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**PROSPECTS FOR UNITY AMONG THE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS
ON THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF
SCRIPTURE, CLERGY AND LAITY**

by

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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million (FAO 2001).

There are a number of reasons for this increase. One of the main reasons is the increase in the world population. The world population has increased from 5 billion in 1987 to 6 billion in 2000, and is projected to reach 9 billion by 2050 (FAO 2001). This increase in population has led to an increase in the demand for food, which has led to an increase in the number of people who are undernourished.

Another reason for the increase in the number of people who are undernourished is the increase in the number of people who are living in poverty. The number of people living in poverty has increased from 1 billion in 1987 to 1.2 billion in 2000, and is projected to reach 1.5 billion by 2050 (FAO 2001). This increase in poverty has led to an increase in the number of people who are undernourished.

A third reason for the increase in the number of people who are undernourished is the increase in the number of people who are living in rural areas. The number of people living in rural areas has increased from 3 billion in 1987 to 4 billion in 2000, and is projected to reach 5 billion by 2050 (FAO 2001). This increase in rural population has led to an increase in the number of people who are undernourished.

There are a number of ways in which the number of people who are undernourished can be reduced. One way is to increase the production of food. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are working in agriculture, and by increasing the amount of land that is used for agriculture. Another way is to reduce the number of people who are living in poverty. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are employed, and by increasing the wages of people who are employed.

A third way is to reduce the number of people who are living in rural areas. This can be done by increasing the number of people who are working in other sectors of the economy, and by increasing the number of people who are living in urban areas. A fourth way is to reduce the number of people who are undernourished by increasing the number of people who are receiving food aid.

There are a number of challenges that must be overcome in order to reduce the number of people who are undernourished. One of the main challenges is the increase in the world population. This increase in population has led to an increase in the demand for food, which has led to an increase in the number of people who are undernourished.

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Introduction.

Someone once charged David Hume, the agnostic, with being inconsistent because he went to hear the orthodox Scotch minister, John Brown. Hume replied, "I don't believe all that he says, but he does. And once a week I like to hear a man who believes what he says."

Belief is the capacity which most completely distinguishes us as human beings from all lower animals, and, as such, invites a hearing. Ironically, the predisposition to listen to the beliefs of an outsider comes more easily when the belief involved is dissimilar rather than similar to our own. For instance, why is it that the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism is so fashionable in the United States while that between Christianity and Islam begs support? It is precisely because Buddhism appears to live in a different world of nirvana while Islam is doctrinally too close for comfort. The fact is that Islam has never received a good press in the Christian west because the beliefs of the two religions are more like each other than unlike. Indeed, similarity is the stuff of which heresies are made, and the heretic has always been feared above the heathen.

The situation becomes more volatile when three monotheistic religions are brought into the same arena, and the beliefs chosen for discussion are ones that have common origins--scripture, clergy and laity!

Underlying these beliefs is the larger question of religious knowledge--"one of the most fundamental branches of human knowledge"--; and yet, as Professor Raphael Patai points out, "it suffers more from lack of unity than any other major branch of knowledge." He declares:

In the natural or exact sciences there are certain generally agreed upon basic facts, accepted equally by specialists in mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc., as well as by scientists all over the world, irrespective of their national, racial or religious affiliation. The situation is similar, although admittedly less unequivocal, in the humanities, in history and in the social sciences. However, in the ulum al-din, the religious sciences, to use al-Ghazali's classical term, the common denominator is so slim that, thus far, it has not proved practicable to build upon it the universal House of God of which Isaiah dreamt three thousand years ago.¹

In a strict sense, Isaiah's dream is at best an eschatological possibility, for religious knowledge is more akin to the truths of poetry than to the truths of the sciences. But this elusive character of religious knowledge does not exonerate us from searching for the "common denominator" within specific beliefs in order to develop a "basis for common religious values

and for a unity of religious knowledge."²

The principal concern of Christian theology is with the knowledge of God. How is this knowledge to be attained? The historic answer of Christianity has been two-fold: through revelation and inspiration.

Revelation may be defined as God's self-disclosure. God is a Person, and persons are only known to the extent they disclose themselves. Revelation is both the process of this knowledge and also its content. Inspiration is the divine energizing of all of our human faculties whereby the knowledge of God is personally appropriated. This experience of the living God, individual and collective, is productive of faith. Faith is not some separate faculty but a new attitude of trust. Faith is not opposed to reason but relies on reason to validate its experience of revelation. This does not set reason above revelation because reason, for example, cannot prove the existence of God; and yet Christians have recourse to reason in order for it to witness to the reasonableness of that belief.

Faith discerns the revelation of God in nature and in history. The chief exponents of faith in human history are the prophets whose numinous experience qualifies them to serve as God's mouthpiece. By virtue of their role both as 'foretellers' and 'forthtellers', prophets have advanced the knowledge of God.

The fundamental Christian claim is that the most decisive advance in mankind's knowledge of God has come through his revelation in Jesus Christ, a cosmic event mediated to us through the inspired figures of the New Testament.

This claim to uniqueness does not deny revelation in non-Christian religions. Christians acknowledge that history attests to the perennial search of man for God, a quest which could never have begun or been sustained were the knowledge of God somehow absent or false. But whereas the knowledge of God in non-Christian religions is sporadic, unrelated and individualised, revelation in the Judeo-Christian tradition is organic, progressive and communal.

All particular revelations are therefore considered dim pointers to the effulgent revelation of God in Christ. The locus classicus of this claim of Christianity to uniqueness is found in the Prologue to St. John's Gospel.

When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it.³

We turn now to the Bible which is the record, par excellence, of this revelation of God in Christ.

1. The Holy Scriptures.

The Christian scriptures have two divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The term "Old Testament" first appears in the writings of St. Paul (11 Cor. 3:14). This is a Christian attestation, denoting a certain evaluation and relationship which is certainly not shared by the Jews, for obvious reasons.

The Hebrew Bible of Palestinian Judaism represents a collection of books selected from a much larger body of literature which grew gradually amid many uncertainties and changes. It is a compilation of three groups of writings: The Law or Torah (Torah= teaching, also used for the Pentateuch), containing the first five books, edited earliest in the years following 621 B.C.E.; the Prophets (Nebi'im), comprising the historical books and the major and minor prophets, organized in final form approximately 200 B.C.E.; the Writings (Ketubim), accepted into the canon soon after 100 B.C.E. The entire collection is known as the TaNaKh, so called because of the combination of Hebrew consonants representing the first letter of each part. By the turn of the first century, the rabbis completed their task of final revision and standardization. "Any writings after that period would have been strenuously opposed and would not have met the test of antiquity."⁴ The official list or canon was ratified by the rabbis at the council of Jamnia (ca. 85-100 C.E.).

