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**PASTORAL PARADIGMS THAT
NECESSITATED A MAJOR REFORM BY
*PRESBYTERORUM ORDINIS***

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1. Introduction

It is interesting for a Church historian to observe the various circumstances and events that influenced the development of ministerial priesthood in the Catholic Church from early centuries up to Vatican II. There existed formal priesthood in Judaism for the fulfilment of the cultic needs of the Jewish people along with other institutions of prophets and kings. As we pass on to the “new covenant” and the economy of the new people of God, we find Jesus establishing a new paradigm of religious leadership merging the cultic, prophetic and kingly roles into one ministerial priesthood which is central to the whole life of the Church in all its aspects. This is the pastoral ministry, a unique institution, for the building up of a Christian community of worship and fellowship. The basic nature of this ministry stands as *diakonia*, one of humble service as taught and modelled by the Master. Jesus stands as the example and prototype of this pastoral leadership, who is named as the High Priest by the author of the letter to the Hebrews (2: 17; 8: 1).

During the first two centuries of Christianity, the spreading of the Church in various regions and the increasing number of local communities necessitated the hierarchical formation of the pastoral leadership and we find the gradual evolving of three specific

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ministries in the Church namely, episcopacy, presbytery and diaconate; and *diakonia* remained as the basic characteristic of these ministries. However, from the beginning of 4th century there was a paradigm shift in the meaning and practice of pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church. Immediate occasion for this shift was the conversion of Roman emperor Constantine and consequent political hegemony of Christianity. We shall discuss in the following pages some important factors that contributed for a distorted profile of the pastoral ministry during the long centuries from 4th to the middle of 20th century.

2. Christianity as a Religion

Jesus designed the Church as a people of God, a community or the 'family of God'. During the early Church it did not have the form of a formal religion with systematic rituals and regulations. It was a new community with a new life-style of 'coming together', worshipping, sharing and fellowship. But this situation could not last long as the Church spread far and wide and people with different cultures and practices became part of it. Men and women with vested interests also began to infiltrate into the Church. Conversion of Gentiles in large numbers necessitated the convening of the Jerusalem Council and the initiation of certain stipulations.

Although there was no formal ministerial structure in the very early Church, during the coming centuries a very systematic hierarchical order of priesthood was slowly introduced in the Church. Parallel to this was the formation of Christianity as a formal religion during the early Middle Ages. From the time of total separation from Judaism many of the Christians felt the need of the paradigms of a formal religion. Christ was considered as the fulfilment of the Old Testament priesthood and Christians as the fulfilment of the old people of God. This led to the reinterpretation of Christianity in the light of Judaism and there was also the influence of Gentile religions. Consequently, Christianity was considered as a formal religion with statutory rituals and cults.

3. Presbyters as Priests

As Christianity assumed the characteristics of a formal religion, there was a natural inkling to have the institution of priesthood as in any other religion of the time. Once out of Synagogue, Christians were branded as people of no formal religion since there was no priestly

structure. This prejudice created a mental frame of nostalgia for a formal priesthood. Thus, the Levitical priesthood and the image of the priesthood of Melchizedek crept into the mentality of the Christians. The theological understanding of Last Supper as 'sacrifice', shifting from 'house-churches' to exclusive church-buildings and separation of lay people from the clergy accelerated the process of sacerdotalization, an idea totally absent from the mind of the apostolic Church. Paul Bernier states: "In the early Church, none of the terms, used to signify service of the Gospel or of the Church, were taken from the sacral world of the Jews or of the pagans."¹

Pre-Nicene period had difficulty in calling the Church leaders 'priestly'. St Augustine refused to call bishops and presbyters as priest in the sense of being mediators between Christ and the community.² Schillebeeckx states: "In the early Church, presiding at the Eucharist was simply the liturgical dimension of the many-sided ministerial pattern of presiding in the Christian community. The one who is recognized by the Church as leader of the community also presides at the Eucharist."³

As presbyters turned to be helpers or assistants to bishops they were delegated to perform the cultic rituals in the village communities as 'vicars' of the bishop. By the Council of Nicaea the image of presbyters started assuming the profile of priests. The words of John Chrysostom qualifying priests' life as a "terrifying existence, full of fear and trembling" is the characteristic of this paradigm.⁴

As the presbyter's image shifted from being a builder of community of faith and charity to a dispenser of graces, the Eucharist was then seen as a source of saving graces. This has also affected the Eastern Churches. Introduction of vestments is also a clear sign of Jewish influence. During Middle Ages one was ordained so that he is authorized to preside over the Eucharistic assembly.⁵ The pastor's care is not a service to the people but essentially a service to the altar

¹P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church, A Historical and Pastoral Approach*, Connecticut, 1996, 98.

²Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry, a Case for Change*, London: SCM Press, 1982, 48.

³E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 49-52.

⁴Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 90-91.

⁵Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church*, New York, 1988, 252.

and sacrifice. It was a 'sacred ministry'. 'Ordination' was a secular term but for the Church it was 'consecration'.⁶

Due to this cultic view of the priest the detachment from the people got importance⁷ and the celibacy became the adequate expression for this separation. For the faithful priesthood meant the supremely sacred power to offer sacrifice and he is the mediator between God and believers. 'Religion', therefore, primarily belonged to the caste of the priests and monks, who are far above the ordinary believers.⁸ A priestly spirituality was developed which was more monastic in spirit and sacrificial in nature.

The Council of Trent asserted that priesthood originated from Eucharist and oriented to Eucharist.⁹ The New Testament was interpreted in accordance with that scholastic view. There was bare minimum mention of preaching and leading of the community: only a secondary reference to forgiveness of sins.¹⁰

4. Clerical Celibacy

The early Church was characterized by a 'domestic culture'. Almost all the early Church leaders and even many of the New Testament writers were married people. In the letters of St. Paul there is the evidence of a positive evaluation of celibacy. In Gnostic context Christians esteemed virginity and chastity as noble and ascetic.¹¹ As the Christian presbyterial ministry was gradually compared to Jewish priesthood the paradigms of the law of ritual purity (which Jesus had repudiated) also set in. In addition to the Hebrew pressure the Hellenistic influence also had its sway. This latter was more influential in Mediterranean regions. Pagan priests had the laws of purity which stipulated that anyone who served at the altar should not have the sensual pleasures on the previous night. Dualistic

⁶Cf. H. Haag, *Clergy & Laity, Did Jesus Want a Two-Tier Church*, Kent, 1997, 103.

⁷Cf. B. Puthur, "Vision of the Vatican Council II and the Clergy of the Syro-Malabar Church" in P. Kanoorkadan ed., *Syro-Malabar Church, Forty Years After the Vatican Council II*, Kochi: LRC Publications, 2007, 168.

⁸Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 59.

⁹Cf. 23rd Session, Chapter one. Cf. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct23.html>, access 06-06-2012.

¹⁰Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 254.

¹¹Cf. Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, PL 2, 930.

philosophies and heresies like Encratism, Gnosticism and Montanism considered matter as evil.¹²

Neo-Platonism affected even the Fathers. Negative out-look on the material aspects of life and exaggerated spiritualism prompted many to flee from societal life and accept monasticism. During the early centuries martyrdom was the heroic venture in Christian life. When that was practically rare, monasticism was of attraction for many as a heroic religious act and it was considered as a state of perfection. A division developed among Christians by 5th century between the monks who were 'spiritual' and the lay people and the married clergy who were 'secular'. There were some Christian denominations which considered sexual abstinence as baptismal obligation although the Catholic Church always defended marriage and marriage obligations.¹³ Eusebius of Vercelli and St. Augustine attempted on common life for the clergy by surrendering private property¹⁴ and living in one house; but that attempt failed. With regard to celibacy and common life the influence of monastic movement was remarkable.¹⁵

In the East, since the Council of Trullo (A.D. 692), continence was made compulsory for bishops. If a married man is made bishop he should leave the wife and send her to a convent. In the West several Councils of the 4th century (Elvira, A.D. 300 ©, Rome, 386; Carthage, 390) insisted that from the time of ordination to diaconate one should abstain from sexual relations with his wife and from 5th century (Orange, 441; Arles, 524) perpetual chastity was the rule.¹⁶ 1 Tim 3:2 was interpreted as prohibiting a second marriage or the marriage after ordination. This move reached a climax at the declaration on the nullity of any marriage of cleric in major orders in the Council of Trent.¹⁷ At that time there were many ministers who accepted celibacy voluntarily following the ideal of the monks before the implementation of the law of celibacy.

¹²Cf. M.S. Driscoll, "Celibacy" in M. Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995, 133-134.

¹³Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 87-88.

¹⁴Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 94-95.

¹⁵Cf. J.T. Leinhard, *Ministry, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, Vol.8, Delaware, 1984, 20.

¹⁶Cf. M.S. Driscoll, "Celibacy," 134.

