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CHINEMEREM VALENTINE UWANDU-UZOMA

The Fundamental Munus of the Ministerial Priesthood in John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper

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Index of Abbreviations

- AAS – Acta Apostolicae Sedis
CIC – Codex Iuris Canonici
CCEO – Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium
CCSL – Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
DH – Denzinger-Hünemann Enchiridion Symbolorum
FC – Fontes Christiani
GuL – Geist und Leben. Zeitschrift für christliche Spiritualität
HDG – Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte
HKSW – Hans Küng, Sämtliche Werke
IKaZ – Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio
MGH – Monumenta Germaniae Historica
MThS.K – Münchner Theologische Studien. 3. Kanonistische Abteilung
JPW – Josef Pieper Werke
JRGS – Joseph Ratzinger – Gesammelte Schriften
QD – Quaestiones Disputatae
Rev. Sc. ph. th. – Revue des Sciences philosophique et théologique
SC – Sources Chrétiennes
SW – Karl Rahner Sämtliche Werke
ThPh – (Zeitschrift für) Theologie und Philosophie
WKGS – Walter Kasper Gesammelte Schriften
ZAC – Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum (Journal of Ancient Christianity)

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Introduction

Any inquiry into the essence and duty of the bearers of the Sacred Orders needs a starting point, a foundation which sustains and permeates all other explanations. It is an axiom of the Catholic theology that this foundation is ultimately God, as revealed in and by Jesus Christ. However, the quest for truth by man can suscite the need for a clarification. The human person often comprehends the simple reality proceeding from God by making distinctions and judgements. This is the case in the attempts to explain the life and ministry of a priest. It is common in theology to describe his office and function in three dimensions: to teach, to lead, and to sanctify. This is usually termed the threefold office or ministry (*triplex munus*).

During and after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), one of the questions which has gained importance in theological debates is the following: If we are to understand the essence and duty of the ordained priesthood by appealing to the threefold scheme, which of the three should be the starting point? In technical terms: among the three *munera*, is there a fundamental *munus*, on which the other two hinge? Can a certain priority be assigned to one of the three dimensions of the priestly office such that it provides the most essential definition of the priesthood while integrating and conditioning the other two?

As a slight detour, one may draw an analogy from another branch of dogmatic theology in the 1940s and 1950s, namely, the quest for the “fundamental principle” of Mariology, i.e., the question of which truth about Mary is the primary one, the point of anchorage for every other truth about the mother of Christ – her divine motherhood, her exemplary function, her cooperation with Christ as the new Eve, etc.?

The quest for the fundamental office of the priesthood was triggered mainly by the crisis of the priestly identity in the Western world since the second half of the twentieth century. The crisis struck not only the priesthood, but also the Church in general. The cultural upheavals in the Western society jarred the existence of the parish priest and the Church as an instance of influence and authority at the centre of the community. Consequently, it evoked the question: What is actually the

function of the priest? For what is he actually ordained? In other words, it is not just a purely academic problem, it also has an existential meaning. Thus, in a bid to answer or solve the question of the fundamental dimension of the threefold office of the priesthood, different theologians developed their individual perspectives.

The first three chapters of this research are preparatory sections dealing respectively with state of research, explication of technical notions, and a brief sketch of the historical development of the question. The fourth to sixth chapters are systematic presentations of the respective *arguments* of the three authors – John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper. There are no special reasons or criteria for choosing the three authors other than the fact that each is a representative of one *munus*. The seventh chapter is an exposition of selected criticisms from the theological literature on their respective positions. The eighth chapter presents the author's own evaluation of the arguments of the three writers while stating his own position. The ninth chapter reviews a topical context of the question, namely, how the problem of the fundamental *munus* of the ministerial priesthood plays out in the German Synodal Path. Finally, the findings of the research are stated once more in a terse conclusion.

Chapter 1: Status Quaestionis

1.0 Preamble

Amongst a variety of published theological works, there already exists a consensus on the positions of the three authors: John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, and Walter Kasper. John Paul II gives priority to the ministry of sanctification, Joseph Ratzinger argues for the ministry of the word, while Walter Kasper takes the ministry of leadership to be central.

1.1 State of Research

There are three categories of such published works which are significant precursors for my research question, and on whose shoulders my work stands. The common denominator of all of them is that they are not specifically about the fundamental *munus* of the ministerial priesthood, but they address it with different intensities within the context of the issues they deal with.

1.1.1 Single-Author Studies

These are works which focus on one author and his theology of the Catholic priesthood, and within the context, briefly state the author's model of the Catholic priesthood with regard to the threefold office.

Nilson Leal de Sa provides an interpretation of John Paul II's teachings on the Catholic Priesthood. He does not, though, state it expressly under the aspect of the threefold office, rather, the picture emerges clearly from the whole work.¹

Ladislav Kučkovský describes among other things Ratzinger's discontentment and distaste for the neo-scholastic Theology, especially

¹ Cf. LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood, Mystery of Faith. Priestly Ministry in the Magisterium of John Paul II*, Washington, D.C. 2022, 43, 60–63. For his subtle criticism, see chapter seven of this work.

its conception of priesthood based on cult and sacrifice. In Ratzinger's view, this neo-scholastic conception could not stand up to the challenge posed by modern biblical exegesis on the office of the priesthood.² This experience lies at the root of Ratzinger's paradigm shift to the priority of proclamation. In grappling with the criticisms of the liberal exegesis, he realizes that even the replacement of the sacramental with a functionalistic conception of the priesthood neither corresponds with the ancient Christianity nor is it rooted in the Scriptures. It is, rather, as a result of a protestant and philosophical predecision. In the protestant tradition, the functionalistic approach to priesthood proves itself unsustainable.³ Kučkovský also shows the inner and peculiar line of development of Ratzinger's thoughts on the priesthood as regards the issue of discontinuity or continuity between the old and new priesthood. The earlier Ratzinger champions a radical discontinuity, while the later Ratzinger introduces differentiations in which he sees a certain form of continuity. Notwithstanding that the priesthood of the new covenant is something completely new in the general history of religion, it does not mean that it has nothing more to do with cult and sacrifice (sanctification). The deeper basis is actually the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: not that of a total breakup, rather of fulfilment, of inner and organic unity. This is to say, the new priesthood is founded on a Christological unity of the proclamation of the word and of sacrifice.⁴ It is only in this sense that the priority of the word in the writings of the earlier Ratzinger can be correctly understood. It has at the same time a sacramental-witnessing dimension.⁵

A similar analysis as the above is found likewise in Jongsu Sang's dissertation.⁶ In contrast to Kučkovský, Sang does not indicate the priority of proclamation in Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood.

2 Cf. Kučkovský Ladislav, *Auf dem Weg zur theologischen und existentiellen Erneuerung. Krise und vertiefte Grundlegung des Priesterbildes bei Joseph Ratzinger*, Regensburg 2022, 200–236.

3 Cf. *Ibid.*, 236–240.

4 Cf. *Ibid.*, 241–250.

5 Cf. *Ibid.*, 331–337.

6 Cf. SANG Jongsu, *Das Verständnis des Priestertums als Selbsthingabe bei Joseph Ratzinger im Licht seiner Christologie*, Hamburg 2025, 172–183.

Stefan Ley's book on Walter Kasper's ecclesiology presents, though minimally, the latter's emphasis on leadership.⁷

1.1.2 General Thematic Studies

These are works which, in the course of a general theology of the Catholic priesthood, make mention of the shifts in models of the priesthood after Vatican II. They state, *inter alia*, but not in details, the positions of one or two of the authors under consideration, e.g., Gisbert Greshake's work on the Priesthood.⁸

Similarly, Paul Josef Cordes, while not discussing Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood as such, takes his thoughts as background to explain the Catholic priesthood generally. One of those thoughts is the primacy of the preaching ministry.⁹

Matthias Fallert, in his study of the relationship between the episcopal and presbyterial offices, makes mention of John Paul's eucharistic theology of the priesthood. He includes brief explanations of the already known positions of the Ratzinger and Kasper.¹⁰

Fazio Giuseppe discusses the eschatological aspect of the ministerial priesthood in the light of Edward Schillebeeckx and Joseph Ratzinger. He discusses Ratzinger's prioritization of the word as well as the influential role played by Luther's challenge to the Catholic Church on Ratzinger.¹¹

7 Cf. LEY Stefan, *Kirche Jesu Christi als Communio. Entstehung, Spezifika und Perspektiven der Ekklesiologie Walter Kaspers*, Freiburg i. Br. 2017, 79–81, 85–87, 198.

8 Cf. GRESHAKE Gisbert, *Priester sein in dieser Zeit: Theologie – Pastorale Praxis – Spiritualität*, Regensburg 2008, 192–195.

9 Cf. CORDES Paul Josef, *Warum Priester? Fällige Antworten mit Benedikt XVI.*, Augsburg 2009, 126, 136f.

10 Cf. FALLERT Matthias, *Mitarbeiter der Bischöfe. Das Zueinander des bischöflichen und priesterlichen Amtes auf und nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Würzburg 2007, 226f., 302–305, 310–316.

11 Cf. FAZIO Giuseppe, *Il sacerdozio ministeriale. Segno escatologico: Una riflessione a partire dalla teologia di E. Schillebeeckx e J. Ratzinger*, Assisi 2021, 195–241.

1.1.3 Specific Thematic Studies

These are works, which, while developing the theology of the Catholic priesthood in the light of Vatican II, present a more detailed account of the post-conciliar theological models of different theologians. These works include two or all the three authors under consideration.

Jean Galot includes Kasper's thesis in his presentation of different models, but neither the thesis of John Paul II nor that of Ratzinger.¹²

In Daniel Donovan's assemblage of the different post-conciliar models of the priesthood, he characterizes John Paul II's standpoint as informed by the Council of Trent, the spirituality of the French School, Christocentrism, and as an opposition to the Western secularization of the sacred and the priesthood.¹³ He offers the most extensive analysis, hitherto, of Ratzinger's position, precisely as regards the question of the fundamental *munus* of the priesthood. A good number of the themes in Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood, as presented in this work, are already addressed in his work.¹⁴ However, he does not include Kasper.

Avery Dulles includes all the three authors. John Paul II, in line with Thomas Aquinas and the Council of Trent, stands in the classical understanding of the priesthood as a vocation based primarily on the ministry of sanctification especially through the sacraments.¹⁵ He identifies two positions in Ratzinger's development. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger emphasizes the common priesthood of all the faithful, protesting against a dissociative overinterpretation of the ministerial priesthood with a theology of sacrifice. In the course of the later years, however, his emphasis shifts more to the representative office of the priest for Christ, without changing his view on the priority of the word.¹⁶ The springboard of Kasper's emphasis on community leadership is the fact that Christ is the shepherd of his flock. Thus, priesthood goes

12 Cf. GALOT Jean, *Theology of the Priesthood*, trans. by Roger Balducelli, San Francisco 1985, 134f.

13 Cf. DONOVAN Daniel, *What Are They Saying About the Ministerial Priesthood?* New Jersey 1992, 25–32.

14 Cf. *Ibid.*, 60–74.

15 Cf. DULLES Avery, *The Priestly Office. A Theological Reflection*, New York 1997, 33–34.

16 Cf. *Ibid.*, 21–22; cf. —, *Models of the Church*, New York 1974, 161f.

beyond cultic and sacral categories. In the Church, the office of leadership is fundamental since it bears the burden of responsibility for the charismas, services and the unity of the Church.¹⁷

Josef Hernoga's research on the post-conciliar German theology of the priestly office makes no specific mention of Ratzinger's prioritization of the ministry of the word,¹⁸ but it briefly mentions the case of Walter Kasper.¹⁹ Studying the Holy Thursday letters of John Paul II, he shows the starting point of the Pope's understanding of the priesthood to be the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ's redemptive being and action. The priest's ministry of sanctification (reconciliation of men with God) is a participation in these mysteries. Consequently, the eucharist and the holy orders form an inseparable identity, in which the latter is defined and conditioned by the former, not vice versa.²⁰ Hernoga makes a significant observation: "It is characteristic of John Paul II's Holy Thursday letters that he does not delve into exegetical and speculative disputes on the question of the institution and connection of both sacraments. He shows, rather, in a logical and plausible way the theological implications of these unquestioned, presupposed realities."²¹

Judith Müller's research on the Priesthood in the German Catholic Dogmatic Theology extends to the whole of the 20th century. Her introductory criticisms on John Paul II are, rather, in passing. It is not a study of his theology and does not address the question of the basic office.²² She recognizes the prioritization of the word in Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood by quoting some texts from Ratzinger's writings, offering no independent exegesis or systematic study of it. She, rather, sticks to a downright negative judgement of Ratzinger's theology of

17 Cf. DULLES Avery, *The Priestly Office*, 47f.; cf. —, *Models of the Church*, 156.

18 Cf. HERNOGA Josef, *Das Priestertum. Zur nachkonziliaren Amtstheologie im deutschen Sprachraum*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 249–262.

19 Cf. *Ibid.*, 285–287, 296.

20 Cf. *Ibid.*, 183–198.

21 [My translation]. "Kennzeichnend für die Gründonnerstagsschreiben ist, daß ihr Verfasser nicht auf die Diskussion der Exegeten und der spekulativen Theologie eingeht, was die Einsetzung und Verbindung dieser Sakramente betrifft, sondern er zeigt logisch und plausibel theologische Folgerungen dieser fraglos vorausgesetzten Wirklichkeit." *Ibid.*, 187.

22 Cf. MÜLLER Judith, *In der Kirche Priester sein. Das Priesterbild in der deutschsprachigen Katholischen Dogmatik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Würzburg 2001, 11f.

the priesthood, neither justifying nor substantiating the judgement.²³ She seems to have dismissed Ratzinger's theology as well as a whole lot of others through a predecision. Karl-Heinz Menke writes that she "brushes down with such an alarming self-assurance everything which does not fit into her own concept. She »dealt with« – in the double sense of the word – authors such as Congar, de Lubac, Balthasar, Ratzinger, Scheffczyk or Greshake, each in averagely two pages."²⁴ She also presents the Kaspers' standpoint alongside its critical reception.²⁵

Piotr Pasterczyk's study of Vatican II's and post-conciliar descriptions of the ministerial priesthood provides the most extensive interpretation, so far, on Kasper's position. His interpretation emphasizes Kasper's thesis of community leadership as "functional" or a sort of functionalized ontology of the priesthood in contrast to the sacral-ontological explanations.²⁶ He explains Ratzinger's viewpoint briefly as a stauncher interpretation of the Vatican II Council.²⁷

1.2 The Difference of the Research

The newness and difference of my research work consist in three points:

1. It precisely focuses only on three Authors: John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger und Walter Kasper. There is no comparative-systematic study of the three authors' positions on the question of the basic office of the priest that has been published – as at the time of the composition of this work.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 215–220.

²⁴ [My Translation]. „Mit beängstigendem Selbstbewusstsein bürstet die Autorin alles nieder, was nicht ins eigene Konzept passt. Autoren wie Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, Balthasar, Ratzinger, Scheffczyk oder Greshake werden auf durchschnittlich zwei Seiten in des Wortes doppelter Bedeutung »erledigt.«“ MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Sakramentalität, Wesen und Wunde des Katholizismus*, Regensburg ⁴2020, 181.

²⁵ Cf. MÜLLER JUDITH, *In der Kirche*, 203f., 205–208. The relevant criticisms are presented in chapter seven of this work.

²⁶ Cf. PASTERCZYK PIOTR, *Theologie des kirchlichen Lehramtes. Das priesterliche Amt in den Dokumenten des 2. Vatikanischen Konzils und in der nachkonziliären Theologie*, Frankfurt a. M. 2002, 104–118. For his critique of Kasper see chapter seven of this work.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 167–169.

2. The already published works present their theologies and positions no doubt, but I am interested in systematically distilling out their justifications or arguments for their viewpoints. Their reasons or arguments are not laid out structurally in their works; they have to be x-rayed and exposed for future studies. This makes some difference in my exposition.
3. The time span gives my work the advantage of a completed view of possible or unforeseen developments in the works of the authors. It is “complete” – not in the sense that my work is not subject to further development or criticism by future researches –, rather, it is complete from the perspective of the authors’ lives themselves. John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger have completed their life spans and their theological works. Walter Kasper is now aged (91 years old). A further development of his theological view by himself, is reasonably no longer expected. The concrete consequence is: My work will show aspects of shifts in the opinions of Ratzinger and Kasper as well as their specific arguments for them. These shifts were not and partly could not have been seen in the previous years, simply because of the limitation of the present as far as knowledge and understanding are concerned. To the best of my knowledge, these changes between an “earlier” and “later” Ratzinger or Kasper on the subject under consideration has, until now, (apart from the observations of Ladislav Kučkovský indicated above) not been captured in the reception of their theologies.

Chapter 2: The Notions of “Ministerial Priesthood” and “Munus”

2.1 Ministerial Priesthood

The clarification on the notion of ministerial priesthood in this work is not about the difference between ordained priesthood and the common priesthood. It, rather, has to do with the *graduated* nature of the ordained priesthood itself. Precisely, it is this fact: The ministerial priest is first and foremost the bishop, the primary successor of the twelve apostles of Christ. It is the bishop who represents Christ sacramentally in fullness in the Church.

The Vatican II Council emphasizes this sufficiently. Firstly, the unbroken missionary succession: Christ – the twelve apostles – their successors (bishops):

This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father (Jn 20:21); and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world... That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world (Cf. Mt 28:20), since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors. For they not only had helpers in their ministry, but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate cooperators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves, recommending to them that they attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God (Cf. Acts 20:28). They therefore appointed such men, and gave them the order that, when

they should have died, other approved men would take up their ministry. Among those various ministries which, according to tradition, were exercised in the Church from the earliest times, the chief place belongs to the office of those who, appointed to the episcopate, by a succession running from the beginning, are passers-on of the apostolic seed. Thus, as St. Irenaeus testifies, through those who were appointed bishops by the apostles, and through their successors down in our own time, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved. Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing. And just as the office granted individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, is permanent and is to be transmitted to his successors, so also the apostles’ office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ (Cf. Lk 10:16). In the bishops, therefore, for whom priests are assistants, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe.²⁸

Secondly, the fullness of the priesthood in the episcopate:

And the Sacred Council teaches that by Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church’s liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.²⁹

²⁸ *Lumen gentium* §18, §20f.; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §7; cf. *Christus Dominus* §2. The English Translations of the documents of Vatican II Council are taken from the Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm (accessed on 04.04.2023).

²⁹ *Lumen gentium* §21; see also §41; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2, §7; *Christus Dominus* §15.

John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper fully incorporate this teaching of the Council into their writings.³⁰ It is in this sense that the word “priest” and its cognates (priesthood, priestly) are used in this work: its primary reference point is the bishop. Though the New Testament authors do not yet have a *homogenous* clear-cut separation of the words ἐπίσκοποι and πρεσβύτεροι – the latter also refers to bishops in contexts which follow the one-tiered model of the Jewish council of elders –, both words refer to the *one* ministry of the twelve apostles, passed on by successorship (laying on of hands).³¹ Recent historical research argues convincingly that up to the post-Constantine era (4th century), as a matter of principle, presbyters did not celebrate the eucharist independent of the bishop, rather they assisted the bishop who presided or when the bishop delegates them to preside.³² From the perspective of the history of theology, it is also in this sense that the earliest Church Fathers operate with the concept of ministerial priesthood before it extended to presbyters (“priests” in the common parlance).³³ The letters of Ignatius of Antioch († c. 108/140 A.D.) leave no doubt about the primacy of the episcopal priesthood.³⁴ Tertullian (160–240) uses the term *sacerdos* besides *episcopus* for bishops, while retaining *presbyter* for those called “priests” in today’s common par-

³⁰ Instances: cf. JOHN Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Pastores gregis (2003) §10, in: *Vatican Website: Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis.html* (accessed on 04.09.2024). See also §1, §6, §11, §13, §19 of the same document. In fact, it is the principle of the whole document. For Ratzinger, see the whole of section 5.11 of this work. Cf. KASPER Walter, *Steuermann mitten im Sturm – Das Bischofsamt nach Thomas von Aquin* (1999), in: *WKGs* 12, Freiburg i. Br. 2009, 451–481: 451f.; cf. —, *Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes* (2000), in: *WKGs* 12, 482–496: 483f.; cf. —, *Die Katholische Kirche* (2011/2012), in: *WKGs* 13, Freiburg i. Br. ²2022, 330–332.

³¹ Cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII: Die Heilsgegenwart in der Kirche. Sakramentenlehre*, Aachen 2003, 439f., 484, 488f., 505f.

³² HEID Stefan, *Altar und Kirche. Prinzipien christlicher Liturgie*, Regensburg ³2023, passim, esp. 90, 140f., 160–162.

³³ For a historical sketch of the conceptual development, cf. BECKER KARL, *Wesen und Vollmachten des Priestertums nach dem Lehramt*, Freiburg i. Br. 1970, 166–172.

³⁴ Cf. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Ephesians* 3–6, *Letter to the Magnesians* 3–4, 6–7, *Letter to the Trallians* 2–3, 7, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 1–4, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8–9. HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Michigan ³2007, 182–257.

lance.³⁵ When Cyprian of Carthage writes of the priest representing Christ (“*ille sacerdos uice Christi uere fungitur*”) in the offering of the bread and wine,³⁶ he has first and foremost the bishop in mind – as the whole context indicates.³⁷ The Eastern Church Fathers especially, remained faithful to that terminological precision.³⁸ John Chrysostom (349–407) titled his work περί ἱερωσύνης (On the Priesthood), latinized to *De sacerdotio*, which refers, in the first place, to the call and duty of a bishop.³⁹ The concept, while it retained its strict use in the East, was already being extended in Latin West of the 4th/5th century to presbyter. In any case, as Anton Ziegenaus summarizes: “In the first centuries only the bishop, not the presbyter (second grade of ordination!), is called ‘priest’ (sacerdos, ἱερεύς).”⁴⁰

The terminological clarification is not to separate bishops and priests, in such a way as to *exclude* the latter. It is rather *inclusive*, but it emphasises the episcopacy as the first reference point of the sacramental representation of Christ. The interpretation line is from the bishop *down* to the priest, not vice versa. As the Vatican II Council teaches: “Priests, although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, and although they are dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power, nevertheless they are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity.”⁴¹

35 “Superest ad concludendam materiolam de observatione quoque dandi et accipiendi baptismi commonefacere. Dandi quidem summum habet ius summus sacerdos, si qui est episcopus; dehinc presbyteri et diaconi, non tamen sine episcopi auctoritate, propter ecclesiae honorem, quo salvo salva pax est.” TERTULLIAN, *De baptismo* 17,1 (FC 76, trans. by Dietrich SCHLEYER, Turnhout 2006, 204). Cf. BECKER KARL, *Wesen und Vollmachten*, 16. Of course, Tertullian also uses *sacerdotes* for the common priesthood of the baptised, cf. TERTULLIAN, *De baptismo* 28.

36 Cf. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, Epistula 63, XIV.4 (CCSL III C, Brepols 1996, 410f.).

37 Cf. *Ibid.*, I.1, XVIII, XIX (CCSL III C, 389, 414–417); cf. BECKER Karl, *Wesen und Vollmachten*, 16.

38 Thanks to Prof. Dr. Bertram Stubenrauch for the clue.

39 Cf. DE LUBAC, Henri, Der «Dialog über das Priestertum» des Heiligen Johannes Chrysostomus (1978), trans. by RUDOLF VODERHOLZER, in: *IKaz* 30 (2001) 484–494: 485f.; cf. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *On the Priesthood (John Chrysostom. Six Books on Priesthood)*, trans. by GRAHAM Neville, New York 1964, 7f.).

40 [My translation]. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 485.

41 *Lumen gentium* §28.

2.2 Munus

2.2.1 The Theological Triad: Christ-Church-Holy Orders

In Catholic teaching and dogmatic theology, the concept of *munus* has three intertwined fields of application.

Firstly, it is used to summarize the life and mission of Jesus Christ (*triplex munus Christi*). God who became man fulfilled his redemptive mission for mankind in three ways together: as priest, as prophet-teacher, and as king-shepherd.⁴² The biblical foundation is summarized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§436):

The word “Christ” comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, which means “anointed”. It became the name proper to Jesus only because he accomplished perfectly the divine mission that ‘Christ’ signifies. In effect, in Israel those consecrated to God for a mission that he gave were anointed in his name. This was the case for kings, for priests and, in rare instances, for prophets (Cf. Ex 29:7; Lev 8:12; 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 16:1, 12-13; 1 Kings 1:39; 19:16.). This had to be the case all the more so for the Messiah whom God would send to inaugurate his kingdom definitively (Cf. Ps 2:2; Acts 4:26-27). It was necessary that the Messiah be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord at once as king and priest, and also as prophet (Cf. Is 11:2; 61:1; Zech 4:14; 6:13; Lk 4:16-21). Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet and king.⁴³

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, §13, §31.

⁴³ „*Christus e versione graeca venit verbi Hebraici «Messias» quod «unctus» significat. Id proprium effectum non est nomen Iesu nisi quia Ipse perfecte missionem divinam adimplet quam id indicat. In Israel etenim in nomine Dei illi ungebantur qui consecrabantur Ei ad missionem ab Eo procedentem. Talis casus erat regum, sacerdotum et, quandoque, Prophetarum. Talis, per excellentiam, casus debebat esse Messiae quem Deus ad Regnum Suum definitive instaurandum missurus erat. Oportebat Messiam per Spiritum Domini unctum esse tamquam regem simul et sacerdotem, sed etiam tamquam Prophetam. Iesus spem Israel adimplevit messianicam in Suo triplici munere sacerdotis, prophetae et regis.*“ *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Vatican 1997, 120. English translation: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM* (accessed on 02.07.2024). The biblical references are footnotes in the original.

Secondly, it is used to circumscribe the continuation of the salvific mission of Christ in and through the Church and its members. It is the life and essence of the Church. Christ continues to sanctify mankind through the Church, proclaim the Gospel to the people and lead them to God. By virtue of their baptism, every Christian participates in that mission.⁴⁴

Finally, it has a specific meaning for the ministerial priesthood. The ordained priest, through the sacrament of holy orders, lives his participation in Christ’s three offices in a specific way: he represents Christ sacramentally before the priestly people of God, and as well, represents them before God in Christ. He does this by building up the people of God through the Word of God, sanctifying them through the sacraments, especially the eucharist, and governing them as a community of believers. This specific difference of the ministerial priest is grounded in the common priesthood he shares with all the baptized.⁴⁵

These three theological fields of *munus* – Christological, ecclesiological, and ministerial-sacramental – also appear structurally in Vatican II’s teaching on the mystery of the Church.⁴⁶ Obviously, the present work is interested in *munus* only as regards the last field of application: the sacrament of Holy Orders.

2.2.2 The Notional Triad: Munus-Officium-Ministerium

2.2.2.1 Lexical Observations

A consideration of the Latin word *munus*, necessarily, extends to the two other related terms: *officium* and *ministerium*. This holds *a fortiori* when it is considered in relation to the priesthood because it is significant for the question of whether the ministerial priesthood is *only* a

⁴⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium* §10–13, §31, §34–36; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2; cf. *Ad gentes* §15; cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem* §2, §10; cf. JOHANNES Paul II., *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Christusfideles laici*, 1988, §13; cf. WOLLBOLD Andreas, Grundvollzüge oder dreifaches Amt? Auf der Suche nach einer praktikablen Einteilung der Pastoral, in: *Lebendige Seelsorge* 57 (2006/2) 58–63; 61.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Lumen gentium* §10, §21, §25–27; cf. *Christus Dominus* §11; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2, §4–6; cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* §2; cf. *Ad gentes* §39; cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem* §2.

⁴⁶ Cf. SCHICK LUDWIG, *Das Dreifache Amt Christi und der Kirche*, Frankfurt am Main 1982, 5.

function to be exercised or rather also a permanent-existential office in the Church.

One can conclude based on the lexical entries, without laying claims to a philological examination, that all the three concepts overlap in their meaning and usage to a very large extent. Lexical entries provide the following data:

Munus: service, office, function, task, duty, a work, an act, employment, burden, tribute, burial/funeral rite, official post, appointment, favour, gift, a public show or spectacle or entertainment, a product or handiwork, a supplementary water supply, a public building.⁴⁷

Officium: service, office, function, task, commission, official duty, obligation, the sense of duty/obligation, dutifulness, conscience, readiness to help or to serve, obedience, attendance, a work, an act of respect or courtesy, employment, burden, tribute, burial ceremony/rite, official post, appointment, official engagement, post.⁴⁸

Ministerium: service, office, attendance, ministry, administration, occupation, work, labour, function, duty, task, employment, commission, support, agency/instrumentality, assistive utensils or equipments, a body of helpers, a train.⁴⁹

The conceptual boundaries of the three terms are fluxional, though one may be more apt in a certain context than the other. For instance, we see that in *officium* there is a likely preponderance of the idea of one's obligation and the consciousness. However, the idea of a favour, gift, a public show or spectacle or entertainment, a product or handiwork, is very minimal in it.

47 Cf. GLARE Peter (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford ²2012, 1260f.; cf. *The Latin Lexicon (Numen)*, in: https://latinlexicon.org/word_study_tool.php (accessed on 03.07.2024); cf. LÖSEK Fritz (ed.), *Stowasser Lateinisch-Deutsches Schulwörterbuch*, München ⁸2022, 448f.; cf. STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation* (MThS.K. 13), München 1960, 83f.

48 Cf. GLARE Peter, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1368f.; cf. *The Latin Lexicon* (accessed on 03.07.2024); cf. LÖSEK Fritz, *Stowasser Lateinisch-Deutsches Schulwörterbuch*, 478f.; cf. STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation*, 82f.

49 Cf. GLARE Peter, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1223; cf. *The Latin Lexicon* (accessed on 03.07.2024); cf. LÖSEK FRITZ, *Stowasser Lateinisch-Deutsches Schulwörterbuch*, 436; cf. STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation*, 83f.

2.2.2.2 First Observation on Vatican II’s Terminology

The documents of Vatican II on priesthood reflect this linguistic flexibility. On the one hand, it seems that *officium* and *ministerium* are the fundamental words for the reality or mystery of the ministerial priesthood *per se*,⁵⁰ while *munus* comes into play when speaking of the concrete expressions of that reality.⁵¹ The title of the third chapter of the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum ministerium*) and its first subtitle (*Presbyterorum munera*) dealing with the threefold duties, are possibly, indicators to this fact. On the other hand, they are also mutually swapped.⁵² At some point, the three functions/offices are jointly designated “ministerium et munus”⁵³ and the priesthood as such, is named a “*munus ministerium*”⁵⁴.

2.2.2.3 Ministerial Priesthood as *Munus in the Language of the Canon Law*

From the perspective of the canon law, there are at least, five observations to be made without laying claims to an exhaustive explanation:

1. In the history of Canon Law, the definition of *munus* is traced back to the Roman legal system as deposited in the *Digesta* – a compilation of writings of classical Roman jurists which became the book of jurisprudence under emperor Justinian in the 6th century. In it, a threefold meaning of *munus* is expressly laid down as gift, duty, office.

“Munus” tribus modis dicitur: uno donum, et inde munera dici dari mittiue: altero onus, quod cum remittatur, uacationem militiae munerisque praestat inde immunitatem appellari. tertio officium, unde munera

⁵⁰ Cf. *Lumen gentium* §20–22, §26, §28, §31, §32, §41; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §1, §2, §3, §7, §8.

⁵¹ Cf. *Lumen gentium* §21, §28, §41.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, §26, §41; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2, §4, §5, §6, §11.

⁵³ Cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §7.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium* §28; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2.

militaria et quosdam milites munificos uocari: igitur municipes dici, quod munera ciuilia capiant.⁵⁵

2. In the current Code of Canon Law, the fundamental legal word for office as such is *officium*,⁵⁶ unless when used in a different sense, for example, “duty” or “obligation”⁵⁷. Apart from that, *officium* is literally interpreted as *munus*.⁵⁸ The meaning of *officium* is inextricably associated with *munus*. Office and service are indeed not completely coextensive, and yet there is no office that is not a service – at least ideally. In this respect then, *officium* is also *munus*:

*An office is a function (in Latin, munus). Offices are not honorific; they involve doing something. As church offices, they entail doing something on behalf of the Church and of Christ ... Munus (“function”) is frequently used for the threefold ministry of Christ: to teach, to sanctify, and to govern. Offices in the Church participate in these functions in various ways.*⁵⁹

This becomes very explicit at the spot where the Canon Law enshrines the ecclesiastical office in a legal definition. Both the former codex

55 *Dig.* 50. 16. 18, in: MOMMSEN Theodor, *Digesta Iustiniani Augusti*, vol. 2, Berlin ²1963, 935. „The word *munus* is defined in three different ways: first, as a donation, and hence are derived the terms to bestow, or send gifts; second, a position which, when anyone is released from it, affords exemption from military service and civil employment, whence is derived the term “immunity;” third, an office, whence are derived military occupations, and certain soldiers are designated *munifices*. For this reason persons who assume civil employments are called municipal officials.” English translation: SCOTT Samuel, *The Civil Law*, Cincinnati 1932, in: https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/D50_Scott.htm#XVI (accessed on 19.07.2024). Cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus* tra ordinamento canonico e comunione ecclesiale, in: *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale* 31, 2019, 117–148: 129f. WATSON Alan (ed.), *The Digest of Justinian*, vol. 4, Philadelphia 1985, 449 translates the three senses as: gift, burden and duty.

56 Cf. CIC/1983, *passim*. For instance: Book I, Title IX.

57 E.g., Can. 747 §1 CIC/1983, *passim*.

58 Cf. GILLESPIE Kelvin, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Exercise of Sacred Power. Towards a Theological and Canonical Understanding of the Mutual Orientation in the Sign of Christ*, Rome 2017, 6f.; cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus*, 128f.

59 PROVOST James, Title IX. Ecclesiastical Offices [cc. 145– 96], in: John BEAL / James CORIDEN / Thomas GREEN (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Mahwah 2000, 195–229: 196.

(1917) and the new codex (1983) of the Latin Church as well as the current Codex of the Oriental Churches (1990) begin their definition of *officium* by precisising that it is a *munus*:⁶⁰

Officium ecclesiasticum lato sensu est quodlibet munus quod in spiritua-
lem finem legitime exercetur; stricto autem sensu est munus ordinatione
sive divina sive ecclesiastica stabiliter constitutum, ad normam sacrorum
canonum conferendum, aliquam saltem secumferens participationem
ecclesiasticae potestatis sive ordinis sive iurisdictionis.⁶¹

Officium ecclesiasticum est quodlibet munus ordinatione sive divina sive
ecclesiastica stabiliter constitutum in finem spiritualement exercendum.⁶²

In Ecclesia officium est quodlibet munus ab ipso Domino vel ab auc-
toritate competenti stabiliter constitutum in finem spiritualement exer-
cendum.⁶³

In other words, we can say that, canonically, both concepts – *officium* and *munus* – are distinguishable, but their inner realities or contents overlap.

⁶⁰ Cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus*, 117f.

⁶¹ Can. 145 §1 CIC/1917, in: <https://codex-iuris-canonici.de/> (accessed on 19.07.2024). „Ecclesiastical office in the wide sense is any responsibility exercised legitimately for a spiritual end; in the strict sense, however, it is a divinely or ecclesiastically ordered responsibility, constituted in a stable manner, conferred according to the norms of the sacred canons, entailing at least some participation in ecclesiastical power, whether of orders or of jurisdiction.” English translation: PETERS Edward, *The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, San Francisco 2001, 72. For the use of the three terms *officium*, *munus* and *ministerium* in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, see: STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation*, 84–98.

⁶² Can. 145 §1 CIC/1983. “An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose.” Latin and English translations: *Vatican Website*: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/cdc/index.htm> (accessed on 19.07.2024).

⁶³ Can. 936 §1 CCEO. “An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by the Lord himself or by competent authority to be exercised for a spiritual purpose.” Latin and English translations are taken from Website of the Gregorian University Rome: <https://www.iuscangreg.it/cceo.php> (accessed on 19.07.2024).

3. From the definitions and usages, one can also deduce that *munus* possesses a wider meaning than *officium*.⁶⁴ Every *officium* is ultimately a *munus*, but not every *munus* is an *officium*. Since both the “broader” and “wider” senses of *officium ecclesiasticum* are designated as *munus*, Richard Strigl, following Klaus Mörsdorf, therefore notes:

In this way, der terminology [*scil.* *munus*] becomes the most universal legal term for office. “Munus” is umbrella term for every ecclesiastical job exercised directly or indirectly for spiritual purposes ...⁶⁵

Thus, I think it is right to speak primarily of the *munus* of the priesthood (hence, the title of this work), instead of *officium* of the priesthood. For unlike the latter, the former emphasizes more the service character of the priesthood without downplaying its official character. But not only that. It keeps more easily in view also priests who are not actively occupying a particular “office”, for instance, as a Parish Priest (see the fifth point).⁶⁶

4. As a matter of fact, the Canon Law labels the priesthood literally as *munus* in the sense of an office. The fundamental term for the “place” of the “clerics” – a word which includes not only bishops and priests – in the Church is indeed *ministerium*.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, when speaking specifically about the bearers of the episcopacy, it resorts literally to *munus*, understood and translated as office. It does not only denominate being a bishop with term *munus*. Its definition also corresponds exactly to the canonical definitions of *officium* quoted earlier on. Contentwise, it is stud with the *tria munera*:

⁶⁴ Cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus*, 118f.

⁶⁵ [My translation]. “Dadurch erhält dieser Terminus die Bedeutung eines allgemeinen ämterrechtlichen Begriffes. ‚Munus‘ ist der Oberbegriff für jede kirchliche Tätigkeit, die unmittelbar oder mittelbar zu geistlichen Zwecken ausgeübt wird ...“ STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation*, 61.

⁶⁶ On how the ministry of extra-parochial priests still encompasses the *tria munera*, see: RAAB Christian, *Understanding the Religious Priesthood: History, Controversy, Theology*, Washington, D.C. 2021, especially pp. 289–307.

⁶⁷ Cf. CIC/1983, Book II, Title III.

