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Viri probati and Presiding Over the Eucharist According to Edward Schillebeeckx

Abstract: Pope Francis in the interview in *Die Zeit* has claimed that probably in the near future it will be possible that the *viri probati* will preside over the Eucharist. In this way the pope opens the theological discussion about the concept of the priestly ministry in the Church. The question of presiding the Eucharist by *viri probati* is not only the question about celibacy but also about the relation between the minister and the community. What is first: the community which has the apostolic succession and appoints a ministers when is needed or a minister who receives in the apostolic succession *sacra potestas* over the community? This question, only formulated in a different way, is the question about the concept of the Church: should it be ecclesial-pneumatological or christological? The article presents the answer for this issue of Edward Schillebeeckx, who offers very courageous theory of the priestly ministry in the Church. Although his solution was recognized by Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as »heretical« one, Schillebeeckx's theory, like any »heresy«, indicates some problems in the Church, marks the limits of investigation and invites us to look for the right solution.

Key words: priestly ministry, Schillebeeckx, *viri probati*, Eucharist

Povzetek: Viri probati **in vodenje evharistične daritve po Edwardu Schillebeeckxu**

Papež Frančišek je v intervjuju za *Die Zeit* izjavil, da bo verjetno v bližnji prihodnosti mogoče, da bodo evharistično daritev vodili *viri probati* (**»**preverjeni, primerni možje**«**). Na tak način papež odpira teološko razpravo o konceptu duhovniške službe v Cerkvi. Vprašanje o *viri probati* ni zgolj vprašanje o celibatu, temveč tudi o odnosu med duhovnikom in občestvom. Kaj je na prvem mestu: občestvo, ki ima apostolsko nasledstvo in imenuje duhovnika, ko ga potrebuje, ali duhovnik, ki po apostolskem nasledstvu prejme *sacra potestas* (»sveto oblast«) nad občestvom? To vprašanje, le da oblikovano na drugačen način, je vprašanje o konceptu Cerkve: naj bo ta eklezialno-pnevmatološka ali kristološka? O tej zadevi članek predstavlja odgovor Edwarda Schillebeeckxa, ki ponuja zelo pogumno teorijo o duhovniški službi v Cerkvi. Čeprav je njegovo rešitev Kongregacija za nauk vere prepoznala za »heretično«, njegova teorija, kakor vsaka »herezija«, kaže na določene težave v Cerkvi, postavlja okvir raziskovanju in nas vabi k iskanju prave rešitve.

Ključne besede: duhovniška služba, Schillebeeckx, *viri probati*, evharistija

The interview with Pope Francis in *Die Zeit* from 9th of March 2017 has become famous because of one of the Pope's statements:

> »We must think about it, if *viri probati* are the right possibility for us. We must also determine, what kind of task they could take up, for example, in the remote communities.« (13)

Pope Francis emphasizes that this reflection refers especially to communities, where is a shortage of priestly vocations. Moreover, he invites theologians to investigate, to be courageous:

> »This is the task of the theologians: you have to investigate to get to the bottom of things, always. /… / What does it mean in our times? What does it mean today? The truth is not to fear. This tells us historic truth, scientific truth: Have no fear! This makes us free.« (15)

Viri probati (»tried men«) is a phrase which appears in the first-century First Epistle of Clement. It used to have different meanings, but nowadays is used in a discussion about ordination and means married men, who could be ordained as priests and preside the Eucharist. Therefore, the declaration of Pope Francis seems to be an invitation to discuss the subject of the ministry in the Church one more time. This article will be a presentation and discussion of a sharp criticism of today's official theology of the ministry in the Catholic Church, presented by Edward Schillebeeckx in his book *Kerkelijk Ambt* (1980).[1]

In the first two paragraphs (the New Testament and the ancient Church period) we will show the theology of the ministry in the first millennium of Christianity, which Schillebbeckx calls »pneumatological-ecclesiological« conception of the ministry. Further on, we will present the radical change in the theology of the ministry, which took place in the Middle Ages. This new kind of conception is called »christological« by Schillebeeckx. Further on, we will describe the attempts to find the convergence between these two conceptions during Vatican II and by Schillebeeckx himself. Because some aspects of the theory of the Dutch theologian were criticized by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we will describe this critique in the next paragraph. Finally, we will try to find some conclusions from the presented discussion.

