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**Review: Achim Buckenmaier. 2023. *Priester. Beruf und Berufung auf dem Prüfstand*. Regensburg: Pustet. 232 p. ISBN 978-3-7917-3397-5.**

Nowadays, the crisis affects the Church in its various dimensions. Basically, we can talk about a crisis of faith, which in practice affects both basic religious practices, as well as belonging to the Church, understanding its essence and mission, structures and functioning, as well as various aspects of its life and spirituality. One of the dimensions of the contemporary crisis of the Church is the crisis of priestly service, which not only affects and is related to the drastic decline in priestly vocations, but also gives rise to discussions about the theological and practical sense and significance of the priestly service in the Church. Therefore, questions arise regarding the rooting of the sacrament of ordination in the biblical tradition, as well as the ways and possibilities of performing priestly service in contemporary societies, which are culturally and socially significantly different from those in which it was formed and took on appropriate characteristics. Sexual scandals among clergy are currently one of many signs of a serious crisis in the priestly ministry. Just as every crisis in the history of the Church was a challenge that became the basis for renewal and the search for new ways of experiencing and living the faith, today we should also look for ways to renew the Christian life and the mission of the Church. This also applies to the crisis affecting sacramental priesthood.

One of the proposals for theological reflection on the priestly ministry in the face of the contemporary crisis is the book by Achim Buckenmaier, a German professor of dogmatics, head of the department of Theology of the People of God at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome and consultant of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in the years 2008–2021. His book *Priester. Beruf und Berufung auf*

*dem Prüfstand*, which was published by the Pustet Publishing House in Regensburg, is an interesting attempt to explain many controversially discussed problems regarding the theology of priestly ministry in the context of various manifestations of the crisis. The reflections contained in the book matured during the author's lectures, which he gave to students of the *Redemptoris Mater* theological seminary in Bonn, and they are not just another form of information about priestly spirituality. Buckenmeier's book presents the theological and historical foundations of priestly ministry and is an attempt to explain the meaning and significance of the life and ministry of a priest in close connection with the understanding of the Church as the people of God. In the context of various distortions of the priestly ministry, often understood and performed from the perspective of power, a managerial position, a faith manager, or an eccentric freak, the German theologian's book, based on biblical texts, explains the theological foundations and development of the priestly ministry, often omitted in contemporary discussions on this topic and presents a renewed and forward-looking image of the sacramental priesthood.

The publication consists of nine proportionally structured points divided into smaller sections, preceded by a short foreword and concluded with a short summary. What is noteworthy about the structure of the book is the division into smaller sections, typical of the works of theologians from the German language area, which helps to orient oneself in the content-rich text and to grasp the author's train of thought.

The author begins his reflections by presenting the contemporary crisis that affects the understanding and priestly service and points to the insufficient nature of the response consisting in repeating known theological statements. In Buckenmaier's belief, it is not only about an office in the Church, but about presenting it in a broader context of understanding the Church and its crisis, which can be overcome through "de-worlding" (*Entweltlichung*), according to the words of Pope Benedict XVI. Holiness and its negation are the two faces of the Church, therefore criticism of the Church needs self-criticism, and its reform requires changes in its own lifestyle. In relation to priestly ministry, this means a return to the biblical image of the shepherd, reflecting positive and negative experiences.

Writing about priestly office in the people of God, the author emphasizes that the existential realization of service in the Church should be at the center of it. The dimension of service is expressed by the word „sacrament”, which means accepting the task of pointing to someone else, which is also a characteristic feature of the Church. A sacrament means more than an office, and it is related to faith, which is a condition for the power, competences and functions of the church office. The author justifies his beliefs on the basis of the Old Testament figures of the patri-

archs Abraham, a man of faith, and Melchizedek, a representative of the new order of service for noble conduct.

Buckenmeier explains the issue of criticism directed at the sacramental priesthood from the perspective of criticism of the Church, which is necessary due to its human dimension. He draws attention to the fact that the prior element is the election of the people by God, which should become a criterion for criticizing the Church, and its reform should be a search for its original form through conversion. Concluding his reflections on the person of the priest and the Church as a person, the author states that the Church as God's people is God's property, which is a decisive element for understanding the sacrament of Holy Orders. The reversal of this relationship is the essence of the crisis of clericalism, which may affect both lay faithful and clergy, and in which ministry and the Church may become personal property.