Episcopi, qui ex divina institutione in Apostolorum locum succedunt per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est eis, in Ecclesia Pastores constituuntur, ut sint et ipsi doctrinae magistri, sacri cultus sacerdotes et gubernationis ministri. Episcopi ipsa consecratione episcopali recipiunt cum munere sanctificandi munera quoque docendi et regendi, quae tamen natura sua nonnisi in hierarchica communione cum Collegii capite et membris exercere possunt.⁶⁸

5. Finally, the canonist James Provost states categorically that „clergy are ordained for a spiritual service in the Church (c. 1008); but do not as such hold an ecclesiastical office; office is distinct from sacred ordination.”⁶⁹ Office is understood here in a strictly juridical sense. However, if there is an ecclesiastical office in the Church that cannot be occupied without the priestly ordination, as envisaged by can. 150⁷⁰, it means that, even if the priestly ordination *per se* does not strictly confer an office in the legal sense, it is still indispensable for that office absolutely. Priestly *service* and priestly *office* are, therefore, juridically distinguishable, but not theologically separable. This is further warranted by an aspect of the historical development of priestly ordination in the Church: For a long period up to the 11th/12th century, ordination was only conferred in view of a specific local church (*ordinatio relativa*), while an *ordinatio absoluta* (ἀπολελυμένως) was forbidden. In the course of time, certain factors (eg., development of the benefice system) necessitated the prac-

68 Can. 375 §1–2 CIC/1983. “Bishops, who by divine institution succeed to the place of the Apostles through the Holy Spirit who has been given to them, are constituted pastors in the Church, so that they are teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and ministers of governance. Through episcopal consecration itself, bishops receive with the function of sanctifying also the functions of teaching and governing; by their nature, however, these can only be exercised in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college.” Latin and English translations: *Vatican Website*: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/cdc/index.htm> (accessed on 19.07.2024).

69 PROVOST James, *Title IX*, 198.

70 Can. 150 CIC/1983: “An office which entails the full care of souls and for whose fulfillment the exercise of the priestly order is required cannot be conferred validly on one who is not yet a priest.” *Vatican Website*: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/cdc/index.htm> (accessed on 19.07.2024).

tice of separating priestly ordination and office juridically, which eventually led to the development of *ordinatio absoluta*.⁷¹

2.2.2.4 The Instruction *Ecclesia de Mysterio* on the Terminological Problem

In response to some problematic practices and questions about lay people performing duties that are actually reserved to ordained priests, an interdicasterial instruction was released by the Holy See on August 15, 1997 titled *Ecclesiae de mysterio* which sought to define the boundaries. The instruction is significant because, as a magisterial document, it certifies, quoting a speech of John Paul II, the existence of a confusion in the theological and canonical usage of the triad: *officium*, *munus* and *ministerium* as regards the priestly ministry:

In his address to participants at the Symposium on “Collaboration of the Lay Faithful with the Priestly Ministry”, the Holy Father emphasised the need to clarify and distinguish the various meanings which have accrued to the term “ministry” in theological and canonical language.

§ 1 «For some time now, it has been customary to use the word *ministries* not only for the *officia* (*offices*) [sic!] and non-ordained (*functions*) *munera* exercised by Pastors in virtue of the sacrament of Orders, but also for those exercised by the lay faithful in virtue of their baptismal priesthood. The terminological question becomes even more complex

71 Cf. FUCHS Vinzenz, *Der Ordinationstitel von seiner Entstehung bis auf Innozenz III. Eine Untersuchung zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Anschauungen Rudolph Sohms*, Bonn 1930; cf. SCHEIPER Jessica, Übertragung und Verlust des Pfarramtes, in: Andreas GRASSMANN / Wilhelm REES (eds.), *Der Pfarrer ein herausgefordertes Amtsträger. Aufgaben, Rechten, Pflichten und Perspektiven eines kirchlichen Berufs*, Regensburg 2023, 53–75: 54. A benefice (from Latin *beneficium*), in the strict sense of the word, “signifies a right, i. e. the right given permanently by the Church to a cleric to receive ecclesiastical revenues on account of the performance of some spiritual service.” CREAGH John Thomas, Benefice, in: *Catholic Encyclopedia*: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Benefice](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Benefice) (accessed on December 12, 2025); cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* § 20; cf. Can. 1272 CIC/1983; cf. KENNEDY Robert, The Temporal Goods of the Church [cc. 1254– 1310], in: John BEAL / James CORIDEN / Thomas GREEN (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Mahwah 2000, 1449–1525: 1473; cf. STRIGL Richard, *Grundfragen der kirchlichen Ämterorganisation*, 8–14, 53–60.

and delicate when all the faithful are recognized as having the possibility of supplying – by official deputation given by the Pastors – certain functions more proper to clerics, which, nevertheless, do not require the character of Orders. It must be admitted that the language becomes doubtful, confused, and hence not helpful for expressing the doctrine of the faith whenever the difference ‘of essence and not merely of degree’ between the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood is in any way obscured.”⁷²

Here, a distinction is made between the triad – not as a claim or proposal but as an observation on a common practice: *Ministerium* is taken as the general description of the priestly duties which are specified into those that are proper to the priesthood (*officia*), in the sense that they require ordination, and those that do not require it (*munus*). Thus, *munera* designates ministerial duties carried out by the priest but which can also be carried out by the lay faithful simply by virtue of their baptism. *Officia*, in contrast, designates ministerial duties carried out *only* by the priest. They cannot be carried out by the lay faithful simply by virtue of their baptism. They can only be delegated to perform them under certain conditions.

72 Interdicasterial Instruction: *Ecclesiae de mysterio. On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest*, Vatican 1997, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html (accessed on 04.02.2025). “Summus Pontifex, alloquens participes Symposii « de collaboratione christifidelium laicorum in presbyterali ministerio », necessitati instituit dilucidandi et distinguendi diversas significationes quas vocabulum « ministerium » sumpsit in theologico canonicoque dicendi genere. § 1. « Mos pridem invaluit appellandi “ministeria” non tantum officia et munera [sic!] quae Pastores virtute sacramenti Ordinis quo sunt insigniti exsequuntur, verum etiam ea quae a fidelibus non ordinatis vi sacerdotii baptismalis exercentur. Quaestio de vocabulorum sensu fit in dies implicatior et difficilior eo quod omnibus fidelibus facultas agnoscitur exercendi — suppletionis tantum causa atque ex officiali deputatione a Pastoribus concessa — quaedam munia clericorum propria, quae tamen Ordinis characterem non requirunt. Tenendum est eiusmodi dicendi genus incertum fieri, confusum ideoque parum utile ad fidei doctrinam enuntiandam quoties sub quolibet aspectu obscuratur distinctio “essentiae, et non tantummodo gradus” quae intercedit inter sacerdotium baptismale et sacerdotium ordinatum »” AAS 89 (1997) 852–879: 861f. Cf. JOHN Paul II, *Discorso ai partecipanti alla riunione promossa dalla congregazione per il clero*, April 22, 1994, §4, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1994/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19940422_fedeli-laici.html (accessed on 04.02.2025).

§ 2. «In some cases, the extension of the term «ministry» to the *munera* belonging to the lay faithful has been permitted by the fact that the latter, to their own degree, are a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The *officia* temporarily entrusted to them, however, are exclusively the result of a deputation by the Church. Only with constant reference to the one source, the «ministry of Christ» (...) may the term *ministry* be applied to a certain extent and without ambiguity to the lay faithful: that is, without it being perceived and lived as an undue aspiration to the *ordained ministry* or as a progressive erosion of its specific nature.

In this original sense the term *ministry* (*servitium*) expresses only the work by which the Church's members continue the mission and ministry of Christ within her and the whole world. However, when the term is distinguished from and compared with the various *munera* and *officia*, then it should be clearly noted that *only* in virtue of sacred ordination does the work obtain that full, univocal meaning that tradition has attributed to it.⁷³

On this account, if taken as the standard, then *officium* would then be the more precise term for the priestly ministry, not *munus*. But this suggestion depletes by the very fact that the wording of the instruction itself does not follow it, as far as the threefold office is concerned. In fact, when enumerating specifically the three offices as regards the

73 Interdicasterial Instruction: *Ecclesiae de mysterio*. "§ 2. Id quod effecit ut quibusdam in casibus dilataretur vox « ministerium » ad « munera » fidelium laicorum propria, inveniendum est in eo quod etiam fideles, pro suo quisque modo, unum Christi sacerdotium participant. *Officia* [sic!] vero ad tempus iisdem commissa pendent tantummodo ab Ecclesiae deputatione. Frequens dumtaxat mentio unius « ministerii Christi » veluti fontis permittit, quodam modo, ut vox « ministerium » fidelibus etiam non ordinatis absque ambiguitate applicetur, quin scilicet hoc intellegatur et vivatur uti indebita « ministerii ordinati » appetitio, vel uti ingravescens eius specificae naturae detrimentum. Hoc in primigenio sensu, vox « ministerium » (*servitium*) [sic!] opus tantum significat quo membra Ecclesiae intra ipsam et per orbem terrarum prolant missionem et ministerium Christi. Cum vero distinctio fit illius vocis quoad relationem et quoad comparisonem inter diversa *munera* [sic!] et « officia », tunc palam animadvertendum est vocem « ministerium » *solummodo* [sic!] vigore sacrae Ordinationis illam sortiri plenitudinem illaque significationis univocitatem, quas traditio ei tribuere consuevit ». AAS 89, 862. Cf. JOHN Paul II, *Discorso*, April 22, 1994, §4.

ordained priest, *munus* is sometimes emphatically used and even left untranslated. Here two excerpts:

The functions of the ordained minister, taken as a whole, constitute a single indivisible unity in virtue of their singular foundation in Christ. As with Christ, salvific activity is one and unique. It is signified and realized by the minister through the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful. This unity essentially defines the exercise of the sacred minister’s functions which are always an exercise, in different ways, of the role of Christ as Head of the Church. Therefore, since the exercise of the *munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi* [sic!] by the sacred minister constitute the essence of pastoral ministry, the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other.⁷⁴

In effect, a canonical or juridical determination made by hierarchal authority is necessary for the exercise of the *munus* of teaching and governing.⁷⁵

2.2.2.5 Resurgence of the Problem at the German Synodal Path

The difficulty of cleanly distinguishing service and office lies till date at the heart of theological controversies on the ministerial priesthood. Some participants at the German Synodal Path did not fail to note the sidestepping of this basic problem in the working text presented by Forum III for a hearing at the five parallel regional conferences

74 Interdicasterial Instruction: *Ecclesiae de mysterio*. “Ministerii ordinati officia, coniuncte considerata, unum propter eorum fundamentum, unitatem quamdam efficiunt indivisibilem. Una enim et unica, quemadmodum in Christo, est salutaris actionis radix, quae a ministro per officia docendi, sanctificandi ceterosque fideles regendi significator atque efficitur. Haec unitas essentialiter functionum exercitium sacri ministerii afficit, eademque semper sunt exercitium, complures per species, partis Christi, Capitis Ecclesiae. Si quidem ministri ordinati procuratio *muneris docendi, sanctificandi et regendi* substantiam constituit ministerii pastoralis, varia ministrorum sacrorum officia, quae individuum unitatem efficiunt, alia ab aliis seiuncta intellegi non possunt ...” AAS 89, 858.

75 Ibid. “Exercitium «muneris» docendi et gubernandi deprecis revera canonicam vel iuridicam hierarchicae auctoritatis deliberationem.” AAS 89, 859.

(04.09.2020) held during the Corona pandemic in the context of the German Synodal Path.⁷⁶ The text in question reads:

The concept “office” here takes its bearing from the canonical understanding of office as “*officium*”. Offices (official) serve a spiritual purpose, they are permanently constituted and are based on divine or ecclesiastical decree (c. 145 § 1 CIC Church’s Code of Law). Offices which are open to the laity are e.g. the office of the associate judge or the diocesan economist. The services (*ministeria*) serve likewise a spiritual purpose. According to the Church’s law, they include liturgical services like the duty of the lector. In the German speaking area both terms (services and offices) are applied to the jobs of the pastoral and community assistants. An office vested with a long tradition and different powers is that of the abess.⁷⁷

On the one hand, the text claims to use *officium* and *ministeria* in their canonical sense, as “office” and “service” respectively. On the other hand, it conflates both again with regard to lay pastoral assistants by an appeal to the peculiarity of the German language. Apparently, it simply sidesteps this major point, in order to easily come to the question of lay (women) administration of priestly duties.

76 THE SYNODAL PATH, Protokoll. Regionenkonferenzen “Fünf Orte – Ein Weg”, 15, 23, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redен_Beitraege/Regionenkonferenzen-20200904_Protokoll.pdf (accessed on 16.04.2025).

77 [My translation]. “Der Begriff „Amt“ orientiert sich hier am kirchenrechtlichen Verständnis von Amt als „*officium*“. Ämter (*officia*) dienen einem geistlichen Zweck, sind dauerhaft errichtet und beruhen auf göttlicher oder kirchlicher Anordnung (c. 145 § 1 CIC Kirchliches Gesetzbuch). Ämter, die Laiinnen und Laien offenstehen, sind z. B. das Amt des beisitzenden Richters oder der Diözesan-Ökonomin. Die Dienste (*ministeria*) dienen ebenfalls einem geistlichen Zweck. Zu ihnen zählt das Kirchenrecht die liturgischen Dienste wie z. B. den Lektorendienst. Im deutschsprachigen Raum werden beide Begriffe (Dienste und Ämter) auf die Berufe der Pastoral- und Gemeindeferentinnen und -referenten angewendet. Ein mit langer Tradition und verschiedenen Vollmachten ausgestattetes Amt ist das der Äbtissin.” THE SYNODAL PATH, Synodalforum III „Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche“: Arbeitstext für die Regionenkonferenz des Synodalen Weges am 4. September 2020, 6, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redен_Beitraege/Regionenkonferenz-20200904-3-Synodalforum-III-Arbeitstext.pdf (accessed on 16.04.2025).

2.2.2.6 Theological Import of the Triad

The theological import of the above observations from the lexicon, Vatican II Council, the canon law, the Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, and the resurgence of the confusion at the German Synodal Path, is that the *triplex munus* of Christ, and therefore, of the ministerial priesthood, is not reducible to one short meaning as *only* a function, or a duty, or an office. It is the whole of it: a gift, a permanent-existential office and identity, as well as a concrete task/service. It means that a synoptic reading of *munus* as regards the ministerial priesthood is more appropriate than a reductive one, at least from the linguistic perspective. The topicality of such a synopsis comes to the fore with theologies arguing that the priesthood is not a permanent-existential office, but only a function. The key concept on which their arguments rest is the biblical Greek word: διακονία.

2.3 Διακονία as Service *versus* office?

Διακονία (service) is sometimes interpreted as the opposite of “office” in the Church. The crucial thesis claims that *office* is not biblical. For instance:

Hans Küng (1928–2021) completely rejects “office” as a Christian concept. According to him, in contrast to service (διακονία), office is a concept interpolated by the Church into the Christian doctrine in order to institutionalize its hegemony.⁷⁸

The German New Testament exegete, Thomas Söding, likewise, holds the distinction between service (*Dienst*) and office (*Amt*) to be a peculiarity of the German language, but completely foreign to the Pauline letters. Διακονία is the only biblical word.⁷⁹ He further argues,

78 Cf. KÜNG Hans, *Wozu Priester?* (1971), in: *HKS* 4, Freiburg i. Br. 2015, 93–155: 107f.; cf. —, *Die Frau im Christentum* (2009), in: *HKS* 4, 392–485: 402.

79 Cf. SÖDING Thomas, *Gemeinsam unterwegs. Synodalität in der Katholischen Kirche*, Ostfildern 2022, 93; cf. —, *Das Charisma des Dienens. Die Entwicklung von Ämtern in der frühen Kirche. Bewegungen und Gegenbewegungen*, in: Walter KRIEGER / Balthasar SIEBERER (eds.), *Ämter und Dienste. Entdeckungen – Spannungen – Veränderungen*, Linz 2009, 89–146: 91f. Besides, he contradicts his own thesis when he notes elsewhere that Christianity was never without offices and services, cf. —, *Das Charisma des Dienens*, 98;

that the term “office” was introduced by Luther as an analogous concept between functions in the Church and in the state.⁸⁰

The German pastoral theologian Herbert Haslinger, concerned about the teamwork between the clergy and the laity, criticises the concept of the *office* of the priesthood as a venture of clericalism. Thus, he argues that the distinction between service and office was actually introduced in order to make a clear demarcation between the two groups. *Office* became a clericalized word. In his view, some German dioceses invented new appellations, e.g., “full-time occupational workers” (“*Hauptberufliche*”) in place of “full-time official workers” (“*Hauptamtliche*”), etc., for the laity working in the Church, just to guarantee that the appellation *office* is reserved to the clergy.⁸¹ Moreover, Haslinger considers this account of the genesis of that distinction to be only a sort of the superstructure. At the substructure lies a mindset which thinks that office is not service: “When both concepts *office* and *service* are used in the manner just described to distinguish two groups of personnel – the bearers of the Holy Orders and the non-clerical personnel – that is, in the sense of a demarcation, then it implies and expresses unambiguously, that office is *not* service.”⁸²

2.3.1 Διακονία as Service *and* Office

2.3.1.1 Internal Non-Contradiction of Service-Office

There is no inner opposition or necessary contradiction between the notions of office and service and there is nothing in the latter word which makes it *a priori* opposed to the former. The opposition presup-

cf. —, Zum Dienst in der Kirche bestellt. Der Aufbruch im Neuen Testament, in: Richard HARTMANN / Stefan SANDER (eds.), *Zeichen und Werkzeug. Die sakramentale Grundstruktur der Kirche und ihrer Dienste und Ämter*, Ostfildern 2020, 31–44: 32.

⁸⁰ Cf. SÖDING Thomas, *Das Charisma des Dienens*, 91f.

⁸¹ Cf. HASLINGER Herbert, Amt als Dienst. Zur diakonischen Identität des Bischofs im frühen Christentum, in: Rüdiger ALTHAUS (ed.), *In verbo autem tuo, Domine. Auf dein Wort hin, Herr. Festschrift für Erzbischof Hans-Josef Becker zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres*, Paderborn 2018, 51–75: 73f.

⁸² [My translation]. “Wenn die beiden Begriffe *Amt* und *Dienst* in beschriebener Weise gebraucht werden, um zwei Personalgruppen, die Weiheamtsträger und das nichtklerikale Personal, zu unterscheiden, also in abgrenzendem Sinn, ist damit implizit, aber unmissverständlich ausgesagt, dass das Amt *nicht Dienst* sei.” Ibid. 74.

posed by the above criticisms is only a strawman. The critics prejudicially project the contradiction into the notion of διακονία. Indeed, a διάκονος in the ancient Greek world does not only mean a “servant” in the most rudimentary sense of the word, but also “an *attendant* or *official* in a temple or religious guild,”⁸³ “a diviner ... because he is an interpreter of the gods, being acquainted with the manner of presenting gifts in a pleasant manner to the gods by means of sacrifice and the consequent bestowal of good things to men ... This word-group has to do with message and its transmission explaining why Hermes is the messenger of the gods, which is an official capacity.”⁸⁴ Even in its areligious linguistic usage, a “statesman” in the ancient Greek set-up was sometimes designated as διάκονος.⁸⁵ Thus, the exegete Innocent Ezeani notes: “That the word διακονέω κτλ in classical Greek only refers to service at table is the opinion of modern commentaries. Classical ancient Greek literatures show that the words belonging to this διακον-family have varieties of meanings.”⁸⁶

While it is true that the notion of diakonia gained a deeper and richer content through Christianity (service of love, humble work, preaching the word, care of the poor), it still remains the case that “the cognate nouns διακονία and διάκονος are well evidenced in the New Testament with διακονία meaning ‘service’ or ‘office’ occurring thirty-three times in the New Testament and διάκονος twenty nine times.”⁸⁷

Haslinger’s argument that the distinction between office and service *also* contains the proposition that office is not service, is therefore both fallacious and linguistically as well as theologically incorrect. The sense of an office is that it should offer a certain service. The non-actualization of the service or misuse of the office in real life does not obliterate the reason for the existence of the office. The same holds in the theology of

83 LIDDELL Henry George / SCOTT Robert, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, New York 1996, 398.

84 EZEANI Innocent Emezie, *The Apologetic Revisited: Exonerating Luke from an Ancestral Exegetical and Theological Burden*, Frankfurt am Main 2014, 214.

85 Cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik I: Grundlage des Dogmas. Einleitung in die Dogmatik*, Aachen 1997, 90; cf. EZEANI Innocent Emezie, *The Apologetic Revisited*, 214.

86 EZEANI Innocent Emezie, *The Apologetic Revisited*, 214.

87 Cf. *Ibid.*, 215f.

the priesthood. The New Testament concept of *διακονία*, likewise, does not compel us to oppose service to office.

2.3.1.2 Biblical Reality

2.3.1.2.1 Instance of Mt. 20:25–28 and Acts 1:15–26

The argument that the notion of office is foreign to the New Testament, rests on some sort of scriptural proof-texting and argumentum ex silentio. Indeed, the typical Greek word for an office holder (ὁ ἄρχων) is not used as a title for the twelve apostles or their successors in the New Testament. The mere absence, however, of a single word for a certain issue in the Scriptures is not a compelling evidence for the absence of its reality. The reality could be very much present, though not very explicit. This is why the Church fathers in their exegesis do not see only a literal sense of the Scriptures. The contexts reveal a truth, which may not have been given by a precise single term.⁸⁸

The above can be illustrated with two biblical scenes. In the first place, Christ uses both words ἄρχων and *διακονία* for two different groups of people, the context being the contention aroused among the twelve by the ambitious petition of (the mother of) James and John.

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers (*ἄρχοντες*) of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant (*διάκονος*), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”. (Mt. 20:25–28; cf. Mk. 10:42–45, Lk. 22:24–27).

The message is unambiguous: their call is a call to servanthood. The question can be posed: why does Christ compare them with the gentile holders of public office? I think, it is important to see the implicit mes-

⁸⁸ Cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus*, 121–124. He briefly presents the development of the interpretation of *munus* towards the sense of an *office* through an exegesis of the three gifts of the magi to the new born Christ: 131–134.

sage that the apostleship is an office in the new community of Christ. The comparison Christ makes here between the holders of office in the Church and in the world is not necessarily the *office* – as suggested, for example, by the New Testament exegete Josef Blank⁸⁹ –, but the mind-set and the mode of living of the office holder: service. On this account, the focus on denying the ministerial priesthood as such in the Church is a misplaced one.⁹⁰

The second biblical scene is an important event of the nascent Church at the threshold of the Pentecost, namely, the completion of the circle of the twelve apostles. It does not seem to me that it would have been such an important matter to fill up the void left by Judas Iscariot, if that empty position were *only* a matter of service in a functionalistic sense. It means that Peter’s decision is a weighty one, otherwise Judas’ “portion of the ministry” (Acts 1:17: τὸν κληρὸν τῆς διακονίας) or rather his “place in the ministry” (Acts 1:25: τὸν τόπον τῆς διακονίας) would have remained as such, but yet unoccupied. The seat is vacant, since Judas has left it [“turned aside from” it] (Acts 1:25: ἀφ’ ἧς παρέβη Ἰούδας). The position still *exists*. In other words, the issue is an office by virtue of which one is empowered to carry out a service. The service is bound to the office. In this case, the service consists in the collective witness of the twelve for the resurrected Christ. Again, the terms used by Luke in his account reflect the indissolubility of priestly office and service. Peter calls the vocation of the eleven and Judas a διακονία (Acts 1:17), yet in quoting the Hebrew word עֲרֻדָּה (p^oqudâ: overseer, oversight, office, visitation) of Ps. 109:8, he uses the Greek word ἐπισκοπή (supervisory office): “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’” (Acts 1:20). Finally, in the prayer

89 Cf. BLANK Josef, »Mitarbeiter an eurer Freude« – Vom Stil des kirchlichen Amtes, in: Solidaritätsgruppe Katholischer Priester der Diözese Speyer (ed.), *Gemeinde ohne Priester – Kirche ohne Zukunft?* Frankfurt am Main 1983, 9–56: 12–24.

90 It is additionally significant that the Lukan version of the contention (Lk. 22:14–38) falls within the context of Last Supper Discourse in which – if compared with the banquet discourse (symposium) of the ancient world – the positions of the partakers at the table play a role. In other words, the quarrel among the apostles may have had something to do with their positions at the Last Supper. Cf. EZEANI Innocent Emezie, *The Apologetic Revisited*, 192–195, esp. fn. 6.

text as reported by Luke, the terms ἀποστολή (office of the one sent / office of the apostle) and διακονία (service) are juxtaposed implying a unitive notion of both: “Then they prayed and said, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place’” (Acts 1:24f.)⁹¹

Joseph Ratzinger once gave a homily on this passage which is based on an understanding of Matthias’ election as an election into a sacramental office:

His [*scil.* Matthias’] appointment was the first installation into a spiritual office by the Church and in the Church ... The next step seems strange to us: they cast lots. But in the Old Testament, this is the way by which a decision which surpasses human criterion is handed over to God. It is the Old Testament way of leaving the installation to God himself. In this sense, one can say with good reason that the sacramentality of the priestly office is sketched out in this process, an office into which ultimately no human being can install anyone because it must come from a higher power than that which human beings possess.⁹²

2.3.1.2.2 Assimilation and Mutual Insemination of Meaning

It is noteworthy that, apart from the term ἄρχων, the ancient Greeks more often name an office by inflecting the ending of the title of the office. For instance, ἀγορανόμιον designates the office of the ἀγορανόμος (market official). A specific word for office itself is, mostly, not necessary. We find the same language phenomenon in the New Testament, at least

91 “καὶ προσευξάμενοι εἶπαν Σὺ κύριε καρδιογνώστα πάντων, ἀνάδειξον ὃν ἐξελέξω, ἐκ τούτων τῶν δύο ἓνα, λαβεῖν τὸν τόπον τῆς διακονίας ταύτης καὶ ἀποστολῆς, ἀφ’ ἧς παρέβη Ἰούδας πορευθῆναι εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν ἴδιον.”

92 [My translation]. “... seine Bestellung war die erste Einsetzung ins geistliche Amt, die von der Kirche und in der Kirche geschah ... Der nächste Schritt scheint uns merkwürdig: Es wird das Los geworfen. Aber vom Alten Testament her ist dies die Form, wie eine Entscheidung Gott übergeben wird, wo sie Menschenmaß übersteigt. Es ist die alttestamentliche Weise, die Einsetzung Gott selber zu überlassen. Insofern kann man mit gutem Grund sagen, in diesem Vorgang werde die Sakramentalität des Amtes vorgezeichnet, in das letztlich kein Mensch einsetzen kann, weil es aus einer höheren Vollmacht kommen muss, als Menschen sie besitzen.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Berufung zum geistlichen Dienst* (1976), in: *JRGS* 14/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2019, 678–679.

in the above Lukan account. If, on the one hand, διακονία designates the ministry as such, in which each of the twelve has a *place*, and on the other hand, διακονία is interspersed with ἐπισκοπή and ἀποστολή, then it is legitimate to speak of an assimilation and a mutual insemination of meanings: διακονία absorbs the notion of *office* emphasised more by the ἐπισκοπή and ἀποστολή, while these are grounded in the notion of service. This leads us back to my argument for a synoptical reading of *munus* (2.2.2.6).⁹³

Furthermore, not only Luke's but Paul's writings as well, indicate this phenomenon. Heinrich Schlier points out that Paul uses ἀποστολή as well as οἰκονομία (administration, management) to describe his διακονία (1 Cor. 9:17, Col. 1:25, Eph. 3:2).⁹⁴ In fact, the concepts he uses to explain his service, indicates the character of an office:

According to 1 Cor. 4:1f., the apostle should be seen as an οἰκονόμος, an 'administrator' of the mysteries of God. He is convinced that he has been 'set apart' for it from times immemorial (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:15), 'called' (Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1), and 'sent' (1 Cor. 1:17, cf. Gal. 2:8), and he is now working for Christ (or as Christ's representative) as his 'messenger' (2 Cor. 5:20, Eph. 6:20). Thus, he received from Christ the ἐξουσία, the empowerment, the right and authority to 'build up' the Church (2 Cor. 10:8, 13:10). Such formulations suggest in any case a sense of the apostolate as an office. It is about vocation, commission, empowerment and mission from above; a mission to be responsible for a certain domain; a service which engrosses and binds its bearer for life.⁹⁵

93 See also the interlocked usage of *officium* and *ministerium* in the Vulgate with regard to priesthood. Cf. VIOLI Stefano, *Officium e munus*, 121–124.

94 Cf. SCHLIER Heinrich, Die neutestamentliche Grundlage des Priestertums, in: *Der priesterliche Dienst I. Ursprung und Frühgeschichte* (QD 46), Freiburg i. Br. 1970, 81–114: 85.

95 [My translation]. "Nach 1 Kor 4 soll man den Apostel ansehen als einen οἰκονόμος, einen „Verwalter“ der Geheimnisse Gottes. Dafür ist er nach seiner Überzeugung von jeher „ausgesondert“ worden, Röm 1, 1; Gal 1, 15, „berufen“, Röm 1, 1; 1 Kor 1, 1, und „gesendet“, 1 Kor 1, 17; vgl. Gal 2, 8, und wirkt nun für Christus (oder an der Stelle Christi) als sein „Gesandter“, 2 Kor 5, 20; Eph 6, 20. Als solcher hat er vom Kyrios die ἐξουσία, die Ermächtigung, das Recht und die Gewalt, empfangen, die Kirche „aufzubauen“, 2 Kor 10, 8; 13, 10. In solchen Formulierungen deutet sich jedenfalls ein amtlicher Sinn des Apostolates an. Es

Söding's claim that the dyad "office-service" does not have any foothold in the Pauline letters, therefore, appears unwarranted.

Schlier further notes: The passing on of the apostolate through the "laying on of hands" by the apostles and their successors is not simply the passing on of functions. It is, rather, a transmission of the whole mission and *ipso facto* a canonical insurance of the continuation of their witness. It is the handing over of an office.⁹⁶

2.3.1.3 Second Observation on Vatican II's Terminology

Again, one finds *expressis verbis* in the documents of the Council a correlation of the Latin *munus* and the Greek διακονία as adequate replications of each other with regards to the priesthood as office and service:

Bishops, as successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord, to whom was given all power in heaven and on earth, the mission to teach all nations and to preach the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain to salvation by faith, baptism and the fulfilment of the commandments (cf. Mt. 28:18; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 26:17ff.). To fulfill this mission, Christ the Lord promised the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and on Pentecost day sent the Spirit from heaven, by whose power they would be witnesses to Him before the nations and peoples and kings even to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8-2:1 ff, 9:15). And that duty, which the Lord committed to the shepherds of His people, is a true service, which in sacred literature is significantly called "diakonia" or ministry (cf. Acts 1:17, 25; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 1:12).⁹⁷

geht um Berufung, Beauftragung, Bevollmächtigung und Sendung von oben her zu einem für einen bestimmten Bereich verantwortlichen, seinen Träger für sein Leben beschlagnehmenden und verpflichtenden Dienst." Ibid.

⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid., 102–104.

⁹⁷ "Episcopi, utpote Apostolorum successores, a Domino, cui omnis potestas in caelo et in terra data est, missionem accipiunt docendi omnes gentes et praedicandi Evangelium omni creaturae, ut homines universi, per fidem, baptismum et adimpletionem mandatorum salutem consequantur (cfr. Matth. 28, 18; Marc. 16, 15–16; Act. 26, 17 s.). Ad hanc missionem implendam, Christus Dominus Spiritum Sanctum promisit Apostolis et die Pentecostes e caelo misit, cuius virtute testes Eidem essent usque ad ultimum terrae, coram gentibus et populis et regibus (cfr. Act. 1, 8; 2, 1 ss.; 9, 15). Munus autem illud, quod Dominus pastoribus

2.4 Munus and Διακονία in the Light of John Paul II

There are, at least, four observations to make on John Paul II’s contributions to the question of *munus* and *diakonia*.

2.4.1 A Synoptic Usage of Munus

In his writings, John Paul II does not make any strict demarcation in the use of the triad *munus-officium-ministerium*. He rather uses them in a wide sense such that the one incorporates the other. Two examples may be given:

Firstly, in his first encyclical, the participation in the salvific mission of Christ by the Church (laity and clergy) is designated with all the three names: *officium*, *ministerium*, *munus*.

The Church performs this ministry (*munus*) by sharing in the “triple office” (*officium*) belonging to her Master and Redeemer. This teaching, with its Biblical foundation, was brought fully to the fore by the Second Vatican Council, to the great advantage of the Church’s life. For when we become aware that we share in Christ’s triple mission (*ministerii*), his triple office (*muneris*) as priest, as prophet and as king, we also become more aware of what must receive service from the whole of the Church as the society and community of the People of God on earth, and we likewise understand how each one of us must share in this mission and service.⁹⁸

Secondly, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, the episcopal office as such, retains the designation *ministerium*. Munus comes in when he speaks of the triple concrete expressions of that office:

populi sui commisit, verum est servitium quod in sacris Litteris «diakonia» seu ministerium significanter nuncupatur (cfr. Act. 1, 17 et 25; 21, 19; Rom. 11, 13; 1 Tim. 1, 12).” Lumen gentium §24, in: AAS 57 (1965) 5–67: 29. Bible reference as footnotes in the English original. ⁹⁸ JOHN Paul II, Encyclical Letter: Redemptor hominis §18, in: AAS 71 [1979] 257–324: 305. English translation: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html (accessed on 04.09.2024).

In the text of the Gospel of Matthew just quoted [*scil. Mt. 28:18–20*], the entire pastoral ministry (*ministerium*) can be seen as organized according to the threefold function (*munus*) of teaching, sanctifying and governing. We see here a reflection of the threefold dimension of Christ's service and mission. We, as Christians, and in a qualitatively new manner as priests, participate in the mission of our Master, who is Prophet, Priest and King, and we are called to bear special witness to him in the Church and before the world. These three functions (*triplex munus*) and the powers that derive from them express on the level of action the pastoral ministry (*munus pastorale*) that every Bishop receives with episcopal consecration. It is a share in Christ's own love that is given in the consecration; this love is made concrete in the proclamation of the Gospel of hope to all peoples (cf. *Lk 4:16–19*), in the administration of the sacraments to those who embrace salvation and in the guidance of God's holy people towards eternal life.⁹⁹

2.4.2 Διακονία as Office and Service

On the one hand, John Paul II emphasizes service as the basic character of the priestly ministry:

In a primary position in the Church are the *ordained ministries*, that is, the ministries *that come from the Sacrament of Orders*. In fact, with the mandate to make disciples of all nations (cf. *Mt 28:19*), the Lord Jesus chose and constituted the apostles-seed of the People of the New Covenant and origin of the Hierarchy – to form and to rule the priestly people. The mission of the Apostles, which the Lord Jesus continues to entrust to the Pastors of his people, is a true service, significantly referred to in Sacred Scripture as “*diakonia*”, namely, service or ministry.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ JOHN Paul II, *Pastores gregis* §9, in: AAS 96/12 [2004] 826–924: 837. English translation: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis.html (accessed on 04.09.2024). Cf. also §5–8. The same applies to *Redemptor Hominis* §19, §21.

¹⁰⁰ “Reperiuntur primum in Ecclesia quaedam ministeria ordinata, id est, ministeria quae ex Ordinis sacramento derivantur. Dominus enim Iesus elegit et constituit Apostolos, germina Populi Novi Foederis et sacrae Hierarchiae originem, eis committens mandatum ut docerent omnes gentes (cfr. *Mt 28, 19*) utque populum sacerdotalem efformarent

However, he insists that it is, precisely, by virtue of both characters (office and service) that the sacrament of orders is distinct from the common priesthood of the baptised. Hence, the Council, in *Lumen Gentium* §10 designates it as *ministerial*: “The council calls the latter [*scil. Sacrament of orders*] the ‘ministerial priesthood,’ which means both ‘office’ and ‘service.’”¹⁰¹

2.4.3 Sacramentality of the Ministerial Priesthood

John Paul II also emphasizes the sacramentality as the basis of the notion of the priestly office. It is only through the sacrament of ordination that the priestly office comes about. In contrast to a functionalistic understanding of an office – an interpretation which would use the duties as the starting point for defining the priesthood and equates the delegability of certain functions to lay persons with the handing over of the priestly office as such – John Paul II insists:

When necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of Orders. The Code of Canon Law states: “When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of the

ac regerent. Haec autem Apostolorum missio, quam Dominus Iesus concedere pergit sui Populi pastoribus, verum est servitium, quod in Sacris Litteris significanter « diakonia », id est, servitium, ministerium, appellatur.” John Paul II, Post-Synoda Apostolic Exhortation: *Christifideles laici* (1988) §22, in: *Vatican Website: Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html* (accessed on 04.09.2024). Latin Text in: AAS 81 [1989] 393–521: 428.

101 “Il Concilio chiama quest’ultimo « sacerdozio ministeriale », il che significa insieme « ufficio » e « servizio.” JOHN PAUL II, Holy Thursday Letter: Anche quest’anno §2, in: AAS 81 [1989] 1030–1038: 1031. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translation of his Holy Thursday Letters are taken from: Socias James (ed.), *Letters to My Brother Priests. Complete Collection of Holy Thursday Letters (1979–2005): Pope John Paul II*, Illinois 52006, 153.

law” [Can. 230, par. 3]. However, *the exercise of such tasks does not make Pastors of the lay faithful*: in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and in his Eternal Priesthood.¹⁰²

It does not in any way imply that sacrament (*ordo*) and office are simply the same.¹⁰³ The sacrament is the greater reality (God’s action) from which the office originates. The view that offices were gradually established in the Church in the course of time¹⁰⁴, therefore, falls short of the sacramental foundations of the ministerial priesthood. The sacramentality guarantees the unity of the three offices.

2.4.4 The Unity of the Triplex (In Contrast to Separation: Thomas Ruster’s Model)

It is important to note that the discussion on the three offices rests on the premise of their inseparable unity. They are “triple dimensions” of the one mission of Christ, not “three different functions”, since they “explain”, “condition” and “clarify” each other.¹⁰⁵ Over and above their mutual interdependence, their inseparability is rooted “most deeply in the Person of Christ ... He unites in himself all the three dimensions of the work of salvation.”¹⁰⁶ John Paul II writes: “As Christians, members of the People of God, and subsequently, as priests, sharers in the hier-

102 JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles laici* §23; cf. —, *General Audience on July 13, 1988*, §1.

103 On this topic, see: BUCKENMAIER Achim, *Sakramentalität des Priestertums – handeln in Persona Christi*, in: Regina MEYER / Bernward SCHMIDT (eds.), *Priesterliche Identität? Erwartungen im Widerstreit*, Münster 2021, 71–83: 71, 73–78.

104 Cf. HILBERATH Bernd Jochen, *Das priesterliche Dienstamt. Eine systematisch-theologische Perspektive*, in: Regina MEYER / Bernward SCHMIDT (eds.), *Priesterliche Identität? Erwartungen im Widerstreit*, Münster 2021, 57–70: 61.

105 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II., *Holy Thursday letter: Novo incipiente*, §3; cf. — *Pastores Gregis*, §9. Yves CONGAR puts it straight: „Christ’s priesthood is royal and prophetic, his propheticism is priestly and royal, and his royalty is prophetic and priestly.” CONGAR Yves, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, trans. by David SMITH, New York 1997, 27; cf. CONGAR Yves, *Sur la trilogie: Prophète-Roi-Prêtre*, in: *Rev. Sc. ph. th.* 67/1 (1983) 97–115: 112.