1. Pneumatological conception of the ministry in the New Testament's Christian communities

The basic concept of the ministry in the New Testament is that the ministry comes from below i.e. the leader is chosen by the community, which recognizes his charisma, but this choice is experienced as a »gift of the Spirit« and therefore the ministry comes »from above«. In other words, it is the community which has the

[1] In quotations we will use English translation: Schillebeeckx 1981.

»apostolic succession« (understood as faith inherited from the Apostles) and recognizes its members' charismas and appoints them to the ministry. Priesthood was seen more as a service to the community then, as it was seen in the Middle Ages (and is seen until now), as »a personal state of life«, a *status* in the hierarchical structure of the Church.

Schillebeeckx claims that Jesus did not leave any strictly defined Church order during His earthly life. Christ appointed the Twelve, but according to Schillebeeckx, more as symbol of the approaching eschatological community of God. Moreover, other »apostles« existed as early as in the first period of building up the Church. The first category were »prophets« – enthusiasts of the earliest Christian period. They probably played an important role in the development of the communities. The second category were »deacons«. Schillebeeckx thinks here about the group of Seven appointed by the apostles from the Greek-speaking community of Jerusalem (Acts 6,2). These »deacons« did everything that apostles did. The best example is Philip (Acts 21,8). (1981, 5–7)

The Twelve shared their experience of crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ with the first communities and that was the beginning of local Churches. But at the time of the apostles, the Twelve were not the only founders of new communities. There were already people, who received their faith from older Christians and did not have any personal contact with Jesus Christ, for example Paul. Schillebeeckx also points out that there was a difference between the founders of the communities and the local leaders. The first founders were usually proclaimers of the gospel and they were constantly on the move. When a founder moved on with his apostolic mission, he left the natural leaders of the community to take his position. Paul writes:

> »We beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you, lead you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.« (1 Thess 5,12)

According to Schillebeeckx, we can see the traces of those leaders in the passages where Paul is talking about charismas and their importance, e.g. 1 Cor 12,28: the first are apostles, then prophets, the finally teachers. The Dutch theologian claims that »prophets and teachers« are technical terms for the first local leaders of the Christian communities. Moreover, the host with his wife played the leading role in the house communities, which we can see in the letter to Philemon, mentioning Philemon and his wife Apphia. (1981, 7–10)[2]

In the New Testament period, there are no precise names for the community leaders. *Episkopoi* are superiors and »deacons« are assistants, but we do not know what was their exact role as ministers. We read only that they build on the foundation laid by Paul. The only exceptions we know, are Timothy and Titus. Both had

[2] In other fragments of the New Testament, the leaders are not called with any official name. Moreover, we can observe differences between communities. Generally ministers are described as »those who labour for you« or »those who lead you« (Rom 16,6.12; 1 Thess 5,12).

a special authority – they were like Paul (Phil 1,1; 2,19-24). Paul says that Timothy is his »successor« in Philippi. In this passage, Paul reveals some tendency to the later conception of »apostolic succession«, more legal, understood as an unbroken chain of succession in the ministry. Schillebeeckx underlines that in Paul's attitude there was no »legalism« – the foundation for the succession was »the community of faith«. (1981, 10–11)

Between AD 80 and 100 the first founders of the communities, apostles and prophets, disappeared and »evangelists, pastors and teachers« succeeded them as the new leaders. This transition can be found in the letter to Ephesus (Eph 4,11; 2,20; 3,5). »Pastors and teachers« were probably the local leaders and »evangelists« were missionaries. Therefore, leaders worked in the name of Jesus Christ, and at the same time they were obliged to safeguard the apostolic heritage. In the transitional period the ministry was part of all services necessary for the community (Eph 4,11). The whole community had to be faithful to its apostolicity (Eph 4,12). The theology of leadership in Ephesians is to preserve the apostolic heritage. Therefore, observes Schillebeeckx, the method of appointing ministers was not so important. (1981, 12–14)

The Pastoral Epistles, 1 Peter and James shows the beginnings of the presbyteral order of the Church and institutionalization of the ministry. Christian communities described in Pastoral Letters recognized charisma from Lord in some of their members and appointed them to the ministry. Those members were appointed by presbyters, by laying on of hands and a word from a prophet (later *epiclesis*). But it was the community that was responsible for preserving its apostolic heritage and it was conscious of the importance of the task – that is why the conditions for admission to the ministry were so strict (1 Tim 3,1). The theology of the ministry does not change here – the »pledge entrusted« (1 Tim 4,13) is important rather than the unbroken succession.

