

**THE MINISTRY
OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION (1)**

When we think about the life of a Brother the word "ministry" often crops up. The word gives rise to at least two possible questions:

- What do we understand by ministry?
- What connection is there between the Ministry of Christian Education and the religious life of a Brother?

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**PART I: THE MINISTRY
OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
ITS STRUCTURES**

First of all, what is the relationship between:

- * Magisterium and Ministerium?
- * Service and Authority?

1. These two words, magisterium and ministerium, contain within themselves the complementary pair magis and minus. In the context of the words, they refer to more (magis) and to less (minus) important social positions. The actual relative importance depends, of course, on your point of view and on the socio-cultural context involved, and this implies a whole variety of consequences.

Whoever has responsibility for what is "magis" is the "magister". Whoever has responsibility for what is "minor" is the "minister". And each has need of the other.

2. The former is the one in charge. This position has always fallen logically to the person with experience, to the older person, to the priest. The latter is sacramentally consecrated as such.

3. The "minister" is the helper, in charge of running one part or other of everyday life within the framework of an overall plan. There is no sacrament to consecrate a person for this position.

4. There is a sort of theological logic about recognising the transcendental nature of the position of the magister because of the sacramental consecration. Another much more human sort of logic has to do with the specific nature of the relationship between the hierarchy and the others due to this sacramental consecration.

However, the notion of ministry does not originate in the sacramental nature of the Church, but in its nature as a society.

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Ministry is something which is an integral part of the life of a group of Christians living together: it is what gives meaning to their relationships, and what transforms them.

1. Ministry is something that grows as a result of people living together. Of course, one of them, the minister, stands out from among the others, not that his "ministry" actually belongs to him: he has to consult the group, he works within a framework, he is responsible to an organisation... to a community. That is why we should avoid seeing in a minister someone set apart: he should always be seen in the context of a "ministerial" community.

2. Each member of a community has a contribution to make, specifically his own, to the building up of the ministry: the way he is, his quality of life. That is why apparently identical ministries may in fact be quite different: for example, being a catechist in a school, in a parish, in a base community cannot be equated: nor can the teaching of religion by a married layman with that of a religious. Human relationships are always altered by differences in individuals.

3. So we can see that, from a religious point of view, the quality of community life depends on the nature of human relationships with their challenges and mutual inspiration.

And so, for example, a Brother, cut off from his pupils, from his social milieu, from his Brothers, from his community house, from the past or recent history of his school... cannot as such be part of any ministry. On the other hand, when his faith leads a Brother to become conscious that he belongs to this or that group, to this set of relationships, to this community, he discovers in some mysterious way that he is capable of making a positive response to the needs of his fellow beings through Christian education. Awareness of the ministry and professional flair go together.

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If people live together as a group it is for some purpose: without a common aim there can be no ministry.

1. Ministries are exercised within the framework of an overall plan. That is why the ultimate purpose of any concrete situation always comes from outside that situation.

The aim of the Church is first and foremost to make people aware that God is at their side and calls them to transcend this life. Its aim is also to make them make a personal commitment to answer that call. The aim of each and every ministry is, whatever the circumstances, identical.

2. And so, even if in each different situation where ministries are exercised there has to be a specific immediate object in view (learning about one's faith, organising charitable activities, bearing witness to the silence of the contemplative life, celebrating the liturgy...), yet none of these specific aims is an end in itself. There is no concrete situation that can be the *raison d'être* of a ministry, nor that can give it meaning. The justification for such a ministry, what gives it meaning, is the attitude of a person who feels himself called to be part of God's plan for the human race.

That is why the ultimate aim of every ministry is to bear witness to the Kingdom of God through the situations of everyday life.

3. In this sense, Catechesis has priority in the Ministry of Christian Education.

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If we accept that the aim of a specific project dictates its content, then, what in the final analysis determines the nature of each ministry is the concrete way in which it chooses to be a means of mediation.

1. We use the word "mediation" because there are concrete situations in which God is alive. So in that sense, everything mediates. Each ministry must undertake to see in every concrete situation the Word of God.

In fact, ministers are a thousand different human faces if God. If we bear this in mind, it, and not current ecclesiastical administrative practice, will be the fundamental point of reference when dealing with the present subject. The theological quality of a ministry comes from faith in Jesus.

2. "Mediation", however, does not mean a half-way house or antechamber prior to entry to somewhere much more important. For example: Christian education does not exist for the sake of catechesis (even if quite a few Founders say it does): it is rather an initiation into the mystery of God who inspires what we know and how we live. "Mediation" means that if as a group we live as part of the social structure, we become identified with Jesus, we make him visible and we begin to share in a new form of life.

3. That is what we mean, in the Christian sense, by the "content" of each and every ministry. We are not talking here of new sorts of education, social work, cultural activities, medicine, methods of assimilation, political theories... but simply of living differently. The way we live becomes new through our faith and our hope.

That is why our life's journey is not directed towards the rites of worship and sacramental ritual, but towards the hereafter.

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It only remains for us now to mention (although it has already been referred to) the final constitutive element of the context in which ministries are exercised: the Mission of the Church.

1. This is a logical consequence. The Church needs ministries, and so it creates them.

There is quite a lot that could be said about this.

2. When we speak of the "Church" we are not referring exclusively to its hierarchical structure. The Church we mean is the community of all the faithful, drawing its life from the Spirit, aware of certain needs and taking steps to fulfil them. That is why no ministry can be considered to be private property. Although most schemes originate in the personal initiative of an individual, experience tells us to base everything on God's plan: his living presence in a ministry always produces results we could only have dreamt about.

3. The hierarchical Church, the Magisterium, has the responsibility of recognising the gifts of individuals and channelling them into ministries. It does not mean, of course, that the Church owns them: it simply bears witness to the action of God. And so the Church's seal of approval (its "missio") is not the beginning of God's action in a given ministry; it is the recognition of its existence. That is why the "missio" of the Church, which is absolutely necessary and which confers the status of ministry, does not indicate what kind of work should be done; rather it is a call to a life of faith. As far as the work is concerned, those involved in the ministry sort things out among themselves. On the other hand, the assurance that God is present in the ministry comes from the seal of approval of the Magisterium and from being part of the universal Church.

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So one could say that the constitutive elements of ministry, or the ministerial structure of education, can be said to be as follows:

1. A situation where people are working for the good of others.
2. These people live and work as a community.
3. They work so that God's Kingdom may be made manifest.
4. They are dedicated to being the visible presence of God (mediation) in real life situations.
5. Their work has the seal of approval: they have been sent (mission) by the Church.

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