106 [My translation]. “Der tiefste Grund für diese untrennbare Einheit des Amtes der Lehre, der Heiligung und der Leitung ... liegt in der Person Christi ... Er vereinigt alle drei Dimensionen des Heilshandelns in sich.” GILLESSEN Herbert, “Das Wichtigste für mich:

archical order, we take our origin from the combination of the mission and office of our Teacher, who is Prophet, Priest and King ...”¹⁰⁷ In the same sense, but in a more striking way, Karl-Heinz Menke writes:

The representation of Christ through the apostolic ministry is not a bouquet of single functions which can be relocated from the vertical to the horizontal plane. Of course, with the exception of presiding the eucharist, absolution and anointing of the sick, a priest can delegate every other thing he does. But by that, the sacramental essence of the Church would already become a victim of functionalistic thinking. It is not the functions that produce the priest, but vice versa: the priest transforms all the functions as Christ’s representative. It is not only when he preaches or administers the sacraments, but also when he makes home visits or visits the sick; when he plays football with the mass servers; when he trains or encourages his coworkers; when he celebrates and is happy with people.¹⁰⁸

The insistence on the inseparability of the three dimensions is relevant to the question of the fundamental *munus* of the priesthood. This can be seen in the context of the recent calls for structural reforms in the Church.¹⁰⁹ As regards the structure of its offices, theological models are proposed which separate the three dimensions of the one priestly ministry. For instance, in Thomas Ruster’s model of separation of powers, the bishop indeed retains the three offices, while the presbyter’s minis-

daß ich Priester bin”, in: Stephan Otto HORN / Alexander RIEBEL (eds.), *Johannes Paul II. – Zeuge des Evangeliums. Perspektiven des Papstes an der Schwelle des dritten Jahrtausends*, Würzburg 1999, 286–293; 288; cf. Interdicasterial Instruction, *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, §2.

107 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §3.

108 [My translation]. “Die Christusrepräsentation des apostolischen Dienstes ist kein Strauß von einzelnen Funktionen, die man von der vertikalen auf die horizontale Ebene verlagern kann. Natürlich kann ein Priester bis auf Eucharistievorsitz, Absolution und Krankensalbung alles delegieren, was er tut. Aber damit hätte man bereits das sakramentale Wesen der Kirche dem funktionalen Denken geopfert. Nicht die Funktionen ergeben den Priester, sondern umgekehrt: Der Priester transformiert alle Funktionen in die Gestalt seiner Christusrepräsentation. Nicht nur wenn ein Priester predigt oder Sakramente spendet, sondern auch da, wo er einen Haus- oder Krankenbesuch macht, wo er mit den Ministranten Fußball spielt, wo er Mitarbeiter ausbildet oder ermutigt, wo er mit Menschen feiert und fröhlich ist ...” MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Sakramentalität*, 305.

109 A case study of the German Synodal Path is offered in Chapter 9.

try is reduced to one of them only.¹¹⁰ According to him, he experienced a perfect replication of his thesis in a Sunday eucharistic celebration which he attended at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2013. Its presider was a lay man, not a priest. The lay man was responsible for opening the celebration, for the initial dialogue of the preface, and for announcements at the end of the mass. A woman moderated the liturgy of the word, within which the mayor of the town held the homily. The priest only had the duty to read the preface and the eucharistic prayer and give the final blessing. Thus, the three offices were distributed to different persons or rather carried out by a team of persons.¹¹¹

2.5 Munus and *Διακονία* in the Light of Joseph Ratzinger

There are, at least, three observations to make on Ratzinger's contributions to the question of *munus* and *diakonia*. These observations include:

2.5.1 Biblical Reality of Office

Ratzinger writes that though the more specific terminology for office is not used for the New Testament priesthood, the reality is, nevertheless, evidently present. According to him:

¹¹⁰ Cf. RUSTER Thomas, *Balance of Powers. Für eine neue Gestalt des kirchlichen Amtes*, Regensburg 2019, 15, 214–222. For criticisms on his thesis, cf. STUBENRAUCH Bertram, *Dreiteilung des Priesteramts? – Es käme zu abstrusen Revierkämpfen* (2020), in: <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/24660-dreiteilung-des-priesteramts-es-kaeme-zu-abstrusen-revier-kaempfen> (accessed on 15.04.2024); cf. MARSCHLER Thomas, *Der priesterliche Dienst im Licht der Tria Munera-Lehre. Die Vorgabe des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils und ein aktueller amts theologischer Reformvorschlag*, in: *Divinitas: Rivista Internazionale di Ricerca e di Critica Teologica* 61 (2018) 343–382: 371–382.

¹¹¹ Cf. RUSTER Thomas, *Balance of Powers*, 10–12, 15. Apropos team building: Thomas Söding, for instance, interprets the texts of St. Paul about bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 3:8–13 and Phil. 1:1) as “proposals” for a “team formation” which should become the model of leadership in the Church. Cf. SÖDING Thomas, *Gemeinsam unterwegs*, 88.

The New Testament clearly differentiates the authorized representative who continues the mission of Jesus in an official capacity from the ordinary believers who are not so authorized. What we call ‘the hierarchy’ and ‘the priesthood’ are New Testament realities. A Catholic theologian will need to lay great emphasis on this, but he has no reason to conceal the fact that the New Testament has its own particular verbal usage. It never calls the officials ‘priests,’ or the office ‘office.’ The Greek words for office (*arkhe*, *exousia*, *time*, *telos*) are not, for the New Testament, appropriate descriptions for the offices of the Church.¹¹²

In support of this argument and to show the link to *διακονία*, he quotes the New Testament exegete Karl Hermann Schelke:

The New Testament knows these words, but does not employ them in the realm of the Church; rather it draws on the word *diakonia*. *Arkhe* is restricted in New Testament usage to the authority of synagogue and a state or to the angelic powers. *time* to the dignity of office of the Old Testament highpriest. The result of such lexicographical investigation is impressive enough evidence that office in the Church is an institution essentially ordered to service. The result also makes manifest the self-understanding of the New Testament that order and law mean essentially different things in the Church and in the world. Therefore, they cannot be named with the same words.¹¹³

112 RATZINGER Joseph, *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit* (1960), in: *JRGS* 8/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 37–101: 79. English translation: *The Open Circle: The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, trans. by William GLEN-DOEPLER, New York 1966, 92.

113 “Das Neue Testament kennt diese Wörter, verwendet sie aber für den kirchlichen Bereich nicht, sondern schafft das Wort *διακονία*. Ἀρχή and ἐξουσία sind im neutestamentlichen Gebrauch beschränkt auf die synagogale und staatliche Obrigkeit oder die Engelmächte, τιμή auf die Amtswürde der alttestamentlichen Hohenpriesters. Schon dieser lexicographische Befund sagt eindringlich, dass alles Amt nur Ordnung des Dienstes ist. Der Befund macht auch offenbar, dass nach dem Selbstverständnis des Neuen Testaments Ordnung und Recht in der Kirche und in der Welt wesentlich verschieden sind. Sie können darum nicht mit den gleichen Wörtern benannt werden.” SCHELKLE Karl Hermann, *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt*, Freiburg 1957, 39, fn. Quoted by Ratzinger in *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit*, 79f. (GLEN-DOEPLER William, *The Open Circle*, 92f.)

The diaconal nature of an office means that office is a relation. The priest possesses an office not for himself, but *for* the others. As regards himself alone, he is a Christian like others, and nothing more.¹¹⁴ Ratzinger states it succinctly in this form: “Service is the measure of office”¹¹⁵.

2.5.2 Abuse of the Term *Διακονία*

Ratzinger stridently denounces and rebuts the contrasting of service with office in the post-conciliar theology. According to him, such a functionalistic conception of the priesthood was developed from within the broader context of demands for an institutional equality for all in the Church. Thus, in order to give it a biblical justification, the New Testament term for “service” was abridged in such a way that only a heterarchical and fragmented image of the ecclesiastical office remained. The one who serves (“*Diener*”) becomes a sort of service provider (“*Dienstleister*”) or a functionary (“*Funktionär*”).¹¹⁶ For Ratzinger, this manner of treating a scriptural term is one of the most deeply rooted theological sins in the history of the Church:

The abuse of the word »service« in order to functionalize the priestly office and eliminate its actual character as a service is to be put on a level with the most blatant examples in the history of the Church of the perversion of a biblical word through a deceitful interpretation. In this case one awaits a protest from the exegetes but unfortunately to no avail.¹¹⁷

114 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes (1968), in: *JRGS* 12, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 350–386: 379.

115 [My translation]. “Der Dienst ist das Maß des Amtes.” Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche (1961), in: *JRGS* 12, 51–69: 58.

116 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, Demokratisierung der Kirche (1970, ³2005), in: *JRGS* 12, 159–186: 169f.

117 [My translation]. “Der Missbrauch des Wortes »Dienst« zur Funktionalisierung des Amtes und zur Aufhebung seines tatsächlichen dienenden Charakters ist den krassesten Beispielen der Umkehrung des Schriftwortes durch eine trügerische Interpretation an die Seite zu stellen, die es in der Kirchengeschichte gegeben hat. Leider wartet man hier auf den Protest der Exegeten noch vergeblich.” *Ibid.*, 170.

2.5.3 Entry of the Term “Office” into Catholic Theology

Ratzinger draws attention to the fact that the word “office” (*Amt*) was practically an irrelevant terminology in Catholic theology up to the time of Vatican II. Around that time, functionalistic-institutionalistic interpretations of the priesthood began to dominate in Catholic theology. It minimized or even outrightly displaced the sacramental-ontological conception. It was within this context that the word “office” was brought more and more into play in order to replace the more sacral term “priesthood”.¹¹⁸ Despite this mode of entry into Catholic Theology and the intentions associated with it, Ratzinger has no difficulty employing the term in his own theology of the priesthood. He employs it, however, as a complementary term for priesthood, not as a substitute, as intended by those who brought it into Catholic theology.

2.5.4 Sacramentality of the Office of the Priesthood

In addition to defining *munus* as office,¹¹⁹ Ratzinger also emphasizes that the concept, “sacrament”, is tied to the “office” of the priesthood. It is an office, not in a purely sociological sense, rather, it takes its origin from the operation of God in the Church and in his calling of people into the office.¹²⁰

The sacramentality of the office of the priesthood is important for Ratzinger in grappling with Martin Luther’s case against the Catholic conception of priesthood as a sacrament. He criticizes three philosophical-theological implications of Luther’s theology of the priesthood:

118 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Dienst und Leben der Priester* (1995), in: *JRGS* 7/2, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 897–915: 898; cf. —, *Die kirchliche Bewegungen und ihr theologischer Ort* (1998), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 363–390: 365.

119 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Kommentar zu den »Bekanntmachungen, die der Generalsekretär des Konzils in der 123. Generalkongregation am 16. November 1964 mitgeteilt hat«* (1965), in: *JRGS* 7/2, 699–711: 704.

120 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchlichen Bewegungen*, 365f.

1. Functionalism: The priesthood is merely a function, not an identity in the very being of the priest. A function which is not grounded in being also means that it only exists at the moment it is being exercised. At the times when nothing priestly is being done, no priesthood exists. It is a primacy of action over being.¹²¹
2. Undifferentiated equality: If the priesthood is only a function and not an office, then any person can exercise the duty. It is only for the sake of order that certain functions are reserved to the priest. If not, any person may preach.¹²²
3. Profanity: If it is true that every Christian has the authority to do that which priests do, then the priesthood does not require an ordination. The ordination to the priesthood would then just be a “profane act”. Consequently, the word “priesthood” gradually disappears from Luther’s vocabulary. He substitutes it with “*Amt*” (office). The idea finds its concrete expression in Luther’s conflation of territorial princes (*Landesherren*) with the office of the supreme heads of territorial Churches. Political and the spiritual leadership become unified in one person.¹²³

2.6 Munus and Διακονία in the Light of Walter Kasper

2.6.1 Entry of the Term “Office” into Catholic Theology

Kasper makes the claim that the term “office” (*Amt*), understood as a certain position with certain powers or authoritative responsibilities attached to it, has no roots in the Scriptures. He lists four ancient Greek words which express “office” in that sense: ἀρχή, τιμή, τέλος and λειτουργία – none of which was used by the authors of the New Testa-

121 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis* (1976), in: *JRGS* 12, 70–84: 81; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum* (1972), in: *JRGS* 12, 85–106: 99–101.

122 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 81; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 99–101.

123 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 81; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 99–101.

ment for those leading the Christian communities. Instead, they used the concept *διακονία*, indicating a completely opposite orientation of meaning, namely, the readiness to help, not only through social commitment for the needy, but also through the preaching of the gospel and carrying out the mandate of Christ to celebrate the eucharist.¹²⁴ According to him, the first appearance of the word *λειτουργία* – which for him is equivalent to office – in Catholic theology is in Clement of Rome’s First Epistle and in the Didache.¹²⁵

2.6.2 Priesthood as Service of Responsibility

The serving character of the ministerial priesthood is emphasized much in Kasper’s theology, though, for him, it does not mean that the priesthood is not an office.¹²⁶ It is truly an office in the sense of possessing the charism or responsibility for all other services or charisms in the church. The specific content of this charism of responsibility is to ensure the unity both in the church and for humanity at large.¹²⁷ In his earlier years though, Kasper seems to propose a functionalistic view of this office of responsibility/leadership for the unity of the Church. In his later years, he shifts more and more away from functionalism. Thus, like John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, he also emphasizes its sacramentality – a visible sign through which the Holy Spirit operates in the Church.¹²⁸

124 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Katholische Kirche*, 315f.

125 Cf. Ibid.; cf. CLEMENT OF ROME, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 40, 2,5; 41, 1; 44, 2,3-6; cf. Didache 15, 1.

126 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Katholische Kirche*, 315–322, 335. The earlier Kasper, though, seems not to be consistent on this. He once states categorically, that Jesus Christ, while on earth, did not establish any ministry. Rather, ministries started emerging in the apostolic and post-apostolic period. cf. KASPER Walter, *Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?* (1973), in: *WKGS* 15, 218–234: 231.

127 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche – der theologische Ort der Räte des gemeinsamen Apostolats* (1969, ²1970), in: *WKGS* 12, Freiburg i. Br. 2009, 19–37: 27–28, 30–31; cf. —, *Amt und Gemeinde* (1970), in: *WKGS* 12, 38–68: 53f., 61f.; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche* (1969, ²1970), in: *WKGS* 12, 153–172: 163–167; cf. —, *Die pastoralen Dienste in der Gemeinde* (1976), in: *WKGS* 12, 69–95: 82; cf. —, *Der Leitungsdienst in der Gemeinde* (1994), in: *WKGS* 12, 105–126: 111.

128 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude* (2007), in: *WKGS* 12, 325–423: 362–364.

2.7 The Content of the Triplex Munus

This sub-section is a brief explanation of the concrete meaning of ministries of teaching, sanctifying and governance. There are no significant differences in what the authors mean when they speak of the threefold office of the priesthood, except for the office of leadership.

2.7.1 Munus Sanctificandi

The ministry of sanctification of the priesthood directly aims at the sinfulness of man and his fundamental need of redemption; and to consolidate his relationship with God. It is, especially, through the sacraments that the redemptive love of God flows into man's life. The sacraments effect the sanctification of man. The Vatican II Council teaches that "the purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct."¹²⁹ Of course, not only the sacraments are involved. Liturgical prayers of the Church and personal prayer (intercessions) are indispensable too.¹³⁰

In this light, John Paul II teaches specifically that it is in the sanctification of the people through the sacraments as well as in leading them in the Church's Worship of God that the priest exercises his office of sanctification.¹³¹ Among the sacraments, eucharist and penance are most vital.¹³² Drawing inspiration from the words of Christ to Simon Peter – "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Lk 5:4) –, he enjoins bishops: "*Duc in sanctificando!* The 'nets' we are called upon to cast among men are, first of all, the sacraments, of which we are the principal dispensers, moderators, guardians and promoters. They form

129 *Sacrosanctum concilium* §59.

130 Cf. *Lumen gentium* §26; cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §5; cf. *Christus Dominus* §30.2

131 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §32–41.

132 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II., *Christifideles laici* §14; cf. —, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992) §26, in: *Vatican Website: Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html (accessed on 04.09.2024).

a sort of saving ‘net,’ which sets free from evil and leads to the fullness of life.”¹³³ John Paul II gives more concrete details:

The sanctification of the Christian takes place in the waters of Baptism, is consolidated by the sacraments of Confirmation and Reconciliation, and is nourished by the Eucharist, the Church’s greatest treasure, the sacrament by which the Church is constantly built up as the People of God, the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit ... The Bishop carries out his ministry of sanctification by celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments, by praising God in the Liturgy of the Hours, by presiding over the other sacred rites and by promoting liturgical life and authentic popular piety. Of all the celebrations at which the Bishop presides, special importance attaches to those which manifest the specific nature of the episcopal ministry as the fullness of the priesthood. These include especially the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation, sacred ordinations, the solemn celebration of the Eucharist at which the Bishop is surrounded by his presbyterate and the other ministers – as for example in the Mass of Chrism – the dedication of churches and altars, the consecration of virgins and other rites of importance for the life of the particular Church. In these celebrations, the Bishop visibly appears as the father and the pastor of the faithful, the “great priest” of his people (cf. *Heb* 10:21), the one who prays and serves as a model of prayer, the one who intercedes for his brothers and sisters and in the assembly beseeches and gives thanks to the Lord, making manifest God’s primacy and glory.¹³⁴

In Ratzinger’s formulation of the same, the priest’s ministry of sanctification consists in bringing people into contact with the Most Holy, with God himself; and this he does, precisely, by using the means which God provided for the transformation of man. He writes:

Today I would like to reflect with you briefly on the priest’s second duty, that of sanctifying people, above all through the sacraments and the worship of the Church. Here we must ask ourselves first of all: what does

133 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §5.

134 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §32f.

the word “Holy” mean? The answer is: “Holy” is God’s specific quality of being, namely, absolute truth, goodness, love, beauty pure light. Thus sanctifying a person means putting him or her in touch with God, with this being light, truth, pure love. It is obvious that such contact transforms the person. The ancients had this firm conviction: no one can see God without dying instantly. The power of truth and light is too great! If the human being touches this absolute current, he cannot survive. On the other hand there is also the conviction: without a minimal contact with God man cannot live. Truth, goodness and love are fundamental conditions of his being. The question is: how can man find that contact with God, which is fundamental, without dying overpowered by the greatness of his divine being? The Church’s faith tells us that God himself creates this contact that gradually transforms us into true images of God. Thus we have once again arrived at the priest’s task of “sanctifying”. No man on his own, relying on his own power, can put another in touch with God. An essential part of the priest’s grace is the gift, the task of creating this contact. This is achieved in the proclamation of God’s word in which his light comes to meet us. It is achieved in a particularly concentrated manner in the Sacraments. Immersion in the Paschal Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ takes place in Baptism, is reinforced in Confirmation and Reconciliation and is nourished by the Eucharist, a sacrament that builds the Church as the People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 32). Thus it is Christ himself who makes us holy, that is, who draws us into God’s sphere. However, as an act of his infinite mercy, he calls some “to be” with him (cf. Mk 3: 14) and to become, through the Sacrament of Orders, despite their human poverty, sharers in his own priesthood, ministers of this sanctification, stewards of his mysteries, “bridges” to the encounter with him and of his mediation between God and man and between man and God (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5).¹³⁵

135 RATZINGER Joseph / BENEDICT XVI, General Audience on Wednesday 5th May 2010, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100505.html (accessed on 13.04.2023).

Kasper’s brings in the perspective of the Church’s unity into the priest’s ministry of sanctification through the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the expression and source of that unity. Hence, the priest serves the unity of the Church through the sacraments.¹³⁶

2.7.2 Munus Docendi

The prophetic-teaching office of the bishop is expressed in his witness for the gospel of Christ. This witness encompasses the different forms of proclaiming the Gospel: magisterial definitions, evangelical preaching (kerygma) through which persons come into contact with the Christian Gospel, the deepening of the understanding of the Faith (catechesis), homily in the liturgy, as well as the personal life witnessing.¹³⁷

John Paul II adopts the above completely in his own writings.¹³⁸ Beyond that, however, he makes some original contributions. Firstly, the *munus docendi* of the bishop, alongside the activity of teaching the Gospel of Christ, is also a preservative task. It is the deeper element in teaching: the preservation of that Gospel as handed down through the tradition of the Church. “The meaning of the episcopal *munus docendi* is rooted in the very nature of what must be preserved, that is, the deposit of faith.”¹³⁹ Teaching preserves that which is being taught. Secondly, John Paul also makes a fine distinction on the authority of the bishop in teaching. By virtue of his episcopal consecration, he has an *objective* authority of preaching the Gospel, irrespective of his personal strengths or weaknesses. Nevertheless, his objective authority becomes *subjectively* established through his own lifestyle.

The witness of his life becomes for a Bishop a new basis for authority alongside the objective basis received in episcopal consecration. “Authority” is thus joined by “authoritativeness”. Both are necessary. The former,

136 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 404–407.

137 Cf. *Lumen gentium* §12, §25; *Presbyterorum ordinis* §4; *Christus Dominus* §12–14, 30.2.

138 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II., *Redemptor hominis* §19; cf. —, *Christifideles laici* §14; cf. — *Pastores dabo vobis* §26; cf. — *Pastores gregis* §5, §29.

139 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §28.

in fact, gives rise to the objective requirement that the faithful should assent to the authentic teaching of the Bishop; the latter helps them to put their trust in his message.¹⁴⁰

Proclaiming or teaching the Word of God is one of Ratzinger's favourite theological themes, such that it cannot be given sufficient consideration in this brief section. A paradigmatic text of his understanding of the priest's *munus docendi* is his catechesis as Pope on 14th April 2010. In it, he explains the ministry by establishing the reason for its existence in Christ. He brings into light its necessity for man, especially in the contemporary crisis of the search for the salvific truth.

Today, in the midst of the educational emergency, the *munus docendi* of the Church, exercised concretely through the ministry of each priest, is particularly important. We are very confused about the fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are. Regarding all this, there are numerous contrasting philosophies that come into being and disappear, creating confusion about the fundamental decisions on how to live; because collectively we no longer know from what and for what we have been made and where we are going. In this context the words of the Lord who took pity on the throng because the people were like sheep without a shepherd came true (cf. Mk 6: 34). The Lord had noticed this when he saw the thousands of people following him in the desert because, in the diversity of the currents of that time, they no longer knew what the true meaning of Scripture was, what God was saying. The Lord, moved by compassion, interpreted God's word, he himself is the Word of God, and thus provided an orientation. This is the function *in persona Christi* of the priest: making present, in the confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world. Therefore the priest does not teach his own ideas, a philosophy that he himself has invented, that he has discovered or likes; the priest does not speak of himself, he does not speak for himself, to attract

140 Ibid., §31.

admirers, perhaps, or create a party of his own; he does not say his own thing, his own inventions but, in the medley of all the philosophies, the priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead. What Christ said of himself applies to the priest: «My teaching is not mine» (Jn 7: 16); Christ, that is, does not propose himself but, as the Son he is the voice, the Word of the Father. The priest too must always speak and act in this way: «My teaching is not mine, I do not spread my own ideas or what I like, but I am the mouthpiece and heart of Christ and I make present this one, shared teaching that has created the universal Church and creates eternal life».¹⁴¹

The uniqueness of the priest’s teaching ministry is the fact that he teaches and witnesses *in the name* of Christ. Thanks to the sacramental ordination, the priest’s witness has an *official* mark. This means, it is something more than just a personal witness. Kasper names it “preaching the gospel in a priestly way”, following St. Paul’s description of his preaching ministry as a liturgical service (Rom. 1:9); he emphasizes the sacramental effectiveness of the priest’s proclamation in the liturgy.¹⁴²

2.7.3 Munus Regendi

The priestly ministry of governance has the widest scope. Reflections on what is very specific to that ministry, or how it is to be concretely and precisely exercised, deviate from one author to the other – not in substance but in the emphasized aspects.

Vatican II explains it in terms of a service bound with authority to take effective decisions in the Name of Christ over the local Church. It is a service, but not a service subjected to human caprices, rather one that *builds up* and *leads* the people to God.¹⁴³ Here, the emphasis is more on ecclesial authority as a legitimate mark of the ministry of the

141 RATZINGER Joseph / BENEDICT XVI, General Audience on 14th April 2010, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100414.html (accessed on 13.04.2023).

142 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 388–390.

143 *Lumen gentium* §27f.

bishop. In the Council's Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops, the ministry of governance is fleshed out completely in pastoral works of a good shepherd.

In fulfilling their office as shepherd, pastors should take pains to know their own flock. Since they are the servants of all the sheep, they should encourage a full Christian life among the individual faithful and also in families, in associations especially dedicated to the apostolate, and in the whole parish community. Therefore, they should visit homes and schools to the extent that their pastoral work demands. They should pay especial [sic!] attention to adolescents and youth. They should devote themselves with a paternal love to the poor and the sick. They should have a particular concern for workingmen. Finally, they should encourage the faithful to assist in the works of the apostolate.¹⁴⁴

Service and authority are not mutually exclusive, rather complementary aspects of the same ministry.

John Paul II likewise adopts the above teaching fully. He further expands the areas of the pastoral care and authority of the bishop to include the institutions of the local church (e.g., the diocesan curia), pastoral visit to the parishes, taking care of his presbyterate, promotion and formation of priestly vocations, care of the permanent deacons and those in a consecrated life.¹⁴⁵ John Paul II places more emphasis on the pastoral character of the governing office. He calls it “service of charity” (“*Servitium caritati*”).¹⁴⁶ Again, he brings in his fine distinction between objective and subjective authority. In governance, a pastoral understanding of authority remains decisive:

The Bishop's governance, nonetheless, will be pastorally effective – once again this must be recalled – only if it rests on a moral authority bestowed by his life of holiness. This is what will dispose hearts to accept the Gospel that the Bishop proclaims in his Church, as well as the rules which he

¹⁴⁴ *Christus Dominus* §30.2.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §32, §43–54.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis* §26.

lays down for the good of the People of God ... The exercise of authority in the Church cannot be understood as something impersonal or bureaucratic, precisely because it is an authority born of witness. All that the Bishop says and does must reveal the authority of Christ’s word and his way of acting. Without the authoritativeness of his lived holiness – his personal witness of faith, hope and love – only with difficulty could a Bishop’s governance be accepted by the People of God as a manifestation of the active presence of Christ in his Church.¹⁴⁷

John Paul II literally coincides with Kasper on a particular point, namely, that the pastor’s *munus regendi* consists in steering the different charisms for the unity of the Church. “The Church is an organically structured community which finds expression in the coordination of different charisms, ministries and services for the sake of attaining the common end, which is salvation. The Bishop is responsible for bringing about this unity in diversity ...”¹⁴⁸ In *Pastores dabo vobis* he writes:

This *munus regendi* represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the bishops. This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who “presides over” and “leads” a community, of an “elder” in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (cf. Ti. 1:7-8).¹⁴⁹

147 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis* §43.

148 Ibid., §44.

149 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §26.

Kasper, describing the priest's office of leadership, writes in 1969/70 that its task is "to bring the many charisms into a meaningful cooperation, to integrate them, to some extent to discover them and to bring them together into a unity."¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the charism of community leadership presupposes purely human leadership qualities: "The capacity to make contact with people, to hold a conversation, to lead people, to organize, for management (in the good and necessary sense of the word). It requires a firm, amicable, balanced nature. Finally, it is not possible without initiative, leadership will, fantasy and knowledge of human nature."¹⁵¹

However, John Paul II retorts any democratic concept of that coordination. It is a divinely given power of coordination. The priest is imbued with the power to effect a judgement which is in service of the unity/communion of the Church.

This said, however, it must be added that the ministry of the Bishop absolutely cannot be reduced to the function of a simple coordinator. By its very nature, the *munus episcopale* entails a clear and unequivocal right and duty of governance, which also includes the element of jurisdiction. Pastors are public witnesses, and their *potestas testandi fidem* attains its fullness in the *potestas iudicandi*: the Bishop is not only called to bear witness to the faith, but also to evaluate and discipline its outward expression by the believers entrusted to his pastoral care. In carrying out this task he will do everything possible to win the consent of his faithful, but in

150 [My translation]. "Seine Aufgabe ist es, die vielen Charismen miteinander in ein sinnvolles Zusammenwirken zu bringen, sie zu integrieren, sie zum Teil erst zu entdecken und sie zu einer Einheit zusammenzuführen." KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 28; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 159; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes* (1969) in: *WKGS* 12, 181–194; 186, 192f.; cf. —, *Neue Aspekte im Verständnis des Priesteramtes* (1973), in: *WKGS* 12, 195–210; 202. On Kasper's general-biblical view of priestly leadership as being-a-shepherd, see: —, *Diener der Freude*, 373–380.

151 [My translation]. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 188; cf. —, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 28; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 164f.

the end he will have to take personal responsibility for decisions which he as their pastor considers in conscience to be necessary, concerned as he is above all for the future judgment of God.¹⁵²

Ratzinger does not delve much into the concrete expressions of the *munus regendi*, but reflects on its biblical foundations. It has its roots in the biblical Shepherd-King-Motif which in turn was taken from the conceptual world of antiquity. He summarizes the long history of the development pointedly in this form:

The image of the shepherd, which Jesus uses to explain his mission both in the Synoptics and in the Gospel of John, has a long history behind it. In the ancient Near East, in royal inscriptions from both Sumer and the area of Babylonia and Assyria, the king refers to himself as the shepherd instituted by God. “Pasturing sheep” is an image of his task as a ruler. This image implies that caring for the weak is one of the tasks of the just ruler. One could therefore say that, in view of its origins, this image of Christ the Good Shepherd is a Gospel of Christ the King, an image that sheds light upon the kingship of Christ.¹⁵³

Another aspect emphasized by Ratzinger is the meaning of priestly authority. The authority exercised by the priest as leader of the people of God is not his own authority and not of the order of this world but has a transcendental root in the supreme authority – God the Father through Christ. It is an authority delegated by Christ to tend the people of God. It is a sacramental authority. It, therefore, presupposes obedience to Christ and the Church on the part of the one called into it.¹⁵⁴ In other words, authority and service are two sides of the same reality.

152 JOHN PAUL II, §44.

153 RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth I. Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung* (2007), in: *JRGS* 6/1, 127–405: 350f. English Translation: *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. by Adrian J. WALKER, New York 2007, 272.

154 RATZINGER Joseph / BENEDICT XVI, General Audience on 26th May 2010, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100526.html (accessed on 13.04.2023).

2.8 Chapter Summary

Two key concepts of this work are the objects of a preliminary clarification. “Ministerial Priesthood” refers primarily to the bishops. The Latin term “*munus*” is a polysemous word, even when used in reference to the priesthood. Three levels of specification are relevant for the theme of the ministerial priesthood. Firstly, it designates the participation of the bearer of the holy orders (Bishop/priest) in the mission of Christ. Secondly, it designates the ministerial priesthood both as a service and an office in the sense of an indispensable form of existence in the Church. Its ancient Greek and biblical counterpart is the term *διακονία*. The three authors to be studied understand it in this sense. Thirdly, threefold dimensions of *munus* have their respective contents which are mutually inclusive and are at the service of human salvation: in the ministry of sanctification, it is the administration of the sacraments; in the ministry of teaching, it is the different forms of proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel of Christ; the ministry of governance bespeaks the authority of the pastoral care of Christ as represented by the priest.

Chapter 3: A Historical Sketch

3.1 Prehistory

The titles – priest, prophet and king – are a biblical triad rooted both in the Old and the New Testaments. This has been studied by various authors.¹⁵⁵ The conscious theological reflection on the trilogy is sometimes presented as a discovery of the protestant theology since John Calvin (1509–1564). In this view, it was adapted by the 19th century catholic theologians like Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835–1888) and John Henry Newman (1801–1890). These applied the trilogy to the ministerial priesthood as well.¹⁵⁶ The element of truth about the protestant originality seems to be that Calvin is the first to make a systematic theology out of it. He restricts it strictly to the soteriological and Christological interpretation and finds no link to the ministerial priesthood.¹⁵⁷

However, it has been shown that the Church Fathers, the ancient liturgical prayers, and medieval Catholic theologians have deeply reflected on and with the trilogy. They initially applied it strictly to Christ and later to Christians and to the priestly ministry. All the same, they did not build a theological system out of it.¹⁵⁸ For example, the

155 For a systematic explanation of the scriptural bases, one may consult: Schick Ludwig, *Das Dreifache Amt*, 35–54; CONGAR Yves, *Sur la trilogie*, 97f.; NOCKE Franz-Josef, *Katholische spezielle Sakramentenlehre*, in: Theodor SCHNEIDER (ed.), *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, Düsseldorf³ 2006, 226–375: 346f.; cf. BÖHLER Dieter, *Levi's Temple Service and the Messiah according to Luke*, trans. by Padraig Ó RIAIN and Dagmar Ó RIAN, in: Mariusz BILNIEWICZ (ed.), *Agere in persona Christi: Apects of the Ministerial Priesthood*, Wells 2015, 13–26.

156 For instance: cf. LEHMANN Karl, *Das theologische Problem des theologischen Ansatzes zum Verständnis des Amtspriestertums*, in: *Existenzprobleme des Priesters*, München 1969, 121–175: 159; cf. SCHICK Ludwig, *Das Dreifache Amt*, 103–107; cf. BARRON Robert, *Optatam Totius*, in: Matthew LAMB / Matthew LEVERING (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, Oxford 2017, 191–207: 192.

157 Cf. SCHICK Ludwig, *Das Dreifache Amt*, 91–96; cf. BOYSEN Knud Henrik, *Christus und sein dreifaches Amt. Multiperspektivische Annäherungen an eine zentrale Figur christologischen Denkens*, Berlin/Boston 2019, 77–103.

158 Cf. CONGAR Yves, *Sur la trilogie*, 98–102; cf. DE MEY Peter, *The Bishop's Participation in the Threefold Munera: Comparing the Appeal to the Pattern of the Tria Munera at Vatican II and in the ecumenical dialogues*, in: *The Jurist* 69 (2009) 31–58: 33; cf. CORDES Paul

“content” of John Chrysostom’s work on the priesthood is precisely the three offices, even though he does not use those terminologies. In other words, the discovery of the trilogy as such is Catholic in its origin, and likewise its relevance for the ministerial priesthood.

The ancient Church had no systematic theology of the ministerial priesthood according to the threefold scheme. Nevertheless, the ministry was interpreted more from sanctification and leadership in a wholistic sense. This is evident, for instance, in the first letter of Clement of Rome (1st century A.D.)¹⁵⁹, or in the prayer of episcopal consecration in the *Traditio Apostolica* (3rd century)¹⁶⁰, or in the thoughts of John Chrysostom (4th century)¹⁶¹. It means that the prioritization of the ministry of sanctification preceded the systematic elaboration of the threefold office.

From the early Middle Ages, however, the wholistic sense seems to have gradually given way to a reductive focus on the sanctification powers of the priest. The priority accorded the sanctification ministry gradually became an isolation. Priests became more or less identified as only administrators of the sacraments.

Josef, “Wer nicht Gott gibt, gibt zu wenig.” Glaubensimpulse nach sechzig Priesterjahren, Heiligenkreuz 2021, 321f. Some of the referenced Church Fathers include: Justin MARTYR, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 86,3 (*St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. by Thomas Falls, Washington, D.C. 2003, 134; EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Historia ecclesiastica* I, 3 (*Eusebius von Caesarea. Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by Heinrich KRAFT, München 62012, 90–93; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* III,5, trans. by John ASHWORTH, Piscataway 2011, 43f.; PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, Sermon 59, 5 (*St. Peter Chrysologus. Selected Sermons*, vol. 2, trans. by William PALARDY, Washington, D.C. 2004, 226f.); PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, Sermon 126, 7 (*St. Peter Chrysologus. Selected Sermons*, vol. 3, trans. by William PALARDY, Washington, D.C. 2005, 184f.).

159 Cf. HAUKE Manfred, *Die Bedeutung des Bischofsamtes bei den Apostolischen Vätern*, in: Rüdiger Althaus (ed.), *In verbo autem tuo, Domine. Auf dein Wort hin, Herr. Festschrift für Erzbischof Hans-Josef Becker zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres*, Paderborn 2018, 77–96: 90f.

160 Cf. *Traditio Apostolica* 3 (FC 1, trans. by William GEERLINGS, Freiburg i. Br. 1991, 216–221); cf. HASLWANTNER Elias, *Hirte und Hohepriester. Zum Gebet für die Weihe eines Bischofs in der sogenannten Traditio Apostolica*, in: Michaela HASTETTER / Ephräm Givi LOMIDZE / Walther WLADIKA (eds.), *Das kirchliche Amt im Licht der Gottesfrage – Orient und Okzident im Dialog* (Theologische Orient&Okzident-Studien 5), Sankt Ottilien 2023, 59–82: 67–80.

161 cf. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De sacerdotio* III, 4–6; cf. FRIEDROWICZ Michael (ed.), *Johannes Chrysostomus. De sacerdotio. Über das Priestertum*, Fohren-Linden 2013, 54–63, 185–197)

Martin Luther (1483–1546), reacting to the state of affairs, went to another reductive extreme. He understood the ministerial priesthood solely as a ministry of preaching.¹⁶² The Council of Trent (1545–1563) condemned Luther's teaching.¹⁶³ The Council was not dealing with the question on the fundamental ministry as such; but it took a staunch defence of the bond between priesthood and the eucharist – a position which effectively became its exegetical history. In any case, up to the middle of the twentieth century, the centrality of the ministry of sanctification was simply presumed.

3.2 Eve of Vatican II Council

The conscious and specific quest for the fundamental *munus* of the ministerial priesthood – in so far as the three *munera* are seen in their unity – started shortly before the Council. Three names that could be associated with this period are: Michael Schmaus (1897–1993), Henri du Lubac (1896–1991), Karl Rahner (1904–1984).

Michael Schmaus: In contrast to the neo-scholastic dogmatic theologians of his time, his *Katholische Dogmatik* (1938–1941) did not postulate the office of the priesthood as a given. Instead, he begins his explanation with the question: Why, in the first place, does this office exist? In his explanation, he then shows that, from the historical development, the celebration of the eucharist was considered to be the priest's primary duty.¹⁶⁴

Henri du Lubac: In his work *Méditation sur l'Église*, published in 1952, he develops a eucharistic ecclesiology. Within that context, he correspondingly explained the priesthood on the basis of eucharistic power of the priest. He considers the ministry of sanctification to be the construction point of the two other ministries.¹⁶⁵

162 See section 5.11.3.

163 See section 5.11.4.

164 Cf. SCHMAUS Michael, *Katholische Dogmatik* IV/1, ^{3,4}München 1952, 571–575; cf. KUČKOVSKÝ Ladislav, *Auf dem Weg*, 39, 40, 55, 69.