> »The teaching which you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.« (2 Tim 2,2)

Therefore, the ministry is in service of the continuity of the apostolic teaching. According to Schillebeeckx, in the theology of Pastoral Letters, the rite of the laying on of hands was not primarily a transition of the ministerial authority, but the prayer for the charisma of the Holy Spirit, which enabled the minister to conserve the apostolic heritage (1 Tim 4,13).[3] In 1 Peter the charismatic type of Church slowly disappeared and was replaced by the presbyteral order. The presbyters replaced »prophets and teachers«. Schillebeeckx explains this change with the danger of persecution (under the emperor Domitian). According to the Dutch theologian, the author of the letter saw that the unique rescue for the endange-

[3] Schillebeeckx suggests that *ordinatio* (later consecration) is a Christian liturgical adaptation of the Jewish rite of *ordinatio* of a rabbi. The ceremony was very similar, a teacher laid on of hands on a rabbinic candidate in the presence of two rabbis as witnesses. The meaning of this rite was to show that the wisdom of the rabbinic teacher pass over to the disciple. In this way the continuity of the Mosaic law was ensured. (Ehrhardt 1954)

red Christian community is to introduce a strict presbyteral Church order (1 Pet 4,14-16). (1981, 16–17; 19–20)

Schillebeeckx notes that in the New Testament there were communities, which had the pneumatological type of the Church order and had never changed it. There were so called Matthean communities (described in the Gospel of Matthew, Apocalypse of Peter and *Didache* of the Apostles) and Johannine communities. But the fate of both was similar: they joined the apostolic Great Church or became part of gnostic sects. We find no traces of any of them in the second century.

Summarizing, Schillebeeckx in his biblical consideration claims that the ministry is in service of the apostolic tradition. Therefore, it is substantial for the Church. It is of lesser importance whether it was originally charismatic and then institutionalized, or how it depends on the changing circumstances of the Christian communities. The ministry has to maintain the »pledge intrusted«, not so much in the sense of unbroken chain of apostolic succession, but as a continuity of apostolic faith. The community has the right to have a minister, who will protect the purity of faith. But this ministry is not a »hierarchical« structure, understood as a Roman *ordo* or later feudal structures, it is more the charisma of the Holy Spirit. (30–31) Moreover, Schillebeeckx underlines that the community has the right not only to the minister but also to the Eucharist, which is the deepest expression of that community. Therefore, the real leader of the local Church has at the same time the right to preside the celebration. So if there is a danger that a community may remain without a minister (priest), and if this problem becomes common, then

> »the criteria for admission which are not intrinsically necessary to the nature of the ministry and are also in fact a cause of the shortage of priests, must give way to the original, New Testament right of the community to leaders« (37).

2. The condemnation of the »absolute consecration« – theology of the ministry in the first centuries

Schillebeeckx observes the same dependence between ministry and community in the antique Church. The Dutch theologian invokes the canon 6 of the Council of Chalcedon against the »absolute consecration« i.e. »consecration« of a candidate without the relationship with a particular community. The Council not only forbade this practice but declared such an »ordination« invalid. Nobody could be ordained priest or deacon unless a local community was clearly assigned to him or in a monastery. Schillebeeckx is convinced that this text indicates that only someone who has been appointed by a particular community (the people and its leaders) to be its pastor can authentically receive ordination. (38)

Another argument that points the local community out as the source of the ministry and »apostolic succession« is that, according to Schillebeeckx, in the an-

cient Church there was a distinction between *ordinatio* (*cheirotonia*) and laying on of hands (*cheirothesia*). In the medieval conception, ordination was realized with laying on of hands by bishops from other dioceses and transmission of the apostolic succession in that way.[4] In the ancient Church, however, although sending the leader, appointed by the community, to his office was in fact made by laying on of hands, the essence of the old concept of *ordinatio* was the mandate of sending someone by the particular Christian community. Laying on of hands by the bishop with *epiclesis* was a prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the minister to help him to fulfil his vocation. Schillebeeckx is aware that there was also the tradition that the local Church did not provide itself autonomously with a minister. The laying on of hands of bishops of neighbouring Churches was necessary. According to Schillebeeckx, however, the presence of the ministers from other Churches was not a proof of the »apostolic succession«, but a sign that the community maintains identity of faith with that of the others. (39; 42)