Book *Priester. Beruf und Berufung auf dem Prüfstand* explains the basics of priesthood based on the texts of the New Testament, starting from the texts of the Gospel to the apostolic letters of St. Paul. The author emphasizes that the bridge between the New Testament and the priesthood in the Church is the life and preaching of Jesus. The apostolic and post-apostolic dynamics, i.e. also the church office, have their basis in the history of Jesus. The continuity between the life of Jesus and the life of the first church communities consists not only in adopting the message of Jesus, but also in His lifestyle, as especially testified by St. Paul.

The letter to the Hebrews and the phrase „high priest” that appear in it are of particular importance for understanding the priestly ministry. The concept of faith developed in this letter indicates that it is not about subjective belief in unseen things, but about the specific history of salvation, initiated in Israel and continued to our times, the key figure of which is Jesus – the high priest, making his disciples sisters and brothers – a new God's family. The author indicates that the office of the sacrament of ordination in representing Christ was overemphasized in the Middle Ages, which led to the idea of brotherhood in the Church being pushed into the background and the clergy being separated from the lay faithful. This development is the cause of the modern aversion to ecclesiastical office and is contrary to the message of the Letter to the Hebrews, which presents the figure of a new high priest in solidarity with his sisters and brothers.

In the chapter on the sacrament of Holy Orders, Buckenmeier discusses, among others: elements of the rite. The author presented the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination as its important elements, emphasizing that it is about a living transmission of the deposit of faith. Moreover, Buckenmeier pointed out that ordination must be desired, requested and supported by the believer so that the process

of transmitting faith can be carried out successfully. Writing about the effects of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the publication points to a change in lifestyle consisting in serving to fulfill God's plans, which is not possible without the help of other believers.

The publication also explains the meaning of the phrase *in persona Christi*, often quoted in the context of priestly ministry. In the author's opinion, it finds its special implementation in the confessional service, as indicated by the phrase of St. Paul "to act in the place of Christ" (2 Cor 5:20) and means reconciliation. It summarizes the mission of the people of God in general and of the office of ordination in particular. *In persona Christi* in relation to the priestly ministry means, on the one hand, that the priest cannot do anything alone and independently of the Church in the matter of transmitting the faith, and, on the other hand, his responsible action, just like Christ.

The special place of action of the priest *in Persona Christi* is the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source of the life of the Church. The Eucharist defines being a Christian, and the Church is built, renewed and can survive only through the Eucharist. What is decisive for communities and individual believers, including priests, is the belief that in the celebration of the Eucharist they experience, understand and feel an identity closely related to being a Eucharistic community. The celebration and appreciation of the Eucharist is the criterion of what the Church is and should do.

With reference to the instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church* (2020), Buckenmeier presents reflections on the relationship between the priestly service and the parish priest's office. The author mentions the original word *par-oikia* (= away from home, existence as a stranger), from which comes the word „parish” in the sense of a stable territory with the parish priest as pastor and person in charge. Moreover, with reference to the biblical understanding of the Church as *ekklesia* (= assembly), the author discusses various aspects of priestly ministry, which are summarized by the words: conversation, discussion, speaking, listening, arguing, silence, listening to the Word of God, praying, teaching, making decisions. Writing about leading a community, the author points out that there is always a risk of confusing one's own interests with God's interests, hence a close connection between the office and inner holiness and humility is necessary. Only then will the Church live in a form that corresponds to God's will.

In presenting and justifying his reflections on priesthood, the author uses literature that includes Church documents and theologians' studies, both recent and from the past. A particularly privileged place in the source database is occupied by

the publications of Josef Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. A certain drawback of the book is the lack of an ordered biographical list, indexes and the localization of footnotes at the end of the book, which makes it difficult to verify the content with its sources. The book's advantage is the inclusion of special boxes in individual chapters containing summaries of the main ideas.

Book *Priester. Beruf und Berufung auf dem Prüfstand*, as its author noted at the end, shows old and new aspects in the understanding of priestly ministry, reaching for traditional theological approaches and proposing a new interpretation of them. With reference to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, it was presented from the perspective of a path characterizing the people of God, in which the person of the priest occupies a specific place. Due to the fact that the publication explains many contemporary questions and problems regarding the nature of the priestly service, its foundations, as well as its various manifestations and forms, it constitutes a significant contribution to theological reflection on the sacrament of Holy Orders, which is currently facing a serious crisis. It is impossible to understand its sources or seek ways to overcome it without connection with the contemporary crisis of the Church and the ways of resolving it.