In addition to the Torah, we must note in passing that Jews revere the Talmud which contains sixty-three books of legal, ethical and historical writings. This massive work was edited by scholars in Babylon in 499 C.E. The oral tradition it incorporates was intended to relate the Torah to changing times. Whereas in Christianity there has been a tension between scripture and tradition, most notably between Roman Catholics and Protestants, in Judaism the two are treated as equally inspired.

A survey of the contents of the Jewish scriptures reveals diverse theological trends. Underlying this colourful tapestry are unifying threads of a monotheistic faith that Yahweh is the creator and sustainer of all life, and that the future belongs to his kingship. For their part, Jews believe they have been called to hear the words of Yahweh; to obey his commands; and that in his justice and mercy, God will fulfill for them all of his covenantal promises. It is this note of future fulfilment that marks the beginning of the "New Testament." The entry of Christianity on the Palestinian horizon involved certain basic assumptions which require some explanation.

First, there is the matter of the inspiration of Scripture. For the first hundred years, when the Church speaks of 'Scripture', it refers exclusively to the Hebrew Bible. The

practice of Jesus and the apostles hallowed the Old Testament as the inspired word of God. Two statements summarise the entire thinking of the early Church: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, reproof, correction" and "No prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."⁵

The Church Fathers--Irenaeus, Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, etc.--unite in one voice to declare the whole of the Old Testament as inspired, down to its smallest details. Human fallibility was removed by the ecstatic possession of the Holy Spirit which moved upon the writers as a musician playing upon an instrument. This emphasis upon the state of ecstasy particularly appealed to the Montanists and tended to reduce the agency of the writer to one of passivity; but generally the Fathers upheld the creative participation of the prophet. The Holy Spirit so cleared the the prophets' minds and expanded their imaginations that they were able to record God's word free of error. Thus the work of the Spirit is assumed in the past.

A second assumption of the Church, relating the Jewish experience to its fulfilment in Christianity, was the continuity of the two Testaments.

The cue for continuity came from the Lord himself. Did not Jesus define his mission as one of fulfilling the Law? Often he aligned himself with the messianic hopes and dreams of Israel (or was interpreted as doing so). The apostles were therefore emboldened to declare that all the events of this man's life, particularly his death and resurrection, were part of a prophetic scenario. In reply to the disconsolate disciples on their way to Emmaus (for they had hoped he was the man to liberate Israel), the risen Christ is presented as saying: "How dull you are!...How slow to believe all that the prophets said! Was the Messiah not bound to suffer thus before entering upon his glory?"⁶ Then, starting with Moses, "he explained to them the passages which referred to himself in every part of the scriptures."

The orthodox thesis of the unity of the two Testaments was resisted by prominent Christians such as Marcion and those belonging to Gnostic groups, but the issue was settled through the arguments of Irenaeus who, while distinguishing between the Law of the Old Testament and the grace of the New, accounted for the disparity in terms of what God considered necessary for the upward climb of mankind toward a more perfect future. The two Testaments therefore represent stages of human development, united by a common progression. Specifically, in terms of ethics, Irenaeus "saw one morality advancing steadily through the moral code of nature possessed by the ancient patriarchs; through the Decalogue; enlarged (through Israel's disobedience) to a fuller "yoke of bondage" (in the Torah?); and through Christianity's new law of genuine love (in contrast with

Judaism's externality) and of true liberty (in contrast with Judaism's legal system)."7 In Irenaeus' own words:

He did not teach us these things as being opposed to the law, but as fulfilling the law, and implanting in us the varied righteousness of the law...This which he did command us is not...the utterance of one destroying the law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and affording greater scope to it.⁸

We may also note that the orthodox assumption on which the Church annexed and incorporated Jewish ethics into Christian ethics, was also extended to Greek philosophy and ethics. Proceeding on the axiom, "Truth is one: falsehood has ten thousand by-paths," Clement states: "Before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety, being a kind of preparatory training...till the Lord should call the Greeks...a schoolmaster to bring 'the Hellenic mind'...to Christ, a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."⁹

One might wonder how the Church was able to propagate her hegemony over Judaism without ever suspecting that her claims to spiritual and ethical dominance were a trifle high-handed. The secret lies in the Church's method of interpreting the text of the Old Testament. Briefly, two methods were followed: allegory and typology.

In allegorical exegesis, the literal, historical meaning of the Old Testament text receives short shrift, and is simply understood as the symbol of some spiritual truth. "The aim of the exegete is to elicit the moral, theological or mystical meaning which each passage, indeed each verse and even each word, is presumed to contain."¹⁰ Recourse to allegory flourished most in Alexandria under the aegis of Philo, a contemporary of Jesus and Paul. His object was to promote a synthetic Judaism. Holding that the Jews had the true Scripture, Philo aimed to enrich and universalize Judaism by co-opting Greek philosophy and ethics. Christians who debated in the academies of Alexandria were quick and eager to borrow Philo's Hellenistic ideas, and most especially, his allegorical exegesis.

The most skilfull exponent of allegory was Augustine, as is evidenced by his interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan in which the traveller stands for Adam; Jerusalem for Paradise; Jericho for human mortality; the thieves for the devil; the priest and Levite for the Old Covenant; the Samaritan for Christ; and the inn for the Church.¹¹

Allegorical exegesis was not all profit to orthodox Christianity because its most extravagant usage was at the hands of Christian Gnostics who used it to advance their dualistic philosophy, creating a tremendous crisis within an already ascetically-ridden community.

Typology significantly differed from allegory. "Essentially it was a technique for bringing out the correspondence between the two Testaments, and took as its guiding principle the idea

that the events and personages of the Old were 'types' of, i.e. prefigured and anticipated, the events and personages of the New." Unlike allegorical exegesis, typology valued the historical event as the locus of God's ongoing redemptive purpose. "Hence he assumed that, from the creation to the judgment, the same unwavering plan could be discerned in the sacred story, the earlier stages being shadows or, to vary the metaphor, rough preliminary sketches of the latter. Christ and His Church were the climax; and since in all His dealings with mankind God was leading up to the Christian revelation, it was reasonable to discover pointers to it in the great experiences of His chosen people."¹² Like allegory, the Church did not invent this method but found it in the Old Testament where prophets such as Deutero-Isaiah employed it most effectively.¹³

The historical orientation of typology gave it an edge over the allegorical method, considering the Church's appeal to history. The Antiochene school was the standard-bearer of the typological method and was represented by such eminent theologians as Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret and John Chrysostom. The nub of their exegesis was theoria (insight): "the power of perceiving, in addition to the historical facts set out in the text, a spiritual reality to which they were designed to point."¹⁴ In order to retain the integrity of theoria, the exegete first had to fix the literal meaning of the text which then had to harmonise with its spiritual extension, and at all times the historical core and the spiritual meaning had to be held in balance. In other words, what we are dealing with are shadow and substance: all Old Testament references to sacrifice are the shadow, and Calvary is the substance; in the same manner as wading through the Red Sea and eating the manna are historical pointers to the Christian sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.