From this vision, Schillebeeckx draws the conclusions in the subject of the relationship between »priesthood« and the Eucharist. He claims that an essential link between the community and his leader also expresses itself in celebrating the Eucharist. In the ancient Church the real leader of the local community was the bishop. In fact, the bishop himself presided over the Eucharist and no Eucharist could be celebrated against his will. Along with the growth of the communities presbyteral helpers of the bishop received the permission to preside over the Eucharist in his absence and they were not consecrated for this. Schillebeeckx cites 1 Clement which claims that normally *episkopos* presides over the Eucharist but he adds »or other eminent members, with the approval of the whole Church«, since »everything must be done in order« (1 Clem 44,4-6). But the most important element was the permission given by the leader of the Church. (1981, 49–51)

In the same time in the Roman empire, *ordinatio* meant getting into a particular *ordo* – firstly, it was the way of naming imperial functionaries, especially the king and the emperor himself. But it also had reference to the social classes. The senators formed the »higher order«, into which one should be »instituted« (*inordinari*). These aspects of *ordinatio* in the Church can be found in Tertullian – *ordo* is a list of successive bishops. Cyprian systematized this theory and summarized in two key concepts of the New Testament: *ordinatio* means 1) the canonical appointment of a Christian to the college of office-bearers, 2) as grace from God. The aspect of Roman *ordinatio* was connected with the Christian ministry especially after the time of Constantine, when the »order of office-bearers« became attractive because the clergy were seen as a higher class rather than ordinary believers. (39) This leads later to emergence of an *ordo clericalis* and an *ordo laicalis*. The process of new understanding of ministry was begun.

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[4] The »new« theology of the ministry led even to the different sign in the rite of ordination that in the Decree for the Armenians we can read: »The priesthood is conferred by handing over the chalice with wine and the paten with the bread.« (Denzinger 2012, no. 1326) The laying on of hands was restored in 1947 by Pius XII in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum ordinis* (Denzinger 2012, no. 3858; Kowalczyk 2007, 459–460).

3. The privatization of the ministry – the second Christian millennium

A fundamental change in understanding the ministry, according to Schillebeeckx, happened in the Middle Ages and was sanctioned by two Ecumenical Councils: The Third (1179) and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The Third Lateran Council radically reinterpreted the understanding of *titulus ecclesiae*. Someone could formerly be ordained only if he was presented by a particular community (an essential element of *ordination*). Otherwise, it was an »absolute ordination« and it was invalid. Here, this old ecclesial practice is understood from a completely different perspective: the old *titulus ecclesiae* is reduced to the feudal aspect of *beneficium*, to the question of priest's financial support. One has or feels a priestly vocation, announces it to the parish priest, then is educated as a priest and ordained. The model is clear: the ordained man simply waits for the place to which his bishop will send him as a priest. The right of the community, which was the principle of *ordinatio*, disappears then. This new usage, according to Schillebeeckx, cannot be automatically identified with the »absolute ordination«, but, for the Dutch theologian, surely there were many invalid absolute ordinations, especially of monks whose principle task was to say private masses. On the other hand, the Fourth Lateran Council declared that the Eucharist can be celebrated only »by a priest who has been validly and legitimately ordained« (Denzinger 2012, no. 802). In this way, the Council strengthened the change in the perception of the ministry – the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist was limited to the »celebrating priest« and not to the celebration of whole community. (Schillebeeckx 1981, 53)

Moreover, Schillebeeckx proves that fundamental changes in the Middle Ages happened for non-theological reasons and because of that we have to give priority to the earlier ecclesial view of the ministry. What were these non-theological reasons? The popes had depended from emperors according to the Byzantine Caesaropapism model since the sixth century. The Carolingian renaissance – in response to such a situation – consolidated the feudal system of foundations and donations, which helped to make the nomination of the priests independent of the influence of secular seigneurs. Thanks to that, the spiritual autonomy of the bishops was restored. (55)