165 Cf. DE LUBAC, Henri, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. by Michael MASON, New York 1956, 87–113.

Karl Rahner: Prior to the Council, he opposed defining the priesthood based on only the eucharistic sacrifice.¹⁶⁶ In the years after Council, he developed his theory of the priority of preaching.

3.3 Vatican II Council and the Post-Conciliar Crisis

The Second Vatican Council and the years around it constitute the exact historical context for the problem under consideration; and there are two reasons for this:

1. The Council is the first *extraordinary* Magisterium which uses the triplex-munus-scheme to explain the ministerial priesthood.¹⁶⁷ Given that the texts of the Council appear to reveal a certain hierarchy within the three *munera*, the real discourse started after the Council, and came into public consciousness.
2. The three authors under consideration – John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper – made their contributions to the topic during the period of the Council and in its wake.

Given that the Council no longer defined the ministerial priesthood only from a sacral-cultic perspective but with threefold scheme, Avery Dulles describes the Council's accentuations as an "abrupt departure from a tradition of many centuries", a departure which subsequently evoked a confusion or a crisis of the priestly identity.¹⁶⁸ The theological questions at the background of the crisis include: the biblical-historical-exegetical justifiability of the necessity of a ministerial priesthood, the question of celibacy, and the theological justifiability of using the threefold scheme as an interpretative key for understanding the sacra-

166 Cf. RAHNER Karl, *Priesterliche Existenz* (1942, 1959), in: SW 20, Freiburg 2010, 196–216.

167 Vatican I Council (1869–1870) would have been the first since there were drafts to that end. Precedent approaches in the *ordinary* Magisterium include: Leo XIII, Encyclical: *Satis Cognitum*, in: ASS 28 (1895–96) 708–739: 723; Pius XII, Encyclical: *Mystici Corporis Christi*, AAS 35 (1943) 193–248: 200–209, 247; —, Encyclical: *Mediator Dei*, in: AAS 39 (1947) 521–595: 525–528. Cf. SCHICK Ludwig, *Das Dreifache Amt*, 119–129.

168 Cf. DULLES Avery, *The Priestly Office*, 1f., 43f.

ment of holy orders. For the purpose of this work, the last point is significant. Dulles describes the crisis concerning it:

Since the council many theologians have wondered whether a convincing rationale can be given for assigning all three functions to the same individual and calling that individual a priest. Even if the confection of the eucharist and the absolution from sins are reserved to priests, could not the functions of preaching and pastoral governance be taken over by others? Is priesthood to be reduced to the few functions that cannot be performed by anyone except bishops and presbyters? If the prophetic and pastoral tasks are not less important than the ritual, does the priestly ministry still have the high significance and centrality traditionally attributed to it?¹⁶⁹

These questions emerging out of a crisis boil down to one basic question: Is there any hierarchy in the relationship of the three offices to one another? Otherwise put: Is it possible to essentially define the priesthood from one ministry which then integrates and conditions the other two? Is there a fundamental *munus*? If yes, which and why?

Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner were the leading figures of the primacy of the word. For Rahner, the priest is ordained first and foremost for the proclamation of the word. The prioritization of sanctification is no longer in keeping with the times and not expressly recognizable in the Scripture.¹⁷⁰ According to Ratzinger, prior to the Council, it was “typically protestant” to define the priesthood from the primacy of the word. During and after the Council, it became a Catholic approach as well. This, he thinks, is proved by the image of priesthood presented by the Council in the Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, though with an

169 Ibid., 4.

170 Cf. RAHNER Karl, *Priester und Dichter* (1955), in: *SW* 12, Freiburg i. Br. 2005, 421–440; cf. —, *Der theologische Ansatzpunkt für die Bestimmung des Wesens des Amtspriestertums* (1969, 1970), in: *SW* 20, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 241–246; cf. —, *Theologische Reflexionen zum Priesterbild von heute und morgen* (1969), in: *SW* 20, 247–262: 249–257; cf. —, *Zum Selbstverständnis des Amtspriesters* (1972), in: *SW* 20, 271–284: 275f.

important and essential difference: The primacy of proclamation does not necessarily exclude the sanctification ministry, rather it includes it.¹⁷¹

In the light of the image of the shepherd, the ministry of governance was also a favourite option after the council. Its leading protagonists were Hans Urs von Balthasar, Walter Kasper and Jean Galot.¹⁷²

According to Pasterczyk, in the period after the Council, the protagonists of the ministries of the word and leadership dominated the debate while only a few theologians still ventured to give a systematic account of the primacy of sanctification.¹⁷³ This seems, to me, not to be the case. It was precisely the crisis that prompted theologians and philosophers to defend the priority of the ministry of sanctification, while not isolating it: Yves Congar,¹⁷⁴ Heinrich Schlier,¹⁷⁵ Otto Semmelroth,¹⁷⁶ Josef Pieper,¹⁷⁷ Karl Becker,¹⁷⁸ Jean Danielou,¹⁷⁹ Robert Spaemann¹⁸⁰. This is where Johannes Paul II falls in. He championed it officially and robustly.

171 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Dienst und Leben der Priester*, 89f. For the rest, see chapter five.

172 Cf. VON BALTHASAR Hans Urs, *Pneuma und Institution. Skizzen zur Theologie IV*, Einsiedeln 1974, 340–368: 353–368; cf. —, *Der Priester im Neuen Testament. Eine Ergänzung*, in: *GuL* 43 (1970) 39–45; cf. —, *Amt und Existenz*, in: *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch*, Einsiedeln 1972, 116–130; cf. GALOT Jean, *Theology of the Priesthood*, 38–50, 135–153. For Walter Kasper, see chapter six of this work.

173 Cf. PASTERCZYK Piotr, *Theologie des kirchlichen Lehramtes*, 170.

174 Cf. CONGAR Yves, *Le sacerdoce du Nouveau Testament. Mission, et culte*, in: Jean FRISQUE / —, *Les Prêtres. Décrets «Presbyterorum Ordinis» et «Optatam totius»*. *Textes Latins et traductions françaises*, Paris 1968, 233–256: 240–256.

175 Cf. SCHLIER Heinrich, *Grundelemente des priesterlichen Amtes im Neuen Testament*, in: *ThPh* 44 (1969) 161–180; cf. —, *Die neutestamentliche Grundlage des Priestertums*, 105f., 112f.

176 Cf. SEMMELROTH Otto, *Das priesterliche Gottesvolk und seine amtlichen Führer*, in: *Concilium* 4/1 (1968) 41–47; cf. —, *Die Präsenz der drei Ämter Christi im gemeinsamen und besonderen Priestertum der Kirche*, in: *ThPh* 44 (1969) 181–195: 192–195.

177 Cf. PIEPER Josef, *Differentia specifica des Priestertums. Priestertum und kultisches Opfer* (1953), in: Berthold Wald (ed.), *JPW* 7, Hamburg 2000, 437–443; cf. —, *Sakralität und »Entsakralisierung«* (1969), in: *JPW* 7, 394–419: 406f.; cf. —, *Nicht Worte, sondern Realität: das Sakrament des Brotes* (1974), in: *JPW* 7, 420–427; cf. —, *Vor-Überlegungen zum Thema »Zölibat«* (1969), in: *JPW* 7, 444–447; cf. —, *Verwunderte Anmerkung eines Laien zum Thema »Priestertum«* (1969), in: *JPW* 7, 448–453; cf. —, *Was unterscheidet den Priester? Ein notgedrungener Klärungsversuch* (1971), in: *JPW* 7, 454–474.

178 Cf. BECKER Karl, *Wesen und Vollmachten*, esp.150–166.

179 Cf. DANIELÓU Jean, *Pourquoi l'église?* Fayard 1972, 37–48.

180 Cf. SPAEMANN Robert, *Die Existenz des Priesters. Eine Provokation in der modernen Welt*, in: *IKaZ* 9/6 (1980) 481–500: 487f.

3.4 Chapter Summary

Calvin developed the first strict systematic theology of the priestly, kingly and prophetic life of Christ, restricting it to Christology and Soteriology. The early Church, however, already used them as interpretative keys in a wider perspective including the priestly ministry in the Church, though not developing a systematic body of knowledge out of it. In the usage and practice of the early Church up to Vatican II, the primacy of the priestly ministry of sanctification was more or less taken for granted. The application of the threefold scheme to the ministerial priesthood, for the first time, by an ecumenical Council and the crisis of the time evoked the conscious and specific quest for the fundamental office of the priest. The three ministries provided a platform for the different approaches: either the primacy of sanctification, or of the word, or of governance. Those are the respective positions defended by our three authors. Of course, they have their *reasons* or *arguments* for them. We begin with John Paul II.

Chapter 4:

John Paul II: *Munus Sanctificandi*

4.0 Preliminary Remarks

In John Paul's theology and spirituality, the fundamental office of the ministerial priesthood is obviously that of sanctification, especially in the sacrament of the eucharist. On a personal note, he testifies to this fact on one occasion of the anniversary of Vatican II's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests:

The priest is a man of the Eucharist. In the stretch of almost fifty years of priesthood, that which continues to be the most important and most sacred moment for me is the celebration of the Eucharist. The consciousness of celebrating on the altar in the person of Christ is dominant in me. In the course of these years, I have never omitted the celebration of the Most Holy Sacrifice. Whenever I might have omitted it, it was only due to reasons independent of my will. The Holy Mass is in an absolute way the centre of my life and each of my days. It is at the centre of the theology of the priesthood, a theology which I learnt not only from textbooks but also from the living examples of holy priests. Above all, from the holy parish priest of Ars, John Mary Viannney.¹⁸¹

181 [My translation]. "Il sacerdote è l'uomo dell'Eucaristia. Nell'arco di quasi cinquant'anni di sacerdozio ciò che per me continua ad essere il momento più importante e più sacro è la celebrazione dell'Eucaristia. È dominante in me la consapevolezza di celebrare all'altare in persona Christi. Mai nel corso di questi anni ho lasciato la celebrazione del Santissimo Sacrificio. Se ciò è accaduto, è stato soltanto per motivi indipendenti dalla mia volontà. La Santa Messa è in modo assoluto il centro della mia vita e di ogni mia giornata. Essa si trova al centro della teologia del sacerdozio, una teologia che ho appreso non tanto dai libri di testo quanto da vivi modelli di santi sacerdoti. Anzitutto dal Santo Parroco d'Ars, Giovanni Maria Vianney." JOHN PAUL II, Speech to the Participants of the International Symposium Convoled by the Congregation for the Clergy on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Conciliar Decree «Presbyterorum ordinis» on October 27, 1995, §4, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19951027_presbyterorum.html (accessed on 24.07.2024).

When considering his theological arguments for his standpoint, one has to keep at least two facts in mind.

Firstly, John Paul II did not publish any systematic-dogmatic work on the priesthood. He was not a dogmatician by profession, rather a philosopher specializing in ethics. He did not delve into dogmatic debates on a scientific platform. This may, in some occasions make his arguments vulnerable to scientific subtleties, though the substance of his arguments retains its validity.

Secondly, almost all his arguments relevant to this topic were written during his time as a pope. Therefore, the sources for his arguments are in the first place his Holy Thursday letters to priests, then some of his magisterial writings, and a few homilies or addresses. They are more pastorally oriented. Nevertheless, they contain dogmatic clarifications and are relevant for a scientific study of the ministerial priesthood.

There are at least seven arguments which John Paul II offers for the primacy of the ministry of sanctification.

4.1 Man's Vocation to an Attitude of Self-Commitment to God

This is a more general argument encapsulating priesthood in its widest Christian sense. John Paul II bases his reflection majorly on four texts of the Council dealing with the common and the hierarchical priesthood, while pointing out the united vocation of all men to give their lives completely to God. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states:

Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.¹⁸²

On the laity, it further states:

For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if

182 *Lumen gentium* §10.

patiently borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’. Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.¹⁸³

The *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* states that:

in him [scil. Christ] all the faithful are made a holy and royal priesthood; they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ ... Through the ministry of the priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ. He is the only mediator who in the name of the whole Church is offered sacramentally in the Eucharist and in an unbloody manner until the Lord himself comes. The ministry of priests is directed to this goal and is perfected in it. Their ministry, which begins with the evangelical proclamation, derives its power and force from the sacrifice of Christ. Its aim is that ‘the entire commonwealth of the redeemed and the society of the saints be offered to God through the High Priest who offered himself also for us in his passion that we might be the body of so great a Head.’¹⁸⁴

Finally, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* states that “all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.”¹⁸⁵

The central point is the making of oneself and everything a responsive gift to God. In the biblical language, it is called a sacrifice to God. This is what constitutes the identity of priesthood, rooted in Jesus Christ. The ministerial priesthood presupposes it. Hence, John Paul II, considering these declarations of the Council in which sacrifice occupies a central place, concludes that the interior attitude of sacrifice is the “simplest and profoundest expression of faith”, that is, of participation in Christ’s priesthood.¹⁸⁶ It applies indeed to the whole people of God,

183 Ibid., §34.

184 *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2.

185 *Gaudium et spes* §24.

186 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II / WOJTYŁA Karol, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, trans. by Paul Stephen FALLA, San Francisco 1980, 221–229.

but more especially to the ministerial priesthood. This is because “the ministry of bishops and priests is directed towards this very attitude ... If the sacerdotal ministry in a sense separates bishops and ordained priests from the members of the People of God who only share in the general priesthood, the former should all the more be distinguished by the attitude which derives from sharing in the priesthood of Christ.”¹⁸⁷ It is a special vocation *a fortiori* of the ministerial priesthood. John Paul II finds this expressed in three different ways in the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*: in a life of self-denial, commitment to serve the People of God, and in celibacy.¹⁸⁸

Priests act especially in the person of Christ as ministers of holy things, particularly in the Sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrifice of Christ who gave himself for the sanctification of men. Hence, they are asked to take example from that with which they deal, and inasmuch as they celebrate the mystery of the Lord’s death they should keep their bodies free of wantonness and lusts.¹⁸⁹

In order to continue doing the will of his Father in the world, Christ works unceasingly through the Church. He operates through his ministers, and hence he remains always the source and wellspring of the unity of their lives. Priests, then, can achieve this coordination and unity of life by joining themselves with Christ to acknowledge the will of the Father. For them this means a complete gift of themselves to the flock committed to them ... What takes place on the altar of sacrifice, the priestly heart must make his own.¹⁹⁰

Through virginity, then, or celibacy observed for the Kingdom of Heaven, priests are consecrated to Christ by a new and exceptional reason. They adhere to him more easily with an undivided heart, they dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men, and they more expeditiously minister to his Kingdom and the work of heavenly regeneration, and thus they are apt to accept, in a broad sense,

187 Ibid., 227f.

188 Cf. Ibid., 228f.

189 *Presbyterorum ordinis* §13.

190 Ibid., §14.

paternity in Christ. In this way they profess themselves before men as willing to be dedicated to the office committed to them—namely, to commit themselves faithfully to one man and to show themselves as a chaste virgin for Christ and thus to evoke the mysterious marriage established by Christ, and fully to be manifested in the future, in which the Church has Christ as her only Spouse.¹⁹¹

John Paul II stresses the link between the sacrificial attitude of the ordained priest and the sacrifice of Christ reenacted on the altar. In an audience of 1993, he alludes to the image of Christ as Priest and Victim, as especially depicted in the letter to the Hebrews, and says:

Today too it is necessary for the clergy to be faithful to that image, which mirrors the living truth of Christ the priest and victim. The reproduction of that image in priests is attained primarily through their life-giving participation in the Eucharistic mystery, to which the Christian priesthood is essentially ordered and linked. The Council of Trent emphasized that the bond between the priesthood and sacrifice comes from the will of Christ, who conferred upon his ministers “the power to consecrate, to offer and to distribute his Body and his Blood” (cf. DS 1764). In this there is a mystery of communion with Christ in being and doing, which must be translated into a spiritual life imbued with faith in and love for the Eucharist ... In offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, presbyters must offer themselves personally with Christ, accepting all the renunciation and sacrifice required by their priestly life—again and always, with Christ and like Christ, *sacerdos et hostia*.¹⁹²

He writes likewise in his Apostolic Exhortation to the bishops:

Just as the Paschal Mystery stands at the centre of the life and mission of the Good Shepherd, so too the Eucharist stands at the centre of the life

191 Ibid., §16.

192 JOHN PAUL II, General Audience on June 9, 1993: The Eucharist is at the Heart of the Priest's Spirituality, in: *Adoremus Bulletin* (Dec. 31, 2007) <https://adoremus.org/2007/12/catechesis-of-his-holiness-john-paul-ii-on-the-eucharist/#anchor4105830> (accessed on 24.07.2024). Italian Original in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19930609.html (accessed on 24.07.2024).

and mission of the Bishop, as of every priest. At the daily celebration of Holy Mass, the Bishop offers himself together with Christ. When this celebration takes place in the cathedral or in other churches, especially parish churches, with the presence and the active participation of the faithful, the Bishop stands before all as *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, since he acts in the person of Christ and in the power of his Spirit, and as *hiereus*, the holy priest, devoted to enacting the sacred mysteries of the altar, which he proclaims and explains by his preaching.”¹⁹³

In all these texts, one can see the steady reference to the eucharist as the unifying point of every form of commitment to God, be it from the lay faithful or from the ordained priest. The notion of sacrifice or gift of oneself and the world to God reaches its acme in the celebration of the eucharist. The relationship to the eucharist is the backbone of John Paul’s arguments for the priestly ministry of sanctification as the fundamental office. Almost all his arguments revolve around the eucharist, resting on it in one way or the other.

4.2 Co-Institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood

The most decisive argument for John Paul II is that Christ instituted the sacraments of the eucharist and the priesthood together at the Last Supper. For him, there is no doubt about this. In most of his Holy Thursday letters to priests and bishops he calls Holy Thursday the “birthday”, the absolute “feast”, the “beginning” of the Catholic priesthood.¹⁹⁴ Since

¹⁹³ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores gregis*, §16.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II., *Holy Thursday Letter to Bishops: Magnus dies* (1979) [Socias James, *Letters*, 6]; cf. —, *Novo incipiente*, §1; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Dominicae cenae* (1980), §1; cf. —, Homily at Chrism Mass on April 12, 1979, §3, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790412_crisma.html (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, Homily at Holy Mass of the Last Supper on April 3, 1980, §4, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19800403_cena-domini.html (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: A ministerii nostri* (1982), §1, §3, §7, §9; cf. —, Homily at Chrism Mass on April 8, 1982, §3, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19820408_crisma.html (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Mentem ad vos* (1983), §1; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Ritibus in sacris*

both sacraments were instituted together, it follows that the eucharist occupies the central place in the ministry of the priest.

According to John Paul II, within the relationship between the Church and the eucharist, there exists a special relationship between the ordained priest and the eucharist. Indeed, Christ entrusted the mystery of the eucharist to the whole Church; but he placed it in the specific responsibility of the twelve apostles and their successors. When Christ spoke the words “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24), he was indeed addressing the whole Church, but he was also assigning it as a task to the twelve apostles.¹⁹⁵ He points out that the placing of the words of the mandate (“Do this in memory of me”) immediately after the words of consecration is not perchance, but expresses it as a specific responsibility of the twelve apostles. It was through it that they received the power of eucharistic consecration.¹⁹⁶

(1985) §1, §8; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Ecce nunc nos* (1986), §1, §12; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Hymno dicto* (1987) §1, §2, §9; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: In cenaculum* (1988) §2, §6, §7; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Anche quest’ anno* (1989) §1f.; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Con queste parole* (1990) §1; cf. —, Homily at the Chrism Mass on March 28, 1991, §4, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/homilies/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19910328_crisma.html* (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Ci incontriamo* (1994), §1; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Non vi stupite* (1995) §3, §8; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Consideriamo*, §8; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Iesu, Sacerdos in aeternum* (1997), §5; cf. —, General Audience on March 26, 1997, §2, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_26031997.html* (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Con la mente* (1998), §7; cf. —, Homily at Chrism Mass on April 1, 1999, §2, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_01041999_crisma.html* (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Jesus having loved his own* (2000), §1, §10; cf. —, *Encyclical: Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), §7; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: It is with Great Joy* (2004), §1–3, §5; cf. —, *Rise, Let Us be on Our Way*, trans. by Walter Ziemba, London 2004, 3, 15.

195 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Jesus having loved his own*, §10; cf. —, Homily at the Airport of Olaya Herrera on July 5, 1986, §1, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19860705_medellin.html* (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: With Deep Emotion* (2002), §1, cf. —, *Rise*, 26.

196 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Dominicae cenae*, §2; cf. —, Homily (April 12, 1979), §3; cf. —, Message for the 19th World Day of Prayer (1982), §3, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/messages/vocations/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_02021982_world-day-for-vocations.html* (accessed on 24.07.2024); cf. —, Homily at the Priestly of Ordination in Sevilla on June 12, 1993, §1, in: *Vatican Website: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19930612_siviglia-ordinazioni.html* (accessed on

John Paul II draws his teaching on this from the Council of Trent which defends the inseparableness of the eucharist and the ministerial priesthood at the event of the Last Supper.

He, then, our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the Cross [*cf. Heb 7:27*] to accomplish for them [there] an everlasting redemption. But, because his priesthood was not to end with his death [*cf. Heb 7:24*], at the Last Supper ... he offered his body and blood under the species of bread and wine to God the Father, and, under the same signs, gave them to partake of to the disciples (whom he then established as priests of the New Covenant) and ordered them and their successors in the priesthood to offer, saying: “Do this in remembrance of me”, etc. [*Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24*] ...¹⁹⁷

If anyone says that by the words “Do this in remembrance of me” [*Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24*] Christ did not establish the apostles as priests ... let him be anathema ...¹⁹⁸

John Paul II concludes from this that the most essential office of the priest is the celebration of the eucharist. It is the starting and end point of all priestly duties.¹⁹⁹ He calls it the “first”²⁰⁰ and “holiest”²⁰¹ task of the priest. The words of consecration bespeak “the highest realization” of the priesthood.²⁰²

24.07.2024); cf. *Mentem ad vos*, §1; cf. *Ritibus in sacris*, §1; cf. *Hymno dicto*, §2; cf. *In cenaculum*, §3; cf. *Anche quest'anno*, §1; cf. —, *Holy Thursday Letter: Lo Spirito del Signore*, §1; cf. *Jesus having loved his own*, §10.

197 DH 1740.

198 DH 1752.

199 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Jesus having loved his own*, §10.

200 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ritibus in sacris*, §1.

201 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Hymno dicto*, §1.

202 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Iesu, Sacerdos in aeternum*, §3.

4.3 The Eucharist as the Purpose and Consummation of the Call of the Twelve

John Paul II tries to bring the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper in line with the *status* of the twelve apostles *before* the Last Supper. The question is: If the twelve became priests not until the Last Supper, what were they before then? John Paul II's answer can be roughly summarised as this: the call of the twelve apostles by Jesus at the beginning of his public life or in the course of it, was the first step towards the priesthood. It was only at the Last Supper that they became priests. He describes this event as a revelation of the purpose of their call:

The image of vocation handed down to us by the gospels is particularly linked to the figure of the fisherman. Jesus called to himself some fishermen of Galilee, among them Simon Peter, and defined the apostolic mission by speaking of their trade ... Peter and other Apostles lived together with Jesus and travelled with him wherever his mission took him. They heard the words he spoke, marveled at his works and were astonished at the miracles he performed. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, sent by God to show Israel and all humanity the way of salvation. But their faith had to pass through the mysterious saving event which he had several times foretold ... Precisely during that Paschal event Christ revealed to the Apostles that their vocation was to become priests like him and in him. This took place when, in the Upper Room, on the eve of his death on the cross, he took bread and then the cup of wine, and spoke over them the words of consecration. The bread and the wine became his body and blood, given in sacrifice and, through their hands, communicated it to the Church for all time. By entrusting to the Apostles the memorial of his sacrifice, Christ made them sharers in his priesthood.²⁰³

It is not only a revelation of it, but at the same time its realization. With the words "do this in memory of me", Christ seals their vocation.²⁰⁴ Again, this supports the conclusion about the essential priority of the

203 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Consideriamo*, §4.

204 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *It is with Great Joy*, §3.

priestly ministry: the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice of salvation as the representative of Christ. “For there is a close and inseparable bond between the offering and the priest: the one who offers the sacrifice of Christ must have a share in the Priesthood of Christ. Consequently, the vocation to the priesthood is a vocation to offer *in persona Christi* his own sacrifice, by virtue of sharing in his priesthood.”²⁰⁵

4.4 Pro-Existence for the Common Priesthood

If every faithful is a priest by virtue of baptism, and Christ, nevertheless institutes a special priesthood, then there must be a reason for it. John Paul II, following the teaching of Vatican II, explains the reason in this way: the special priesthood is a gift from Christ for the community of believers, for the Church. The gift entails that the ordained priest, through his existence and actions, serves the common priesthood in two ways:

1. He helps the faithful to be conscious of their priesthood by virtue of their baptism. He reminds them that they are the sanctified people of God.
2. He helps them to live out their priesthood, i.e., to offer themselves and their daily lives up to God as a spiritual sacrifice.²⁰⁶

The existence and actions through which the ordained priest fulfils this service takes concrete forms. For John Paul II, among those different forms, the offering of the eucharist is the most important:

This takes place above all, when the priest “by the sacred power that he has ... [*sic*] in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*) effects the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people” [*Lumen Gentium*, 10] ... The sacramental priesthood is truly a gift for this community and comes from Christ himself, from the fullness of his

²⁰⁵ JOHANNES PAUL II, *Consideriamo*, §4.

²⁰⁶ Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §4.

Priesthood. This fulness finds its expression in the fact that Christ, while making everyone capable of offering the spiritual sacrifice, calls some and enables them to be minister of his own sacramental sacrifice, the Eucharist – in the offering of which all the faithful share – in which are taken up all the spiritual sacrifices of the People of God.²⁰⁷

This also supports the primacy of the ministry of sanctification.

... our Eucharistic worship, both in the celebration of the Mass and in our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, is like a life-giving current that links our ministerial or hierarchical priesthood to the common priesthood of the faithful, and presents it in its vertical dimension and with its central value. The priest fulfills his principal mission and is manifested in all his fulness when he celebrates the Eucharist, and this manifestation is more complete when he himself allows the depth of that mystery to become visible, so that it alone shines forth in people's hearts and minds, through his ministry.²⁰⁸

4.5 Pro-Existence for the Eucharistic Presence of Christ

In his Apostolic Letter *Pastores dabo vobis*, the Pope, making reference to *Presbyterorum ordinis* 5, summarises the essence of the eucharist in this way: the eucharist is nothing less than Christ himself; the whole treasure of the Church is in it, “*totum bonum spirituale Ecclesiae*”. Hence, the celebration of the eucharist, is the “central place” of the priestly life and witness.²⁰⁹ The Church lives from the eucharist:

207 Ibid.; cf. —, *Consideriamo*, §2.

208 JOHN PAUL II, *Dominicae cenae*, §2.

209 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §26. It is noteworthy, that in the translations of this document, the emphasis placed on the priestly ministry in the eucharistic sacrifice is played down by translating the Latin word „*enim*“ (used in the foregoing paragraph about the priestly ministry of the word) with “first of all”, “zunächst”, “avant tout”, “anzitutto”, and the like). For example, in the english translation, it reads: “The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God.” But the Latin Original simply reads: “Est enim sacerdos Verbi Dei administer ...” Ibid., in: AAS 84 (1992) 657–804: 698.

In a certain sense the Church is daily born from the Eucharist, celebrated in so many places all over the world, in so many different situations, among such diverse cultures, and so the reenactment of the Eucharistic Mystery becomes as it were a daily “creation.” Thanks to the celebration of the Eucharist, the evangelical awareness of the People of God grows ever more profound, both in nations of age-old Christian tradition and among peoples who have only recently entered the new dimension imparted to human culture in all times and places by the mystery of the incarnation of the Word and by the mystery of the Redemption accomplished by his death on the cross and his resurrection.²¹⁰

Thus, one of the reasons why there exists a ministerial priesthood, different from the common priesthood, is that the former ensures the permanent sacramental presence of Christ in the world.²¹¹ “Christ himself has instituted the ministerial priesthood to make available to the whole People of God the Eucharistic Sacrifice . . .”²¹² In other words, the priesthood is for the eucharist *because* the latter is for the Church.²¹³ The eucharist is the source (“*ex ea*”), the reason for the existence (“*pro ea*”) and, therefore, the paramount responsibility (“*circa eam*”) of the priest for the sake of serving the faithful.²¹⁴ “The eucharist is the very reason for the priesthood. The priest exists in order to celebrate the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we find meaning for everything else we do.”²¹⁵ [sic!]

It means that the sacramental nature of the Sacred Orders is guaranteed only by the sacrament of the eucharist, and vice versa. “There can

210 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ci incontriamo*, §1; cf. —, *Redemptor hominis*, §20.

211 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Christifideles laici*, §55.

212 JOHANNES PAUL II, Homily during the Celebration of the Word with Priests, Religious and Laity in Halifax on September 13, 1984, §6, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19840913_cattedrale-st-mary.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

213 “Eucharistia est ante omnia donum Ecclesiae datum. Inenarrabile donum. Sacerdotium quoque *donum* est Ecclesiae factum, respectu *Eucharistiae habitio*.” JOHANNES PAUL II, *A ministerii nostri*, §8; cf. —, *Mentem ad vos*, §1; cf. —, *General Audience on June 9, 1993*.

214 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Dominicae cenae*, §2, §11; cf. —, *Anche quest’anno*, §1; cf. —, *It is with Great Joy*, §2.

215 JOHANNES PAUL II, Speech at the Meeting with the Clergy in Toronto on September 14, 1984, in: *Website of the Canadian Bishop’s Conference*: <https://www.cccb.ca/the-catholic-church-in-canada/papal-visits-canada/john-paul-iis-first-visit-canada/addresses-speeches-homilies/meeting-with-clergy/> (accessed on 26.07.2024).

be no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”²¹⁶ The bond between both sacraments is very significant because the Church itself is built on the apostles.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in explaining how the Church is apostolic – founded on the Apostles – sees *three meanings* in this expression. First, “she was and remains built on ‘the foundation of the Apostles’ (Eph 2:20), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself” [No. 857]. The Eucharist too has its foundation in the Apostles, not in the sense that it did not originate in Christ himself, but because it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors. It is in continuity with the practice of the Apostles, in obedience to the Lord’s command, that the Church has celebrated the Eucharist down the centuries.²¹⁷

If the bond to the eucharist as the source of life of the Church is such, then, the eucharist has a position of priority in the priestly ministry.

4.6 The Eucharist: Instrument and Summit of Proclamation and Governance

John Paul II is very much convinced that the progress of evangelisation takes place through the mystery of the eucharist. Two reasons can be extracted from his explanation. Firstly, the eucharist is the birthplace of the Church, as already explained above. Secondly, the incarnate Word of God leads the whole creation back to God, to its consummation, only through his suffering, death and resurrection. This redemptive work of Christ is renewed and effected through the eucharist. It means, therefore, that the evangelization of creation practically takes place in the eucharist.

²¹⁶ JOHANNES PAUL II, *Gift and Mystery*, Rockland 1996, 61; cf. —, Angelus at Wrocław on June 1, 1997, §3, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/angelus/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19970601_polonia.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

²¹⁷ JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §27; cf. —, *It is with Great Joy*, §3.

We share in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, “the first-born of all creation” (Col 1:15), who in the Eucharist restores to the Father the whole of creation: the world of the past and the world of the future, and above all the world of today. In this world he lives with us, he is present through us, and precisely through us he offers to the Father the Sacrifice of our Redemption. We share in the mystery of Christ, “the first-born from the dead” (Col 1:18), who by his Passover unceasingly transforms the world, bringing it ever closer to “the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19). In this way the whole of reality, in all its aspects, becomes present *in our Eucharistic ministry*, which at the same time embraces every concrete personal need, all suffering, expectation, joy or sadness, in accordance with the intentions which the faithful present for Holy Mass. We receive these intentions in a spirit of charity, thus introducing every human problem into the dimension of universal Redemption. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood! This ministry forms a new life in us and around us. The Eucharist evangelizes our surroundings and confirms us in the hope that Christ’s words will not pass away (cf. Lk 21:33). His words will remain, for they are rooted in the Sacrifice of the Cross ...²¹⁸

He describes the eucharistic celebration as a sacramental evangelization:

Our primary service as priests is to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. [sic!] We communicate this message, however, not “in terms of philosophy in which the crucifixion of Christ cannot be expressed”, but through “the language of the cross”, which is “God’s power to save” (1 Cor 1:17-18). Effective preaching requires that we be imbued with the mystery of the Cross through study and through daily reflection on God’s word. Our priestly service finds its most sublime expression in the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Indeed, the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the sacramental proclamation of the mystery of salvation.²¹⁹ [sic!]

218 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ci incontriamo*, §1.

219 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Speech at the Meeting with the Clergy in Toronto on September 14, 1984*.

John Paul II, even where he emphasizes the three dimensions of the priestly ministry together, still attaches a greater importance to the ministry of sanctification. This is observable in his conceptual nuances. For instance, he says:

The priest is sent by Christ and his Church to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, above all in the celebration of the Eucharist. The priest is ordained to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, and thus to renew the Paschal Mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a minister of Christ, the priest is called to sanctify the People of God by word and sacrament. He shares the pastoral solicitude of the Good Shepherd, which is frequently expressed in prayer for the flock. As priests, you and I are called to preach and teach the word of God with clarity, lively faith and personal commitment, with orthodoxy, and love. We are called to gather the People of God together, to build the Body of the Church.²²⁰

In this speech, two forms of accentuation are identifiable. Firstly, the ministry of the word is accorded its special abode in the ministry of sanctification: the priest fulfills the mission of proclaiming the Gospel “above all” in the Eucharist. Secondly, the concepts he applies to each of the ministries reveal, from the perspective of the dogmatic-sacramental language, a certain accordance of primacy to the ministry of sanctification. The priest is “sent” or “called” to preach and teach the Gospel of redemption in Christ. Mission, in this case, has a general, comprehensive character. As a shepherd, he “shares” in the Christ’s governance of his people. However, in the case of celebrating the Holy Mass, the Pope says that the priest is “ordained” for it. Here, a sacramental concept which is not general but restricted in its dogmatic content, comes into play. It is about that which is much more specifically conferred by the sacrament of ordination.

220 JOHANNES PAUL II, Address to the Priests and Seminarians of Nigeria at Enugu on February 13, 1982, §1, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820213_sacerdoti-nigeria.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

The governing responsibility of the shepherds for the unity of the Church depends on the eucharist which is the source of unity of the body of Christ. It is the source of pastoral love and all pastoral initiatives.

In any case, everything begins with the Eucharist which is the vital principle of pastoral animation ... The Eucharist is the source of unity and the most perfect expression of the union of all the members of the christian community. It is the duty of the priest to ensure that it is truly so ... The priest should, with great pastoral charity, remind all of the teaching of St. Paul: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (*1 Cor 10, 16-17*) ... The Eucharist is, therefore, the vital principle of the Church as a community of the members of Christ: the pastoral animation draws inspiration, strength and dimensions from it.²²¹

The eucharist is not only a vehicle of evangelization and governance, but also their apex, because in it, the redemption in Christ is concretely and really bestowed on the faithful. He tells the bishops in Nigeria:

Your evangelizing ministry finally reaches its summit, which is at the same time the centre of all sacramental life, in the Eucharist. Here the Gospel is fully proclaimed; here perfect, union with Jesus is offered to the faithful. Here each Christian can receive the saving power of Redemption in its fullness. And here, in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, your own pastoral mission is brought to fulfilment. Here you are truly one with Christ the Good Shepherd, the Chief Pastor of the flock. All conversion leads up to

221 [My translation]. "In ogni caso, tutto farà capo all'Eucaristia, nella quale è il principio vitale dell'animazione pastorale ... L'Eucaristia è la sorgente dell'unità e l'espressione più perfetta dell'unione di tutti i membri della comunità cristiana. È compito dei presbiteri procurare che sia effettivamente tale ... Con grande carità pastorale, i Presbiteri ricorderanno a tutti l'insegnamento di san Paolo: "Poiché c'è un solo pane, noi, pur essendo molti, siamo un corpo solo: tutti infatti partecipiamo all'unico pane", il quale "è comunione con il corpo di Cristo" (*1 Cor 10, 16-17*) ... L'Eucaristia è dunque il principio vitale della Chiesa come comunità dei membri di Cristo: di qui prende ispirazione, forza e dimensione l'animazione pastorale." JOHANNES PAUL II, General Audience on May 19, 1993, §7, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19930519.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

that union which is fully possible only in the Eucharist. All evangelization points to this centre, which is both its source and summit. It is also in the Eucharist that we ourselves, bishops of the Church of God, find pastoral strength and joy to lead God's people in the way of salvation and eternal life. Here we assemble, in Christ's name, his pilgrim Church on their journey to the Father ...²²²

John Paul II, therefore, calls the eucharistic sacrifice the “centre” around which every other thing the priest does revolves; every other priestly duty is a “preparation” for or an “echo” of it.²²³ “Just as the life of Jesus receives its full meaning and is completed in the Paschal Mystery, so too it is in the Eucharist that the priest finds the full meaning of his life, the source of his strength, and the joy of his dedicated pastoral service to the People of God.”²²⁴

4.7 Establishment of Priestly Friendship at the Institution of the Eucharist

In his Holy Thursday Letter to priests in 1983, a new element is brought in to corroborate the primacy of the Eucharistic Ministry. The idea is taken from Jn 15:15: “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” John Paul II takes as his premise the conviction that Christ spoke these words while in the Upper Room, “in the immediate context of the institution of the Eucharist and of the Priest-

222 JOHANNES PAUL II, Address to the Bishops of Nigeria in Lagos on February 15, 1982, §5, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820215_vescovi-nigeria.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

223 JOHANNES PAUL II, Homily at the Major Seminary of Seoul on May 3, 1984, §3, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19840503_messa-seoul.html (accessed on 26.07.2024); cf. —, Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration with Priestly Ordination in Sion on June 17, 1984, §4, in: *Vatican Website*: <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en.html> (accessed on 23.07.2024)

224 JOHANNES PAUL II, Homily during the Priestly Ordination at Taegu on May 5, 1984, §4, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19840505_messa-taegu.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

hood.”²²⁵ In 1985, he stated poetically that those words were “*good wishes for the birthday*” of the priesthood.²²⁶ It also goes hand in hand with the conviction that it was only to the twelve apostles that those words were addressed,²²⁷ since it was in the context of the institution of the priesthood. Hence, the Pope understands the profession by Christ in the sense of a priestly friendship. He concludes from it, that the eucharistic, being the framework of that friendship, is the hermeneutic key for understanding and realizing the ministerial priesthood.