Thus, the methods of exegesis employed by the early Church justified its assumption that a continuity existed between the truths of the Old Testament and the truths of the New Testament, and since truth is one and progressive, the Christian Bible is the repository of the fullness of truth. By the time of Augustine, this assumption was given doctrinal form, encapsulated in his epigram: "In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New the Old is revealed."¹⁵ All of this proceeded from the Church's belief in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; but while the fact of inspiration was unequivocal, its theory exercised differences of opinion. We have already stated that some of the early Fathers held to a theory of passivity while others took a less mechanical view. Generally, from the fourth century onwards, the theory of verbal inspiration gained ground, and even when it is not asserted is

generally implied.

The Scholastic theologians did not delve into the subject of inspiration, except Abelard (1079-1142) who contended that the text of scripture may be faulty; that its interpretation may err; and that the doctors of the church should be read without the necessity to believe but with liberty to judge. Such vigorous assertions of intellectual freedom sound very modern, but it must be remembered that this brilliant and contentious scholar, in so many crucial areas, was but a voice crying in the wilderness.

The Church continued in its dogmatic slumbers up to the Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries. By this time, the eminence of a ruling ecclesiastical hierarchy eclipsed the power of the Word, and a legalistic treatment of the Bible dissipated the gospel of God's grace. Both Luther and Calvin revered the Bible as the inspired "Word of God", by which they meant the assurance of grace through Jesus Christ. But the reformers understood inspiration in terms of degrees, as we find in Luther's reference to the book of James as "an epistle of straw." They also distinguished between "the Word of God" and the Scriptures, that is, the revelation itself and the record of the revelation.

On the whole, the attitude of the Reformers toward the Scriptures was conservative. This meant biblical literalism without too much critical analysis. They inherited the typologist's stance of finding hidden spiritual meanings in the biblical texts, guided by the Holy Spirit. However, the voice of the Holy Spirit, too often, was none other than the voice of Luther or Calvin!

The successors to the Reformers soon became embroiled in the controversy between the relative status of the Scriptures and Tradition as reposed in the Church. The Protestants ascribed to the Bible the same position of supreme authority the Romans Catholics reserved for the Pope. One consequence of sole reliance on the Bible led to the doctrine of biblical infallibility. As the establishment clung tenaciously to the notion of the "infallible Church", the Protestants appealed more stridently to the idea of the "infallible Book." What was lost in this controversy was Luther's important distinction between the Scriptures and the Word of God. The battle was on and the Bible soon became an arsenal of proof-texts, insulated by the theory of verbal inspiration. The Formula Consensus Helvetica (1576) laid down that every word of the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit, down to the vowel-points of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

This Bible-centred orthodoxy marked the path of Protestantism into the twentieth century. It was certainly the faith of the fathers who founded this country, and until a couple of generations ago, directed the life of the Church in

Europe and the United States.

The latest incarnation of biblical literalism is Fundamentalism. "Fundamentalism is biblical literalism in fighting mood....it is an attitude, not of simple evangelical piety rooted in the Bible, but of polemical defense of the verbal inspiration and hence the literal inerrancy of the Scriptures."¹⁶

Since the end of the nineteenth-century, first in Europe and then in Britain and the U.S., textual, historical, and literary researchers have opened up new perspectives on the Bible, enabling scholars to piece together the order in which the books were composed and the ways in which they were edited by later redactors.

Contemporary Jewish scholars are united with their Christian counterparts in adopting the historico-critical approach to the scriptures. This enterprise is most important for Judaism and Christianity because they look upon themselves as "historical religions." Part of the scholar's task is to separate the facts of history from their pious interpretations. This poses a central problem for New Testament scholars in their quest for the historical Jesus vis-a-vis the Christ of faith. This process of biblical archaeology has unearthed features of a biblical tradition which remove some of the stumbling-blocks which have historically separated Christians from Jews. One such discovery is that Jesus was a Jew! Commenting on the role of the Hebrew prophet, Ninian Smart states:

Some of their intuitions about the future were inspired visions of the direction in which the religion of Yahweh must lead. (It is upon such intuitions that Christians base their claim that the prophets anticipated the messiahship of Jesus many centuries before his actual life. Needless to say, Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Bible does not countenance such an exegesis. The Hebrew Bible cannot be taken without strain to point unequivocally at Christ, though belief that the life of Jesus completes in a discernible way the development of God's revelation in the Hebrew writings is surely not lacking in substance.)¹⁷

The need for a critical attitude toward one's scriptures, as we have seen in the case of Christianity and Judaism, does not arise for the Muslim. The reason is: whereas the books of the Old and New Testaments have diverse authors; have evolved over long periods of time; and have undergone changes since their canonization, the infallibility of the Qur'an is ensured because it is God's revelation to Muhammad in the Arabic language through the Archangel Gabriel (Jibril). These revelations were received over a twenty-two year period, beginning from Muhammad's ministry in 610 C.E. to his death in 632 C.E.

It is no compliment to the Muslim to hear praise for the Prophet's literary genius in the production of such an immortal

work because he believes the Qur'an is God's verbal message, involving no human agency. Muhammad was simply the conduit through whom Allah communicated his message to mankind. Further, it is believed that during the Prophet's lifetime the contents of the Qur'an were organized into chapters (suras), and memorised and committed to writing, but not in a single volume (mushaf). The historical significance of this is that the full text of the Holy Book was established while Muhammad was still alive. The collection (mushaf) as we now have it was canonised during the reign of the third Caliph Uthman (644-656 C.E.), a mere twenty years after Muhammad's death. These facts make the Qur'an unique among the scriptures of the world; both in terms of its proceeding from a single person, and also the brevity of time between its composition and canonization.

Modern scholarship discerns three phases in the composition of the Qur'an.

In the first phase Muhammad was at Mecca, trying to summon men to a recognition of the worship of Allah. In the second phase, covering the last years at Mecca and the first years of his residence in Medina, Muhammad incorporated into his revelations elements drawn from Judaism and Christianity. In the third phase, the revelations indicated a hardening of attitude toward these latter faiths, and the final triumph of a distinct teaching--a new faith which crowned and superseded the earlier prophets from Moses to Jesus.