¹⁷Cf. Canon IX, Session 24th. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct24.html>, access 18-06-2012.

During the course of history the meaning assigned to clerical celibacy assumed varied forms. During the Gnostic period it was for renouncing the prison of earthly body. In the Hellenistic view of the dichotomy of body and soul, it was to protect the purity of the body. During the Feudal period celibacy helped to safeguard the Church property from bequeathing to the cleric's inheritors. For Pope Pius XI, celibacy was a means of total consecration to God.¹⁸ Along with it came the consideration of availability of more time and care for pastoral work as clerics are free from family preoccupations. Economic considerations also set in as maintenance of celibate cleric was less expensive.¹⁹

It was Vatican II which ruled out ritual purity and all other reasons as the basis for clerical celibacy and introduced for the first time the biblical basis for clerical celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom of God."²⁰ The Council deliberately avoided the term "*perfecta castitas*" in order to respect the married clergy of the East.²¹

5. Absolute Ordinations

The Chalcedonian concept of *titulus ecclesiae* (invalidity of absolute ordinations) was reinterpreted by Third Lateran Council under Pope Alexander III, as to mean that no one might be ordained unless he has been assured of a proper living.²² *Titulus ecclesiae* was reduced to mere feudal issue of *beneficium*. Later this led to a situation where, after ordination, the priest had to wait for the good will of the bishop who may assign him to ministry. Here the claim of the community disappears. Since then there have been many such ordinations especially of monks who engaged themselves in offering private masses.

At a time when everyone was baptized a radical difference between worldly men and the spiritual men consisted in the division between an ordinary Christian and a cleric or monk. Thus ordination became a status symbol. As Schillebeeckx writes: "As a result priesthood was seen more as 'a personal state of life', a 'status', than as a service to

¹⁸Cf. M.S. Driscoll, "Celibacy", 134.

¹⁹Cf. M.S. Driscoll, "Celibacy," 134.

²⁰Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, No. 16. Cf. also Paul VI, Encyclical Letter , *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, No. 286-287.

²¹Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 88.

²²Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 52-53.

the community; it was personalized and privatized."²³ This meant absolute ordinations meaning that the man, who is ordained and has no community, has full power of a priest in his own person having the power to consecrate Eucharist. This led to 'private mass' which was quite unthinkable to early Christians. Pope Innocent III (1198 – 1212) practised this principle in the consecration of bishops and declared that all absolute consecrations were valid.²⁴

6. Clergy - Laity Dichotomy

After Jesus' time his followers were calling themselves as 'saints'.²⁵ The Christian communities followed Jesus' example in all their inter-relations, sharing a common vision and hope in Christ. Among them there were various tasks and duties but all were faithful in fulfilling them with a ministerial solidarity. Women had a very conspicuous role in the early Church (Acts 9:16; 12:12; 16: 14, 20). The Church valued the great diversity of personal charisma given for the building up of the community (1 Cor 12:28) and considered all of them as of equal worth. There were no terms of difference between the lay people and the ministers. Various ministries in the Church were well coordinated according to each one's call and charism and all were equal in dignity and status (Gal 3:28).

It was only by the third century that *kleros*²⁶ (clergy) was used to indicate a particular group in the Church.²⁷ Along with this, the term '*laikos*'²⁸ (laity) was used to mean the ordinary faithful.²⁹ But as the Church became socially free³⁰ and powerful in the secular field, the ordained ministry was accorded special privileges and positions which eventually grew into a new sociological class on its own. The discriminations and privileges given to clerics from the civil authorities including exemption from civil and military service, from

²³E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 57.

²⁴Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 57.

²⁵Cf. E.C. Sellner, "Lay spirituality," in M. Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1993, 589.

²⁶Cf. J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood, the Baptized and the Ordained*, Vol. I & II, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2006, 18-19.

²⁷Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 146.

²⁸For more details cf. J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood*, 15-16.

²⁹Cf. Sellner, *Lay Spirituality*, 590.

³⁰It was with the 'Constantine revolution' that Church officials were bestowed with privileges and endowments while lay people were looked upon as the subordinates. Cf. H. Haag, *Clergy & Laity*, 12.