Christ made known to the Apostles, and to all those who inherit from them the ordained priesthood, that in this vocation and for this ministry they must become *his friends*—they must become the *friends of that mystery* which he came to accomplish. To be a priest means to enjoy special friendship with the mystery of Christ, with the mystery of the Redemption, in which he gives his flesh “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51). We who celebrate the Eucharist each day, the saving sacrament of the body and blood, must have a particular intimacy with the mystery from which this sacrament takes its beginning. The ministerial priesthood is explainable only and exclusively in the framework of this divine mystery—and only within this framework is it accomplished.²²⁸

He also sees in Christ’s profession of friendship a prerequisite that explains why he later gives them a share in his authority of forgiving sins.²²⁹

225 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Mentem ad vos*, §2; cf. —, *In cenaculum*, §6; cf. —, *Con queste parole*, §2; cf. —, Homily at the Airport of Olaya Herrera on July 5, 1986, §1.

226 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ritibus in sacris*, §2f.

227 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Ecce nunc nos*, §12.

228 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Mentem ad vos*, §2; cf. —, *In cenaculum*, §6; cf. —, *Iesu, Sacerdos in aeternum*, §5; cf. —, Homily at the Airport of Olaya Herrera on July 5, 1986, §1.

229 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *In cenaculum*, §6; cf. —, *Mentem ad vos*, §3.

4.8 Excursus 1: Primacy of Munus Docendi?

On some occasions in his writings or speeches, it might seem that John Paul II rather prioritizes the ministry of the word. His prayer in the Holy Thursday letter of 1986 reads:

We thank You for having likened us to You as ministers of Your Priesthood, by calling us to build up Your Body, the Church, not only through the administration of the sacraments, **but also, and even before that**, through the proclamation of Your “message of salvation” (Cf. Acts 13:26), making us sharers in Your responsibility as Pastor.²³⁰

When compared with other similar texts, one sees that the Pope is not contradicting himself, rather, he is emphasizing a certain aspect of the importance of the ministry of the word. In his letter *Dominicae cenae*, while maintaining that the eucharist “is the principal and central *raison d'être* of the sacrament of priesthood”, he, nevertheless, indicates that the episcopal and priestly ministries “normally begin with the proclamation of the Gospel”.²³¹ In other words, he makes a differentiation in the notion of primacy. The ministry of the word has primacy in terms of time. Nevertheless, for him, it is not the most essential mark of the priesthood, for he writes in the same letter:

Over and above our commitment to the evangelical mission, our greatest commitment consists in exercising this mysterious power over the body of the Redeemer, and all that is within us should be decisively ordered to this. We should also always remember that to this ministerial power we have been sacramentally consecrated, that we have been chosen from among men “for the good of men” (Heb 5:1). We especially, the priests of the Latin Church, whose ordination rite added in the course of the centuries the custom of anointing the priest’s hands, should think about this.²³²

230 [My emphasis]. JOHANNES PAUL II, *A ministerii nostri*, §3.

231 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Dominicae cenae*, §2.

232 *Ibid.*, §11.

In his exhortation to the bishops, he acknowledges the proclamation of the gospel as “one of their principal responsibilities”, given to them through their episcopal consecration.²³³ He, however, emphasizes in the same document: “Among all the responsibilities of the Bishop’s pastoral ministry, that of celebrating the Eucharist is the most compelling and important.”²³⁴

He also takes cognizance of the fact that in the daily exercise of the priestly life, the personal charism(s) of a priest can subjectively make any of the three ministries his fundamental *munus*. Still, it ought not to lead to the neglect of or withdrawal from the priest’s sacramental duty which is the destination of his ministry.

A wise application of the principle of unity also has to take into account the charisms which every priest has received. If some have special talents for preaching and teaching, they have to use them for the good of the Church. Here, it is useful to recall the case of St. Paul, who, though convinced of the necessity of baptism and sometimes administered this sacrament, nevertheless, considered himself called to the preaching of the Gospel, and devoted his energy above all to this form of ministry (cf. 1 Cor 1:14,17). In his preaching, however, he didn’t lose sight of the essential work and obligatory service of building up the community (cf. 1 Cor 3:10). It means that also today, as it has always been in the history of the pastoral ministry, the allocation of work will involve placing emphasis on preaching or on cult and the sacraments depending on the capacity of the persons and on the evaluation of the situations. Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that for priests, preaching and teaching, even at the highest academic and scientific levels, must always preserve the one goal of service to the ministry of sanctification by means of the sacraments.²³⁵

233 Cf. JOHANNES PAUL II, *Pastores gregis*, §26.

234 *Ibid.*, §37.

235 [My translation]. “Una saggia applicazione del principio di unità deve anche tener conto dei carismi che ogni Presbitero ha ricevuto. Se alcuni hanno talenti particolari per la predicazione o l’insegnamento, occorre che li sfruttino per il bene della Chiesa. È utile ricordare qui il caso di san Paolo, il quale, pur convinto della necessità del Battesimo e avendo anche, qualche volta, amministrato tale sacramento, si considerava nondimeno come inviato per la predicazione del Vangelo, e consacrava le sue energie soprattutto a questa forma di ministero (cf. 1 Cor 1, 14. 17). Ma nella sua predicazione non perdeva di vista l’opera essen-

4.9 Excursus 2: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Interpretation of John Paul II

Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his commentary on the Holy Thursday letter of 1979, is of the opinion that for the Pope, the fundamental *munus* of the priesthood is the office of the shepherd, i.e., *munus gubernandi*.

The papal writing rightly places the biblical imagery of a shepherd at the centre ... The statement of the Council about the difference in "essence" between the ministerial and the common priesthood which the pope cited several times, is grounded in the biblical shepherd-image. There are no uninterrupted transitions between shepherd and the flock; no matter how gifted a sheep might be, it cannot replace the shepherd.²³⁶

One may, of course broach the subject again rhetorically with the question: it is true that "no matter how gifted a sheep might be, it cannot replace the shepherd," but why precisely can the sheep not replace the shepherd (provided we do not linger only in the imagery)? I think that it is Balthasar's own theological opinion – primacy of the shepherding office²³⁷ – that is resonating in his interpretation of the text. Balthasar makes reference to certain statements from the part of the letter deal-

ziale di edificazione della comunità (cf. *1 Cor* 3, 10), alla quale essa deve servire. Vuol dire che anche oggi, come sempre nella storia del ministero pastorale, la ripartizione del lavoro potrà portare a porre l'accento sulla predicazione o sul culto e i Sacramenti, secondo le capacità delle persone e la valutazione delle situazioni. Ma non si può mettere in dubbio che per i Presbiteri la predicazione e l'insegnamento, anche ai più alti livelli accademici e scientifici, devono sempre conservare una finalità di servizio al ministero di santificazione per mezzo dei Sacramenti." JOHANNES PAUL II, General Audience on May 3, 1993, §2, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19930505.html (accessed on 26.07.2024).

²³⁶ [My translation]. "Das päpstliche Schreiben stellt mit Recht das biblische Bild vom Hirten ins Zentrum ... Im biblischen Hirtenbild ist die vom Papst mehrfach zitierte Konzilsaussage vom „Wesens“-Unterschied zwischen amtlichem und allgemeinem Priestertum der Gläubigen grundlegend. Zwischen dem Hirten und der Herde gibt es keine kontinuierlichen Übergänge; ein noch so begabtes Schaf kann den Hirten nicht ersetzen." VON BALTHASAR Hans Urs, *Dienst aus der größeren Liebe zu Christus. Schreiben Johannes Paul II. an die Priester*, Freiburg i. Br. 1979, 66.

²³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 69; Balthasar's relevant works are listed under section 3.3.

ing with the pastoral character of the priesthood to support his interpretation. For our purposes, three phrases from the letter are relevant:

Firstly, the context where the Pope writes that it is the duty of every Christian to care for the salvation of others, while “priests are expected to have care and commitment which are far greater and different from those of any lay person.”²³⁸

Secondly, the statement of the Pope: “Do not the words ‘the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep’ (Jn 10:11) refer to the Sacrifice of the Cross, to the definitive act of Christ’s priesthood?”²³⁹

Thirdly, in his interpretation of the sixth paragraph of the letter, Balthasar writes that “all commitments of the priest can be summarized as the *direction of souls*”, i.e., “the possibility to guide people on to the ways of God and Christ in a manner that is serving, loving and gifted with spiritual authority. In order to have such an authority – which is intrinsically different from that of a psychotherapist – the priest must disown himself like Christ and be transformed ‘into a man for others’ ...”²⁴⁰ The pastoral mark of such statements cannot be missed. However, if one reads the whole paragraph 5 of the letter, which is the origin of the first and second quotes referred to by Balthasar, then, one can reasonably argue that Balthasar’s interpretation from the perspective of the shepherd-image is one-sided. His claim that, in the Holy Thursday letter of 1979, the biblical shepherd-image is taken as the foundation for the intrinsic difference between ministerial and common priesthood, does not do justice to the letter. In this case, it is helpful to first quote that part of the letter in full:

238 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §5; cf. VON BALTHASAR Hans Urs, *Dienst aus der größeren Liebe*, 66.

239 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §5; cf. VON BALTHASAR Hans Urs, *Dienst aus der größeren Liebe*, 66.

240 [My translation]. “Alle Einsätze fassen sich zusammen in dem, was *Seelführung* genannt wird: die zugleich dienende, liebende und dazu mit einer geistlichen Autorität begabten Möglichkeit, Menschen innerlich auf den Wegen Gottes und Christi zu geleiten. Um solche Autorität zu haben – die von der eines Psychotherapeuten wesentlich verschieden ist –, muss der Priester in einer Christus ähnlichen Weise seiner selbst enteignet und *zum Menschen für die andern* umgeformt sein ...” VON BALTHASAR Hans Urs, *Dienst aus der größeren Liebe*, 66f.

As I write, there pass before the eyes of my soul the vast and varied areas of human life, areas into which you are sent, dear Brothers, like labourers into the Lord's vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1–16). But for you there holds also the parable of the flock (cf. Jn 10:1–16), for, thanks to the priestly character, you share in the *pastoral charism*, which is a sign of a special relationship of *likeness to Christ, the Good Shepherd*. You are precisely marked with this quality in a very special way. Although care for the salvation of others is and must be a task of every member of the great community of the People of God, that is to say also of all our brothers and sisters who make up the laity—as the Second Vatican Council so amply declared (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11)—nevertheless you Priests are expected to have care and commitment which are far greater and different from those of any lay person. And this is because your sharing in the priesthood of Jesus Christ differs from their sharing, “essentially and not only in degree” (*Lumen Gentium*, 10). In fact, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is the first source and expression of an unceasing and ever effective care for our salvation, which enables us to look to him precisely as the Good Shepherd. Do not the words “the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep” (Jn 10:11) refer to the Sacrifice of the Cross, to the definitive act of Christ's priesthood? Do they not show all of us that Christ the Lord, through the sacrament of Orders, has made us sharers in his Priesthood, the road that we too must travel? Do these words not tell us that our vocation is a singular *solicitude for the salvation of our neighbour*; that this solicitude is a special *raison d'être* of our priestly life; that it is precisely this solicitude that gives it meaning, and that only through this solicitude can we find the full significance of our own life, perfection and holiness? This theme is taken up, at various places, in the conciliar Decree *Optatam Totius* (cf. 8–11; 19–20).

However, this matter becomes more comprehensible in the light of the words of our same Teacher, who says: “For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mk 8:35). These are mysterious words, and they seem like a paradox. But they cease to be mysterious if we try to

put them into practice. Then the paradox disappears, and the profound simplicity of their meaning is fully revealed. May all of us be granted this grace in our priestly life and zealous service.²⁴¹

Despite its pastoral orientation, I think that the dogmatic substance of the text lies in the ministry of sanctification. There are two reasons for this claim:

On the one hand, the letter states that priests are shepherds by **virtue of their priestly seal**, not vice versa: "... thanks to the priestly character, you share in the *pastoral charism* ..." Balthasar interprets it vice versa.

On the other hand, it states that the commitment of the priest is greater than that of a lay faithful *because* his participation in the priesthood of Christ is essentially different. It is not merely because the priest is a "shepherd". When the Pope writes that Christ's words about the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep "refer" to his priesthood as accomplished in his death on the cross, then, he does not, of course, just mean a "reference", as Balthasar seems to understand it. It, rather, means that the commit of a shepherd has its very foundation in that sacrifice on the cross. If Christ did not die on the cross or if he had not given away his life, then the talk about the commitment of a shepherd would remain nebulous.

It may seem, on the contrary, that Balthasar's view is supported by the Pope's word that the priestly vocation "is a singular *solicitude for the salvation of our neighbour*; that this solicitude is a special *raison d'être of our priestly life*; that it is precisely this solicitude that gives it meaning, and that only through this solicitude can we find the full significance of our own life, perfection and holiness?"²⁴² I do not think this is the case, because the *solicitude* in question is not foundationally the subjective worry of the priest, but first of all the solicitude of God himself (primacy of God), on which the sacrament of the priesthood is founded. It is the reason why God (Christ) instituted a ministerial priesthood – a "place" where his solicitude condenses into a real-symbolic form.

241 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §5

242 Ibid.

Moreover, it is remarkable that at the same point where John Paul II speaks of the Shepherd laying down his life, he names Christ's sacrifice on the cross the "the definitive act of Christ's priesthood". The priest's pastoral love, though it is the uniting bond of all his different activities, "has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist. As the Council states: 'This pastoral charity flows mainly from the eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the center and root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice' (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 14)."²⁴³

4.10 Chapter Summary

Seven arguments for the primacy of the ministry of sanctification, especially the eucharist, can be deciphered from the writings of John Paul II: man's vocation to commit his life to God, the institution of the priesthood during the institution of the eucharist, the revelation and fulfillment of the goal of the twelve apostles at the Last Supper, service for the common priesthood, service for the sacramental presence of Christ in the eucharist, the eucharist as instrument and fulfillment of the ministries of preaching and governance, and finally, Christ's establishment of a priestly friendship in the context of the Last Supper. In contrast to John Paul, who did not develop his teaching systematically and scientifically, the next author did just that, but came up with a different result.

243 JOHANNES PAUL II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, §5; cf. —, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §31.

Chapter 5:

I. Joseph Ratzinger: *Munus Docendi*

5.0 Preliminary Remarks

In Ratzinger's theological vision, the fundamental office of the priesthood is preaching / proclamation. His concept of preaching, however, is not restricted to the word. It, rather, encompasses the whole priestly action such that the celebration of the sacraments, especially the eucharist, is also a proclamation of salvation. In a non-scientific context, Ratzinger makes a statement which, I think, crisply encapsulates his position. In an interview, the journalist Peter Seewald asks him what differentiates a Catholic priest from the priests of other religions. This is his response:

Well, first of all, the Catholic priest is there in response to the mission of Jesus Christ, in the authoritative pattern of the apostles. So he is not the figure of the priesthood as seen in the general history of religions. The standard for this class, if we may call it that, derives from the figure of the apostle, as created by Christ. Christ gives him the task of proclaiming his Word, proclaiming himself, proclaiming the promise he has given us. And within the framework of this proclamation—which is always a task of love, of building up the Body of Christ, of service to the poor—the proclamation of his death which we call the Eucharist and which is a sacrament, is central.²⁴⁴

This is the foundation of his theology of priesthood.²⁴⁵ Eleven arguments can be deciphered in Ratzinger's case against the prioritization of the ministry of sanctification and for the primacy of the preaching. The eleventh argument is a historical one with different sub-arguments.

²⁴⁴ RATZINGER Joseph, *God and the World. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. by Henry TAYLOR, San Francisco 2002, 430f. For the German Original: *JRGS* 13/2, Regensburg 2016, 459–838: 814f.

²⁴⁵ Cf. OHLY Christoph, Gleichgestaltung mit Christus. Zu einer theologischen Maßgabe der Leitnormen des Weiherechts, in: Christoph OHLY *et al* (eds.), *Das Geschenk der Berufung zum Priestertum. Zur Zukunft der Priesterausbildung*, Berlin 2020, 241–259: 244.

5.1 Jesus Christ as a “Lay Man”

The justification of the existence of the priesthood rests on the conviction that it is traced back to Christ. This traceability backwards must answer to questions: 1) Did Christ establish the ministerial priesthood? 2) If yes, did he, by doing that, institute something external to himself, or did it emanate from something which he *is* himself? The second question is more profound and is the starting point for giving an affirmative response to the first. It boils down to the simple question: is Jesus Christ himself a priest or not? Ratzinger’s answer is: no and yes.

No: from the perspective of the general history of religion, Christ was not a priest. He was, rather, a Jewish lay person, meaning that his death on the cross was not a ritual religious event.²⁴⁶ In the existing religions, priests were ritualists mediating between God or gods and human beings. Usually, they were a juridically separate class of people. Indeed, in Judaism at the time of Jesus, there was no longer any priestly caste in the strict sense, i.e., the Levites. Nevertheless, Jesus was not a member of the existing caste of lay people who arrogated the traditional priestly rules to themselves, i.e., the pharisees. His lineage was not a priestly one. Thus, from a secular point of view, he was simply a Jew from Nazareth. The office of the apostles which he established, therefore, was outside a priestly caste system. It was founded purely on a call. This means that the idea of priesthood which has prevailed until then, i.e., from other religions, cannot be simply applied to Jesus Christ. Hence, for Ratzinger, the Catholic priesthood cannot be understood on the bases of a ritual.²⁴⁷ The above is only the negative response of Ratzinger.

As already mentioned, his response is also a “yes”. If Jesus Christ was not a priest, in what sense then was he a priest? This is the point where the new perspective begins to open up. Ratzinger begins with a theology of mission.

²⁴⁶ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 55; cf. —, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 352, 354, 356.

²⁴⁷ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 352; cf. —, *Der Priester im Umbruch der Zeit* (1969, ²2007), in: *JRGS* 12, 387–401: 396f.

5.2 Jesus Christ as “Messenger” and “Mediator” of God the Father

Jesus Christ of Nazareth did not consider himself merely a “lay person” who had something to say about God to the people. On the contrary, he made the highest claim, namely, that he was the Son of God whom the Father sent into the world and given authority to lead men back to him, i.e., to preach the kingdom of God (Mk 1:22,27; Lk 2:49; 4,43; 24:44).²⁴⁸ He is the “apostle of the Father”.²⁴⁹ In the Gospel of John, mission becomes the “christological key concept”, that is to say, Jesus Christ is in his very being the messenger of the Father; being-the-Father’s-messenger is the “origin and driving force of his earthly life”; he acts only in radical obedience to his Father and loses himself completely in it (Jn 5:19,30; 7:16).²⁵⁰ There is something priestly shining forth from his selfless being-as-a-messenger, even though the gospels do not use the term “priest” for him: he is the mediator between the Father and men.²⁵¹

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the paradox in Christ of not being and at the same time being a priest absolutely, comes out in its whole clarity and force. There, the core of all religions (i.e., the sacrifice of animals to God for men through ritual practices) is taken up and their inadequacy exposed. It is only the Son of God, sent by the Father, that could truly make the bridge between God and man. He did not sacrifice something else other than himself; not the blood of animals, but his own blood. Thus, his death, though it outwardly had nothing to do with a religious cult, was yet a priestly act.²⁵²

He, who, juridically speaking, was a lay man, was in reality – according to the Letter to the Hebrews – the only true priest of the world. And his death, which, from a historical perspective, was not a ritual act, but a pro-

248 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 55f; cf. —. *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 356.

249 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester als Mittler und Diener Jesu Christi im Licht der neutestamentlichen Botschaft* (1972), in: *JRSG* 12, 107–128: 115.

250 Cf. *Ibid.*, 115f.; cf. —, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums* (1990), in: *JRGS* 12, 33–50: 37f.

251 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester als Mittler*, 115f.

252 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 352f.

fane process, namely, the execution of a man who was condemned as a political criminal, was the only real liturgy of the world. It took place not in the demarcated place of liturgical play – in the temple. On the contrary, it was a cosmic liturgy in which Jesus publicly passed through the curtain of the »flesh« (10:20), i.e., through the curtain of death into the real temple – before the face of the living God ... the hour of the cross was the cosmic day of atonement. There is no other ritual other than this – says the Letter to the Hebrews, and also no other ἱερεὺς (priest) other than him who performed it, Jesus Christ.²⁵³

According to Ratzinger (1967), this concept of the priesthood as developed in the Letter to the Hebrews remained foreign to the Catholic mindset. Thus, this unfortunate state of affairs is reflected in Vatican II's Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* §3, where the text of Heb 5:1 – a text expressly stating the definite end of the High Priest's office of the Old Testament – is still applied to the priests of the New Testament.²⁵⁴

For Ratzinger, Jesus was a priest, but not a ritual priest. On the contrary, he was sent by God the Father as his selfless representative and mediator of men. This was the priestly mission which Christ transmitted to the twelve apostles. In other words, the essence of the office of the apostle consists in this: just as Christ understood himself to be sent by the Father to proclaim and realize the Kingdom of God, so did Christ himself call, constitute, endow and send them with authority to proclaim the Kingdom of God with signs of power, and to give in their

253 [My translation]. "Er der juristisch gesehen ein Laie war, war in Wirklichkeit – so sagt der Brief – der einzig wahre Priester der Welt. Und sein Tod, der geschichtlich gesehen keineswegs eine Kulthandlung war, sondern ein profaner Vorgang – die Hinrichtung eines Mannes, der als politischer Verbrecher verurteilt worden war –, dieser Tod war die einzige wirkliche Liturgie der Welt. Eine kosmische Liturgie, in der nicht in dem abgegrenzten Bereich des liturgischen Spiels, im Tempel, sondern in aller Öffentlichkeit Jesus durch den Vorhang »des Fleisches« (10,20), d.h. durch den Todesvorhang hindurch in den wirklichen Tempel, vor das Angesicht des lebendigen Gottes trat [...] die Kreuzesstunde war der kosmische Versöhnungstag. Einen anderen Kult als diesen – sagt der Hebräerbrief – gibt es nicht, und auch einen anderen ἱερεὺς, einen anderen »Priester« nicht als den, der ihn vollzog, Jesus Christus." Ibid.

254 Cf. Ibid., 353.

lives for it (Mt 10:7f.,40, Mk 3:13–19, Lk 10:16).²⁵⁵ Being a priest means to have been incorporated by Christ into his own mission. Ratzinger makes reference to Christ's words such as: "Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Jn 13:20); "as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:18); "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21).

We may conclude this point with the summarizing words of Ratzinger:

The idea of mission is ... the Christian content and determinant. The Christian priest, in contrast to the Jewish and *a fortiori* to the pagan Sacerdos, is not really and primarily a servant of a religious cult, who processes a certain ritual. Rather, he is a messenger who carries on the mission of Christ to the people, who carries on his καλεῖν (calling) to the ἐκ-κλησία (the community of those who have been called out). The assignment, with which he is charged, is a deeply human service. He looks for people and wants to gather them into the new man Jesus Christ, into the holy communion of the Church of God.²⁵⁶

5.3 Non-Mediative Priesthood of the New Testament

One way of counteracting an image of the priesthood fixed on rituals, for Ratzinger, is to disconnect it from the concept of mediatorship. In his doctoral thesis (1951), Ratzinger makes a lucid criticism of priesthood understood on the basis of the sacraments. In a comparative anal-

255 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester als Mittler und Diener*, 115; cf. —, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 38f.; cf. —, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 56.

256 [My translation]. "Die Idee der Sendung ist [...] das Inhaltgebende und christlich Bestimmende. Der christliche Priester ist im Gegensatz zum jüdischen und erst recht zum heidnischen sacerdos nicht eigentlich und primär Kultdiener, der ein bestimmtes Ritual abwickelt, sondern Gesandter, der die Sendung Christi auf die Menschen hin, sein καλεῖν (Rufen) zur ἐκ-κλησία (zur Gemeinde der Heraus-Gerufenen) fortsetzt. Der Dienst, mit dem er beauftragt ist, ist ein tief menschlicher Dienst. Er sucht die Menschen und will sie in den neuen Menschen Jesus Christus, in die heilige Gemeinschaft der Kirche Gottes hineinversammeln." RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 361f.

ysis of the concept of the Church among the Church fathers (Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine of Hippo), he notes in passing that Augustine, in his ecclesiology, attributes that which is priestly in Christ, i.e., his salvific actions, to the whole people of God (*ecclesia*). According to him, however, the recent sacramental theology (i.e., as at the time before the Council) has shifted this attribution to the priest, namely, that Christ, as the principal minister of the sacraments, administers them “directly” through the priest, not through the Church as such. This led to a lopsided shift of the sanctification ministry of the Church to the priest and it is not far from the heresy of Donatism.²⁵⁷ A vivid example, according to Ratzinger, for this aberration is the image of the priest as a mediator: “For example, I only need to recall that the popular concept of the priest as a mediator between God and the people was formed by the Donatist Parmenian, but it was stridently rejected by Augustine ...”²⁵⁸

In addition, he writes that the linkage of mediation with the bearers of the ministerial priesthood is unbiblical:

The new understanding of the Scriptures in our generation has made the traditional image of the priesthood in Catholic Dogmatic Theology questionable, much more the image of the reverend as usually and effectively preached in the first masses of new priests. In it, the priest was depicted as the mediator between God and the people, and he was literally raised to a supernatural altitude (it is said that one must greet the priest first, before greeting an angel); he offers with his hands the sacrifice of reconciliation to God; he was praised as a human being on whom the power is imparted to literally force God down upon the altar with the words of consecration. This image has been shattered irrevocably. The colossal misunderstanding of the concept of mediation as well as the idea of sacrament which was included in it, has become clear to us with a piercing

257 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von Kirche* (1954), in: *JRGS* 1, Freiburg i. Br. 2011, 41–418: 221.

258 [My translation]. “Ich brauche z. B. nur daran zu erinnern, dass das heute beliebte Wort vom Priester als dem Mittler zwischen Gott und Volk von dem Donatisten Parmenian geprägt und von Augustin scharf zurückgewiesen wurde ...” *Ibid.*

lucidity ... In the real life of the early Church ... nothing of such form of priesthood is to be found. To our amazement, at least no mention is made directly of a ritual power of a priest.²⁵⁹

In a later work, Ratzinger grapples with the biblical meaning of mediation. He notes two points about the usage of the word “mediator” in the New Testament.

1. It is not a core concept of the New Testament. It only plays a secondary role. This is evidenced by the following facts: It occurs only six times; strictly speaking, it is not the main title of Jesus; it is not included in Church’s creed; wherever it appears in the New Testament, it is in the context of theological reflections and interpretations (Gal 3:19f.).²⁶⁰
2. Its usage in the New Testament is not consistent. In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul applies it negatively in the sense of the non-necessity of a mediator, since God encounters us directly in Christ. However, the Letter to the Hebrews and the First Letter to Timothy stress the necessity of the incomparable mediation of Jesus, and yet arrive at the same result with the Letter to the Galatians: in Christ God comes to us real and unmediated (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, 1 Tim. 2:5). In other words, “mediator” is a paradoxical concept in the New Testament which in the long run points towards the same thing in Christ, namely, that the uniqueness of his mediation rests in his

259 [My translation]. “Das neue Verständnis der Schrift, das unserer Generation zugefallen ist, hat das übliche Priesterbild der katholischen Dogmatik, mehr noch jenes der üblichen Form von Primizpredigt und des darin wirksamen Hochwürdigkeitsdenkens fragwürdig werden lassen. Der Priester wurde dort als Mittler zwischen Gott und den Menschen geschildert und in eine geradezu unirdische Höhe erhoben (vor einem Engel müsse man ihn grüßen, hieß es); mit seinen Händen bringe er Gott das Opfer der Versöhnung dar, er wurde gepriesen als der Mensch, dem die Macht verliehen sei, mit den Wandlungsworten Gott geradezu auf den Altar herabzuzwingen. Dieses Bild ist unwiderruflich zerbrochen. Das ungeheure Missverständnis des Versöhnungsbegriffs wie auch des Sakramentsgedankens, das es einschloss, ist uns mit greller Deutlichkeit klargeworden. ... Im wirklichen Leben der frühen Gemeinde ... findet sich nichts von einer solchen Form des Priestertums. Eine kultische Vollmacht des Priesters wird zu unserem Erstaunen direkt jedenfalls nicht erwähnt.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 351.

260 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester als Mittler und Diener*, 109f.

divinity. The New Testament marks itself off from the general history of religion through this paradoxical usage, and points out that which is specifically Christian.²⁶¹

What these observations on mediation means for Ratzinger is this: The priesthood of the New Testament is not in the line of Old Testament priesthood, and cannot be deduced from it. It has nothing to do with mediation through rituals, but something new. The newness is what Paul describes in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (3:7–9) as the pneumatic office excelling beyond Moses. It is pneumatic because it transmits the divine life. On the one hand, it is the opposite of the office of Moses which was not life-giving but law-giving. On the other hand, its interpretation is taken from the office of Moses in so far as the latter also served for the reconciliation with God. Paul calls the office of the apostle a service of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). Hence, Ratzinger insists that the office of the apostle is a priestly one, though not from the ritual priesthood of the Old Testament, but from that of Moses. That is, it is a selfless mediation. In his Letters to the Romans, Paul expresses this with a ritual language: the duty of the apostles is that, through their preaching of the gospel, all men would live their lives as a pleasant offering to God (Rom 15:16). In other words, the ritualistic image of the priesthood is interpreted in the sense of preaching and life conduct. Paul himself conceives his apostolic office as martyrdom (Rom 3:17) and with that he indicates the selflessness of the “mediator”.²⁶²

5.4 Profanity of the Titles for Priests in the New Testament

Comparing how the early Christians handled the situations of their respective times, Ratzinger claims that the New Testament did not demonize the secular world, but found in it good soils for the relationship with God. This “world-piety” (“*Weltfrömmigkeit*”) of the New Testament is reflected in the secular words with which liturgical offices

261 Cf. *Ibid.*, 111–114.

262 Cf. *Ibid.*, 116–120.

were designated, even though they were filled with Christian meanings.²⁶³ The actual ancient and religious word for priests – ἱερεὺς (Latin = *sacerdos*) does not feature as an office title in the New Testament. One, rather, finds first and foremost, “the twelve” (οἱ δώδεκα) which per se is not a religious title, but is in the context of the New Testament a conscious demarcation with a symbolic background in the history of Israel.²⁶⁴ Apart from that, the office holders are called ἀπόστολοι (messengers), ἐπίσκοποι (overseers: Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:7); among the Jewish Christians we find πρεσβύτεροι (elders: Acts of the Apostles and the Catholic Letters) and διάκονοι (servants: Phil 1:1). In the New Testament, the eucharist also does not bear the name *sacrificium* (sacrifice).²⁶⁵ Moreover, up till the end of the first century, the offices were not yet exactly defined, but were more or less collocated. In any case, they were not described or designated as ritual offices or services for the eucharist. Instead, their duty was above all the preaching of the gospel, service of the neighbour and other practical services for the Christian community.²⁶⁶

5.5 Jesus Christ the Word of God

According to the gospel of St. John, Jesus Christ is not only the messenger of the Father, but also his Word (Logos). Ratzinger sees in this an “inseparable unity” of Mission and Word, which God continues through the ministry of the apostles and which eventually signifies the primacy of proclamation.²⁶⁷ It is in this sense that Jesus is a priest. Given that the ministry of the bishop or the presbyter stems from the

²⁶³ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Sentire ecclesiam* (1963), in: *JRGS* 7/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 323–329: 327f.

²⁶⁴ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 56; cf. —, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe* (1965), in *JRGS* 12, 233–261: 233–236; cf. —, *Vom Ursprung und vom Wesen der Kirche* (1956), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 140–156: 142f.

²⁶⁵ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Sentire ecclesiam*, 327f.; cf. —, *Der Kirchenbegriff im patristischen Denken* (1965), in: *JRGS* 1, 649–663: 658f.; cf. —, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priestertlichen Dienstes*, 353f.; cf. —, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 34, 43f.; cf. —, *Dienst und Leben der Priester*, 898; cf. —, *Der Priester als Mittler und Diener*, 120.

²⁶⁶ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 34.

²⁶⁷ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 58f.

ministry of the twelve, then their first duty is to “serve the word”, which also includes sacramental power.²⁶⁸ The mission makes the priest “the caller” urging people to Christ.²⁶⁹ “The Church is the living presence of the divine Word. This presence is made concrete in those persons (the bishops) whose basic function is to hold fast to the word, who are, then, the personal embodiment of ‘tradition’ (παράδοσις) and to this extent are in the apostolic line of ‘succession’ (διαδοχή).”²⁷⁰

5.6 The Call of the Twelve

Ratzinger interprets the priesthood of the twelve apostles principally from the experience of their being called by Jesus. The decisive text for him is Mk 3:13–19:

³He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

The most essential point here, for Ratzinger, is the anchorage of their calling in the depths of God’s mystery, for it is the fruit of the conversation of Jesus in prayer with his Father the whole night preceding it (Lk 6:12f.). From this perspective, therefore, a purely functionalistic con-

268 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester als Mittler und Diener*, 124.

269 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 362.

270 RATZINGER Joseph, *Primacy, Episcopate, and Apostolic Succession*, in: RAHNER Karl / RATZINGER Joseph, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, trans. by Kenneth BARKER et al, New York 1962, 37–63: 59. German original: *Primat, Episkopat und Successio apostolica* (1959), in: *JRGS* 12, 212–232: 229.

ception of priesthood or a purely human means of generating priestly vocations is ruled out.²⁷¹

The second important point for Ratzinger is the meaning of the word “appointed” (literally: “he made twelve” – “ἔποιήσεν δώδεκα”). There is hidden in it a connection to the Old Testament: “In reality, these words of the Evangelist take up the Old Testament terminology for appointment to the priesthood (cf. 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33) and thus characterizes the apostolic office as a priestly ministry.”²⁷² In other words, for Ratzinger, in calling the twelve apostles, Jesus immediately constituted them as priests as well.

A third point still can be deciphered from the text: the twelve are listed by their names. Ratzinger sees in this an indication of the connection to the Old Testament prophetic office. “Moreover, the fact that the ones chosen are then individually named links them with the Prophets of Israel, whom God calls by name. Mark thus presents the apostolic ministry as a fusion of the priestly and prophetic missions ...”²⁷³ In other words, the priestly sanctification ministry and the prophetic ministry of proclamation are merged together right at the calling of the twelve. This fact alone does not yet lend support to any priority of any ministry. To come to that, Ratzinger goes back to the reason for their calling by Jesus, as given by the evangelist: “to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out demons” (vs 14f.). Hence, he concludes: “The first task is preaching: to give people the light of the word, the message of Jesus. The Apostles are first and foremost Evangelists—like Jesus, they preach the Kingdom of God and thereby gather people into God’s new family.”²⁷⁴ He adds though that preaching is not exhausted only in the communication of words, but also institutes an event of encountering the person of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the primacy of preaching remains.

271 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Von der Taufe*, 269f.

272 Ibid., 270. (*Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, 171).

273 Ibid.

274 Ibid., 272 (*Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, 173).

5.7 The New Meaning of “Sacrifice” in the New Testament

Through the appropriation of secular concepts, early Christianity dissociated itself from the history of religion so far: Christian sacrificial ritual is no longer the same as the sacrificial ritual in other religions. Instead, it is “grounded in the humanity of the man Jesus Christ”, in his love.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, through the appropriation, the New Testament moved the religious and liturgical terminologies into the day-to-day life of Christians in the world. The model text for Ratzinger in this regard is the St. Paul’s statement, that God called him “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16).

A first decisive note here, for Ratzinger, is that St. Paul designated himself as “officiant of the gospel”. Preaching the gospel, not ritual acts, is the “content” of his vocation.²⁷⁶

The second point is the goal: so that the gentiles may become an acceptable offering to God. This means that the secular world is also included in the offering; ultimately, the whole of humanity should be an offering pleasing to God. For this reason, Ratzinger speaks of a “cosmic liturgy” as the eschatological goal of proclamation. The liturgy, in the meantime, is serving that purpose.²⁷⁷ The priestly duty consists in preparing this sacrifice through proclamation of the Word and through sanctification. He is, first and foremost, a *missionary* who gathers people into Christ through his preaching. Thus, it becomes clear that the religious cult (eucharistic celebration) and the day-to-day life of Christians are inseparably united. It is in this perspective that the sense of common priesthood and its relationship to the ministerial priesthood becomes perceivable: What priests are for the lay faithful, the lay faith-

275 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Sentire ecclesiam*, 327f.; cf. —, *Der Kirchenbegriff im patristischen Denken*, 659; cf. —, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 354f.

276 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester im Umbruch der Zeit*, 396f.

277 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets (1967), in: *JRGS* 7/2, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 919–951: 937f.; cf. —, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 361.

ful are for the world. The lay faithful carry the sacrifice of redemption into the world. So, Christian priesthood is not primary a matter of indoor rituals.²⁷⁸

5.8 Christian Priesthood: Restauration of the Original Unity of Word and Sacrifice

The separation of preaching and ritual has, according to Ratzinger, its forerun in late Judaism. The Old Testament prototype of Judaism had priests whose job was both to explain the dictates of God to the people and to celebrate the worship service with them. However, in the Late Judaism, a bifurcation developed: the explanation of the Word of God was left to the Rabbis, while the priests retained liturgical worship alone. The consequence was that in the hands of the Rabbis, the Word of God became only a theoretical word of scholars, while liturgical worship in the hands of the priests truncated to a mere ritual. Paul's designation of the Christian priest as an "officiant of the gospel" (Rm. 15:16) bespeaks the restoration of the archetypal union of Word and sacrifice. Its foundation is Jesus Christ who is the absolute officiant of the gospel. For in him, the Word of God and sacrifice are identical and inseparable.²⁷⁹

5.9 The Eucharist as Proclamation

The idea of the already mentioned cosmic liturgy as the goal of preaching and the interim liturgy means, for Ratzinger, that eucharist, over and above its ritual character, is by its very essence a proclamation – a proclamation towards the cosmic liturgy. Thus, we say in the mass: „we proclaim your death, O Lord, and we profess your resurrection until you come again in glory”. The eucharist proclaims God's saving action for us. It doesn't mean a degradation of Christ's sacrifice which is re-enacted through the priest's ministry of sanctification. On the contrary, it constitutes the centre and core of the assignment to proclaim the gospel.

²⁷⁸ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Sentire ecclesiam*, 328f.; cf. —, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, 937–941; cf. —, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 46f.; cf. —, *Eucharistie und Mission* (1997), in: *JRGS* 11, Freiburg i. Br. ²2008, 397–423: 420f.

²⁷⁹ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Priester im Umbruch der Zeit*, 397.