The beginning of the twelfth century also marked the time of the renaissance of the Roman law. The influence of the Roman law, realized in the feudal context, detached the power of leadership from the concept of »territoriality« and in the religious sphere, the ministry from the local Church i.e. the feudal seigneur received a noble title and separately some land with peasantry, the priest received his ordination and separately the parish with a Church and land for his financial support. At the end of the thirteenth century, we can talk about authority as a value-in-itself apart from the community. (55–56)

The medieval theological shift of the conception of the ministry was possible thanks to the non-theological factors – feudal and legal. In the first ages the boundary between the »spirit of Christ« and the »spirit of the world« laid in being baptized or not. In the Middle Ages, when »everyone« was baptized, this

boundary moved to being ordained or not. Therefore, the priesthood was understood more as »a personal state of life« rather than as a service to the community – it was personalized and privatized. The earlier celebration of the whole community becomes the celebration of the priest done in the name of all of the believing people (Innocent III 1855, 845). The new notion of law (*ius*), and thus of jurisdiction, led to the division of the power of ordination and the power of jurisdiction. This division, from the theological point of view, was an opening of the door to absolute ordinations: an ordained man can be in no way assigned to the Christian community (have no *potestas iurisdictionis*) and still has the »power« which comes from his ordination (*potestas ordinationis*) (Cox 1959). The man has the »power of Eucharist« quite apart from a particular Church. This was the beginning of theology of the ministry with another orientation. In the ancient Church the minister was »appointed« to be a leader of the community, to build up the community in »Christian faith« and for this reason he celebrated the Eucharist. In the new model a priest is ordained to celebrate Eucharist. He receives the »power of consecration«. (Schillebeeckx 1981, 56–58)

According to Schillebeeckx, the Council of Trent continued the medieval deviation and strengthened it, although not deliberately. The Dutch theologian claims that by taking over the medieval conception of the minister the Trent sanctioned it without intending to do so. This is how Schillebeeckx describes the new point of view:

> »The priest is a mediator between Christ and the community in the presence of the Christian community. This priestly mediation, which makes the person who has been consecrated an *alter Christus*, rests on a character that the priest, without any merit on his part, nevertheless has in his personal possession by virtue of the holy power of the one who consecrates him and lays hands on him. In that case the priest has a power which he can also exercise on his own, even if the whole of the community is absent (unless the Church forbids it to him).« (64–65)

Schillebeeckx claims that this formulation cannot be a dogma of the Church, but only current official teaching of the Western, Latin Church. Otherwise, the practice and the views of the ancient Church could be viewed as heretical in the eyes of Trent and *vice versa* the sixth canon of Chalcedon could serve as a basis of a condemnation of some canons of Trent or at least their later reception. Taking this into consideration, the Dutch theologian insists that an important issue needs to be discussed: whether it was the first or the second Christian millennium which one can call Christian and apostolic. (65)

4. Convergence and divergence between the first and the second Christian millennia

As far as continuity is concerned, Schillebeeckx indicates two lines: firstly, the Church is against any Eucharist which denies the universal communion of the

Church; secondly, there is awareness that no Christian community can autonomously provide itself with ministers. On the other hand, there is a discrepancy because the first millennium understood the ministry in ecclesial and pneumatological way and the second millennium in a christological way. (66–67)

Schillebeeckx admits that:

> »At many points Vatican II deliberately referred back to the theological intuitions of the ancient Church, but its view of the Church's ministry, above all in the terminology it used, is unmistakably a compromise between these two great blocks of tradition in the Church. The Churchly or ecclesial dimension of the ministry is again stressed, and instead of *potestas* the council prefers to use the terms *ministerial* and *munera*: Church service. However, *potestas sacra* also occurs several times, though the classic difference between *potestas ordinis* and *potestas iurisdictionis* cannot be found anywhere in *Lumen Gentium*. Rather, an essential foundation of the jurisdiction is already given with ›consecration‹ itself. Thus at least in principle, the old view of the *titulus ecclesiae* of the ministry is restored to favour, and at least a beginning is made towards breaking down the legalism which surrounds the ministry.« (67)

On the other hand, Vatican II still places the presence of Christ in the minister as a person, and not in the act of exercising the ministry: »through the *ordo* the priests are consecrated to God in a new way« (PO, no. 12). Schillebeeckx observes this trend also in a later declaration of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith on women in the ministry from 1976, where ecclesial and pneumatological dimension is abandoned and the priesthood has direct christological foundation.