As the above quotation alludes, Muslims believe in the Torah (Tawrah) as the Book revealed to Moses and in the Gospel (Injil) as the Book revealed to Jesus. The Qur'an specifies that the scriptures were revealed to each messenger in the language of his own people. At the same time, Muslims contend that the current texts of the Old and New Testaments have departed from their originals.

Both in the time of the Prophet and subsequently, Jews and Christians have not been impressed by the Islamic evaluation of their scriptures and have rejected the Qur'an's claim to finality.

On a more positive note, Jews Christians and Muslims find a unique kinship in their partaking of a common tradition which is based on the Unity of God. At the same time, it is this very concern to preserve the monotheistic faith which set Judaism and Islam at odds with Christianity because of its claim for the divinity of Jesus Christ and the parallel doctrine of the Trinity. Since many of these doctrinal problems boil down to the old question of what is meant by inspiration, let us suggest how these problems may be resolved.

Actually, the problem is not with inspiration per se but with the mode of inspiration. As we have already pointed out, historically the Church has taken a literalistic position in this regard. The Council of Trent, 1563 (which is authoritative

for the Roman Catholic Church), decreed that the Scriptures were written "by the dictation of the Holy Spirit" (Spiritu Sancto dictante). The same view is repeated by Vatican 1, 1870, to the effect that the canonical books have been "written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (Spiritu Sancto inspirante) and "have God for their author."¹⁹ Interestingly, Vatican 11 reiterates the earlier conciliar statements, but adds its own interpretation:

To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own powers and faculties so that, though he acts in them and by them, it was as true authors they they consigned²⁰ to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.

This statement of Vatican 11 clearly departs from the earlier "dictation" theories of inspiration and recognizes the biblical writers as true authors and not mere secretaries. Allowing for this human input, we distinguish between God, and man's thoughts of God at the different milestones of his earthly pilgrimage, and we refuse to attribute to God what is in fact attributable to the developing ideas of man. This view does not discredit the spirituality of the Bible, but only recognizes its cultural conditionality. The consciousness of having this "treasure hidden in earthen vessels" should cultivate attitudes of respect and openness to other Scriptures which are similarly human expressions of the divine.

Secondly, it is correctly insisted upon that the monotheistic religions are unique by virtue of their being historically oriented. Instead of relying on abstractions and speculations, as the Hindus and other philosophic traditions do, these religions are empirically grounded. The central salvific event for the Jew is the Exodus; for the Christian, the resurrection of Jesus; and for the Muslim, the Hijrah (flight from Mecca to Medina). On closer observation one discovers that while it is history that is being invoked, it is not history in an objective, scientific sense. One might even expand this caveat and argue that there is no such thing as "objective, scientific history," for all history is some fact plus interpretation. The subjective element seems to be unavoidable. Happenings around the world are daily reported in diverse ways through the media. We may go even further and say there is no such thing as "the world", but only views of the world. The "world" is a mediated phenomenon which often reveals more about the perceiver than the perceived. If these observations are

correct, then Judaism, Christianity and Islam must admit that the "facts" to which they appeal are, essentially subjective, internal and personal. St. Augustine was probably very near this truth when he said the Bible could only be understood through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As long as a religion thinks it is founded on facts, this "Rock of Ages" mentality invests it with a certain sense of inerrancy; but when it acknowledges its subjectivity, it can see itself in the position of a portrait artist--drawing out from its object features not seen by the untrained eye. To this extent, what appears on the canvas of the artist may, in "fact", be more real than the "real life" picture of a photographer, i.e., the objective historian.

Thirdly, we draw on the insights of Liberation Theology because it is biblical and ecumenical, aside from being on the cutting edge of the Christian movement in Latin America and elsewhere. The historical context of Liberation Theology is well-known: poverty, alienation and exploitation of the "marginalized" people by the wealthy. As expressed by Gustavo Gutierrez, its leading exponent: "In a continent like Latin America...the main challenge does not come from the nonbeliever but from the nonhuman--that is, the human being who is not recognized as such by the prevailing social order."²¹

In such a context, theology must begin with "where the pain is"--with the wretched of the earth. The poor not only have a clearer view of the world; but they are the special objects of God's concern as set forth both in the Old and New Testaments. Given this starting point, the central focus of Liberation Theology is with "praxis". Deane Fenn explains: "Praxis is the continuing interaction between practice and theory, doing and thinking. Theology as praxis is not the search for correct thinking (orthodoxy), but rather the intermingling of thought and action (orthopraxis)."²²

This activist stance of Liberation theologians causes them to concentrate on certain elements of the Bible: the Exodus, showing God as the liberator of the oppressed; the prophets, as the standard-bearers of justice; and the Kingdom of God, as the hope that values of the Exodus, the prophets and of Jesus will be vindicated in the future through the triumph of peace, justice, love and freedom.

The ecumenical significance of this approach to Scripture is that it settles questions of truth and falsity in respect to scripture, not along the old lines of orthodoxy, but whether the interpretation issues in the kind of action which takes sides with the God of the Bible who is at all times engaged in the struggle for liberation.

2. Clergy.

The clergy are officers within the church's ministry. The term 'ministry' is rooted in the Hebrew word, sheret (to serve), and refers to temple officers. It was translated by the Greek

word leitourgein in the Septuagint. The Hebrew meaning is conveyed to the New Testament through the many usages of leitourgein, including references to worship and the performance of various services, in the writings of St. Paul and others.²³

There are several other indicators of a continuity of function between Old and New Testament ideas of ministry. The New Testament proclaimed that the Jewish priestly and sacrificial system was cancelled through Christ's priesthood and sacrificial death upon the cross, yet the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist is patterned after Old Testament rites. Paul asks: "Consider the practice of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?"²⁴ Peter describes the whole Christian communion as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation."²⁵ Likewise, the New Testament declared that the Mosaic Law was no longer binding upon Christians, and there was therefore no more need for professional scribes to expound and interpret it; yet the Jewish mode of instruction was continued in the preaching of the gospel and instruction in Christian living. Similarly, a good deal of the form and organization of the Christian ministry was borrowed from its Jewish source. It is therefore less than generous to assert that "the Christian ministry derives its essential nature directly from the person and work of Christ and only indirectly from anything in Judaism."²⁶ The claim overlooks the fact that Jesus himself was a rabbi and his whole style of preaching and teaching is fully understandable within the Jewish context! But this is not to deny the newness of the Christian ministry in the light of its transforming message.