After all the Catholic priest has always been understood – not just in rhetorical exaggerations but in the whole liturgical and theological tradition – as the officiant of the eucharistic celebration. How about that now? Was it also a wrong track? Should this task now be dismissed? ... The task is not dismissed, rather it is now more clearly integrated into the large context to which it belongs. The Christian liturgy is not a ritual performance in which a priest offers God a reconciliatory sacrifice. Instead, it is an empowered proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord. It is of such power that in it, that event itself becomes present.²⁸⁰

Ratzinger corroborates this argument with the fact that the word “remembrance” is used in the Scriptures and in the early Church for naming the eucharist. In those contexts, “remembrance” does not mean only words, but also making something to become present, a realization of that which once happened.²⁸¹ “The Church is effectively realized in the eucharistic celebration, in which the word of preaching likewise becomes present.”²⁸² Thus, the circle is brought to completion:

Sacramental deed and proclamation are not opposites. Instead, Christian sacrifice, in comparison with the history of religion, has its Christian uniqueness precisely in the fact that it is as such a word-service, just as

280 [My translation]. “Der Katholische Priester ist doch immer – nicht bloß in rhetorischen Übertreibungen, sondern in der ganzen liturgischen und theologischen Überlieferung – als Liturge der eucharistischen Feier verstanden worden. Wie steht es nun damit? War etwa auch das ein Irrweg? Soll diese Aufgabe vielleicht nun abgetan sein? [...] Nicht abgetan ist diese Aufgabe, sondern in den großen Zusammenhang deutlicher eingefügt, dem sie zugehört. Christliche Liturgie ist nicht ritueller Vollzug, bei dem ein Sacerdot Gott ein versöhnendes Opfer darbringt, sondern ist bevollmächtigte Verkündigung von Tod und Auferstehung des Herrn, von solcher Vollmacht, dass in ihr jenes Geschehen selbst anwesend gemacht wird.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 361.

281 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission*, 937f.; cf. —, “Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil (1966)”, in: *JRGS* 7/2, 1003–1025: 1007f.; cf. —, “Ist die Eucharistie ein Opfer? (1967)”, in: *JRGS* 11, 259–270: 268–270.

282 RATZINGER Joseph, *Gesamtkirche und Teilkirche. Der Auftrag des Bischofs* (1991, ²1992), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 519–537: 520. English translation in: *Called to Communion. Understanding the Church Today*, trans. by Adrian WALKER, San Francisco 1996, 75–103: 77.

Christian cult has its uniqueness in the fact that it represents an assembly of people among each other.²⁸³

A key biblical passage for Ratzinger in this context is 2 Cor. 5:18,20 where St. Paul describes his apostolic office as a service of reconciling people with God by virtue of Christ's suffering and death. The question, however, is: where or how precisely does he effect the reconciliation? On this, Ratzinger points to the sense of sacramentality for the historicity of the Church: The suffering and death of Jesus is, first of all, a historical event which lies in the past. It can be made present or applied "only sacramentally". Hence, Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, indeed names the eucharist and baptism as the content of his ministry of reconciliation. He anchors both, however, on the ministry of preaching through which faith arises in the first place.²⁸⁴

5.10 The Church Fathers' Concept of Apostolic Succession

Ratzinger further supports his position with the way the Church Fathers, especially Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–c. 202), employed the doctrine of apostolic succession in the battle against Gnosticism. Given that the Gnostics appealed to the apostolic tradition in defending their teaching, and since there was not yet a canon of the bible, the only visible guarantors of the true gospel of Christ were the witnesses whom the twelve apostles left behind as their successors.²⁸⁵ Hence, when the Gnostics claimed to possess the true teachings and traditions of the twelve

283 [My translation]. "Sakramentales Tun und Verkündigung sind keine Gegensätze, sondern christlicher Opferdienst hat seine christliche Eigentümlichkeit gegenüber der Religionsgeschichte gerade darin, dass er als solcher Wortdienst ist, wie christlicher Kult seine Eigentümlichkeit darin hat, dass er Versammlung der Menschen untereinander darstellt." RATZINGER Joseph, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission*, 938; cf. —, *Ist die Eucharistie ein Opfer*, 268–270.

284 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 40–42. Ratzinger did not write any precise chapter or verse to which he is referring to in the First Letter to the Corinthians.

285 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Kirchenbegriff im patristischen Denken*, 662f.; cf. —, *Primat, Episkopat und Successio apostolica*, 219f.

apostles, the early theologians did not retort with Scriptural arguments, but with the principle of apostolic succession.²⁸⁶

Ratzinger identifies in this principle something more than argument, namely the idea that the priestly office exists in the Church primarily for the sake of the proclaimed and bequeathed word. Ratzinger reinforces the centrality of the word in the idea of apostolic succession by alluding to the fact that, originally, only one Greek word – διαδοχή – was used for both *tradition* as well as *succession*. That is to say, one cannot speak of a teaching being handed over without at the same time speaking of the person who is handing it over. The word is bound to the person, and therefore, to the office. Conversely, for the office bearer who is in the apostolic succession, this means: the priestly ordination does not just mean the transmission of certain powers, but it means to be placed under the authority of the word and for the word.²⁸⁷ “It is a service accountable to the word.”²⁸⁸

By emphasizing on the bond between the priestly office and the word, Ratzinger concurrently distances himself from the protestant idea of *word in itself*, a *hypostatized word* in the Church, i.e., word that is not bound to the apostolic office. On this point, he refers to reformation theologians like Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth who also champion the primacy of the word, but understand this primacy as negation or refutation of the Catholic principle of apostolic succession.²⁸⁹ Ratzinger, in the contrary, emphasizes that the Word and the bible are historically and theologically not coextensive. In the New Testament, the faith evoking word is not simply the word that is read, but the word that is proclaimed and heard (for example, see Rom. 10:14), and therefore, the inseparability of preaching from the authorized preacher, i.e., the bearer of the office.²⁹⁰ Ratzinger writes: “Evangelical theology defines the Church without office and understands the word as a self-reliant

286 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Primat, Episkopat und Successio apostolica*, 225f.

287 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Ibid.*, 219f.; cf. —, *Der Kirchenbegriff im patristischen Denken*, 663.

288 [My translation]. “Es ist verantwortlicher Dienst am Wort.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 60. Cf. —, *Kirche – Systematisch* (1961), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 205–219: 213.

289 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Primat, Episkopat und Successio apostolica*, 224.

290 Cf. *Ibid.*, 224–226.

corrective for office. Catholic Theology, however, sees office as criterium of the word: it does not know a self-reliant Word, a sort of hypostatized word, which is a counterpart to the Church; instead, the word lives in the Church just as the Church lives from the word – a relationship of mutual independence.²⁹¹ The word is bound to the apostolic office.²⁹²

5.11 Primacy of Cult and Sacrifice: A Result of the Devaluation of the Episcopacy

Ratzinger's argument here is a historical one, tracing how the primacy given to the ministry of sanctification came about as a consequence of loss of the meaning of the episcopal office as the first reference of the priesthood.

5.11.1 The Early Church: The Bishop as Foundation of the Ecclesial Structure

Ratzinger summarizes the ecclesiological self-understanding of the early Church with the words “*ecclesia in ecclesiis*”. The Church realizes itself in the individual local churches and these are churches at all because they are in the one Church. This self-realization takes place in that Christian “assembly” (= *ecclesia*) consisting of hearing the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist, but which is bound to the union with the local bishop who again is bound to the communion of the bishops of the Church.²⁹³ It is in this within this structure of the Church that the meaning of the sacrament of Orders emerges. Here, Ratzinger takes recourse to testimony of Ignatius of Antioch (2nd century): the bishop

291 [My translation]. “Die evangelische Theologie definiert die Kirche ohne das Amt und fasst das Wort als selbständiges Korrektiv des Amtes, die katholische Theologie dagegen sieht das Amt als Kriterium des Wortes an: Sie kennt nicht eine der Kirche gegenüber selbständiges, quasihypostatisches Wort, sondern das Wort lebt in der Kirche, wie die Kirche vom Wort lebt – eine Relation gegenseitiger Abhängigkeit und Beziehung.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Das geistliche Amt und die Einheit der Kirche*, 52.

292 Cf. *Ibid.*, 60, 63f., 67–69.

293 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum in der Entwicklung der Kirche*, 87f.; cf. —, *Gesamtkirche und Teilkirche. Der Auftrag des Bischofs* (1990), in: *JRGS 8/1*, 519–537: 520–524.

was responsible for the local church or community and he was assisted by priests and deacons.²⁹⁴ What is given expression in this structure is that in the assembly of the local church, the universal Church was, so to speak, present.

For Ignatius, the figure of the bishop is the expression at once of the unity and of the public character of the Eucharist ... The bishop guarantees not only the unity of each individual community but also the unity of the individual community with the one Church of God in this world. Just as the community continues to be a community only by being so in reference to the bishop, so the bishop continues to be a bishop only by being so in reference to other bishops who, together, form a public unity, which, in turn, is ordered to a primacy ...²⁹⁵

Hence, in the early Church the office of the bishop, not priestly ordination, was the “basic form” from which the ministerial priesthood was understood.²⁹⁶

5.11.2 Medieval Shift of Emphasis to the Presbyter

Although Ratzinger basically appeals to the authority of the Church Fathers, he is not uncritical to their theologies. In fact, he thinks that the root of the identity crisis of the Catholic priesthood is “partly” present already in the theology of the Church Fathers of the nascent Middle Ages. It continued growing up the point that in the high Middle Ages the priesthood was only understood in terms of sacrifice.²⁹⁷ In the medieval understanding, Ratzinger says, the reason for ordaining the priest

²⁹⁴ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 88; cf. —, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe*, 237f.; cf. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4.1 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 239).

²⁹⁵ RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 88f. English translation in: *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. by Mary Frances MCCARTHY, San Francisco 1987, 250–267: 253. Cf. —, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe*, 237–240.

²⁹⁶ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis* 74.

²⁹⁷ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils (1966)*, in: *JRGS* 7/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 527–575: 566f. His doctoral thesis also reflects his critical distance to the usual cultic-sacrificial conception of the priesthood, though his criticism was still veiled in the exegesis St. Augustine’s ecclesiology. Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Volk und Haus Gottes*, 290–292.

is simply that he may be offering God the sacrifice of reconciliation. He criticizes this view as one-sided and a contradiction to the New Testament's picture of the priesthood. The medieval view was drawing on the concept of priesthood in the general history of religion. Such an assimilation may indeed mark itself off from the pagan idea of placating the gods by proposing a finer concept of reconciliation. Nevertheless, it remains wedded to the pagan theology, and therefore, is incompetent to explain the priesthood of the new covenant.²⁹⁸ The root of this development, according to Ratzinger, is the shift of emphasis from the bishop to the priest. He traces the individual steps of this development, beginning with Augustine of Hippo (354c–430).

5.11.2.1 Augustine's Ecclesiology

Ratzinger considers the onset to be in Augustine's ecclesiology which basically tends to be spiritualistic. Faced with a shocking collapse of the visible *communio* in the North African Church during the Donatist controversy, Augustine links up his ecclesiological vision with his doctrine of predestination. In this theory, the Church is eventually not just the people in the visible eucharistic assembly, but the chosen, i.e., platonically speaking, the Church here is only an appearance, while the chosen ones are actually the real Church.²⁹⁹ Augustine does not pull this idea through to its logical conclusion which would be a purely invisible Church. It is Martin Luther who later does that in the most radical manner, but the seed of its effect for the significance of the episcopal office is already planted. For it means, in the ultimate analysis, that the bishop's office is no longer the basic structure of the visible *ecclesia in ecclesiis*.

5.11.2.2 Jerome's Conflation of the Episcopal and Presbyteral Office

In the same epoch but from a different angle, the significance of the bishop was weakened theologically by putting it on the same level with the priest. The foundation for levelling down of the difference was laid

²⁹⁸ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, 566f.

²⁹⁹ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 94f.

by St. Jerome (c. 342–420).³⁰⁰ Jerome’s idea was adopted in the Gallian text of the fifth century – *Statuta ecclesiae antiquae* – and from there it was disseminated.³⁰¹ Ratzinger gives no further details on this development. In any case, the development became apparent also linguistically. Unlike the New Testament’s profane titles, *sacerdos* also became a title for bishops in the early Church.³⁰² Furthermore, around the sixth / seventh century *sacerdos* became synonymous with *presbyter*.³⁰³

300 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 74. Ratzinger makes no reference to any specific work of St. Jerome and gives no further detail. In any case, in a Commentary on St. Paul’s letter to Titus 1:6–7, St. Jerome writes that, originally, each community of Christians was taken care of by a “common council of priests”: It was only due to the egoistic co-optation of baptised persons by individual priests that the decision was made to elect one priest as the leader of the whole community. In this way, divisions and abuses in the community could be brought under control. Thus, for Jerome, there is no essential, divinely ordained difference between bishops and priests. The superiority of the bishop’s office over that of priests is, in his view, only a matter of custom. He goes on to support his opinion with references to Phil. 1:1–2, Acts 20:28, Heb. 13:17, 1 Pt. 5:1–2. Cf. JEROME, Commentary on Titus, 1.5b (*St. Jerome’s Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. by Thomas SCHECK, Indiana 2010, 277–349: 288–290). There is also the view that the Aelius of Pontus (4th century) was the first to equate the bishop with the presbyter. Cf. OTT Ludwig, *Das Weihesakrament*, in: Michael SCHMAUS *et al* (eds.), *HDG*, vol. 1V/5, Freiburg i. Br. 1969, 23f. Jerome’s error lies in the fact that he conflates the New Testament “presbyter” which is tantamount to the bishop in the one-tiered model of the Jewish council of elders (πρεσβύτεροι) with that of the three-tiered model (ἐπίσκοποι – πρεσβύτεροι – διακονία) which developed also in the apostolic period and in which “presbyter” meant “priest” (second grade of the sacrament of ordo). Cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 518f.

301 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 74. The *Statuta ecclesiae antiquae* is a compilation made in the 5th century A.D., comprising of 102 ecclesiastical and liturgical laws. It includes the prerequisites for an episcopal candidate and the rites for appointments to different offices in the Church. Cf. OTT Ludwig, *Das Weihesakrament*, 23, 27f., 46.

302 We find an example of this in CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *Epistula* 63, XVIII.3, XIX (CCSL III C, 415f).

303 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis* 74f. Kurt Koch notes that the linguistic shift became also apparent in the transference of the concept “*paroikia*” (which originally designated the bishop’s local community) to the parish community. Cf. KOCH Kurt, *Der Bischof als Bindeglied der Katholizität. Die episcopale Dimension der katholischen Ekklesiologie*, in: George AUSGUSTIN (ed.), *Die Kirche Jesu Christi leben*, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 56–107: 64.

5.11.2.3 The Term “Body of Christ” and Episcopal Authority

The medieval transformation of the term “body of Christ” as from around the 12th century also contributed to a transformation of the understanding of the priestly office. In 1939, Henri de Lubac published his work *Corpus mysticum* in which he demonstrated how the Church Fathers’ understanding of the “the body of Christ” was changed reversely in the medieval theology. In the theology of the Church Fathers, *mysterium* and *mysticum* did not mean “mystery” or “mystical”, rather “sacrament” and “sacramental”, not something invisible, but something visible. Hence, they called the eucharist *corpus mysticum*, but called the Church *corpus verum*. However, at the beginning of the Middle Ages *mysticum* was no longer understood to mean “sacramental”, but that which is invisible and mystical. Hence, there was a switching of terms: *corpus mysticum* was no longer used for the eucharistic body of Christ, but for the Church, while the eucharist now became *corpus verum*.³⁰⁴ Ratzinger does not remember if he read the De Lubac’s work before or after writing his doctoral thesis, but in any case, he came to the same conclusion through his study of St. Augustine’s ecclesiology.³⁰⁵

This switching of terms naturally has as its consequence a spiritualistic ecclesiology, for if the true Church is actually invisible, then the visible structures become superfluous, including the episcopal office.³⁰⁶ Ratzinger notes that in the period between the two world wars, this mystical ecclesiology was “celebrated as an aversion for the hierarchically stamped ecclesiology.”³⁰⁷

Back to the Medieval Ages: According to Ratzinger, the medieval shift went hand in hand with the separation of the sacramental power

304 Cf. DE LUBAC Henri, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Gemma SIMMONDS *et al*, Notre Dame 2006. Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Geist der Liturgie* (2000), in: *JRGS* 11, 29–194: 85f.; cf. —, *Leib Christi* (1961), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 286–289: 286f. St. Augustine did not even use the adjective “mystical” in connexion with “the body of Christ”: cf. —, *Preface to Doctoral Thesis* (2011), in: *JRGS* 1, 5–9: 7; cf. Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Theologische Aufgaben und Fragen bei der Begegnung lutherischer und katholischer Theologen nach dem Konzil* (1966), in: *JRGS* 7/2, 955–979: 965–967.

305 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Volk und Haus Gottes*, 7. See also his comments on page 274 of the same work.

306 Cf. Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Sakramentalität*, 140.

307 [My translation]. RATZINGER Joseph, *Preface to Doctoral Thesis* (1992), in: *JRGS* 1, 48–57: 52.

from the governance (jurisdictional) power of the bishop. The question was about what was sacramental and what was merely of a juridical nature in the office of the bishop. The argument was that the power over the *corpus Christi verum* (now the eucharist) was the actual sacramental factor in Holy Orders, while the power over the *corpus Christi mysticum* (now the Church) was only a matter of legislation. The logical consequence is this: if the power to consecrate the eucharist is already given at the priestly ordination, then episcopal consecration does not confer any sacramental power, but merely a legislative authority.³⁰⁸ The problem with this view is an isolation of the sacrament of eucharist from the Church, whereas in reality both the eucharist and the Church make up *together* the Body of Christ in history. Ratzinger, therefore, concludes:

Perhaps, we may say that the drifting apart of the theology of the eucharist and the ecclesiology, traceable since the 11th and 12th century, is one of the most unfortunate sides of the medieval theology which was otherwise so meritorious in many other questions. Due to this separation, both (theology of the eucharist and ecclesiology) lost their centre. A theology of the eucharist which is not related to the communion of the Church loses its essence just as an ecclesiology which is not constructed from its eucharistic core.³⁰⁹

The isolation of the eucharist from its ecclesial life framework and its reduction to the major work of the priest also led to the privatization of the mass by the faithful through stipends for their individual pious intentions. The faithful then saw the Church only as the legal author-

308 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 74f.; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 90f.; cf. —, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe*, 251–255; cf. —, *Die bischöfliche Kollegialität* (1965), in: *JRGS* 7/2, 665–669.

309 [My translation]. “Man darf wohl sagen, dass das Auseinandertreten von Eucharistielehre und Ekklesiologie, das sich seit dem 11. und 12. Jahrhundert feststellen lässt, einer der unglücklichsten Seiten der in vielen anderen Fragen so verdienstvollen Theologie des Mittelalters darstellt, weil beide damit ihr Zentrum verloren. Eucharistielehre, die nicht auf Gemeinschaft der Kirche hinbezogen ist, verfehlt ebenso ihr Wesen wie Ekklesiologie, die nicht von der eucharistischen Mitte her konzipiert wird.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe*, 253.

ity coordinating the whole business.³¹⁰ These consequences escalated in the Late Middle Ages up to the Baroque period: the priest now just performed the ritual celebration (=sanctification), while the authority for governance and proclamation was in the hands of some other persons who were mostly not ordained. This is the root of the problem of lay investiture.³¹¹

The ministry of the Word which has fallen out of the priestly identity became the affair almost exclusively of medieval scholastic theologians. The Word of God was no longer in contact with the life of the people. It was only when the mendicant orders came up that the unity of sacrament and proclamation was rediscovered, though simply with a *missionary* conception of priesthood ignorant of its episcopal reference point.³¹²

5.11.2.4 The Ordination Rite of the Council of Florence

Furthermore, Ratzinger argues: through its *Decretum pro armenis* of 1439, the Florentine Council practically introduced the theological stricture of priesthood and cult-sacrifice into the liturgical ritual of priestly ordination. It stipulated the sacramental matter of the priestly ordination to be the handing over of the chalice with wine and the paten with bread.³¹³ It, thus, gave liturgical expression to the view that the priest was primarily ordained to celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice. For Ratzinger, it cannot be interpreted as meaning otherwise. It becomes more obvious in sacramental form for administering the ordination as stipulated by the Council: “Receive the power of offering the Sacrifice in the Church for the living and the dead, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁴ Ratzinger considers these stipulations of the Council as the “strongest manifestation” of the “entanglement” of the Church with Germanism – an entanglement which he considers to be still enduring. In fact, the whole theological conception of the liturgy was an emulation of power conferment in the secular world.³¹⁵

310 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum in der Entwicklung der Kirche*, 91–93.

311 *Ibid.*, 90–93.

312 *Ibid.*, 92–94.

313 Cf. DH 1326.

314 *Ibid.*

315 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 71–75.

The incisive consequence of this approach is not far-fetched: the determinant perspective all over is now *potestas*, power, authority. Priesthood is related only and directly to the power of eucharistic consecration and is defined as such – a view which then finds expression in the rite of ordination. The care of souls is split off from it and it is constricted to a juridical power over the mystical body.³¹⁶

Moreover, Ratzinger identifies the implied devaluation of the episcopacy in favour of the presbyter in the fact that the Council says nothing about the bishop, apart from mentioning him as the minister of the sacrament of Holy Orders.³¹⁷

5.11.3 Martin Luther's Augustinian Approach and Protest Theology

The spiritualistic orientation of St. Augustine's ecclesiology in connection with his doctrine of predestination was carried by Martin Luther to its final consequence. For Ratzinger, Luther's public burning of the excommunication bull was a sort of symbol for it, because by doing that, it became publicly clear that the *Communio*-theology (*ecclesia in ecclesiis*) of the early Church has been overruled. The important thing was no longer the visible membership to the Catholic Church, but the invisible communion of faith. The Church was understood as the opposite of *communio*. Certainly, the politicization of the practice of excommunication in the Church also contributed to this.³¹⁸

Luther then links up his concept of the Church as a spiritual communion of the chosen with a new concept of the mass. Indeed, he rightly criticized medieval benefice system in the Church. However,

316 [My translation]. "Die einschneidenden Folgen dieser Betrachtungsweise liegen auf der Hand: Allenthalben ist nun *potestas*, Macht, Vollmacht der entscheidende Gesichtspunkt. Priestertum ist unmittelbar nur auf Wandlungsvollmacht bezogen und als solche definiert, was sich dann, wie gezeigt, im sakramentalen Ritus niederschlägt. Seelsorge ist davon abgesprengt und zur Rechtsgewalt über den mystischen Leib verengt." *Ibid.*, 75.

317 Cf. *Ibid.*, 73.

318 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 95f.

while pruning such overgrowths from the mass celebration, he left nothing apart from the words of institution.³¹⁹

This brings us directly to the question of the priesthood, namely: how does Luther, following his view of the Church and the eucharist, explain the priesthood? To answer this question, Ratzinger holds the earlier years of Luther and his work *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae* (1520) to be the most important reference point. In that work, Luther strongly criticizes the restrictive connection made between priesthood and sacrifice. For Luther, such connection implies “a denial of grace and a return to the law.”³²⁰ Ratzinger, though, observes that the early Luther, especially in his *De captivitate*, was not criticizing the sacrificial theology of priesthood, but the eucharistic theology of the priesthood, i.e., the priest as someone who celebrates mass. It is because for Luther, the priesthood was not instituted at the Last Supper, and therefore, was not a sacrament. Instead, it was instituted at those times when Christ gave admonitions to pray. Consequently, for him, the major duty of the priest is to pray the liturgy of the hours.³²¹ The two claims of Luther – denial of the sacramentality of the priestly ordination by denying its institution at the last Supper and the shrinkage of the mass itself to words of institution – necessitates him to reduce the essence of the priesthood to the proclamation of the word.³²² In his protest against the Catholic reductionism (priest-sacrifice), he falls prey to another reductionism (priest-word). He sees even the administration of sacraments as nothing other than proclamation of the word. “He [the priest] is a preacher of grace, that is all; even in the eucharistic celebration and in the confession, he assures, in a special way, the grace of forgiveness; even in these actions, the presbyter does not step out of the function of preaching.”³²³

319 Cf. *Ibid.*, 96f.

320 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, 566f.; cf. —, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 80.

321 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 80f.; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 98f.

322 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 99f.

323 [My translation] “Er ist Prediger der Gnade, sonst nichts; auch in der Eucharistiefeyer und in der Beichte sagt er auf eine spezielle Weise die Gnade der Vergebung zu; auch mit diesem Tun tritt also der Presbyter nicht aus der Funktion des Predigens heraus.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 81.

5.11.4 The Council of Trent on Luther's Theology and on Episcopacy

Ratzinger evaluates the Tridentine doctrine of the priesthood on two counts: its response to the view proposed by Luther and the place accorded the episcopacy.

On the first point, Ratzinger considers the Council's response to Luther to be theologically unsatisfactory. What evoked Luther's criticisms on the priesthood was actually the overgrowths in the mass celebration, e.g., the benefice system. The Council, however, did not really solve this problem and therefore, could not halt the impacts of Luther's criticism. Ratzinger names three reasons for this failure:

1. Luther was strongly biblical in his argumentation, but the Council trapped itself in a scholastic language, and therefore its texts appeared to be "too positivistic and churchy". The post-Tridentine scholastic theology ignored the very ideas for renewal from the Council. It was not until Charles Borromeo came into the scene that it was pastorally implemented.³²⁴
2. Indeed, the Council did not intend to give a wholistic account of the Catholic doctrine of the priesthood, but then, what it gave in response to Luther was only polemically processed. It only provided "antitheses to Luther's basic ideas"³²⁵, i.e., only those teachings in his *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae*.³²⁶ Luther's reduction of the priesthood to preaching was simply countered with the specific sacramental power (eucharist and absolution) of the priest. His functionalistic concept of priesthood was countered with the *character indelibilis* received at ordination. His doctrine of an undifferentiated equality and the consequent profanity of the priesthood was coun-

324 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 81; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 103.

325 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 82.

326 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 101.

tered with the institution by Christ and the doctrine of hierarchy in the Church.³²⁷

3. The Council elaborated on the Catholic doctrine of sacrifice, but it did not respond to the serious objections of Luther. On the practical level, it centralized the celebration of the mass, in order to check abuses. However, through the centralization, the liturgy became an object of pure formalism. It lost its vitality. It became increasingly a dead, „encrusted system”, having no relation with the lives of the faithful.³²⁸

On the second point – the question of the episcopacy –, Ratzinger thinks that the Council marks the beginning of a reversion from the medieval shift, back to the original priority of place accorded to the bishop in the structure of the Church. The Council channelled the perspective towards the pastoral character of the priesthood and its rootedness in the episcopacy. “The imposition of the obligatory residence is only the canonical expression of a pastoral conception of the bishop’s office; he is responsible for the sacraments, he is responsible for preaching. Correspondingly, he has the obligation of making visitations and hold synods at regular intervals.”³²⁹

5.11.5 Pius XII’s Reform of the Ordination Rite

What Pius XII did through the Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum ordinis* of November 30, 1947, was, according to Ratzinger, to expurgate in the area of liturgy the cultic constriction of the priesthood which has

327 Cf. Ibid. For the respective texts of the Council: sacramental authority (DH 1764, 1767, 1771, 1773), *character indelibilis* (DH 1767, 1774) and institution by Christ (DH 1768, 1769, 1776, 1777).

328 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Ergebnisse und Probleme der dritten Konzilsperiode* (1965), in: *JRGS* 7/1, 423–428. English translation in: *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. by Henry TRAUB / Gerard THORMANN / Werner BARZEL, New York 1966, 129–131.

329 [My translation]. “Die Einschärfung der Residenzpflicht ist dabei nur der kirchenrechtliche Ausdruck dafür, dass der Bischof als Seelsorger gefasst wird; verantwortlich für die Sakramente, verantwortlich für die Predigt. Dem entspricht dann auch die Pflicht der Visitationen und regelmäßiger Synoden.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 80; cf. —, *Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum*, 101–103.

taken roots in the ordination liturgy, especially since after the *Decretum pro Armenis* of the Council of Florence. The sacramental matter of ordination was no longer the handing over of chalice and paten, but simply the imposition of hands. The content of the sacramental form no longer simply referred to the eucharist. Instead, it was a more comprehensive and pneumatologically designed preface. Moreover, one gets a picture of the bishop as the bearer of the fullness of the priesthood and not just as the administer of the sacrament of holy orders.³³⁰

Ratzinger emphasizes that the universal Church did not contradict itself through this reform, because the tradition practiced until then was never binding for the universal church, but was a special tradition of the western / Roman Catholic Church. The reform, therefore, was actually a correction of the practice of a particular Church by the universal Church – a correction which restored the tradition of the early Church.³³¹

5.11.6 Vatican II: Episcopal Ecclesiology – Ministry of the Word

5.11.6.1 Lumen Gentium

Ratzinger argues that it was not until the Second Vatican Council that the reductionist conception of the priesthood based on the cult of sacrifice was doctrinally surmounted. The Council's teaching originates from a deeper and more comprehensive sense of the priesthood. Ratzinger even fixes the "decisive basis" of the Council's teaching in a specific statement of the Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:

That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors.³³²

³³⁰ PIUS XII., *Apostolic Constitution: Sacramentum ordinis* (1947) in: AAS 40 (1948) 5–7; Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 71–73.

³³¹ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 71f.

³³² *Lumen Gentium* §20; cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die bischöfliche Kollegialität*, 672.

There are two assertions in the statement: firstly, the foundation of the priesthood is the mission handed over to them and it consists in passing on the gospel to others; secondly, by recalling the retrospective bond of that mission with the twelve apostles, the Council makes it clear that the office of the bishop is, by virtue of the *successio apostolica*, the full form of the sacrament of ministerial priesthood.³³³

Ratzinger even interprets the Council's teaching on the ministry of sanctification in number 26 of the same Constitution as giving primacy to the ministry of the word. "The third and last section of the article focuses on the whole issue of the episcopal duty to »sanctify«. This duty is first explained as the authority to preach the Word, and then, before every other thing, as the responsibility of the bishop for all other sacraments."³³⁴

5.11.6.2 Presbyterorum Ordinis

According to Ratzinger, the Council's approach in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests is much more comprehensive and is more appropriate to that which is unique to Christianity, namely, from the perspective of the gathering of the faithful (*ecclesia* – those called together) in Christ. Thus, it depicts the priest as a servant to the faith of the people of God, a servant of evangelisation.³³⁵ The Decree expresses this vividly when it states:

The People of God are joined together primarily by the word of the living God. And rightfully they expect this from their priests. Since no one can be saved who does not first believe, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all.³³⁶

333 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die kirchliche Lehre vom Sacramentum ordinis*, 74–76.

334 "Der dritte und letzte Abschnitt des Artikels widmet sich zur Gänze dem Thema der bischöflichen Aufgabe zu »heiligen«. Diese Aufgabe wird zuerst in der Vollmacht, das Wort zu predigen, ausgeführt und dann vor allem anderen in der Verantwortung des Bischofs für die übrigen Sakramente." RATZINGER Joseph, *Ortskirche und Gesamtkirche. Kommentar zu »Lumen gentium«*, Artikel 26 (1965), in: *JRGS* 7/2, 696–698: 697f.

335 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, 567; cf. —, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 368f.

336 *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §4.

The priest is, intrinsically, a missionary of Jesus Christ. What this means for his day-to-day existence and spirituality is, in Ratzinger's words:

The priest must be someone who lives his Life from the Word of God, is saturated with it, and goes in and out of it. He must practically find the construction point of his existence in it. To put it drastically: he is not to be a craftsman of cultic rituals, but a meditator of the Word. Certainly not a mediator of the Word just in academic sense (even though he ought to be abreast of the consciousness of the times), but in such a way that he learns to hear the Word more and more as *God's Word* ...³³⁷

It is on this basis that the eucharistic sacrifice as the focal point of Christian life can be rightly understood. The eucharist is, together with other sacraments, a form of proclamation. Ratzinger notes that, while the Council stated only in an isolated manner ("*liturgizistisch*") in its Constitution on the Liturgy that the "liturgy" is the source and summit of the Christian life, it now inserts that statement into a balanced context, namely, that the *eucharist* is "the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel."³³⁸ If the eucharist is the centre of the priestly work, then it is only because the eucharist itself is the centre of evangelisation.³³⁹ On this interpretation then, the priest does not simply exist for the sake of the eucharistic sacrifice which reaches its apex at the consecration. Instead, the Council strikes the core of priestly identity with a term from the New Testament and the early Church: *Presider*. The priest principally presides over the people of God. He is the "*pater familias*" of "God's own household". He says the prayer at the table of

337 [My translation]. "Der Priester muss dann nämlich ein Mensch sein, der sein Leben vom Wort her lebt, der durchtränkt ist von ihm, der in ihm aus- und eingeht. Er muss dann auch ganz praktisch den Konstruktionspunkt seiner Existenz in jenem Wort finden. Drastisch ausgedrückt: Nicht Kulthandwerker, sondern Wortbedenker hat der Priester zu sein. Allerdings nicht Wortbedenker in einem bloß akademischen Sinne (wiewohl auf der Höhe des Bewusstseins seiner Zeit), sondern so, dass er das Wort mehr und mehr als Wort Gottes zu vernehmen lernt ..." RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 369.

338 Cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis* §5; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §10; cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 373.

339 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 373.

meal, proclaims in thanksgiving the saving works of God in Jesus Christ and, at the same time, makes those saving actions present by virtue of the power of consecration conferred on him at ordination.³⁴⁰

Ratzinger, again, interprets the Council's teaching on the ministry of leadership in number 6 of the same Decree as giving primacy to the ministry of the word. Ultimately, the proclamation of the Word of God is the ministry which "encompasses and grounds" as well as is expressed by the sanctification and shepherding ministries.³⁴¹

5.11.6.3 Poor Reception of Vatican II: New Devaluation of the Episcopacy

In Ratzinger's view, despite the primacy given to the bishop's office and the ministry of the Word by the Council and the positive attempts to implement it (for example, homilies being held by the bishops themselves, missionary-oriented pastoral letters), the Council's teaching on the priesthood was ignored to an alarming extent. This led to a new disregard for the magisterial authority of the bishops. Ratzinger names two such maldevelopments:

1. Catechesis as a regular and obligatory duty of the bishop was not implemented. Instead, it was taken over by the "so-called experts".³⁴²
2. There was a blurring of the difference between preaching the gospel and doing theology. According to Ratzinger, theologians, instead of keeping their different and often contrary findings and opinions within their expertise groups, used the mass media to serve them so raw to the public as doctrine of the faith, in such a way, that they suppressed the voices of the bishops.

³⁴⁰ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, 567. (*Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 248–253.

³⁴¹ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 376f.

³⁴² Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Lehrvollmacht der Bischöfe* (1989), in: *JRGS* 12, 322–326: 323.

Despite all the indisputable efforts of the bishops to preach the Word, theologians in large parts of the world displaced the bishops as teachers. Indeed, they said a lot of good things, but all in all, the outcome was predominantly uncertainty and confusion: the contours of the faith vanished behind the theological reflections which was supposed to explain them.³⁴³

Ratzinger further observes that the Council's explicit teaching on primacy of teaching/preaching in the bishop's ministry (*Lumen Gentium* 25) was simply ignored, uncommented in the theological discussions after the Council. Instead, having displaced the bishops as teachers, theologians attempted to find another duty of priority for the bishops: to be a sort "spiritual administrator" of the different theological viewpoints. He names three examples:

It is in this sense that Jean Colson claimed that there is an equivalence between the early Christian *Episcopos* and the *Mebaqqer* of the Qumran community, and he tried to verify this on the model of the apostle James and other Christian authorities. According to him, they were »monitors« in the Qumran sense. The patrologist Adalbert Hamman says something similar, but from the perspective of the Greek world: the »bishops« called themselves episcopos, i.e., inspector, in accordance with the language usage in civil administration then. Hans Küng makes the same etymological and genealogical connection, and on that basis, he made his distinction between episcopos and teachers, he amputated teaching from being a shepherd. All these theories didn't remain within the confines of the academicians. Instead, they were used as a sort of coercion on the bishop: as a duty, he must now avoid polarisations, he has to come on the stage as a moderator of the pluralism of opinions, but he may not himself become biased about the contents.³⁴⁴

343 [My translation]. "Trotz aller unbestreitbaren bischöflichen Bemühungen um die Verkündigung des Wortes haben die Theologen in großen Teilen der Welt den Bischof als Lehrer abgelöst. Obwohl dabei auch viel Gutes zu Tage getreten ist, ist aufs Ganze gesehen das Ergebnis überwiegend Unsicherheit und Verwirrung: Die Konturen des Glaubens verschwinden hinter den Reflexionen, die ihn erklären sollen." *Ibid.*, 323.

344 [My translation]. "So hat Jean Colson eine Äquivalenz zwischen dem frühchristlichen *Episkopos* und dem *Mebaqqer* der Qumran-Gemeinde behauptet und dies am Modell des Jakobus und anderer christlicher Verantwortlicher zu verifizieren versucht. Sie seien nur

II. Joseph Ratzinger: *Munus Sanctificandi*

5.12 Preliminary Remarks: Shift in Formulation and Content

Ratzinger later changed his opinion as regards the fundamental *munus* of the priesthood. He later opted for the ministry of sanctification, especially the celebration of the eucharist. However, it seems to have been a gradual and subtle process, at least the much that can be inferred from his documented writings and speeches. Generally, his shift of opinion can be classified into two phases which are to some extent interwoven.

The first phase is marked not by a change in content but in the *formulation* of his thesis. In the first published volume of his Jesus-trilogy (2007), he maintained the substance of his argument – the primacy of preaching.³⁴⁵ However, in the course of years, there has been a conspicuous mitigation in his manner of expressing the same substance. His increasing caution may have been conditioned by his experience of the post-conciliar crisis in the Church and the counterculture of the 1960s, especially the protests of 1968, insofar as they involved the Church. As a matter of fact, the experience of the ecclesial life has shown that an overemphasis of the preaching work in the priesthood over the sacramental life also has its own dangers in the practical implementation. In any case, one can reasonably argue that an important landmark in Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood is the year 1966. This is because *latest* in 1966 – a year after the Council –, Ratzinger became sensitive to

»Überwacher« im Sinne von Qumran gewesen. Der Patrologe Adalbert Hamman sagt in ähnlichem Sinn, nun von der griechischen Umwelt her: Die »Bischöfe« nannten sich Episkopen, das heißt Inspektoren gemäß dem Sprachgebrauch der damaligen Zivilverwaltung. Hans Küng stellt denselben etymologischen und genealogischen Zusammenhang fest und kommt von daher zu seiner Unterscheidung von Episkopen und Lehrern, zu seiner Abtrennung der Lehre aus der Funktion der Hirten. Alle diese Thesen sind nicht im gelehrten Bereich verblieben, sondern sind zu einer Art Pression auf den Bischof geworden: Seine Aufgabe sei es dadurch geworden, Polarisierungen zu vermeiden, als Moderator im Pluralismus der Meinungen aufzutreten, aber nicht selbst inhaltlich »Partei« zu werden." Ibid., 324.