Schillebeeckx is not satisfied with the solution of Vatican II. He thinks that from the theological point of view the »preference must be given to the first Christian millennium as a model for a future shaping of the Church ministry, albeit in a very different, modern historical context« (67). It would have been very advantageous also from the ecumenical point of view (Persson 1965; Society 1975). How to realize this postulate?

First of all, we have to remember that according to the New Testament it was Christ and the Church who were priestly. The New Testament did not know the notion of the minister taking on priestly characteristics. Even Augustine, who accepts the priestly character of the minister, is against theory of the minister being a mediator between Christ and humanity. Therefore, we have to apply the adjective »priestly« to the minister in his service to Christ and his Church – the servant of both. In this context Schillebeeckx reminds that in the pre-Nicene period the distinction between clergy and laity was functional, not in an official civic sense, but in an ecclesial sense – it was a specific and indeed sacramental function and not a state. The actual

> »tension between an ontological-sacerdotalist view of the ministry on the one hand and a purely functionalist view on the other must therefore be

> resolved by a theological view of the Church's ministry as a charismatic office, the service of leading the community, and therefore as an ecclesial function within the community accepted by the community« (Schillebeeckx 1981, 70).

Here, the aspect of the sacramentality of the ministry emerges – its initiation normally occurs in couple with a liturgical celebration. At this stage of the ecumenical discussion the essential elements of *ordination* are the following: acceptance by the community and appointment to or for a community. The most usual rite of the ordination is the laying on of hands by other ministers together with the prayer of the *epiclesis*. From this perspective, the ecumenical theology no longer puts together the issue of mutual acceptance at the Eucharist and the recognition of each other's ministry. (71)

But in such a situation we should ask about the sacramental character of the ordination (Legrand 1972). The candidate receives an »indelible spiritual mark« (character) in this sacrament and it becomes the part of his nature. This theory remains a stumbling block in ecumenical discussions about ministry for many Christians. But Schillebeeckx affirms that it should not be so, because the »priestly character« appears for the first time in the official Church document in 1231 in a letter from Gregory IX to the Archbishop of Paris (Denzinger 2012, no. 852) and from the dogmatic point of view

> »character seems to be a particular medieval category which expressed the ancient Church's view of the permanent relationship between the minister and the gift of the pneumatological charisma of the ministry in the Church« (Schillebeeckx 1981, 72).

In the conclusion of this reflection Schillebeeckx underlines that the ancient Church could not imagine Christian community without the Eucharist. In the pre-Nicene Church, there was a tradition based on the Jewish model that a community with at least twelve fathers of families assembled, had the right to have a leader, who could preside the Eucharist (Gregory of Nyssa 1863, 909). That is why a shortage of priests in those days was unimaginable. Today›s shortage of priests is, according to Schillebeeckx, a result of the situation in which a candidate for the ministry has to fulfil many *a priori* conditions, which, moreover, have nothing to do with theological reasons. The Dutch theologian insists that even now there are enough Christian men and women who are ready to be appointed as leaders and ministers e.g. catechists in Africa or pastoral workers in Europe. According to the rules of the pre-Nicene Church they fulfil every condition. (1981, 72–73)

Finally, Schillebeeckx demonstrates the relationship between the ministry in a local Church and the ministry in the »universal Church«. In the ancient Church there did not exist any supra-regional entity (though patriarchates and metropolitan Churches quickly appeared) above the local Churches. As time went by, the position of Rome was increasing and in result Rome was called »primacy of the bond of love«. Vatican II goes back to this notion of the Church and speaks about

local Churches »in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative« (LG, 23). Schillebeeckx does not agree with Rahner (1964), who sees the universal Church in the higher, supra-diocesan personnel of the Church (the College of Bishops). This point of view does not reflect the spirit of the Church or of Vatican II. People belong to the universal Church because they belong to the local Church. But this indicates, however, that no local Church can monopolize the faith. Christian solidarity is the basis of every healthy local community. (Schillebeeckx 1981, 73)

On the other hand, this concept implies mutual criticism within the local communities and the basic criteria are found in the gospel. How does it work, according to Schillebeeckx?

