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Ministries in the Church in India,

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Ministries in the Church in India is a collection of study papers and recommendations based on the findings of a team of eminent Research Scholars who for a whole year dedicated themselves, individually and collectively, to the task of exploring the varieties of ministries that could transform the world in general, and India in particular. It is, as the Editor says, "an offering made to the whole Church in India—in humble and loving homage"—in the confident hope that it will stimulate further study, and enrich pastoral effectiveness in the church.

This team was a very representative group. It was composed of eight Bishops, Priests, Nuns and Christians drawn from all over India and abroad. There were scholars in Theology, Holy Scripture, Church History, Canon Law, Ecumenism, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology and Indology. The service for, and in Christ, cannot be restricted by "narrow domestic walls." Hence it is gratifying to note that Christian scholars shedding their "isms", met in prayerful fellowship to study and explore various types of ministries in an ever-changing world which Christ the Great Minister of mankind continues to transform through His human agents. For a whole year this team studied in depth the avenues in which the church could serve the Indian community in its socio-economic context. It based its studies on reality, taking into account the pastoral situation and needs in the various parts of the country. It was a work of love, of dedication, of humble service to the

local church. All the modern tools and disciplines of scientific research were pressed into service. There was consultation at all levels. A full year of study, research and hard work; prayer and reflection was crowned by a seminar organised and conducted by Rev. Fr. Amalorpavadass, who all through remained the animator, inspirer and pilot of the movement. Though the group is very modest in the assessment of its achievement—and its attitude is one of underestimation—the result is a masterpiece of erudition and scholarship, opening up vistas and horizons for further study and research.

The focus is mainly on two issues: (1) On the basis of a new evaluation and appraisal of existing ministries, how can the present, time-honoured ministries be revamped in the service of Christ? (2) In a world of rapid changes, what other new forms of ministry can give effective witness to the service of Christ among men? :

The book has two sections. The first section is devoted to the research seminar. It contains the 31 research papers on ministries presented for the seminar. These are grouped under three headings and form a coherent whole.

- (a) The human sciences and Indology providing the framework for the re-thinking of church ministries.
- (b) The papers on Scripture, Church History and Ecumenism dealing with "ministry in the history of the Church".
- (c) The papers on Liturgy and Theology providing the basis for the study of "the church and ministers".

Of special interest are parts IV and V. Part IV contains the inter-disciplinary workshop reports on Lay ministries, *Permanent Diaconate, Women in ministries. New forms of ministry and Team ministry.*

Neither the papers nor the workshop reports claim to give a consistently worked out programme or ready-made solutions, but only to open up avenues of thought, reflection and discussion.

While every baptised and confirmed Christian has his part to share in the ministry of Christ in the Church, "entering the ministry" has so far signified only the ordained priesthood—a microscopic minority. The ministries in the church are mostly clericalised. The papers would like this imbalance to be corrected. They focus our attention on the *lay-ministries*—the part that "God's frozen people" must play in the extension of the kingdom.

Another point that needs study is the role of *Women in the ministries* of the church. While women are playing ever more important roles in public life, they are relegated to the background in the ministries of the church. In Christ there is neither man nor woman. There are ministries in the church which can be better done by women. The official participation of women—the *gens devota*—will enrich the pastoral effectiveness of the church.

There is need to study the place of the *permanent Diaconate*, not merely as a stepping stone to the priesthood, but as a service in its own right, in accordance with ancient tradition. There are groups that have studied and presented papers on (a) New forms of ministry in different settings. In a fast changing world, the church giving witness to the service dimension of Christ must give adequate and effective response to the emerging needs of time and place. There is not only a need for a new evaluation and appraisal of existing ministries, but still more exploring new avenues of service, (b) Training towards new ministries.

Part V: The conclusions of the Seminar, contain the quintessence of the study and reflections, the theological background of the study—the ministry of Christ, of the church and of the Christians. It also indicates certain guide-lines for ministry in the cultural background and socio-economic context in India. It specifies out certain forms of ministry—for the laity, for bishops, priests, deacons. Finally it points out certain new areas of spiritual apostolate that need further study—types of ministry in urban and rural areas, teamwork, permanent diaconate in its own right, specialised training etc.

Section II of the book is about the Pastoral consultation based on the conclusions of the Seminar and the survey conducted. The findings of the consultation while they serve as a basis for study at national and regional levels form part of India's contribution to the F.A.B.C.—the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference—which has proposed to conduct an Asian symposium on ministries in the Church in February, 1977.

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