345 Cf. Section 5.6 above.

the rising objections against his proposal and put it on paper. According to Ratzinger himself, it was essentially objected that under the influence of the Lutheran-reformation critique, he was reducing the holy mass to the ministry of the word, thereby truncating its sacramental-sacrificial character and the nature of the Catholic priesthood, as taught by the Council of Trent.³⁴⁶ Ratzinger takes the objection seriously and in his response to it, he concedes that his “**formulation** is misunderstandable and can induce such an interpretation”, but that his reason for emphasizing the preaching character of the holy mass was to place it as a “corrective to the one-sided dominance of the notion of the holy mass as meal” – a notion which alone cannot grasp the essence of the eucharistic celebration.³⁴⁷ In his later re-formulations, Ratzinger marked clear boundary posts to his thesis, and with that, the ministry of sanctification came back more and more to the centre of his theology of priesthood.

The second phase is marked by a change in content: from primacy of the word to primacy of sanctification (eucharist and reconciliation) in the priesthood. However, unlike his expositions on the ministry of the word, he did not develop it strictly systematically. For the most part, they are indices, but obvious ones, and they are to be found rather in his non-academic and pastoral statements of the later years (homilies, talks to priests, interviews). It only became very obvious in his very last write up before his death. Hence, 1977 may be identified as the latest landmark for the inception of this phase of Ratzinger’s theology of the priesthood. This may also have been conditioned by the fact that it was the year in which he became a bishop and cardinal entrusted with pastoral care of a diocese.

In what follows, five arguments from Ratzinger are presented which make his gradual-subtle shift to the primacy of sanctification evident. Not all, though, are scientific-systematic accounts. The fourth argument (5.16) has three sub-divisions.

346 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, 1008, Fn 2.

347 [My translation and emphasis]. “Ich gebe zu, dass die Formulierung missverständlich ist und zu einer solchen Auslegung verleiten kann ... Wenn ich in meinem Vortrag auf das Element der Verkündigung so großen Wert legte, so sollte das gerade eine Korrektur gegenüber der einseitigen Herrschaft des Mahlgedankens bedeuten, mit dem man der Struktur der eucharistischen Feier nicht gerecht werden kann ...” Ibid.

5.13 Inseparability of Cult (Sacrament) and Proclamation

In his later years, Ratzinger strongly dissociated himself from any theology of farewell to cult for the sake of giving primacy to the word or any purely allegorical interpretation of cult and priesthood.³⁴⁸ He rejects playing off the primacy of the word against the ministry of sanctification. He finds the tendency to be historically rooted in the modern biblical exegesis. In it, the dialectics of preaching and cult played out in three stages between the end of the 19th and the 20th Century.

1. *Before the First World War.* Having been infiltrated by the individualism of liberalism at the end of the 19th century, liberal exegesis interpreted Jesus Christ only from an individualistic perspective. According to the interpretation, Jesus has nothing to do with cult or a religious institution. He is even an enemy of it. Hence, religion should be a purely individual thing which is based only on one's own conscience. In other words, religion is just an ethos.³⁴⁹ Ratzinger names Adolf von Harnack with his work – *What is Christianity* – as the main representative of this school of thought.³⁵⁰
2. *After the First World War:* The experience of war generally aroused the yearning for a collective foothold. The absolutisation of the individual was unsustainable. Hence, yearning for the collective went hand in glove with the re-discovery of the communion of the Church. There developed in the Scandinavian and English theology an exegesis of cult according to which Jesus was actually not a cult-critic, but lived by it (temple worship). In German Protestantism, there was a new appreciation of the Church: she is founded by Jesus at the Last Supper, and is therefore, a community of faith which lives by celebrating the Last Supper (cult).³⁵¹

348 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Vom Einzug in Jerusalem bis zur Auferstehung* (2011), in: *JRGS* 6/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 415–635: 594f.

349 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen. Kirche heute verstehen*, 13.

350 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 37.

351 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen. Kirche heute verstehen*, 14f.

3. *From after the Second World War till after the Vatican II:* This phase is characterized by two schools of thought – neoliberalism and neo-marxism. Neoliberalism did the same as its predecessor (liberalism). It placed an opposition between Jesus and cult / institution. However, unlike liberalism which did it by reason of its individualistic philosophy, neoliberalism did it from the perspective of an eschatological hermeneutics, according to which, Jesus proclaimed the end of all religions with their institutions and priesthood, while heralding the dawn of a charismatic-prophetic freedom.³⁵² After the Second Vatican Council, neoliberals, drawing on Karl Barth's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of opposition between Christianity and religion, fancied banishing everything cultic from Christianity. They now interpreted Christ's crucifixion simply as an act in the midst of world, not a cultic act at a religious site.

The emphasis in the Letter to the Hebrews that Jesus suffered outside of the city and the summon to go out to him (Heb. 13:12f.) became a symbol: The cross has torn the curtain of the temple, the new altar stands in the midst of the world, the new sacrifice is not a cultic event, but wholly a profane death.³⁵³

According to Ratzinger, even though Luther did not come up with the idea of profanity of Christ's death, he laid the foundation for it. After all, it is nothing other than a further development of the Lutheran conviction that the bible teaches an opposition between law and grace, between priesthood and prophecy, between cult and promise.³⁵⁴

In its own turn, neo-marxism adopted this neoliberalist approach and transformed it into the idea of class struggle. Priesthood is like the class of the bourgeois, while prophecy stands for the proletariats. Christ's death was the result of his struggle against institutionalized religion. Virtually, he was killed by priests, the defenders of institution. Jesus' preaching implicated the end of this class struggle which,

352 Cf. *Ibid.*, 15f.

353 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Vom Wesen des Priestertums*, 34.

354 Cf. *Ibid.*, 34–36.

of course, will come off favourably for the oppressed class. In other words, at the end there will be no more an official Church, but only the Kingdom of God in which there is no class society. Ratzinger names Leonardo Boff (*1938) with his work – *Jesus Christ Liberator* (first published in 1972) – as the main representative of this school of thought.³⁵⁵ In his study of the person of Jesus Christ, Ratzinger, who earlier on emphasized the Jewish lay status of Christ, now developed a theology of the continuity between Old Testament's and Christ's priesthood by finding a point of interface in the person of John the Baptist who belonged to a priestly tribe. On this basis, he justifies the rationality of the link between the Old Testament ritualistic priesthood and the New Testament priesthood.

The story of John has particularly deep Old Testament roots. Zechariah is a priest from the division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth is also of priestly stock: she is from the tribe of Aaron (cf. *Lk* 1:15). According to Old Testament law, the service of priests is tied to membership of the tribe of the sons of Aaron and Levi. So John the Baptist is a priest. In him the priesthood of the Old Covenant moves toward Jesus; it becomes a pointer toward Jesus, a proclamation of his mission. It strikes me as important that in John the whole Old Covenant priesthood becomes a prophecy of Jesus, and so—together with Psalm 118, the highest expression of its theology and spirituality—it points toward him, it makes itself his. A one-sided emphasis on the contrast between the Old Testament sacrificial cult and the spiritual worship of the New Covenant (cf. *Rom* 12:1) would obscure this connecting line, this inner dynamic of the Old Testament priesthood, which is a part toward Jesus Christ not only in John but earlier too, in the development of priestly spirituality expressed in Psalm 118.³⁵⁶

355 Cf. *Ibid.*, 37.

356 RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Prologue. Die Kindheitsgeschichten* (2012), in: *JRGS* 6/1, 37–126: 52f. English translation: *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. by Philip WHITMORE, New York 2012, 18f. The Jews sang psalm 118 (the „Great Hallel) at the end of the Passover meal. It was most probably the hymn sung by Jesus and the twelve at the end of the Last Supper (Mt. 26:30, Mk 14:26). Cf. PITRE Brant, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist. Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper*, New York 2011/2016, 70, 154–158.

Ratzinger does not only offer a strong critique and dissociation from a theology of preaching without cults. The other side of the coin is that he firmly believes that renewal of the Church depends on the renewal of the liturgy (cult). In his own words: “I am convinced that the crisis we are facing today in the Church was substantially caused by the degradation of the liturgy ...”³⁵⁷

Interestingly, in his capacity as pope, he makes an open diagnosis and negative judgement on the primacy which is given to the ministry of the word over the sacraments. He insists on the inseparability of both ministries, but also on the primacy of the eucharist as the greatest consolidation of the presence of Christ who is the Word of God.

In recent decades there have been tendencies that aim to give precedence, in the priest's identity and mission, to the dimension of proclamation, detaching it from that of sanctification; it is often said that it would be necessary to go beyond a merely sacramental pastoral ministry. Yet, is it possible to exercise the priestly ministry authentically by “going beyond” the sacramental ministry? What exactly does it mean for priests to evangelize, in what does the professed “primacy of proclamation” consist? As the Gospels report, Jesus says that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the goal of his mission; this proclamation, however, is not only a “discourse” but at the same time includes his action; the signs and miracles that Jesus works show that the Kingdom comes as a present reality and in the end coincides with his very Person, with his gift of himself, as we heard today in the Gospel Reading. And the same applies for the ordained ministry: he, the priest, represents Christ, the One sent by the Father, he continues his mission, through the “word” and the “sacrament”, in this totality of body and soul, of sign and word. Referring to priests in a letter to Bishop Honoratus of Thiabe, St Augustine says: “Let those, therefore, who are servants of Christ, his ministers in word and sacrament, do what he has commanded or permitted” (Letter 228, 2). It is necessary to reflect on whether, in some cases, having underestimated the faithful exercise of the *munus sanctificandi* might not have represented

357 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Aus meinem Leben. Erinnerungen (1927–1977)*, München 1998, 174.

a weakening of faith itself in the salvific efficacy of the sacraments, and ultimately in the actual action of Christ and of his Spirit, through the Church, in the world.

Who, therefore, saves the world and man? The only answer we can give is: Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, Crucified and Risen. And where is the Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ that brings about salvation? In Christ's action through the Church, and in particular in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which makes the redemptive sacrificial offering of the Son of God present in the sacrament of Reconciliation in which from the death of sin one returns to new life, and in every other sacramental act of sanctification (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5).³⁵⁸

In a way, this speech is a silent retraction of what he championed earlier as a young theologian.

5.14 "Sacrifice" in the New Testament: Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Vocation to Self-Sacrifice

As we have seen (cf. 5.7), the earlier Ratzinger understands certain Pauline expressions of sacrifice only in a spiritualized/sublimated, non-cultic sense. The central verse is Paul's admonition to Christians in Rom. 12:1: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In his later years, Ratzinger becomes more attentive to the cultic content without losing sight of the implications for a spiritual Christian life. In a talk in 1989³⁵⁹ he juxtaposes the verse with two similar ones:

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb. 13,15f.)

358 BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience on May 5, 2010*.

359 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, »Aufbauen zu einem geistigen Haus« Eine Betrachtung zu 1 Petr 2,5 (1989), in: *JRGS* 12, 422–431.

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5)

Based on these texts Ratzinger indeed discerns a new fusion of priesthood and sacrifice.³⁶⁰ On the one hand, it refers to the form of spiritual lifestyle of Christians, the day-to-day living out of their common priesthood. On the other hand, it refers more deeply to the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ as the source and means through which Christians offer up their sacrifice to God. Thus, he writes that Peter's words "let yourselves be built up into a spiritual house" indicates "a new theology of the liturgy which at the same time is a theology of the Christian life."³⁶¹ What this means for Ratzinger as regards the ministerial priesthood then is that the latter (Christian life) is a preparation and a requisite for the former (the sacrifice on the altar).

Growing into the priestly dimension of Christian existence, i.e., putting the spiritual content of baptism into practice, is the decisive prerequisite for one to be able to perform the service of the special priesthood. It would be easy to show that the specific demands of the spirituality of priestly service are concretizations of the standard of Rom. 12:1 where there are two full formulas interpreting and complementing each other: »to present the bodies as a living sacrifice«, »your reasonable worship« ... Of course, we ought never to forget that this worship can only take place »through Jesus Christ« ... Becoming a victim consists in letting oneself be built into this »through Christ« ... That is why the »corner stone« of this Christian sacrifice is the Christian sacrifice: the eucharistia in which we give in our being into the Word, into him who is the Word and who alone, therefore, can convert man's worship into a »reasonable« worship, a worship in accord with the logos (Greek: logiké).³⁶²

360 Cf. *Ibid.*, 430.

361 *Ibid.*, 428.

362 [My translation]. "Das Hineinwachsen in die priesterliche Dimension der christlichen Existenz, d.h. das Realisieren des geistlichen Gehalts der Taufe, ist die entscheidende Voraussetzung dafür, den Dienst des besonderen Priestertums tun zu können. Es ließe sich leicht zeigen, dass die spezifischen Anforderungen der Spiritualität des Dienstes Konkreti-

He expresses this double implication in more explicit and simple terms from personal experience:

In the days of my youth, one still occasionally encountered in the countryside the view that the preparation for priesthood consists mainly in learning how to say the mass. And people wondered why it took so long then, even though they knew that one must learn Latin for it and that this was not an easy thing. Understood rightly, one could really say that the preparation for the priesthood is ultimately about learning how to celebrate the eucharist. But we can also conversely say: the eucharist exists to teach us life. We celebrate it then only correctly if we have learnt to live, i.e., if our whole life has entered into Christ's form, if it [*scil.* our life] has become with him [*scil.* Christ] a praise of the Father and love towards his creatures.³⁶³

In an ordination liturgy, the Archbishop of München und Freising preached a homily on the fourth priestly promise dealing with the readiness to live a life of sacrifice in union with Christ. He links the promise back to the eucharist which he declares to be the primary assignment of the priest. The question by the bishop to the candidate for priesthood states:

sierungen des Maßstabes von Röm 12,1 sind, wo ja zwei Totalformeln stehen, die einander auslegen und ergänzen: »die Leiber bereitstellen als lebendiges Opfer«, »euer vernünftiger Gottesdienst« ... Dabei dürfen wir freilich nie vergessen, dass dieser Gottesdienst nur stattfinden kann »durch Jesus Christus« ... Das Opferwerden des Menschen besteht darin, dass er sich in dieses »durch Christus« hineinbauen lässt ... Deswegen ist der »Eckstein« dieses Christenopfers das Christenopfer. Die Eucharistia, in der wir unser Sein in das Wort hineingeben, in den der das Wort ist und der allein daher den Gottesdienst der Menschen zu einem »vernünftigen«, logos-gemäßen (griech.: *logiké*) Gottesdienst machen kann" Ibid., 430f. 363 [My translation]. "In meiner Jugendzeit fand man auf dem Land noch gelegentlich die Ansicht, die Vorbereitung zum Priestertum bestehe in der Hauptsache darin, dass Messelernen zu erlernen. Und man wunderte sich, warum dies denn gar so lange dauere, wenn man auch wusste, dass man dazu das Lateinische erlernen musste und dass dies keine ganz einfache Sache sei. Recht verstanden könnte man in der Tat sagen, im Letzten gehe es in der Vorbereitung zum Priestertum darum, das Eucharistiefiern zu erlernen. Aber man kann auch umgekehrt sagen: Die Eucharistie ist da, uns das Leben zu lehren. Wir feiern sie nur dann richtig, wenn wir leben gelernt haben, d.h. wenn unser ganzes Leben in die Christusform eingegangen ist, wenn es mit ihm Lobpreis des Vaters und Liebe zu seinen Geschöpfen geworden ist." Ibid. 431.

Are you resolved to consecrate your life to God for the salvation of his people, and to unite yourself more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice?³⁶⁴

Ratzinger explains that this question “actually summarizes the quintessence of all the other questions ... Although it is not said explicitly, the basic idea here is the eucharistic assignment as the centre of priestly existence. The priest is there to give the eucharist, to celebrate God’s feast amongst the people, to be so to speak God’s wedding inviter for his joy in this word. The wording is, however, important. The question is not ‘do you resolve *to perform* or *to do* this and that?’, but ‘do you resolve *to be* a sacrifice in union with Christ?’ It is not only action that is demanded, but being.”³⁶⁵ To this he adds, nevertheless, that “the eucharistic duty cannot be without steady proclamation of the Word of God ... Hearing the Word of God must precede the eucharist. It prepares the senses and the heart for it.”³⁶⁶

His adherence to both a eucharistic and spiritual meaning of sacrifice becomes much more evident in a *lectio divina* he held as a Pope in the Roman Major Seminary – though in this case he does not employ it for the theme of priesthood specifically. He devotes the *lectio divina* to Paul’s injunction in Rom. 12:1 that presenting one’s body as a “living sacrifice” to God is the “true worship” (λογικὴν λατρείαν). According him, Paul is speaking here about liturgy in a dynamic sense of the word:

364 INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ENGLISH IN THE LITURGY, *The Roman Pontifical: Revised by the Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*, 1978, 210.

365 [My translation]. “Die letzte der Fragen fasst eigentlich alle anderen ihrem Kern nach in sich zusammen ... Obwohl es nicht ausdrücklich gesagt ist, steht dahinter der eucharistische Auftrag als die Mitte priesterlichen Daseins. Der Priester ist da, die Eucharistie zu bereiten, das Fest Gottes unter den Menschen zu feiern, gleichsam der Hochzeitslader Gottes für seine Freude in dieser Welt zu sein. Aber die Formulierung ist wichtig. Es heißt da nicht: Seid ihr bereit, dies und das zu *machen* oder zu *tun*? Sondern es heißt: Seid ihr bereit, mit Christus Opfergabe zu *werden*? Nicht nur das Tun ist angefordert, sondern das Sein.” RATZINGER Joseph, *Mit Christus Opfergabe werden zum Heil der Menschen* (1978), in: *JRGS* 12, 578–583: 578.

366 [My translation]. “... dass eucharistischer Dienst nicht sein kann ohne die ständige Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes ... Der Eucharistie muss vorausgehen das Hören des Wortes Gottes, die Bereitung der Sinne und des Herzens dafür.” *Ibid.*, 580.

lifestyle and the celebration of the eucharist. A striking comment summarizes it all:

“Present your bodies”: he speaks of the liturgy, he speaks of God, of the priority of God but he does not speak of the liturgy as a ceremony, he speaks of the liturgy as life. We ourselves, our body; we in our body and as a body must be liturgy. This is the newness of the New Testament, and we shall see it again later: Christ offers himself and thereby replaces all the other sacrifices. And he wants “to draw” us into the communion of his Body. Our body, with his, becomes God’s glory, becomes liturgy. Hence this term “present” — in Greek *parastesai* — is not only an allegory; allegorically our life would also be a liturgy but, on the contrary, the true liturgy is that of our body, of our being in the Body of Christ, just as Christ himself made the liturgy of the world, the cosmic liturgy, which strives to draw all people to itself.³⁶⁷

He further shows the two-pathed religio-historical movement of the meaning of sacrifice: on the one hand, the increasing awareness in the Old Testament of the sacrificial deficiency of things external man; on the other hand, the increasing awareness of Greek philosophers that the true worship of the Divine Reason (*Logos*) must consist in a rational union with God. Both movements towards the sublimation of sacrifice did not find their fulfilment in a bodiless spirituality, rather they, like “two rivers”, find their confluence in the “new liturgy of the Christians and of Christ”.³⁶⁸

Finally, in his Post-Synodal Exhortation on the eucharist, he relates those words of St. Paul in Rom. 12:1 directly and primarily to the eucharistic worship which then transforms man’s life.

³⁶⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Visit to the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary on the Occasion of the Feast of our Lady of Trust on February 15, 2012: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120215_seminario-romano-mag.html (accessed on 21.05.2025).

³⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

Here the eucharistic celebration appears in all its power as the source and summit of the Church's life, since it expresses at once both the origin and the fulfilment of the new and definitive worship of God, the *logiké latreía*. Saint Paul's exhortation to the Romans in this regard is a concise description of how the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God: "I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (*Rom* 12:1). In these words the new worship appears as a total self-offering made in communion with the whole Church. The Apostle's insistence on the offering of our bodies emphasizes the concrete human reality of a worship which is anything but disincarnate. The Bishop of Hippo goes on to say that "this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church celebrates this mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered." Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful. This insistence on sacrifice – a "making sacred" – expresses all the existential depth implied in the transformation of our human reality as taken up by Christ (cf. *Phil* 3:12) ... Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: «Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God» (*1 Cor* 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom* 8:29ff.). There is nothing authentically human – our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds – that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes

a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God.³⁶⁹

5.15 Pro-Existence for the Eucharistic Presence of Christ

Cardinal Ratzinger preached at the pilgrimage centre of Caravaca de la Cruz on the occasion of its jubilee year in 2003. In his homily, he uses the history of the cross of Caravaca to unambiguously explain the quintessence of the priesthood in terms of being an instrument for the possibility of the eucharistic presence of Christ in the world.

We keep in mind first of all the tradition according to which this cross mysteriously appeared here on the 3rd of May 1232, in a region under Islamic control. The muslim king Zayd Abu Zayd, who was ruling over Murcia in those years, wanted to know from a priest he imprisoned what priesthood means, what it means to celebrate the mass. The priest briefly explained, that the highest calling of the priest is to celebrate the eucharist which the Lord instituted at the Last Supper, and that at the mass, bread and wine are transformed into the flesh and blood of the redeemer, *cuero de Dios puro y verdadero*. For that to happen, however, the priest must be vested with the holy garments like Christ and he must speak the words which Christ spoke at the Last Supper.³⁷⁰

369 BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Sacramentum caritatis* (2007) §7of., in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html (accessed on 26.05.2025).

370 [My translation]. “Wir denken dabei zuallererst an die Überlieferung, wie am 3. Mai 1232 hier auf geheimnisvolle Weise mitten in einem islamisch beherrschten Raum dieses Kreuz erschienen ist. Der moslemische König Zayd Abu Zayd ... wollte von einem bei ihm gefangengehaltenen katholischen Priester wissen, was das sei: ein Priester – was es bedeute, eine Messe zu feiern. Der Priester erklärte ihm kurz, dass die höchste Bestimmung des Priesters die Feier der Eucharistie ist, die der Herr beim Letzten Abendmahl eingesetzt hatte und dass dabei Brot und Wein in Fleisch und Blut des Erlösers verwandelt werden... Dazu aber müsse der Priester mit den heiligen Gewändern bekleidet sein wie Christus gesprochen hatte ...” RATZINGER Joseph, *Den Blick des Herzens auf Christus ausrichten* (2002), in: *JRGS* 14/1, 64–69: 64f.

The story goes on till the miraculous appearance of the cross. Ratzinger, here, was not merely narrating a story of what happened or the self-image of the priest in the story – an outrightly classical image of the priesthood as a ministry of the eucharist. He aligns himself with this view a few lines later:

Much in this old version of the story of the holy cross of Caravaca which is thought-provoking. The priest is replete with the knowledge, that his *highest ministry* is to call forth the true presence of the body and blood of Christ, to tear heaven open for him to come on earth. So, he is conscious of the grandeur of the priesthood; he knows that he is not doing it himself, but that he has »put on« Christ – not only in an external sense, but from within: The Lord has taken possession of him, he acts and speaks through him. He himself, the Lord, is back again and speaks through the mouth of the priest the holy words which transforms the things of the earth into the mystery of God.³⁷¹

5.16 Institution of the Ministerial Priesthood at the Last Supper

It is noteworthy that Ratzinger in all his academic writings as a priest does not explicitly mention the Last Supper as the institution of the priesthood. He neither explicitly argues for or against it. He is silent on the question. Indeed, he argues for the Last Supper as the place of origin of the Church (the new people of God) because in it, Christ incorporated and transformed the two “founding acts” of Israel as a people

371 [My translation and emphasis]. “Vieles an dieser ältesten Fassung der Geschichte des heiligen Kreuzes von Caravaca muss uns nachdenklich machen. Der Priester ist erfüllt von dem Wissen, dass sein höchster Dienst ist, die wahre Gegenwart von Leib und Blut Christi herbeizurufen, den Himmel aufzureißen, damit er auf die Erde kommt. Er weiß so mit heiligem Erstaunen um die Größe des Priestertums; weiß, dass da nicht er selber handelt, sondern dass er »Christus angezogen hat« – nicht nur in einem äußeren Sinn, sondern von innen her: Der Herr hat von ihm Besitz ergriffen, handelt und spricht durch ihn. Er selbst, der Herr, ist wieder da und spricht durch den Mund des Priesters die heiligen Worte, die die Dinge der Erde in Gottes Geheimnis hinein wandeln.” *Ibid.*, 65.

of God: The Passover meal and the covenant agreement at Sinai.³⁷² It is irreconcilable with the protestant approach which considers the Church to be founded on the preaching of the word.³⁷³ However, what this could mean for the ministerial priesthood, is not addressed then. It is only later as a pope that he begins to speak in that direction. He takes three different approaches in this regard: through Jn. 15:15, through Jn. 17:17,19 and through Christ's mandate of re-enactment (Lk. 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24f).

5.16.1 Establishment of Priestly Friendship at the Institution of the Eucharist

The later Ratzinger as Pope fosters a hermeneutic of the "friendship with Christ" based on Jn 15:15 in the sense of the institutive moment of the ministerial priesthood. In other words, he in fact goes beyond John Paul II (4.7). He thinks that it can be understood as the institution of the priesthood. In any case he sees in it the biblical unification of all the explanatory rites at priestly ordination.

The Lord laid his hand upon us. He expressed the meaning of this gesture in these words: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15: 15). I no longer call you servants but friends: in these words one could actually perceive the institution of the priesthood. The Lord makes us his friends; he entrusts everything to us; he entrusts himself to us, so that we can speak with he himself [sic!] - *in persona Christi capitis*. What trust! He has truly delivered himself into our hands. The essential signs of priestly ordination are basically all a manifestation of those words: the laying on of hands; the consignment of the book – of his words that he entrusts to us; the consignment of the chalice, with which he transmits to us his most profound and personal mystery. The power to absolve is part of all

372 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Ursprung und Wesen der Kirche* (1990), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 220–241: 227–229 (*Called to Communion*, 24–27); cf. —, *Das Geschick Jesu und die Kirche* (1965), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 128–139: 137f.; cf. —, *Die Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* (1985), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 258–282: 262f.

373 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Gesamtkirche und Teilkirche*, 522f. (*Called to Communion*, 80f.).

this. It also makes us share in his awareness of the misery of sin and of all the darkness in the world, and places in our hands the key to reopen the door to the Father's house.³⁷⁴

This is not only what Ratzinger has to say on this verse. The point, however, is that in this homily – given at a Chrism mass of Holy Thursday – the emphatic direction of interpretation is the sanctification office of the priest: the sacraments of the eucharist and penance. He understands the context of those words to be the Last Supper – the institution of the eucharist.

5.16.2 Institution of the Priesthood in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer

Especially in the third part of his *Jesus of Nazareth* (published as pope) and in his last theological essay *The Catholic Priesthood* (published as pope emeritus), he briefly develops the theology of the institution of the priesthood based on the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus Christ; more precisely, in his supplication for the “sanctification” of his disciples.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth ... And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. (Jn 17:17.19)

Ratzinger's unnamed premise is that Jesus Christ is praying here *only* for the twelve apostles. For the rest, he elicits the institution of the priesthood from the word “holy”. It means, first and foremost, God's nature. He alone is holy. Therefore, to make something or a person holy, to sanctify it/him, means to consecrate it/him completely to God either as a sacrifice (Ex. 13:41, Dt. 15:9), or as a priest who performs the sacrifice (Ex 28:41). When Jesus speaks of his own sanctification, it means two things: his union with God the Father in his humanity and the approaching sacrifice of his life to the Father (“I sanctify myself”) – a

374 BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on April 13, 2006, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060413_messa-crismale.html (accessed on 05.12.2024).

sacrifice which would be continually made present in the eucharist.³⁷⁵ In other words, he is a priest. When he now prays that the twelve be sanctified, he is asking that they be incorporated into his own sanctification (= the sacrifice of his life), i.e., that they be partakers of his priesthood. Hence, it is a prayer request to God the Father to constitute them as priests.³⁷⁶

If the disciples' sanctification in the truth is ultimately about sharing in Jesus' priestly mission, then they may recognize in these words of John's Gospel the institution of the priesthood of the Apostles, the institution of the New Testament priesthood, which at the deepest level is service to the truth.³⁷⁷

One observes, in his interpretation of Jn. 17:17,19, the inner tension between his earlier and later theology of the priesthood. On the one hand, the emphasis on sacrifice as well as the terminological link to the Old Testament sacrifice and priesthood hints at the eucharistic sacrifice as the primary locus of realizing the new priesthood of Christ. On the other hand, his characterization of the priesthood as "service to the truth" hints at the primacy of proclamation. The paradox comes up in a different formulation, though in a wider perspective:

³⁷⁵ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Vom Einzug in Jerusalem*, 483–486. Ratzinger refers to the works of two exegetes as the source of his interpretation: BULTMANN Rudolf, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen 1956, 391, and FEUILLET André, *Le sacerdoce du Christ et des ses ministres d'après la prière sacerdotale du quatrième évangile et plusieurs données parallèles du Nouveau Testament*, Paris 1972, 31, 38.

³⁷⁶ Cf. BENEDIKT XVI, The Catholic Priesthood, in: ROBERT Sarah, *From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy, and the Crisis of the Catholic Church*, trans. by Michael MILLER, San Francisco 2020, 23–60: 57f.; cf. —, Homily at Chrism Mass on April 9, 2009, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090409_messa-crismale.html (accessed on 26.05.2025); cf. —, Homily at Mass of the Lord's Supper on April 1, 2010, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100401_coena-domini.html (accessed on 26.05.2025).

³⁷⁷ RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Vom Einzug in Jerusalem*, 487. English translation: *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. by the VATICAN SECRETARIAT OF STATE, Bangalore / San Francisco, 2011, 90; cf. —, *Homily at Chrism Mass on April 9, 2009*.

The Church is born from Jesus' prayer. But this prayer is more than words: it is the act by which he "sanctifies" himself, that is to say, he "sacrifices" himself for the life of the world. We can also put it the other way round: in this prayer, the cruel event of the Cross becomes "word", it becomes the Feast of Atonement between God and the world. From here the Church emerges as the community of those who believe in Christ on the strength of the Apostles' word (cf. 17:20).³⁷⁸

5.16.3 Co-Institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood

Finally, he takes up the traditional view that Jesus instituted the eucharist and the priesthood together through the very words of the mandate: "Do this in memory of me", though he does not develop a systematic theology on this point. It looks as if he unveils this conviction in gradual steps.

At the beginning of his pontificate, he just appeals to the authority of John Paul II, emphasizing the centrality of the eucharist in the priestly life and ministry. It was in his very first address to the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel right after his election to the papacy.

My Pontificate begins in a particularly meaningful way as the Church is living the special Year dedicated to the Eucharist. How could I fail to see this providential coincidence as an element that must mark the ministry to which I am called? The Eucharist, the heart of Christian life and the source of the Church's evangelizing mission, cannot but constitute the permanent centre and source of the Petrine ministry that has been entrusted to me . . . I ask everyone in the coming months to intensify love and devotion for Jesus in the Eucharist, and to express courageously and clearly faith in the Real Presence of the Lord, especially by the solemnity and the correctness of the celebrations. I ask this especially of priests, whom I am thinking of with deep affection at this moment. The ministerial Priesthood was born at the Last Supper, together with the Eucharist, as my Venerable Predecessor John Paul II so frequently emphasized.

³⁷⁸ RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Vom Einzug in Jerusalem*, 495; cf. also 479–481. (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 101f.; cf. 79–82).

“All the more then must the life of a priest be “shaped’ by the Eucharist” (*Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2005*, n. 1; ORE, 23 March, p. 4). In the first place, the devout, daily celebration of Holy Mass, the centre of the life and mission of every priest, contributes to this goal.³⁷⁹

Then, sometime later, he goes beyond the appeal to the authority of his predecessor, and makes it his own words. He begins a Holy Thursday homily with the definition: “Holy Thursday is the day on which the Lord gave the Twelve the priestly task of celebrating, in the bread and the wine, the Sacrament of his Body and Blood until he comes again.”³⁸⁰ The words “gave the Twelve the priestly task ...” suggest the institution *per se* of the ministerial priesthood, though not with undebatable clarity.

Finally, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, he puts it straight with undebatable clarity:

The intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Holy Orders clearly emerges from Jesus’ own words in the Upper Room: “Do this in memory of me” (*Lk 22:19*). On the night before he died, Jesus instituted the Eucharist and at the same time established the *priesthood of the New Covenant*.³⁸¹

Similarly, he teaches in a Holy Thursday homily: “At the hour of the last Supper, the Lord instituted the new [sic!] Testament priesthood. ‘Sanctify them in the truth’ (*Jn 17:17*), he prayed to the Father, for the Apostles and for priests of all times.”³⁸²

379 BENEDICT XVI, *Missa Pro Ecclesia: First Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the End of the Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the College of Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel on April 20, 2005*, 4, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050420_missa-pro-ecclesia.html (accessed on 17.08.2024).

380 BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on April 13, 2006.

381 BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* §23.

382 BENEDICT XVI, Homily at Chrism Mass on April 21, 2011, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110421_messa-crismale.html (accessed on 26.05.2025). BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on April 13, 2006.

It is probably pertinent to note that one needs not see a contradiction in the fact that Ratzinger interprets three different texts as Christ's institution of the priesthood. For Ratzinger operates with the exegetical consensus that both chapters of John's gospel are part of the context/scene of the Last Supper (the institution of the eucharist).³⁸³

5.17 Eucharistic Prayer II

The clearest scholarly evidence of Ratzinger's turn is found as well in his very last theological contribution – *The Catholic Priesthood* – which was published shortly before his death. In it, he restores the eucharist to the centre of the priestly identity. As a matter of fact, the whole essay is a defence of the *cultic* (eucharistic) priesthood of the New Covenant. In order to buttress the continuity between the Old and New Testament priesthood, he draws from a text from the second Eucharistic Prayer – a prayer which only the priest says in the mass: “we give thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you” (“*gratias agentes quia nos dignos habuisti astare coram te et tibi ministrare*”). According to him, the sense of the text is not the physical posture of the priest (*astare* – to stand) or even of the lay faithful during the Eucharistic Prayer. Instead, both words are simply taken from the Old Testament Scriptures used for describing the ritual service of the priest.³⁸⁴

383 For instance, in the following statements: “At that moment, at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus raised to the Father the prayer of consecration for the apostles and for all the priests of all times, when he said: ‘Sanctify them in the truth’ (Jn 17: 17).” BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Holy Mass for the Ordination to the Priesthood of 19 Deacons of the Diocese of Rome on May 3, 2009, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090503_ordinazioni-sacerdotali.html (accessed on 26.05.2025). “In the Upper Room, on the eve of his Passion, the Lord prayed for his disciples gathered about him. At the same time he looked ahead to the community of disciples of all centuries, ‘those who believe in me through their word’ (Jn 17:20). In his prayer for the disciples of all time, he saw us too, and he prayed for us. Let us listen to what he asks for the Twelve and for us gathered here: ‘Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, so that they also may be consecrated in truth’ (17:17ff).” BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at Chrism Mass on April 9, 2009*.

384 Cf. Benedikt XVI, *The Catholic Priesthood*, 48f.

At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to him and to bless in his name. (Deut. 10:8)

And:

For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for ever. (Deut. 18:5)

Through the insertion of this biblical word into her Eucharistic Prayer II, the Church is interpreting the New Testament priesthood as one which is founded anew and perfected in Jesus Christ, but which also stands in intrinsic continuity to the Old Testament priesthood. Ratzinger no longer considers the theological recourse to the Old Testament priesthood to be a sort of paganization of the Christian priesthood.

Based on a notion inspired by the Reformation, one might be tempted to say that we are looking here at a step backward in relation to the newness of the community of Jesus Christ. One would be tempted to see in it a relapse into a cultic priesthood that was outmoded and should be rejected. Quite the contrary, it is precisely the step forward of the New Covenant, which takes up into itself and at the same time transforms the Old Covenant by elevating it to the height of Jesus Christ. Priesthood is no longer linked with membership in a family; rather, it is open to humanity on a vast scale. It no longer coincides with the administration of the sacrifice in the Temple; rather it gathers humanity in the love of Jesus Christ, which embraces the whole world. Worship and the critique of worship, liturgical sacrifice and the service of love for neighbor are now one.³⁸⁵

More precisely, the two words – *astare* and *ministrare* – in the Eucharistic Prayer II are two priestly duties towards God. Ratzinger interprets both in the sense of celebrating the eucharistic sacrifice as the primary duty of the priest, but also, in the extended sense of watchfulness or attentiveness of the priest for the presence of God in the world. In

385 Ibid., 50.

addition to that, the eucharist, now being the centre of the priesthood, incorporates the ministry of the word, not vice versa.

There are therefore two duties that define the essence of the priestly ministry: in the first place, “to stand in his [the Lord’s] presence”. In the *Book of Deuteronomy* this is read in the context of the preceding disposition, according to which priests do not receive any portion of land in the Holy Land – they live of God and for God. They did not attend to the usual work necessary to sustain daily life. Their profession was to “stand in the Lord’s presence” – to look to him, to be there for him. Hence, ultimately, the word indicated a life in God’s presence, and with this also a ministry of representing others. As the others cultivated the land, from which the priest also lived, so he kept the world open to God, he had to live with his gaze on him. Now if this word is found in the Canon of the Mass immediately after the consecration of the gifts, after the entrance of the Lord in the assembly of prayer, then for us this points to being before the Lord present, that is, it indicates the Eucharist as the centre of priestly life. But here too, the meaning is deeper. During Lent the hymn that introduces the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours – the Office that monks once recited during the night vigil before God and for humanity – one of the duties of Lent is described with the imperative: *arctius perstemus in custodia* - we must be even more intensely alert. In the tradition of Syrian monasticism, monks were qualified as “those who remained standing”. This standing was an expression of vigilance. What was considered here as a duty of the monks, we can rightly see also as an expression of the priestly mission and as a correct interpretation of the word of Deuteronomy: the priest must be on the watch. He must be on his guard in the face of the imminent powers of evil. He must keep the world awake for God. He must be the one who remains standing: upright before the trends of time. Upright in truth. Upright in the commitment for good. Being before the Lord must always also include, at its depths, responsibility for humanity to the Lord, who in his turn takes on the burden of all of us to the Father. And it must be a taking on of him, of Christ, of his word, his truth, his love. The priest must be upright, fearless and prepared to sustain even offences for the Lord, as referred to in the *Acts of the Apostles*: they were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name” (5: 41) of Jesus.