> »It is a concern of every Church community, but that should not include *a priori* self-censorship, in the sense that people exclude from the start everything that would not be welcome to higher authorities, though they themselves see it as legitimate Christian practice and as possible and urgently necessary within the context of their own Church life. Within an integrated leadership ultimate responsibility is left to the person who in fact bears it; otherwise an obstructive vicious circle develops within the collegial leadership in the Church. It was to overcome such introversion that the spokesmen of neighbouring communities were required to be present at the liturgical institution of ministers in a particular local community.« (73–74)

It is worth remarking that almost every Christian confession accepts a supra-parochial ministry, it means a synod, which gathers the personal leaders. Schillebeeckx underlines that many of them can even accept the papacy. It is important that local ministers are both critical spokesmen of their Churches and a part of the management of the »universal Church«. One of them, in the bond of love, fulfils the function of Peter. (74)

Therefore, according to Schillebeeckx, the critics of the contemporary vision of the ministry and other believers cannot put all the blame on Rome. Leadership can be meaningful only if it shapes the consciousness of believers and ministers. Rome cannot change the Church order if it is not going to have approval of Christian communities. It could be a reason for a big schism, which then would have to be healed for years (like the division in the Episcopal Church after the introduction of ordination of women). So, for Schillebeeckx, the experience of critical attitude of the local communities, as a place of creating a new consciousness is indispensable. This would be an impulse for the official Church and the necessary exception at the same time, enabling these communities to have the Eucharist. This exceptional position would become the ferment, which can give results when the Church is ready to change its order into a more adequate one for its actual needs. (99)

5. The criticism of the Congregation

The fundamental thesis of Schillebeeckx's theory was condemned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984. In its letter, after further dialogue with the Dutch theologian, the Congregation precisely describes the condemned thesis, it means the affirmation of Schillebeeckx that

> »the local particular community has in itself the necessary resources to remedy the lack of ordinary ministers and that it can ›make use (for that) of the services of those among its members who are the persons most suited for this service‹, this last being /… / is simply ›an accentuation and specification‹ of baptism« (CDF 1984).

On this basis the Dutch theologian claims that

> »these ›extraordinary ministers‹ receive /… / a real ›competence‹, which enables to do ›in sum‹, according to circumstances, all that is necessary to the community life of an *ecclesia Dei*, which competence is not mere ›permission‹, but is ›sacramental power‹« (CDF 1984),

so that »they receive ›the *sacramentum ordinis*‹, which is thus transmitted to them ›in an extraordinary manner‹, without insertion into the apostolic succession in the technical sense of this expression« and give the possibility to celebrate an Eucharist without any difference to that celebrated by the ordinary minister.

Responding to this theory the Congregation says that this thesis is unacceptable for the Magisterium of the Church. CDF refers to the letter *Sacerdotium Ministeriale*, pronounced by the same Congregation on the 6th of August 1983. It points out that the apostolicity of the Church is not realized solely in

> »the doctrinal identity of her teaching with that of the apostles, but through continuation of the work of the apostles by means of the structure of succession in virtue of which the apostolic mission is to endure until the end of time« (CDF 1983, no. 3.2–3).

Moreover, the Congregation underlines that »even though all the baptized enjoy the same dignity before God, in the Christian community, which was deliberately structured hierarchically by its divine Founder, there have existed from its earliest days specific apostolic powers deriving from the sacrament of holy orders« (no. 3.3). It means that »no community has /… / the power to confer apostolic ministry, which is essentially bestowed by the Lord« (no. 3.2). Among these powers given by the Christ to the apostles and their successors is the power of presiding the Eucharist. Only bishops, and priests who participate in their mission, can renew in the Eucharist what Christ did at the Last Supper. (no. 3.4) This means that »the Church holds that the Eucharistic mystery cannot be celebrated in any community except by and ordained priest, as expressly taught by the Fourth Lateran Council« (no. 3.4). The Congregation concludes that the exception to these

doctrines »undermines the entire apostolic structure of the Church and distorts the sacramental economy of salvation« (no. 3.4).