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subjection to civil courts (this exemption necessitated the starting of ecclesiastical courts) and exemption from taxation, led to a formation of "special lot" or a caste of 'kleros' in the Church with special dress,³¹ titles, duties, celibacy,³² breviary, and enrobed in Latin culture and liturgy. Tonsure was prescribed for clergy from the beginning of 5th century; this was in imitation of the monks. This necessitated a difference of hair style from that of the lay people.³³ Council of Chalcedon (451) stipulated that clerical orders were irrevocable and the clerics were forbidden to return to lay life. This only enhanced lay-cleric dichotomy. The clergy were the educated class who could read and write Latin. The lay people did not have any significant role in the Church and they were treated as passive objects of the clergy-dominated apostolate.³⁴ The lay people could not have any stand in the Church especially in liturgy and the Church governance. On the other side, the lay faithful were considered as the 'idiotai', illiterate and 'seculars'.³⁵

The tension between 'the Church and the World' was transferred to the Church community itself – a tension between 'clerics' (secular priests and monks) and the lay people.³⁶ Greater part of the Church history is blurred by this tension. Early monasticism was to a great extent a lay protest against increasing clerical supremacy and lay subjugation. Pope Boniface VIII, in the 'Constitution' of 31st July, 1297, remarked: "The fact that the laity is hostile to the clergy is something which antiquity has handed on to us clearly enough."³⁷ Anti-clericalism was at the root of many dissents in the Middle Age. The Reformation³⁸ and other anti-Catholic movements had this background. Reformation, in fact, provoked the Church so as to take

³¹Only from the 5th century the clergy started using special dress outside liturgy and that was only to separate them from the lay people. Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 46.

³²Cf. S. Arokiaraj, "Extraordinary Ministries of the Laity," in *The Divine Shepherd's Voice*, 6, 2 (April-June, 2008) 81.

³³Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 146.

³⁴Cf. J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood*, 73.

³⁵H. Küng, *The Church*, London, 1978, 493. Shortened to, H. Küng, *The Church*.

³⁶Cf. H. Küng, *The Church*, 493.

³⁷H. Küng, *The Church*, 493.

³⁸Reformers stressed the 'priesthood of the people of God' mainly to uproot the dichotomy between the clergy and the laity or the religious and secular. Cf. S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright, ed., *New Dictionary of Theology*, Illinois, 1988, 375.

more intensified attitude towards this dichotomy.³⁹ Anyhow, most centuries have produced outstanding lay leaders and theologians.⁴⁰ The mentality that reflected during the Middle Ages is clear from the statement in the 'schema' of the First Vatican Council.

The Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same gifts. It is a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach and govern, and to others not.⁴¹

With an attitude of 'first and second class' membership in the Church, the obligation of lay people was only to 'pay, pray and obey'. The encyclical letter of Pope Pius X, *Vehementer Noster*, (1906) states: "The College of pastors alone has the right and the authority to lead and guide all the members toward the goal of the community. The majority have the duty to be led themselves and follow the shepherds like an obedient flock."⁴² A radical healing and 'ecclesiological breakthrough' in the concept of status, dignity and apostolate have been effected in Vatican II.

7. Monastic Influence

The decline of the corporate force of the Episcopal Synods, the weakening of the diocesan structure and the shallow theological knowledge and morale of the local clergy during the early middle age prepared the ground for the flourishing of monasteries. St. Basil and St. Augustine were the pioneers in this field; but it was St. Benedict, who founded the monastery of Monte Casino (529), who formally inaugurated this tradition in the Church. Monks had high theological knowledge and moral calibre and so they had much influence in the Church and society. Bishops were either the feudal lords or their passive supporters. Priests did not have considerable influence in the society. By the middle of 9th century Church Councils insisted on monastic spirituality for the diocesan clergy. Many of the leading

³⁹Cf. H. Haag, *Clergy & Laity*, 13.

⁴⁰Cf. S.B. Furgson, *Dictionary of Theology*, 375.

⁴¹Quotation given in J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood*, 34. Also in J.M. De Mesa, "Participation of Lay People in Church Decisions," in *Vidyajyothi* 44, 6 (June-July, 1980) 268.

⁴²Pius X, Encyclical, *Vehementer Nos*, *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, 39 (1906-1907) 8-9. Cf. also J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood*, (Endnote No.122) 217.

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bishops were monks; other bishops could not establish their stand and influence. Paul Bernier remarks: "In the East and in Ireland, monastic community was the normal setting for the ministry. The great cathedral schools were monastic in both format and theology ... By the year 1000, monasteries set the tone for the Church."⁴³ In the Roman Council of 1074, Gregory VII insisted on the vow of poverty and monastic common life for the diocesan clergy. The feudal system also helped monasteries. Due to monastic influence there was feudalization of ecclesial ministries and sacerdotalization of monasticism. Paul Bernier remarks: "Ministry was reduced to jobs within monasteries and to liturgical services. The great liturgies as well as private masses were both considered ministry par excellence. The style on ministries centred on people gave way to monastery-centred liturgy and spirituality."⁴⁴

The life-style of bishops resembled that of an Abbot who was considered as 'father' and spiritual guide of his people rather than the builder of Christian communities. In the East bishops were chosen from among the monks or were made monks before the consecration.