Part of this newness in the Christian sense of ministry is crystallized in the word diakonia, meaning "service." It refers to the work done by a menial and exemplifies the self-effacing quality of Christian ministry. The model for the Christian minister was that of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and saying, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet."²⁷

The New Testament also makes it very clear that the diverse ministerial functions within the Church are 'gifts' (Gk. charismata) of Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

What is not clear in the New Testament is the organization of the clergy. Scholars are profoundly divided on the question of "how far the New Testament reflects a uniform and obligatory pattern of ministerial orders."²⁸ On one side are the 'Catholics' (Roman, Eastern, and Anglican) who hold to a doctrine of "Apostolic Succession", signifying an uninterrupted line of succession in the episcopacy from the apostles to the present times. Vatican II re-states this doctrine as follows:

Among those various ministries which, as tradition witnesses, were exercised in the Church from the earliest times, the chief place belongs to the office

of those who, appointed to the episcopate in a sequence running back to the beginning, are the ones that pass on the apostolic seed. Thus, as St. Irenaeus testifies, through those who were appointed bishops by the apostles, and through their successors down to our own time, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved throughout the world.

With their helpers, the priests and deacons, bishops have therefore taken up the service of the community, presiding in the place of God over the flock whose shepherds they are, as teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and officers of good order. Just as the role that the Lord gave individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, is permanent and was meant to be transmitted to his successors, so also the apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and was meant to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore, this sacred Synod teaches that by divine institution bishops have succeeded to the place of the apostles as shepherds of the Church, and that he who hears them, hears Christ, while he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ (cf. Lk. 10:16).²⁹

Protestant churches (with the exception of certain Presbyterians) reject the Catholic doctrine of Apostolic Succession as an unbiblical, fictitious mediaeval theory. They argue that Jesus was not the architect of any such clerical organization; that the apostles assumed authority on the grounds that they were the personal companions of Jesus; that clerical organization grew gradually out of the needs of the infant church, and hence the appearance of several clerical patterns in the New Testament; that there is a valid ministry when an individual hears the call of the Holy Spirit, attested to by the Church, and faithfully transmits the apostolic testimony through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments; and that the function of such ministry is representative--on behalf of a common priesthood of all believers.

Summarily stated, whereas the Roman Catholic position is that the Church ensued from the ministry; it is the Protestant position that the ministry ensued from the Church. In the case of the doctrine of "Apostolic Succession", the authorization to minister is conceived of as 'from above', reaching back to Christ himself; in the Protestant view, where authorization is "by the living Church", it is conceived of as 'from below.'³⁰

The sharp differences between these two branches of the Church on the question of ministry requires that we briefly try to reconstruct its status in the New Testament, fully acknowledging the controversial aspect of our investigations.

Every movement needs leadership to succeed, and the Church was no exception. An instructive passage is found in Acts (vi.1-6):

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews

because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

It is clear that first of all there were those whose primary charge was "the ministry of the word." Secondly, in response to specific needs, ministers were set aside "to serve tables." Even though this latter group was engaged in practical administration, it was essential that individuals in all forms of ministry be "full of the Spirit."

Ministers of the word appear to have belonged to three categories: Apostles, Prophets and Teachers. Paul tells the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12.28): "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...."

An Apostle is a messenger (Gk. apo-stellein=to send forth). In the Gospels the reference primarily is to the twelve disciples whom Jesus appointed "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach."³¹ Quite early, the term was extended to include such persons as Matthias, Barnabas and many others who measured up to the qualifications of the title. The chief task of the apostle was to preach Christ among those who had not yet heard the gospel. Essentially, therefore, the apostle was a travelling missionary. His precise ties with the churches he founded are apparent in the letters of Paul. He provided his new converts with general direction in matters of faith, morals and discipline. He was careful not to extend his authority to churches which he had not personally founded, such as the church in Rome. Paul considered the ministry of the apostle the prime office of the church and that it was the result of a charism.

The second class of ministry in the New Testament was that of the Prophets. The rise of Apocalypse in Judaism marked the end of prophecy; but it did have a brief lease on life in Christianity till the end of the second century. Both John the Baptist and Jesus were looked upon by their contemporaries as prophets because they spoke with the conviction of spiritual authority, "and not not as the scribes." In like manner, the prophets we encounter in the early church were all "Spirit-filled" individuals who interpreted the Word of God "as the Spirit gave them utterance." Like the apostles, prophets were itinerant ministers; but unlike the apostles, they did not break new ground, choosing rather to labour in the fields that were created by the apostles. In terms of function, the Greek verb propheteuein (to prophesy) has several connotations. There is the predictive element. In his diatribe upon the pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, Jesus says: "You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.'"³² There is the declaratory element in terms of announcing a divine revelation. Jesus says: "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord,

Lord, did we not prophesy in your name....?"³³ There is the revelatory element, disclosing the truth of what has heretofore been concealed. At his trial, the tormentors of Jesus slap his face and then ask: "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"³⁴ The edificatory element was deemed highest of all. Paul exhorts the Corinthians: "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation."³⁵ For all these elements, the prophet was ranked by the early Christians as second only to the apostle. The words of a true prophet were the very words of God, and to question or criticize his pronouncements was to commit the unpardonable sin. A Christian of prophetic rank deserved rich support. The Didache instructs the brethren: "So you shall take the first fruits of the produce of the wine press and the threshing floor and of cattle and sheep and give the first fruits to the prophets for they are your high priests."³⁶

On the other hand, abuses of privilege were to be reckoned with, both among the apostles and prophets. The brethren are warned: "Let every apostle who comes to you be welcome as the Lord. But he shall not stay more than one day, and if it is necessary, the next day also. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when an apostle leaves, let him take nothing except bread to last until he finds his next lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet."³⁷ When infractions of this type began to multiply, the eminence of the prophets yielded to that of the local ministers.

Teachers constituted the third class of ministry. These were keepers of the oral tradition of the teachings of Jesus. They were versed in the Old Testament and were able to relate it to the Gospel, especially for Gentile converts. They instructed the flock on a daily basis, often through set formulations (Eph. 5.22-6.9, Col. 3.18-4.1, 1 Pet. 2.18-3.7) which were fast developing in the church and are reflected in the epistles, pertaining to matters of belief and morals.

Thus, within the threefold classification of the "Prophetic Ministry" in the New Testament, "the apostle proclaimed the Gospel and converted people to belief in Christ; the prophet by his inspired utterance renewed and deepened conviction, repentance, and hope; to the teacher fell the task of building up the daily thought and life of the local community of Christians by expounding points of belief and conduct."³⁸

In addition to the prophetic ministry which was itinerant, the Church in New Testament times was developing a local form of ministry that comprised two main offices: elders and deacons.

