lifted, to see nuns reading for degrees in theology, attending courses of all kinds to fit them for pastoral work, taking part in the giving of retreats, working for national religious organizations, perhaps at headquarters, perhaps travelling the motorways to start or to stimulate local groups. And I am very sad to observe that the river of nuns' vocations, which could have been used to irrigate the Church so richly, has now dwindled to a trickling stream. It saddens me personally, because in two-and-a-half decades of priesthood I have come increasingly to respect, admire and learn from women religious, whether they clanked a five-foot rosary or jingled their car keys, crepitated with starched linen or surprised my nostrils with 'Tweed'.

I have to make myself realize that just as it is an error to think of pastoral work as being the sole prerogative of priests, so it is equally erroneous to imagine that a female Christian can only 'work side by side with us in the gospel' when she has taken the three traditional vows of religion in a recognized Institute. Ministry is the privilege of no group or groups; it is the responsibility of all. 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'.[9] Perhaps I must at last do what I am always reluctant to do, and start to define. Ministry I see as sharing in the activities of the Church, helping it to offer faith in Christ to the non-Christian, helping Christians to comprehend their faith better, helping to bind the christian community together, serving its needy and contributing to its worship. Of course, given this definition, a moderately observant Christian would be hard put to it to avoid ministering in some way or other. Even his physical presence at Mass, no matter how unobtrusive, adds something to the communal worship. Perhaps a definition

[9] 1 Cor 12, 9.

of ministry which can be made to apply to any practising Christian seems purposeless. I would claim that it is not. If all christian practice has at least a touch of ministry in it, as I contend it has, the whole perspective changes. Most of us would regard a reader at mass, an unordained distributor of communion, a 'parish sister', as doing something of what a priest does, but doing much less of it. It would, I urge, be more accurate to say that they are doing what every Christian does, but doing more of it, doing it in a more specific, more visible, more specialized way.

The first ordination ceremony to be described in the Acts of the Apostles is instructive. As the Jerusalem Church grew, its system, or lack of system with regard to poor relief, drew criticism. The Apostles insisted that they were not going to spend less time teaching so as to be able to supervise meals. (Some contemporary teachers have taken a similar stance.) 'Pick out from among you seven men of good wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty'. The congregation chose seven men. 'These they set before the Apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them'.[10] As we soon find Stephen and later Philip preaching, the story is not quite as plain as one would like. It remains, as I said, instructive. Specific individuals have been designated for specific work, and their responsibility for it ritually conferred by the Church and accepted by themselves. Such ministry, that is, specified work done by designated people who have been 'ordained' to it, I should like to call 'formal' ministry. I see it as a crystallization of that general ministry, which it is an obligation on every Christian to exercise in some degree. (The minor orders are textbook examples of such 'formal ministry'.) The priesthood I conceive of as a particularly highly developed and intensive form of this crystallization.

Should we have formal ministries other than the priesthood? Vatican II speaks of the diaconate with great solemnity, only admitting in the second paragraph that it does not at the time of writing really exist. The 'extraordinary' minister of the Eucharist is becoming a less extraordinary figure. I should like to see the office of 'ordained' reader restored; it would be for those who have shown that they can read adequately, and that they appreciate the value of a clear, sensitive presentation and understand the importance of preparation. In an appropriate ceremony, they would accept the responsibility of reading regularly, which is not necessarily frequently,

[10] Acts 6, 6.

and of reading after preparation, while the congregation might well pray in the spirit of the ancient ceremony that the life of the reader should proclaim the christian message as unequivocally as his voice. I should certainly not want a tangle of legalities here with everyone forbidden to read except the ordained lector. I should like to recognize, to organize, to celebrate liturgically the work of those who are prepared to commit themselves to regular reading; but I would want to do it without depriving the Church of the occasional or even once only service of others. It would be very regrettable if we extended 'formal ministry', only to discourage a more random spontaneous ministry by the establishment of a set of 'closed shops'. Trained, experienced, committed teachers of religious doctrine should surely have their vocation more ceremonially recognized; while a proved, formed, dedicated counsellor seems to me a much better subject for ordination than an early medieval doorkeeper.

I must not go on listing people whom we might ordain to 'formal ministry', as this article has already outrun the length set me. I suggest that wherever competent people are prepared to commit themselves to some regular work for the Church, there is a good case for some form of consecration to that work. I am not just arguing for the suitability of having a ceremony. I am appealing for us to encourage various forms of 'formal ministry' in my sense, and for us to regard them as normal manifestations of the Church's life and not as a 'make do' because priests nowadays, like oil, need to be conserved. One reason, it seems to me, why there are less candidates for the priestly ministry and to the women's religious orders is the contemporary shrinking from commitment. Many people go to Church to collect some spiritual nourishment in much the same way as they go to the supermarket for their groceries, taking what they want or the nearest to it they can get, being quite willing to pay for it but in no sense belonging. They are customers rather than members. In which case, of course, I am not going to find countless candidates for my 'formal ministry'. I admit this, and plead that in this situation we must clutch at, encourage, promote, and recognize all the commitment we can find; appeal for it, provide scope for it, offer it training and recognize it liturgically.

I cannot prove the universal validity of the dictum, 'The totality of the gifts of the Spirit is given only to the totality of believers', but I have no doubt at all that it should be our working hypothesis. And I should like George to get some sort of recognition as a preacher quite soon. I quite fancy him as the panegyrist at my requiem.

Postscript

Perhaps some readers, their curiosity aroused by my description of the minor orders, are wondering whether those institutions still exist, and whether they are still conferred in the same way. A *motu proprio* of 1972 decreed as follows. In the place of the minor orders and the sub-diaconate there are now two 'ministries', that of lector and acolyte. The lector is to read the lessons at mass, lead the bidding prayers and perhaps direct both the singing and the spoken responses of the congregation. He can instruct people 'for the worthy reception of the sacraments', a commission which sounds very broad, and can train other people 'who by a temporary appointment are to read the sacred scripture in the liturgical celebrations'. The acolyte is to assist in liturgical celebration, especially mass, can act as an extraordinary minister in the distribution of communion and publicly expose the Blessed Sacrament, and instruct others who 'by temporary appointment' carry the missal, cross, candles, etc., or perform other such duties. In other words, he can train the altar boys. The offices of lector and acolyte are no longer 'orders' but 'ministries'; which implies that they are not now restricted to clerics *en route* to diaconal or presbyteral ordination, and so may be exercised by lay people. They are conferred by 'installation' rather than ordination, and such installation is reserved to males.

The document gives with one hand and withholds with the other. It makes available to lay people what is termed above formal ministry, and grants ceremonial initiation. At the same time, it seems determined to keep the distinction between cleric and lay, at least to my over-suspicious ears, not only praiseworthily clear, but somewhat unnecessarily emphatic. More dismaying, it preserves the total taboo against a woman exercising any recognized role in the celebration of mass. In practice, I am glad to say, women do read the lessons, no doubt 'by temporary appointment', while some women are, in fact, commissioned to distribute Holy Communion as 'extraordinary ministers'. So the work is done and some of it by women, and a parish priest can avoid offending his Phoebes, Euodias and Syntyches by proposing ritual installation as lectors or acolytes neither to men nor women. This, of course, leaves those ceremonies to seminarists.

So the principle of extending permanent, formal, ritually sanctioned ministry to laymen is granted; but the embarrassing refusal of the same ceremonial installation to women seems likely to minimize the full application of the decree even to men.