Perfection in spiritual life was considered in terms of interiority and mysticism inspired by the monastic life-style of detachment and contemplation. Celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments was the only community based religious activities; all other devotions and spiritual exercises were monastery centred. Secular clergy were forced to recite divine office under penalty of mortal sin. They were to put on monastic dress and celibacy was insisted on with more vigour. With the rise of monasticism people's devotions assumed a monastic structure. Full canonical hours went from monasteries to the churches. Priests were required to lead a monastic-type of prayer life.⁴⁵

8. Votive Mass

The Eucharist was offered only on Sundays and a few feast days in the early Church. But by the Middle Age daily Mass and private Masses became common. Daily Mass was initially associated with

⁴³P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 108.

⁴⁴P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 109.

⁴⁵Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 185.

veneration of relics.⁴⁶ Monasteries became increasingly clerical where, due to the presence of many priests, private Masses as votive for private intentions became usual.⁴⁷ Another reason for frequency of Masses was the Eucharist offered for the dead. Many monks were ordained just for saying these Masses.⁴⁸ The custom of stipends for the Mass led some monks to offer even dozen Masses a day, mostly in private. This custom deprived the community aspect of the Eucharist and made it an act of devotion. The practice of the celebrant turning his back to people and facing the altar reduced lay participation.⁴⁹ K.B. Osborne observes:

Not until the Synod of Seligenstadt do we have a synodal decision to limit the number of masses to three per day, and only with Pope Alexander II (1061 - 1073) do we have the limit of one per day for the rule. Such rules would not be part of synodal or papal statements, unless the opposite were occurring. Celebration of mass was the focus of priestly ministry.⁵⁰

9. Gregorian Reform

The priestly ministry, in the beginning of the second millennium, was really inspired by the religious reform of a monk, Hildebrand, who became Pope Gregory VII (1073 - 1085). He brought the powerful emperor Henry IV under his thumb. The Cluny reforms had a sway even in Rome and that paved the way for Gregory VII to initiate a radical reform in the Church. His primary objective was to liberate the Church from the lay investiture. His challenging effort to keep away the secular powers from the periphery of the Church made papal authority more consolidated. Historians would accuse him of enforcing direct authority of pope over each Christian but if it were not there the reforms would not have taken place. He was never moved by any self interest for glory or power but motivated only by the good of the Church.⁵¹

⁴⁶In some Cathedrals even from 4th century Masses were offered over relics of saints. There were over 14 altars in cathedrals where Masses were offered on regular basis. Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 117.

⁴⁷Eastern Churches did not accept this practice of private or daily Eucharist for a long time.

⁴⁸At the time of St. Benedict no monk was allowed to be ordained, not even the abbot.

⁴⁹Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 118.

⁵⁰K. B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History*, 190.

⁵¹Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 127.

Gregory was convinced that only by improving the quality of the priests the spirituality of the people would grow. He was not reluctant to take actions against bishops or even deposing those who lived a scandalous life or who did not comply with his reforms. Priests were the most affected people due to this movement. Some bishops asked people to keep away from the Eucharist offered by priests who were married. To promote celibacy Pope Gregory proposed community life and compulsory divine office for priests.

The Lateran Councils⁵² consolidated the above reforms by enacting canons. The first session prohibited clerical marriage and the second made it illegal and invalid. Some priests resisted this move and many resorted to community life which freed them from the clutches of the feudal lords by being directly under the bishop. This law helped to save the Church property from bequeathing to priests' own inheritors. This also further helped to increase the power of the bishops over the priests. The independence of bishops from the power of the lords was also secured by the Council and this made them more obedient to Pope.

This period consolidated the powers of ecclesiastical organizations like papacy, papal curia, College of Cardinals and helped the codification of Canon Law. The whole set-up was that the central authority rested on Pope and from him to bishops, to priests and to the lay people. This augmented the position and powers of priests who could perform all functions like ruling, teaching and preaching. But priests in villages were poorly educated and the theory *ex opere operato* led them to think of the sacraments as some magical performance to get people to heaven.⁵³

10. Major and Minor Orders

Ordination or *ordo* is to be analyzed from the paradigm of structuralized dichotomy of clergy and lay people. As Jose Puthenveetil observes, "In the Greco-Roman world, there were established *ordines*: the order of senators, *ordo senatoris*; the order of *decurions*, *ordo decurionum*; the order of knights, *ordo equester*. The people of these orders were highly respected, and the orders themselves considered sacrosanct."⁵⁴ The Christian society of the

⁵²Four Lateran Councils were held in years 1123, 1139, 1179, 1215.