Accounts in the Acts show how the missionizing apostles would appoint elders in the churches they founded to exercise the necessary authority. In doing so they were following the example of the local Jewish synagogues which were presided over by senior men, known as elders, who were charged with the

responsibility of conducting its business and maintaining discipline in keeping with the Mosaic Law. They were inducted into this office by the laying on of hands. By virtue of the power invested in them, they could represent their local synagogue before the Roman magistrate, and could excommunicate dissident members. Christian elders also functioned in judicial and administrative capacities; but in addition they acted as pastors and assisted the congregation in their conduct of worship. Acts 20 and the Pastorals make it evident that in the New Testament the titles elders, presbyters and bishops all stand for the same office. They were the group that ruled within the local church.

Deacons exercised a subordinate ministry under the supervision of the elders. They assisted him in acts of public worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, and in the business of the church. Their chief responsibility was to operate the philanthropic outreach of the church.

The elders and deacons were consecrated to their office by the laying on of hands, as in the case of their Jewish counterparts. In time, this simple sign of benediction would take on the presumption of magical virtue, as some of the Fathers taught that through the ritual there was an impartation of the Holy Spirit.

Before we continue with the development of the doctrine of the ministry, it is of ecumenical interest to note that the fundamental flaw of Christian propaganda at this formative stage was its violent exegesis of the Old Testament which cast Jesus in the role of the Fulfiller of Jewish predictions. Today, Christian scholars unanimously reject such contrived "proofs" of the Messiahship of Jesus, but it seems they can do nothing about the fateful direction taken by the early church as a result of this mistaken and misguided spirituality. Our suggestion is that in the interests of undoing a historic error, Christians should celebrate Jesus as the fulfiller of earlier teachings and ideals which give him and his movement a rightful distinctiveness; but Christianity must be seen as but one exotic flower in a whole garden of spiritual creativity, rooted firmly in Jewish soil.

But hopes aside. The die was cast; and the ministry developed along doctrinal lines, influenced by environmental forces. By the beginning of the second century, the star of the itinerant ministers began to set, and that of the local ministers was ascendant, particularly that of the bishops. We witness the emergence of a threefold ministry of Bishops, Elders and Deacons. As associations were formed by urban churches, bishops began to assume area responsibilities which marked the development of the monarchical episcopate. This majestic position of the bishop is reflected in the writings of Ignatius (about 110). By the end of the second century the power of the bishop throughout Christendom is unequivocal in terms of preacher of the Word, celebrant of the sacraments, and chief pastor and ruler of the flock. His election was by the congregation, and he was ordained by a neighbouring bishop, aided by the elders. The stature of the office grew with the

onslaught of heresies, persecution and false prophets. By the third century the episcopacy is given a sacerdotal interpretation, primarily in the writings of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258). This is conveyed through his rigid formulation of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession wherein the office of the bishop proceeds, not from the Church, but from God to Christ, to the apostles, to the bishops and to their successors. The episcopos is therefore the head and heart of the ecclesia, and without the one there cannot be the other. As Christ's representative to his people, the bishop functions as their high priest. The Eucharist is no longer a memorial service but a sacrifice. By the power of that sacrifice, the bishop has the authority to forgive sins. These sacerdotal ideas of the ministry, introduced by Cyprian, were refined by Augustine (d. 430), and prevailed up to the time of the Reformation.

When Christianity was re-organized under the patronage of the Roman Emperor, Constantine (306-337), the responsibility of the bishop was extended beyond the parish to the diocese. By this time the primacy of the bishop of Rome was generally upheld and all ministerial powers were seen as flowing from him. The meaning of ordination was transformed from that of a simple blessing through the laying on of hands, to a sacrament wherein grace is transmitted for the sacerdotal performances of the office.

Ministerial privileges granted by the Roman Emperor were continued through the Middle Ages, the clerical estate being regarded somewhere in between the nobility and the town's people. Bishops and priests constituted the upper crust, while acolytes, exorcists and others were granted minor status.

After years of tension, the Eastern Church split from Rome in 1054, but continued the old pattern of the threefold ministry.

The decisive break from Rome came in the sixteenth-century with the Protestant Reformation. Substituting biblical authority for papal authority, Luther rejected ministerial sacerdotalism for the New Testament doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." The ministry was an office of the Church, and those who held office were executive officers of the whole congregation, and through the congregation, representatives of Christ who had called them to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. As to the form of the ministry, Luther was a pragmatist, accommodating to circumstances according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Hence, both episcopal and congregational forms have been acceptable in Lutheranism.

Calvin (1509-1564) followed in Luther's footsteps, emphasizing the right of the church to have charge of its ministry, both being divine institutions. In respect to form, Calvin adopted a fourfold ordering of ministry, comprising pastors, teachers, deacons and elders. The influence of Calvin's ministerial constitution can be seen among the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Disciples of Christ, and others. The Society of Friends (Quakers) stand out in this group, because while they, too, return to the scriptures, like

the Reformers, they find no sanction for an ordained clergy in the New Testament.

The Anglican Church, stirred by the marital frustration of King Henry VIII, also broke from Rome in the sixteenth century. They perpetuated the view of apostolic succession but rejected any pretensions of papal infallibility. As such, their clergy are looked upon as priests, and their form of church government is episcopal. Their views of the episcopacy vary, so that at one extreme there are the high church Anglo-Catholics, and at the other, the low church Evangelicals.

Today, efforts are underway for the reunification of the world's 825 million Roman Catholics with 65 million Anglicans (Episcopalians in U.S.). The talks begun in 1966 have now reached their final point expressed in a four-page letter from the Pope's top ecumenical adviser, Jan Cardinal Willebrands, to the 24-member Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission which is studying reunion. The Cardinal declares that the Vatican is prepared to end centuries of refusal to recognize Anglican priests as legitimate if "the Anglican Communion...state formally that it professes the same faith concerning essential matters where doctrine admits no difference." What this amounts to is that the Anglican Church should affirm the Roman Catholic position in respect to the Eucharist and its relationship to the priesthood.³⁹

The Cardinal's letter only cursorily mentions another problem which stands in the way of reunion, and which, in fact, may prove the knottiest of all, namely, the ordination of women. Richard McBrien gives us a summary of the negative arguments against the ordination of women articulated in such Vatican documents as the 1976 Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the 1972 statement of the United States bishops, entitled: Theological Reflections on the Ordination of Women. The arguments are:

1. The constant tradition of the Church is opposed to ordination of women to priesthood.
2. Jesus did not call women, not even his mother, to priesthood.
3. The ordained priest must act in the name of Christ, and, therefore, must be able to represent him physically as well as spiritually. The Orthodox refer to this as "iconic" representation.
4. No one has a right to ordination.
5. It is not clear that the women who were called deaconesses in the New Testament were ordained or whether their ordination was sacramental.⁴⁰

On the Anglican side, the issue of women's ordination to the priesthood is an inevitable conclusion, given the strong forces in its behalf. True, Archbishop Robert Runcie finds Scripture and Church tradition "highly discouraging to the idea" but the groundswell of support for the cause of women priests is so great that it ensures the breaking up of the men's club in merry old England. However, 1994 would probably be the earliest

date by which the ordination of women would be authorized after the necessary legislation has passed through the synod and Parliament. In the meantime, Anglican branches outside the British Isles have ordained more than 619 female priests (U.S., 474; Canada, 97; New Zealand, 40; Hong Kong, 4; Uganda, 3; Kenya, 1).⁴¹ In March of 1986, at the Anglican conclave in Toronto, U.S. Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning announced he is ready to approve the consecration of women as bishops.

The Protestant churches are more accurate representatives of the spirit of the times and have, since the 1950s, been ordaining women to the clergy.

Our survey has shown the variables in the Christian ministry. But since the purpose of this essay is to establish points of ecumenical consensus, we shall now endeavour to bring out the cementing factors, as John Macquarrie does in his Theology, Church and Ministry.

Hans Kung refers to 'constants' of the ministry, that is, ministerial functions that have persisted through the Christian era. Macquarrie identifies three of these basic functions.

The first is the function of service typified by the Greek word for ministry in the New Testament (diakonia=service). The ministry of Jesus was one of supreme service. Paul reminds the Philippians that though Christ was in the form of God, "he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." The word standing for "servant" is doulos, meaning slave. Macquarrie: "It is right that one of the ancient orders of ministry in the Christian church should bear the name 'diaconate', for it focusses and symbolizes for us the obscure unspectacular service that is very much at the heart of Christian ministry."⁴² The kind of service that is demanded of the Christian minister is one that is directed to the last, the lost, and the least. Above all it is a service that shares in the sufferings of Christ.

A second basic function of the Christian ministry is that of proclamation. The gospels tell us that Jesus taught with authority, even revising the law of Moses. At the end of his career he commissioned his disciples to continue this ministry of proclamation. "Proclamation is by no means opposed to service within the total context of ministry. Indeed each needs the other. There are times when the silent witness of service is the best way of commending the gospel and communicating the message of salvation, but a time must come when it is necessary to articulate that gospel in words."⁴³ Proclamation may be addressed to those outside the church in the form of evangelism; it may be part of the church's teaching office or magisterium, for the edification of believers; or it may be prophetic preaching "which subjects both church and society to the critique of God's word."⁴⁴

The third group of ministerial functions are the priestly functions. It combines the service and proclamation functions because the priest, as mediator, "represents the church in humility, before God and represents also God's word to his church."⁴⁵ The New Testament represents Christ as a priest,

and it also calls the whole church a 'royal priesthood.' But in a special sense, bishops and presbyters are priests of the church, deriving their ministry from the work of Christ in whose name they act in the church and in the world. This priestly ministry is especially associated with the sacraments, and most of all, with the eucharist. In the eucharistic ceremony, as he repeats the Lord's words and distributes the 'holy gifts' to the congregation, the priest stands in a sacramental relation to what Christ did in the Upper Room and on Calvary. Notwithstanding this priestly emphasis in the Anglican-Roman Catholic tradition, these traditions do not drive a wedge between the ordained ministry and that of the general ministry of the church, for in emergency situations lay persons are authorized to perform all of the priestly functions.⁴⁶

These basic functions which the ordained ministry has performed from the beginning should serve as rallying points for the mutual recognition of denominational ministries. This is the thrust of the contemporary ecumenical movement which is goading each denomination to re-examine its ministry in the light of other communions; and as a consequence there is a "growing consensus." In the judgment of Robert S. Paul,

Statements on ministry prepared for the Consultation on Church Union (1984), which reflected the views of ten American Protestant denominations, and by the World Council of Churches (1982) indicate a significant and growing consensus. This consensus reveals an emphasis on the servanthood of ministry as evidenced in the ministry of Jesus; an awareness that the whole church is the proper context in which the ordained ministry should be considered; an awareness that the doctrine of church and ministry cannot be separated; and a recognition that the traditional threefold ordering of ministry should not be lightly discarded.⁴⁷

This growing consensus is clearly indicative of the fact that Christian churches now "seek to manifest their essential unity and to arrive at a point where their ministries may be mutually recognized."⁴⁸

The issues of ministry which vex the Christians do not arise for the Jew or the Muslim. This is because, whereas the centre of gravity in the church, 'Catholic' or 'non-Catholic', has resided with the clergy both in priestly or non-priestly form, authority for the Jew and Muslim has always lain in the hands of the people, and the cleric has functioned as a representative and not a mediator. This places the Jewish and Muslim cleric in greater proximity to the Protestant minister than to the Catholic priest.

Priesthood came to an end for the Jew with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Besides, the priest had to be of pure Levitical lineage, which now cannot be claimed. The contemporary counterpart to the Christian minister in Judaism is the rabbi (lit. teacher). The title came in vogue nineteen hundred years ago. Prior to that, scholars of the stature of Hillel carried no such title. The rabbi differs from a Christian priest in that

his authority lies in his learning and not in his office; he is not an intermediary between God and man; and his traditional role is not that of a leader of worship but that of a scholar. "The rabbi's role as a Sabbath preacher is a modern innovation, borrowed from the Protestants."⁴⁹

The modern rabbi is a living link with Christian origins, for Jesus himself was a rabbi. A rabbi was a lay preacher who interpreted the meaning of the religious law for his people. It was not uncommon that this should sometimes bring him into conflict with the temple priesthood. No doubt, Jesus' interpretation of the Law was radical and sweeping. Yet his disdain of legalism, as Andrew M. Greeley points out, "was to be found in other such wandering teachers of his day. He may have been willing to push the Pharisaic insight about love further than any of the other rabbis, but it was not an insight that was uniquely his."⁵⁰ This sort of retrieval of historic data by Christian scholars helps fill the gaps between Jesus and his Jewish roots and serves to mitigate the variability between Christianity and Judaism that was stirred up by theological propheticism.