6. »Heresy« of Schillebeeckx – danger or inspiration

One may ask why one presents a theory condemned by CDF? How could this theory be helpful in the discussion about *viri probati* recently renewed by Pope Francis? Somebody could say there is something wrong and dangerous about popularizing any kind of heresy, and it has never been practised in the tradition of the Church – heretics were sentenced to death and their works buried (Paluch 2012).

In my opinion it is better to make a heresy known, but together with an adequate explanation of the error made. This kind of publication can work as a »vaccine« for the believers. This way of dealing with controversial theories was also chosen by the CDF, which publishes letters to the »heretic« authors with a description of the wrong theory and explanation of what is unacceptable in it, for example: CDF 1984; CDF 2004; CDF 2006. Moreover, in every contemporary theological manual we find descriptions of heresies and a Church response to the problem, for example Arianism and the Nicene Council (Schönborn 2002). Knowledge of a false theory serves as a background to make the doctrine of the Church clearer, which was usually an answer to the problem. Furthermore, every serious heresy exposes the actual problems of the Church, provokes polemics and search for the right solutions. In this way, heresies have always been inspirational for theological development. (Majewski 2005, 146) Finally, heresy marked the limits of theological investigation.

What are this limits which shows us Schillebeeckx's concept of the ministry? The Dutch theologian divides the theology of the ministry in two lines: pneumatological-ecclesiological (first Christian millennium) and christological (second Christian millennium). In christological line, the priest is a mediator between Christ and the community. The Christian community is only present at the celebration. This priestly mediation, which a consecrated person realizes as an *alter Christus*, is connected with a character that the priest, without any merit on his part, nevertheless has in his personal possession thanks to the holy power he receives from the bishop who consecrates him and lays hands on him. Before that, for Christians the dividing line between the »spirit of Christ« and the »spirit of the world« was in baptism. In the Middle Ages when virtually everyone was baptized, this division moved between the clergy and the laity. As a result priesthood was understood more as »a personal state of life« rather than as a service to the community; it was personalized and privatized.

On the other hand, there is the pneumatological-ecclesial line. According to this approach, the ministry is understood as something that comes from below, but at the same time is experienced as a »gift of the Spirit« and therefore comes »from above«. In other words, it is the community which is in possession of the

»apostolic succession« i.e. the faith inherited from the Apostles. Therefore, it is the community which recognizes charismas of its members and appoints them to the ministry. Also, the community recognizes and appoints its leader, who is not only the pastor of it but also the president of the liturgical expression of the community i.e. Eucharist. In line with this theory, the authorization to preside the Eucharist derives from the community, which is in possession of the »apostolic succession« and not from a bishop who gives a person, formerly prepared, the power to consecrate bread and wine, and who, after the ordination, is almost completely independent of the community in his priesthood. For Schillebeeckx, the Eucharist is an expression of the community, therefore, every community has the right to celebrate this sacrament and in emergency cases, it can appoint somebody (even laymen) for this purpose.

The basic idea of Schillebeeckx's theory was to give preference to the pneumatological line and in this way renew today's conception of the ministry. The lesson we can learn from his considerations is that the Catholic idea of the ministry always has to contain both lines: pneumatological and christological. This is the boundary that the Catholic theologian cannot surpass. That was also the direction taken by the Vatican II.

What is inspiring in Schillebeeckx's theory? Surely, the wideness of the theological vision presented. His suggestion is not mere criticism of today's conception of the ministry, but an effort to construct a new proposal. The courage of this suggestions is worth admiring. We hope the presentation of Schillebeeckx proposal will inspire some theologians to respond to Pope Francis' invitations to find theology for the ministry which introduces *viri probati* in presiding over the Eucharist. The task is even harder, because the Pope excluded the simplest solution, which would be voluntary celibate.[5] But the Holy Spirit is present in his Church and gives inspiration, sometimes even through »heresies«.

Abbreviations

CDF – Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
LG – Second Vatican Council. 1964. *Lumen Gentium*.
PO – Second Vatican Council. 1965. *Presbyterorum ordinis*.

[5] »Here, the voluntary celibate is not a solution.« (Francis 2017, 13) If not this phrase of the pope, from the point of view of the canon law it would have been only a disciplinary step, without need to change the theology of the ministry (Jakubiak 2017).

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