⁵³Cf. P. Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 130.

⁵⁴J. Puthenveetil, *Priesthood*, Vol. I, 25.

third-fourth century was strongly influenced by the Greco-Roman polity. As the Church started structuring itself it followed the pattern of the 'ordered' society of the Greco-Roman world. In ecclesiastical usage also this term *ordo* got importance. Thus we have the order of *episkopoi*, order of *Presbyteros*, and the order of *diakonos*.⁵⁵ Fathers of the Council of Trent affirmed the sacramentality of order and no one was to doubt that order is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the holy Church.⁵⁶ Council of Trent is firm on the permanent character of three sacraments, namely, baptism, confirmation and order and they are not repeated. A person who is ordained, he always remains a priest, even though he might not exercise his ministry.⁵⁷

11. The Scholastic Effect

Pre-Vatican II concept of priestly ministry depended mostly on the Scholastic doctrine on Christian priesthood. D. Alphonse remarks:

[The Council of Trent] not only identified the presbyterial ministry with his priestly or cultic function but also presented the presbyter as a super-Christian. He belonged to a higher ecclesiastical order or rank by virtue of his presbyterial ordination which was recognized as imprinting in him an indelible sacramental character. This character was explained as bringing about an ontological transformation in the very ordination of the presbyter that configures him to Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest. This ontological transformation of the presbyter made him superior to the laity in three important aspects – greater power, holiness and dignity.⁵⁸

Ordination meant conferring of power to confer sacraments, a power which the 'ordinary' Christian did not possess. All these demanded from priests a greater holiness than that of the lay people.

The hierarchical structure was acknowledged as a divinely established institution with Peter as the head and the apostles together with Peter as the supreme ministerial college with the sole responsibility of the mission of the Church. These powers were handed over to their successors as Pope and bishops. Thus the

⁵⁵Cf. J. Puthenveettil, *Priesthood*, Vol. 1, 25

⁵⁶Cf. 23rd Session of the Council, Chapter one. Cf. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct23.html>, access 06-06-2012.

⁵⁷Cf. K.B. Osborne, *Priesthood, a History* 255-256.

⁵⁸D. Alphonse, "Presbyter as Coordinator of Ministries" in T. D'Sa, ed., *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2005, 332.

bishops were to have the fullness of the priestly power of Jesus. They were to share some powers with presbyters and a few others with deacons. Thus the Pope, bishops, presbyters and deacons formed the sector of the ministers.⁵⁹ They only possessed the wisdom and power to preach. Lay people were totally disqualified from evangelization. They were only submissive recipients of the Word and grace.⁶⁰ Due to this odd situation the lay people's rich resources and charisms for the apostolate in the Church were not fully acknowledged and utilized.

12. Conclusion

The status, dignity and the apostolate of presbyters in the apostolic Church based on *diakonia* and preaching the Word of God had to face stiff challenges and trials during the subsequent centuries. The Hebrew and Hellenistic influences in the initial stage were accompanied by the imperial and feudalistic fascination. All these had so deep an impact in the life and ministry of the clerical leadership that even the reforms of the strong-willed Pope Gregory VII could not have a lasting effect in the Church. A predominant cultic paradigm and a priestly hegemony paved the way for a long lasting clergy-laity dichotomy. This, in fact, prompted the Reformers to strike at the root of the doctrine on Catholic Priesthood. The Council of Trent, a follow up of the Counter-Reformation, only confirmed and sealed the existing theories of the Scholastic teachings on priesthood.

A close observation of the long discussions, documentations and the renewal attempts that followed the Vatican II, were centred on the revitalization of the apostolate of the laity and the pristine ministry of the priests. The Council Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, a document finalized after much serious discussions and re-working on varied drafts, offers a genuine image of pastoral ministry as envisaged by the one and the Supreme High Priest for the true building up of his Mystical Body and the Kingdom of God on Earth.

⁵⁹The order of diaconate slowly moved out of scene and presbyters remained the only minister of a local community.

⁶⁰Cf. D. Alphonse, "Presbyter as Coordinator," 333.