The case is similar in respect to Islam. In the Qur'an, persons are directly addressed by God. Since Islam does not subscribe to a doctrine of 'original sin', humans are deemed capable of immediate communication with God, so there is no provision for saviour figures or their sacerdotal representatives. In an ideal Muslim society, each individual would be possessed of the knowledge and expertise to develop his/her spiritual life. However, in practice there is provision for teachers, but they do not function as Christian clergy do. Those who come nearest to the "clergy" in Islam are the ulama--a non-structured group of specialists in religious sciences.

Further, the Muslim system of law (Shari'a) is decentralized and is open to varieties of interpretation in matters that lie outside the essential beliefs. There is no counterpart to the Vatican in Islam--no hierarchical structure which defines orthodoxy for the whole community of believers. "The nearest approximation to such a centralized authority," as Gamal M. Badr avers, "is to be found among the Shi'a, comprising about 10% of present day Muslims, who believe their successive Imam to be infallible and the only authoritative expounders and interpreters of the law. Since the twelfth Shi'i Imam went into hiding more than a thousand years ago, the Shi'i ulama or fuqaha collectively stand in for him. Their highest echelon select one of themselves as primus inter pares (e.g. Khomeini in present-day Iran). The Shi'i scholars of religious sciences thus have more of the characteristics of a 'clergy' than their Sunni counterparts."⁵¹

3. The Laity.

The lay issue is more of a problem for Christianity than for Judaism and Islam. In Judaism, as we have seen, the rabbi is invested with no special privileges or prerogatives; he does not serve as an intermediary between God and man; he is not identified with the synagogue but with the congregation; and he

is not bound to lead in worship services (the Orthodox seldom do). It is the responsibility of the cantor to lead in worship, and any able layman may enter the pulpit and offer public prayer. So, too, with the Muslim. It is the privilege of any Muslim to lead the Friday congregation prayer. It is only a matter of practical division of labour that some mosques have full-time prayer leaders. Rituals connected with the Pilgrimage to Mecca are the supreme signs of the theological equality of all Muslims.

For a short time, while Christianity was close to its biblical roots, the laity was recognized as having theological status, but with the development of a powerful ecclesiastical-hierarchical establishment within the church, the status of the laity in terms of its place and responsibility in the church was badly depreciated.

The Hebrew words am and goral are translated into Greek by the words laos (people) and kleros (portion, lot). The Hebrews are the chosen people of Yahweh from among the nations of the earth (goyim) and are made heirs to his promise. The message of Yahweh to Moses as related to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage is clear and simple: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." These chosen people are assigned by lot for religious service by the priestly tribe who therefore do not receive any portion of the land.

The New Testament meaning of the word laos is drawn from its Old Testament source, and reflects both the parochial and universal connotations of the people of God, as these unfold in the expanding consciousness of the prophets. Paul seizes upon the universal messianic expectations of Isaiah (45.20) and others as he welcomes even the Gentiles into the fold of the new people of God (Rom. ch. 9). The Church is the New Israel bound by a New Covenant that is sustained by faith: "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God....There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3.26-29).

While there were no distinctions within the laos on the basis of race or sex, the one, unifying Spirit manifests itself through a variety of gifts and services (1Cor. 12.4). The central point is that in the New Testament epoch, the whole Church is conceived of as the laos, and as "brethren" (adelphoi), they form a "royal priesthood." Even when the bishop assumes a central role within the ministry, he functions within an organic unity in which there is no contradistinction between the clergy and the laity. The charismatic character of those first Christians could not have developed within an ecclesiastically compartmentalised environment.

But charisma gave way to orthodoxy as the church did battle against heretics. Threats from within and without elevated the position of the bishop so that, with the inauguration of the monarchical episcopate in the second century, it could then be said with the voice of Cyprian: "The Bishop is in the Church,

and the Church in the bishop, and if any one be not with the bishop, he is not in the church." This concept of the Church is that of a single, visible, orthodox, hierarchical structure embodied in the episcopacy.

This emergent ecclesiology was marked by a sharp distinction between the laity and the clergy who are no longer thought of as presbyters but priests, very much in the Jewish and pagan style. Several factors reinforced this duality. There was the socio-political model of the Greco-Roman city-state in which the magistrate (kleros) was distinguished from the people (laos). There was the Old Testament model of the Levites who occupied the high office of priesthood. There was the monastic model, from the third century onwards, that defined normative Christianity in terms of celibacy and withdrawal from the secular life. Most especially, there was the sacramental model, highlighted by the central place given to the eucharist as a means of grace, the service of which invested the celebrant with numinous qualities. The result of all of this elevated the clergy to the position of subject and the laity to the position of object. The good lay person was one who accepted his lowly estate and obediently followed the word of his superiors. The dividing line between the subject and the object was ordination, a sacrament which declared: "duo sunt genera Christianorum."

The Reformation radically challenged the ecclesiastical-hierarchical tide and inaugurated a new view of the place of the laity in the church. Luther stressed the interiority of the Church as an invisible union of believers who are sanctified by God alone. He demolished the dualism between clergy and laity, and in his manifesto To the Christian Nobility he declared: "All Christians are truly priests and there is no distinction amongst them except as to office....Everybody who is baptized, may maintain that he has been consecrated as a priest, bishop or pope."

Thus, the biblical idea of the "people of God" was restored to the Church by the Reformers and their followers. It is a credit to the Roman Church that despite its almost 2000 year oblivion of the "lay apostolate", it has given conciliar formulation to this cause through Vatican II in a manner which would make Luther embrace the pope! The Introduction to the "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity" reads in part:

Wishing to intensify the apostolic activity of the People of God, this most holy Synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity, whose proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church it has already called to mind in other documents. The layman's apostolate derives from his Christian vocation, and the Church can never be without it. Sacred Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful such activity was at the very beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 11:19-21; 18:26; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3).⁵¹

The present challenge to the Christian Church is to transcend all earlier meanings of ethnocentricity and exclusivity, and to give the phrase, "People of God," its true

universal identity. It should begin by expanding its Judeo-Christian connotation to include Muslims, for Islam also looks back to Abraham as the progenitor of the monotheistic faith. We are reminded that "while the main line of the people of God has descended from Abraham through Isaac, there was another line stemming from Ishmael, also a son of Abraham and traditionally regarded as the ancestor of those Semitic peoples whom today we call the Arabs."⁵³ In the Abrahamic cycle of stories we are told that God said to Hagar, the bondswoman, concerning Ishmael, the son who was fathered by Abraham: "I will make him a great nation."⁵² Therefore Ishmael's descendants must also be hailed as the People of God!

FOOTNOTES.

1. Ralph Patai, "In Search of Unity Among the Monotheistic Religions," p. 2. A committee proposal for private circulation.
2. Ibid.
3. John 1.1-4. New English Bible.
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