Now let us move on to the second word that the Second Canon repeats from the Old Testament text – “to stand in your presence and serve you”. The priest must be an upright person, vigilant, a person who remains standing. Service is then added to all this. In the Old Testament text this word has an essentially ritualistic meaning: all acts of worship foreseen by the Law are the priests’ duty. But this action, according to the rite, was classified as service, as a duty of service, and thus it explains in what spirit this activity must take place. With the assumption of the word “serve” in the Canon, the liturgical meaning of this term was adopted in a certain way – to conform with the novelty of the Christian cult. What the priest does at that moment, in the Eucharistic celebration, is to serve, to fulfil a service to God and a service to humanity. The cult that Christ rendered to the Father was the giving of himself to the end for humanity. Into this cult, this service, the priest must insert himself. Thus, the word “serve” contains many dimensions. In the first place, part of it is certainly the correct celebration of the liturgy and of the sacraments in general, accomplished through interior participation. We must learn to increasingly understand the sacred liturgy in all its essence, to develop a living familiarity with it, so that it becomes the soul of our daily life. It is then that we celebrate in the correct way; it is then that the *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating, emerges by itself. In this art there must be nothing artificial. If the liturgy is the central duty of the priest, this also means that prayer must be a primary reality, to be learned ever anew and ever more deeply at the school of Christ and of the Saints of all the ages. Since the Christian liturgy by its nature is also always a proclamation, we must be people who are familiar with the Word of God, love it and live by it: only then can we explain it in an adequate way. “To serve the Lord” – priestly service precisely also means to learn to know the Lord in his Word and to make it known to all those he entrusts to us.³⁸⁶

386 Ibid., 51–54. The text was originally a homily he preached in the Chrism Mass of Holy on March 20, 2008: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080320_messa-crismale.html (accessed on 06.08.2024).

5.18 Chapter Summary

Within the span of his life, Ratzinger gave two answers to the question of the fundamental office of the priesthood. In his earlier theology, up to around 1977 when he became a bishop, he was a clear proponent of the primacy of proclaiming the word, basing it on arguments such as: the Lay status of Jesus Christ in his Jewish roots; his new form of priesthood as the messenger and Word of God the Father; the non-mediative priesthood of the apostles; the profane terms used for priests in the New Testament; the context of the call of twelve; the new meaning of sacrifice in the New Testament; the restoration of the unity between word and ritual; the eucharist as a mode of proclamation; the Church Father's understanding of the apostolic succession; the historical devaluation of the post of the bishop in the Church which resulted to giving priority to ritual (sacraments); Pius XII's reform of the ordination liturgy; and finally, the teaching of Vatican II.

In his later theology, he turned gradually to the priority of sanctification in the priest's life and ministry, especially through the eucharist. His arguments, of which not all were systemically developed, include: the inseparability of the word from the sacrament; the inner relation between the eucharist as a sacrifice and the call of the priest to self-sacrifice; the priesthood as a pro-existence for the eucharistic presence of Christ; the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper; the biblical words for sacrifice and priestly service being assimilated into the Second Eucharistic Prayer.

A similar turn, though from a different perspective, is to be found in the next author – Walter Kasper.

Chapter 6:

I. Walter Kasper: *Munus Regendi*

6.0 Preliminary Remarks

In the tumultuous years after the council, I attempted to interpret the ministry of priestly service as leadership of the community on the model of the biblical understanding of the ministry of “shepherd” (*pastor* in Latin).³⁸⁷

At the time Walter Kasper was writing these words, there was already a turn in his thesis. His concern was no longer the leadership, but the celebration of the eucharist as the basic duty of the priest. In this context, he writes in retrospect of his views during the post-conciliar years. Hence, the first part of this chapter deals with his arguments for community leadership, while the second part deals with his arguments for the ministry of sanctification.

6.1 Profanity of the Titles for Priests in the New Testament

Kasper, just like Ratzinger, uses the non-sacrality of the terminology for office holders in the New Testament as argument, but he comes to a conclusion different from that of Ratzinger. According to him, the early Christians dispensed with titles (ἀρχή, ἐξουσία, τέλος, τιμή, ἱερεύς) which suggest authority and sacrality. Instead, they borrowed terms which bespeak more of service or administration (διακονία, οἰκοδομία).³⁸⁸ Kasper, apart from using this fact to emphasize the service-character of the priestly office, deduces from it a negative conse-

387 KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 373. English translation: *A celebration of Priestly Ministry: Challenge, Renewal, and Joy in the Catholic Priesthood*, trans. by Brian McNEIL, New York 2007, 95.

388 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 27; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 159; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priestertlichen Dienstes*, 186.

quence for the question of the fundamental *munus*, namely: the unsuitability of sanctification as starting point for explaining the priesthood. “When defining the essence of the ecclesiastical office, one ought not to take its ritualistic-sacramental functions as a starting point. That is, if we want to ascertain that which is essential to the ecclesiastical office, we should not, as has been the case for a long time, start with the power of consecration.”³⁸⁹

This is only the negative delimitation. The question remains whether the profane terms also bespeak something positive regarding the basic office of the priest. Kasper does not make any strict and direct linguistic derivations here, but he thinks that the profane titles used by the authors of the New Testament place a special emphasis on the subject of spiritual leadership/presidency: προϊστάμενοι (presiders: Rom. 12:8, 1 Cor. 16:16, 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:17), κυβέρνησις (to lead: 1 Cor. 12:28), ἡγούμενοι (leaders: Lk. 22:26, Heb. 13:7.17.24), κοπιῶντες (workers, labourers: 1 Cor. 16:16, 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:17), ἐπίσκοπος, πρεσβύτερος und διάκονος (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, Phil. 1:1, James 5:14). Especially, the last three titles express leadership. In the ancient world, the ἐπίσκοπος was a supervisor in one way or the other (governor, local officer, etc.), likewise the διάκονος (e.g., caretaker); the concept of πρεσβύτερος was borrowed from the Jewish synagogal structure in which it designated the community elders.³⁹⁰

6.2 Unity in the Church and in the World

For Kasper, priesthood is an office and charism in service of keeping the different charisms in unity in the Church. It is meant to bear the respon-

389 [My translation]. „In der Bestimmung des Wesens des kirchlichen Amtes darf man nicht von dessen kultisch-sakramentalen Funktionen ausgehen. Man darf also, wenn man das Wesentliche des kirchlichen Amtes bestimmen will, nicht einfach, wie es lange Zeit geschehen ist, von der Konsekrationsvollmacht ausgehen.” KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 27; cf. —, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 48; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 159.

390 KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 27f; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 186f.; cf. —, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 66f.; cf. —, *Neue Aspekte im Verständnis des Priesteramtes*, 199f. The same theory is found in KÜNG Hans, *Wozu Priester?* 108f.

sibility for them, and therefore, for the common priesthood. He writes that the ministerial priesthood is a service amongst other services in the Church, though it is the service of leadership. Being one charism among many others, its specific function is to “integrate”, not to “accumulate”, other charisms, thereby working for the unity of the Church. The “integration” occurs not by means of demanding obedience or subordination to the priestly ministry, but by way of mutual love and understanding.³⁹¹ Kasper also reinforces this argument from the perspective of the “freedom” of being God’s children: Jesus died on the cross to set us free and restore the image of God in us; therefore, the priestly office representing him sacramentally, is in the service of that freedom of the followers of Christ, using its authority not to “quench” the gifts of the spirit, but to “create space” for them, to “nurture and cultivate” them.³⁹² “Therefore, the charisms should mutually subordinate, limit, correct and integrate each other ... The ministerial priesthood must listen to the prophets and teachers in those things that pertain to the duty of the prophets and teachers; the prophets and teachers must listen to the ministerial priesthood in that which is the special and unique function of the ministerial priesthood.”³⁹³ It is the duty of the charism of leadership “to bring the many charisms into a meaningful cooperation, to integrate them, to some extent to discover them and to bring them together into a unity.”³⁹⁴ Ultimately, it means to bear responsibility for the Church, both at the local and universal level. The service for the unity of the Church fleshes out in the three basic tasks of the Church: martyrria (witness or confession of the faith), leitourgia (sacramental worship, especially the eucha-

391 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 24.

392 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 61.

393 [My translation]. “Die Charismen sollen sich also gegenseitig unterordnen, begrenzen, korrigieren und integrieren ... Das Amt muss auf die Propheten und Lehrer hören in dem, was Aufgabe der Propheten und Lehrer ist, Propheten und Lehrer aber müssen auf das Amt hören in dem, was die besondere und einmalige Funktion des Amtes ist.” KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 24.

394 [My translation]. “...die vielen Charismen miteinander in ein sinnvolles Zusammenwirken zu bringen, sie zu integrieren, sie zum Teil erst zu entdecken und sie zu einer Einheit zusammenzuführen.” KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 28; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 159; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 186, 192f.; cf. —, *Neue Aspekte im Verständnis des Priesteramtes*, 202.

rist), and diaconia (service in love of neighbour). The office of leadership should see to it that the faithful preserve unity in these three tasks. Two of these tasks – martyria and leitourgia – play a more significant role in the question of the office of the priesthood.

6.2.1 Unity in Martyria

Here, Kasper focuses only on the preaching aspect of the witness of faith. In regard to this, the responsibility of the leadership office for unity consists only in orientational and supervisory actions. Hence, he also proposes that preaching in a eucharistic celebration ought not to be reserved only to ordained ministers, but also be extended to the laity. “Preaching is a duty of all and it would be absolutely possible to confer on lay people not only the *missio catechetica*, but also the *missio homiletica*.”³⁹⁵ In fact, for Kasper, the conflation of both teaching and leading authority in the office of the bishop is even one of the disastrous maldevelopments in the history of the Church:

Teaching office (in the wider sense) and leadership office, prophetic and apostolic office, need not be unified at all costs into one hand. Here, a virtually fatal development took place in the course of the Church’s history, namely: One charism, the charism of ecclesiastical office claimed exclusive power over all other charisms. Thus, today, the bishop claims to be both teacher and shepherd, to exercise both the prophetic and the apostolic office. Here, a deconcentration would be necessary.³⁹⁶

395 [My translation]. “Die Verkündigung ist also Aufgabe aller und es wäre durchaus möglich, Laien nicht nur die *missio catechetica*, sondern auch die *missio homiletica* zu verleihen.” KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 29; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 191; cf. —, *Die schädlichen Nebenwirkungen des Priestermangels* (1977), in: *WKGS* 12, 96–104: 97.

396 [My translation]. “Lehramt (im weiteren Sinn) und Leitungsamt, prophetisches und apostolisches Amt brauchen nicht unbedingt in einer Hand vereinigt zu sein. Hier hat im Laufe der Kirchengeschichte eine geradezu fatale Entwicklung stattgefunden. Es hat nämlich ein Charisma, das Charisma des kirchlichen Amtes, alle anderen Charismen an sich gezogen. So beansprucht der Bischof heute, Lehrer und Hirte zu sein, prophetisches und apostolisches Amt auszuüben. Hier wäre durchaus eine Entflechtung notwendig.” KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 24; cf. —, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 55.

If preaching in its strict sense is not specific to the ordained ministers, then it drops out from the possibility of being the fundamental *munus* of the sacrament of orders. Kasper gives that attribute to leadership.

6.2.2 Unity in Leitourgia

The realization of the unity of the Church takes place at its deepest and most concrete level in the eucharist. In Kasper's view, it is precisely because of this that the presidency of the eucharistic celebration is reserved to the bearers of the office of leadership. Thus, leadership is the fundamental office from which the priest's ministry of sanctification is to be understood and into which it is integrated.

It is from there that the priest's ›power of consecration‹ becomes more intelligible. The special service of the priest in the Eucharist must be understood from his service to the unity of the Church. It is only in this way that the priestly consecration escapes the danger of a magical misconception.³⁹⁷

From his conception of leadership as the centre of the priestly identity, Kasper deduces two practical consequences. On the one hand, the eucharist cannot be validly celebrated against or in rejection of the ministerial priesthood. It requires an ordained priest. On the other hand, in the case of protracted emergency situations where the presence of a priest is impossible, a celebration of the eucharist without an ordained priest is eventually possible and valid.³⁹⁸ His reasons for this view are the following:

³⁹⁷ [My translation]. "Von daher lässt sich die ›Konsekrationsvollmacht‹ des Priesters besser verständlich machen. Der besondere Dienst des Priesters bei der Eucharistie muss von seinem Dienst an der Einheit der Kirche verstanden werden. Nur dadurch entgeht die priesterliche Konsekration der Gefahr eines magischen Missverständnisses." KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 24; cf. —, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 165; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 187, 191.

³⁹⁸ KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 191f.

1. The concern is about a persistent state of emergency, not on an intentional action out of spite for the priestly office. Instead, it is due to the “pains” for its absence.³⁹⁹
2. Christians who, in such a painful longing for a priest, nevertheless, celebrate the eucharist without a priest, are “at least by disposition (in voto)” still in communion with the Church and the priesthood.⁴⁰⁰ In an ecumenical context, Kasper expands this concept of *in voto* beyond a quality in the people: he applies it concretely to the leadership ministries of protestant Churches, designating them as “*votum* and *vestigium ordinis*”, since they are not products of a democratic election but must have been received “from above”.⁴⁰¹
3. Vatican II’s teaching in *Unitatis redintegratio* §22f. on “the different ›degrees of density‹ in the realisation of the eucharist and the different modes of Christ’s presence” mitigates the possible discourse on whether such a mass without a priest is truly a eucharist “in the formal sense of the word”.⁴⁰² For Kasper, the protestant celebration of the Last Supper even has a “quasi-sacramental character”.⁴⁰³
4. Finally, for him, the possibility of a mass without a priest is historically backed up. There has been, apparently, cases in the Church history where a lay person presided over the eucharist. As an evidence, Kasper refers without explanation to Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 14:16: “Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying?” He also makes reference to a spot in the Church constitution *Didache* (first century) where it states in the context of the eucharistic prayer:

399 Cf. *Ibid.*, 192.

400 Cf. *Ibid.*

401 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen* (1964), in: *WKGS* 14, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 64–84: 81.

402 [My translation]. “Ob es sich dabei freilich um Eucharistie im formellen Sinn des Wortes handeln würde, ist eine nicht ausdiskutierte Frage, die jedoch ihre Brisanz dann sofort verliert, wenn man bedenkt, dass es verschiedene ›Dichtigkeitsgrade‹ in der Verwirklichung der Eucharistie und verschiedene Weisen der Gegenwart Christi gibt.” KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 192.

403 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 80, Fn. 79.

“But permit the prophets to give thanks however they wish”.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, he makes mention of the teaching in the *Canons of Hippolytus* (probably 4th century) that those who have proven their readiness to martyrdom (=confessors) by suffering for the sake of the faith have by that very fact attained the priesthood, and do no longer require any sacramental ordination.⁴⁰⁵

6.2.2.1 Excursus 3: Kasper on Communion with the Church *in voto et vestigis*

Kasper’s attempt at justifying the possibility of the laity presiding over the eucharist – since for him, the sanctification ministry does not constitute the centre of the ministerial priesthood – rests *inter alia* on his theology of Church membership (communion). The two classical concepts he operates on are: communion by “desire”/“disposition” (“in voto”) and the so-called “vestiges of the Catholic Church” (“*vestigia ecclesiae*”) in other Churches or ecclesial communities.

6.2.2.1.1 “In voto”

It is interesting to note that Kasper actually considers the idea of Church membership to be highly problematic, its antecedent formulations inclusive. Kasper find its antecedent form in Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943) which, on the one hand, identifies the Roman Catholic Church as the actual mystical body of Christ, but on the other hand, leaves a certain “leeway” (“*Spielraum*”) open by acknowledging that other non-Catholic Christians are somehow related to that mystical body.⁴⁰⁶ Such an ecclesiology makes ecumenism practically impossible since the non-Catholic Churches in some way or other, though less

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. *Didache* 10,7 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 361); cf. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 191; cf. —, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 63.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. *Canons of Hippolytus*, 6. (BRADSHAW Paul [ed.], *The Canons of Hippolytus*, trans. by Carol BEBAWI, New Jersey 2010, 15); cf. KASPER Walter, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 63.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus* (1964), in: *WKGS* 14, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 37–63: 51f.; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 65.

rigorously, also lay claim to being the mystical body of Christ.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, even the doctrine of the salvific indispensability of the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) must be interpreted as not intended to mean a monopoly of God's "grace" by the Church.⁴⁰⁸

The statement »*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*« is often misunderstood. It must, therefore, be dialectically brokered with the statement that there is grace also outside the Church. Theologically, grace is always a bit of ›Church reality‹.⁴⁰⁹

Now, the concept of Church membership "in voto" (analogous to baptism "in voto") came up, according to Kasper, in Catholic theology as an attempt to solve the ecumenical impasse of these precedent formulations.⁴¹⁰ However, he insists that it is no less problematic because it blurs the distinctions of Christian identity both at the individual and at the ecclesial-communal level:

Besides some aporias to which this theory leads, the problem consists in the fact that it places non-Catholic Christians practically on the same level with the non-baptised. In addition, it fails to recognise that we are not dealing only with individual non-Catholics but with church-like communities. The non-Catholic Christian is a Christian through the ecclesial community in which he received the faith and was baptised. If we do not want to fall short of the reality, we have to ask the

407 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 52; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 66.

408 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 52f.; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 67. As evidence, Kasper makes reference to the official condemnations of Paschasius Quesnel's (1634–1719) teaching that "outside the Church no grace is granted" ("*extra ecclesiam nulla conceditur gratia*") and other related Jansenist doctrines. Cf. DH. 2429, 2301–2310.

409 [My translation]. "Der oft missverstandene Satz »*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*« muss also dialektisch mit dem anderen vermittelt werden, dass es auch außerhalb der Kirche Gnade gibt. Gnade ist aber theologisch immer ein Stück ›Kirchenwirklichkeit‹." KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 53; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 67.

410 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 53; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 67f.

question of what we Catholics think theologically not only of individual non-Catholic Christians but of non-Catholic ecclesial communities. On this question, the votum-doctrine does not get us anywhere, because a non-Catholic ecclesial community as such cannot have a votum.⁴¹¹

In a different article he outlines his nuances of the problem more explicitly: He concedes a very minimal possibility of a votum in individual non-Christians and unbaptised people, but denies it absolutely to non-Catholic Christians *as an ecclesial-social unit*.

1. This solution practically equates non-Catholic Christians with the unbaptised who could indeed also have such a votum baptismi and accordingly the votum ecclesiae.
2. This solution falls short of the reality of non-Catholic Christians; it fails to recognise that we are not dealing only with individual Christians. These are rather Christians only as members of their ecclesial communities.
3. The underlying interpretation of votum ecclesiae here is to a great extent a psychological fiction. The non-Catholic Christians generally do not have the longing to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. In a certain sense, one can even speak of a votum contra ecclesiam.⁴¹²

411 [My translation]. "Abgesehen von manchen Aporien, in die diese Theorie führt, besteht ihre Problematik darin, dass sie die nichtkatholischen Christen praktisch auf eine Stufe stellt mit den Nichtgetauften. Sie verkennt dazuhin, dass wir es nicht nur mit einzelnen Nichtkatholiken zu tun haben, sondern mit kirchenähnlichen Gemeinschaften. Der nichtkatholische Christ ist Christ dadurch, dass er in seiner kirchlichen Gemeinschaft den Glauben empfangen hat und getauft wurde. Will man die Realität nicht verfehlen, so muss man also die Frage stellen, was wir Katholiken nicht nur von einzelnen nichtkatholischen Christen, sondern von den nichtkatholischen kirchlichen Gemeinschaften theologisch halten. Die Votum-Lehre hilft in dieser Frage nicht weiter, weil eine nichtkatholische kirchliche Gemeinschaft als solche kein Votum haben kann." KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 53.

412 [My translation]. "1. Diese Lösung vollzieht praktisch eine Gleichstellung der nichtkatholischen Christen mit den Ungetauften, die ja auch ein solches votum baptismi und entsprechend das votum ecclesiae haben können. 2. Diese Lösung verfehlt die Wirklichkeit der nichtkatholischen Christen, sie verkennt, dass wir es nicht nur mit einzelnen Christen zu tun haben. Diese sind vielmehr nur als Glieder ihrer kirchlichen Gemeinschaften Christen. 3. Die hier zu Grunde gelegte Deutung des votum ecclesiae stellt weitgehend eine psychologische Fiktion dar. Die nichtkatholischen Christen sehnen sich im Allgemeinen

In any case, one thing is obvious: Kasper categorically denies non-Catholic Christian *communities* of possessing any disposition or desire of communion with the Church, and as such he simply forfeits the idea. There remains then an enigmatic question on how Kasper uses the same thing he denies non-Catholic Christian communities also as a principle of justification for the validity leadership offices of the protestant churches (6.2.2 and then 6.2.2.1.3).

6.2.2.1.2 "Vestigia ecclesiae"

A further Catholic attempt, according to Kasper, to solve the deadlock was to borrow from the vocabulary of the ecumenical movement a concept that was still in the process of clarification: "vestigia ecclesiae". Being still vague, it became a sort of chameleon-like word switching its meaning depending on whether it is used in Catholic or non-Catholic theology.⁴¹³ The Catholic version uses it to identify specific "values" which constitute a Church, and as such are fully present in the Catholic Church, while their "traces" are present in one form or the other in other ecclesial communities.

In the Catholic sense, it is usually understood as certain authentic Christian values which are proper to the Church as Church, values which are constitutive for the being of the Church and also feature in the non-Roman Churches. Such Christian values which constitute the Church include, for instance, the proclamation of the word of God, baptism, celebration of the eucharist. In their full form, they belong to the Church, but are factually present also outside the Catholic Church. Consequently, there are traces of the Church outside the Church.⁴¹⁴

nicht danach, Glieder der römisch-katholischen Kirche zu werden. In gewissen Sinn kann man sogar von einem *votum contra ecclesiam* sprechen." KASPER Walter, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 68f.

⁴¹³ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 53.

⁴¹⁴ [My translation]. "Im katholischen Sinn versteht man darunter gewöhnlich bestimmte authentische christliche Werte, die der Kirche als Kirche zu eigen sind, die konstitutiv sind für das Sein von Kirche und die auch in nichtrömischen Kirchen vorkommen. Zu solchen christlichen Werten, die Kirche konstituieren, gehören etwa die Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes, die Taufe, die Feier der Eucharistie. Sie gehören in ihrer Vollgestalt der katholis-

It is interesting to note from the above words that, for Kasper, the holy mass would also exist in non-Catholic ecclesial churches. Weighty theological questions necessarily accrue to it: What is the difference between holy mass in its full form (Catholic Church) and in its vestigial form (non-Catholic Churches)? What does such a distinction entail for the priestly ministry?

Be that as it may, the protestant version of “*vestigia ecclesiae*”, Kasper writes, dates back to Calvin and is used in a sense diametrically opposite to the Catholic version: it designates the still extant traces (“*reliques*”) of the Church in the Roman Catholic Church despite its shattered state.⁴¹⁵

Over and above the two opposing views stands the 20th century ecumenical version of “*vestigia ecclesiae*”.

Here, it does not mean the dead residue of the past, rather signs of hope and powerful instruments through which God does his work; they are viewed positively and dynamically as promising points of contact through which the Churches preserving them can be led to the whole truth.⁴¹⁶

Moreover, there are two protestant criticisms of the Catholic version. The first is that the very Catholic-apologetic premise of being in full possession of those values is false. The argument is that there has apparently been a “process of oblivion” (“*Prozess des Vergessens*”) in the Catholic Church. That is, certain constitutive “values” were for a long period of time more or less “forgotten” or neglected in the course of history of the Catholic Church, though they were not explicitly negated, for example, the value of the word of God, the episcopal office and the laity.⁴¹⁷ The

chen Kirche an, sind faktisch aber auch außerhalb der katholischen Kirche vorhanden. Es gibt folglich Spuren der Kirche auch außerhalb der Kirche.“ KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 53; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 73f.

415 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 73.

416 [My translation]. “Hier bedeuten sie keine toten Überreste der Vergangenheit, sondern hoffnungsvolle Zeichen und machtvolle Instrumente, durch die Gott sein Werk tut; sie werden positiv und dynamisch gesehen, als verheißungsvolle Anknüpfungspunkte, über die die Kirchen, die sie bewahren, zur vollen Wahrheit geführt werden können.” *Ibid.*, 73.

417 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 54.

complementary part of the critique accuses the Catholic Church also of a process of additions foreign to the Gospel.⁴¹⁸ Thus, for Kasper “*vestigia ecclesiae*” in the Catholic sense as stated above, is not plausible at least from the perspective of other churches. “Leaving aside the question of the accuracy of this accusation, it becomes impossible that the Catholic Church judge other churches simply by her own heritage.”⁴¹⁹ Secondly, it is argued that a “static” ecclesiology underlies the Catholic concept of *vestigia*. The Church is not understood as a “dynamic”, spirit-driven reality.⁴²⁰ Kasper himself attempts to validate this with the history of Catholic Theology:

Theologically speaking, Church is never a purely static entity. She never simply ›is‹, rather she is ever again an event. It pertains to the Church that she is under way waiting for the second coming of the Lord ... This eschatological view of the Church which is currently becoming more and more emphasised in Catholic theology implies surmounting of the romantic or neo-romantic concept of the Church in which the Church is somewhat unilaterally seen as the continued existence of Christ. Truly, Christ is already now present in the Church in his fulness. But this fullness of Christ is for the concrete Church not only a gift, but also continually an assignment, continually an event. The divisions in the Church are also signs that the Church is still under way ... This historical perspective of the Church is in no way new to Catholic theology ... Already the post-Tridentine apologetics in dealing with the *notae ecclesiae* has attempts from such a perspective. In addition to the exclusive method according to which these *notae* can be assigned only to the one true Church, it also uses the comparative method according to which the *notae* belong to the Catholic Church in a special way. In this way, certain Christian-ecclesial values are attributed also to the separated church communities at least indirectly. More explicit attempts are to be found in the so-called baptism controversy and the conflicts with Donatism.

418 Cf. *Ibid.*, 54.

419 [My translation]. “Abgesehen davon, wie es um diesen Vorwurf steht, wird es damit unmöglich, dass die katholische Kirche alle anderen Kirchen einfach an ihrem Besitzstand misst.” *Ibid.*; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 74.

420 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 75.

A result of these controversies was especially singled out by Augustine: the validity of sacraments administered outside the Church. Thus, it is put on record that a ›bit of Church reality‹ can exist outside the Catholic Church.⁴²¹

Kasper's aim in his distinction between a static and a dynamic ecclesiology is simply to validate the protestant criticisms against the Catholic understanding of "vestigia ecclesiae". In other words, this concept is also deficient. It, however, raises the same enigmatic question on how Kasper uses the same thing he considers deficient also as a principle of justification for the validity leadership offices the protestant churches.

6.2.2.1.3 Grades of Communion with the Church (in Analogy to the Sacraments)

Kasper seeks to complement the deficiencies of *votum* and *vestigia* by using the nature of the sacraments as an analogy for explaining the grades of communion with Church. Just as the celebration of the sacraments has two dimensions which may fall apart, so does the com-

421 [My translation]. "Kirche ist theologisch nie eine rein statische Größe. Sie ›ist‹ nie einfach, sie wird vielmehr je neu Ereignis. Zur Kirche gehört, dass sie unterwegs ist, dass sie wartet auf die Wiederkunft des Herrn ... Diese eschatologische Sicht der Kirche, die gegenwärtig innerhalb der katholischen Theologie immer mehr betont wird, bedeutet eine Überwindung des romantischen beziehungsweise neuromantischen Kirchenbegriffs, in dem die Kirche etwas einseitig als der fortlebende Christus gesehen wird. Christus ist in seiner Fülle zwar jetzt schon in der Kirche gegenwärtig. Aber diese Fülle ist für die konkrete Kirche nicht nur Gabe, sondern auch stets neue Aufgabe, stets neues Ereignis. Auch die Spaltungen in der Kirche sind ein Zeichen dessen, dass die Kirche erst unterwegs ist ... Diese geschichtliche Betrachtungsweise der Kirche ist für die katholische Theologie gar nicht so neu ... Bereits die nachtridentinische Apologetik kennt bei der Behandlung der *notae ecclesiae* Ansätze zu solcher Betrachtungsweise. Sie kennt nämlich neben der exklusiven Methode, nach der diese *notae* nur der einen wahren Kirche zukommen können, auch die komparative Methode, wonach die *notae* der katholischen Kirche in besonderer Weise zugehören. Damit werden wenigstens indirekt auch den getrennten Kirchengemeinschaften bestimmte christlich-kirchliche Werte zugesprochen. Noch deutlichere Ansätze finden sich im sogenannten Ketzertaufstreit und in den Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Donatismus. Als Ergebnis dieser Auseinandersetzungen wurde besonders von Augustinus die Gültigkeit der außerhalb der Kirche gespendeten Sakramente herausgestellt. Damit wird aber festgehalten, dass es auch außerhalb der katholischen Kirche ein ›Stück Kirchenwirklichkeit‹ geben kann." KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 54f.; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 72, 76–78.

munion with the Church have two dimensions which do not always or necessarily coincide. One could receive a sacrament validly (the sign as such / *sacramentum tantum*) and yet lack the fruit of the sacrament (the reality of grace / *res sacramenti*). In an analogous way, one could be visibly in communion with the Church, and yet be spiritually outside it. Conversely, one may not receive a sacrament visibly (analogous to not being officially a Church member), and yet possess the “inner reality of grace” by virtue of his disposition (“*votum sacramenti*”) or a substitutive desire (“*votum supplens*”).⁴²² This analogy, thus, fits in squarely into the “dynamic” nature of the Church as described by Kasper, and herein lies probably the key to the enigmatic question posed above by his simultaneous discontentment with the Catholic *votum-vestigia*-doctrine as such and his deployment of the same with regard to the possibility of ministerial priesthood in protestant churches.⁴²³

The briefly outlined analogy from the doctrine of the sacraments allows for a dynamic definition of Church membership and the ecclesiological status of non-Catholic ecclesial communities. In terms of the inner reality of Christ, they also can constitute Churches in the full sense, i.e., when Christ becomes an event in them through the word or sign. However, at the level of the sign, i.e., juridically identifiable Church membership, from the Catholic perspective they cannot be placed on the same level with the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, there is an inner unity also in them which is nascent and already visible in the external domain through creeds, sacramental forms and through an office; an office which they also do not interpret simply as a ›democratic delegation‹ from below, rather as a divine empowerment from above ...⁴²⁴

422 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten eines katholischen Ökumenismus*, 55f.; cf. —, *Der ekklesiologische Charakter*, 78–81.

423 For a circumspect analysis of the question of *votum sacramenti*, see: SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 169f.

424 [My translation]. “Die kurz skizzierte Analogie aus der Sakramentenlehre erlaubt eine dynamische Bestimmung der Kirchenmitgliedschaft und des ekklesiologischen Status der nichtkatholischen kirchlichen Gemeinschaften. Hinsichtlich der inneren Christuswirklichkeit könne auch sie Kirchen im vollen Sinn darstellen, wenn nämlich Christus in ihnen durch das Wort oder im Zeichen Ereignis wird. Bezüglich der Ebene des Zeichens, der rechtlich fassbaren Kirchengliedschaft, können sie allerdings vom katholischen Stand-

6.2.2.2 Excursus 4: Kasper on Unitatis Redintegratio §22

Kasper's concern for the possibility of eucharistic celebration without an ordained Catholic priest and for the recognition of protestant leadership offices as tantamount to the ministerial priesthood is embedded more broadly in his interpretation and criticism of Vatican II's insistence, even in its ecumenical vision, on the link between the absence of the ministerial priesthood and the absence of the eucharistic sacrifice in the protestant Churches:

Though the ecclesial Communities which are separated from us lack the fullness of unity with us flowing from Baptism, and though we believe they have not retained the proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders, nevertheless when they commemorate His death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and look forward to His coming in glory. Therefore the teaching concerning the Lord's Supper, the other sacraments, worship, the ministry of the Church, must be the subject of the dialogue.⁴²⁵

Indeed, Kasper's interpretation of this text is not directly concerned with the question of the fundamental office of the priesthood. Nevertheless, it is indirectly, in so far as he advocates for the recognition of protestant *leadership* ministries as some form of ministerial priesthood. Some major points of his thoughts on the quoted passage of Vatican II in this sense are as follows:

6.2.2.2.1 Shifting of Priorities: Doctrine of Justification and Ministry

According to Kasper, the justification of man by God stands at the centre of the Christian faith. Ministries in the Church are only serving for

punkt aus nicht auf eine Ebene mit der katholischen Kirche gestellt werden. Trotzdem ist die innere Einheit auch bei ihnen anfanghaft schon im äußeren Bereich sichtbar durch Glaubensbekenntnisse, sakramentale Formen und durch ein Amt, das ja auch bei ihnen nicht einfach als eine ›demokratische Delegation‹ von unten verstanden wird, sondern als göttliche Bevollmächtigung von oben ... " Ibid., 56.

⁴²⁵ *Unitatis redintegratio* §22.

this purpose. Both the reformers and the Council of Trent respected this hierarchy of things in their approach to the ecclesial problems of the day. The reformers were not primarily interested in the ministerial structure of the Church, but on the essence of Christianity which is preaching the salvation of man by Christ. They only criticized the ministerial structure when and where it was given priority over that essence of Christianity.⁴²⁶ Kasper, therefore, thinks that the above teaching of Vatican II does and inspires the opposite: the question of ministry takes up the centre and becomes the major obstacle to the unity of Christians, for example, in the problem of intercommunion. Hence, ministerial unity becomes the pre-condition for the possibility of unity in the celebration of the eucharist which is the highest expression of the unity of the body of Christ, the Church.⁴²⁷

Following the scheme of hierarchy of truths, Kasper further argues that, since thanks to ecumenism a consensus has been achieved on the doctrine of justification, which is much more fundamental, it follows that the question of the ministerial structure, which is secondary, should no longer be a stumbling block to Christian unity.⁴²⁸ For him, there are two pointers to this consequence:

1. Vatican II emphasizes the preaching of the word as the first task of the priestly ministry (*Lumen gentium* §25, §28, and *Presbyterorum ordinis* §4), thereby bringing the Catholic understanding of ministry nearer to that of the protestant Churches.⁴²⁹
2. Generally, in all Churches without exception, ministry is being called into question. Hence, all Churches and ecclesial communities are “forced” to rethink the *raison d'être* of ministry in the Church, in other words to reflect again on that which actually unites them. In this case, the doctrinal differences become less relevant.⁴³⁰

426 Cf. KASPER Walter, Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen (1971), in: *WKGS* 15, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 195–211: 196.

427 Cf. *Ibid.*, 195.

428 Cf. *Ibid.*, 196.

429 Cf. *Ibid.*, 196f.

430 Cf. *Ibid.*, 197.

6.2.2.2.2 The Question of Apostolic Succession: Episcopal and Presbyterial

As the lines of *Unitatis redintegratio* §22 indicate, the reason why protestant Churches do not and cannot have the proper reality of the eucharist is that they do not have the ministerial priesthood. The sacrament of the eucharist can only be effected through the sacrament of holy orders which can only be conferred by a bishop standing in the chain of apostolic succession. In other words, from a Catholic perspective, protestant office holders are no priests and cannot effect sacraments because they are not ordained by bishops in the apostolic succession. Kasper characterizes this as “the most common Catholic argument for the invalidity of the ministry in Lutheran Churches” and raises the question whether it is really a Catholic dogma that for one to be a valid minister in the Church, he must be ordained by a bishop in the apostolic succession.⁴³¹

Kasper says that this is not the case. The core of his conviction is what he considers to be the actual meaning of apostolic succession. According to him, apostolic succession is not merely about the imposition of hands by an ordained bishop with the right intention. That would be a “mechanical” understanding which is not adequate to the communication of the Holy Spirit.⁴³² Apostolic succession draws its meaning from the “apostolicity” of the Church (*credo ecclesiam apostolicam*). In other words, it has its meaning from a mark of the *whole Church*, not just from ministry.⁴³³ Thus, Kasper does not interpret apostolic succession as a ministerial call which is also historically bound back to the specific ministry of the twelve apostles, but as a succession in the apostolic faith, that is, being and living in the faith of the whole Church. The succession in the apostolic office is only an “important sign” for the faith of the whole Church.⁴³⁴ He claims that this is how apostolic succession was understood in the early Church and it is “increasingly”

431 Cf. *Ibid.*, 197.

432 Cf. *Ibid.*, 203f.

433 Cf. *Ibid.*, 204.

434 Cf. *Ibid.*; cf. —, *Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?* 226–228, 232f.; cf. —, *Ökumenischer Fortschritt im Amtsverständnis* (1973), in: *WKG* 15, 235–240: 238.

becoming the stance of the contemporary Catholic theology.⁴³⁵ The shift from the original to the mechanical understanding of apostolic succession took place, according to Kasper, at the beginning of the second millennium through scholasticism. The attention shifted from seeing God's action through the Church to analysing the "inner structure of the sacramental signs, their efficacy and validity".⁴³⁶

What Kasper just does in his concept of apostolic succession can be summarized in a simple sentence: he replaces "office" / "ministry" with "faith". Instead of succession in ministry, he speaks rather of succession in faith. This expansion of the concept, thus, allows him to do two things: 1) to remove apostolic succession from episcopal monopoly and 2) to reduce the meaning of validity of a ministry in the Church to more or less a matter of legal recognition and interpretation.

1) On the first point: According to Kasper, apostolic succession is not only episcopal, but also presbyterial. That is, the sacrament of holy orders is passed on not only by bishops, but also by priests. He buttresses this point with historical perspectives from the early Church down to the Council of Trent. He argues that there exists in the Catholic Church *practically* and the *doctrinally* the ordination of priests, not only by bishops, but also by priests.⁴³⁷ On the doctrinal part, the first indication of this is the non-unified structure of ministry in the early Church. The hierarchical differentiation and order (diaconate – presbyterate – episcopate) are later developments since Ignatius of Antioch. Before then, the ministries existed parallel to each other, depending on the individual communities, but of the same rank in essence. As his evidence material, Kasper refers to Acts 20,17–28, First Epistle of Clement (44,5; 47,6; 54,2; 57,1), Second Epistle of Clement 17,5, Irenaeus of Lyon's *Adversus Haereses* (3,2,2; 4,26,5), Clement of Alexandria's *Quis dives salvetur?* 42, Firmilian of Caesarea's Letter to Cyprian 75,4,7, and of course Jerome (*Epistle* 146, 85; *Epistle* 69,3; *In Titum* 1,5) whose argu-

435 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen*, 204.

436 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Konvergenz und Divergenz in der Amtsfrage* (1972), in: *WKG 15*, 212–217: 216.

437 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen*, 203.

ment became authoritative for the whole medieval theology.⁴³⁸ In the Middle Ages, many canonists, following Huguccio (+1210), taught, contrary to common opinion of theologians, that a simple priest can perform priestly ordination, if permitted by the pope.⁴³⁹ If the Council of Florence in the *Decretum pro Armenis* (1439) designates the bishop as the ordinary minister of the sacrament of Orders (DH 1326), it does not necessarily prohibit the option of an extraordinary minister.⁴⁴⁰ The Fathers of the Council of Trent are conscious of the historical facts and, therefore, avoided designating the distinction between bishops and presbyters as “institutione divina”, but as “ordinatione divina” (DH 1776).⁴⁴¹ The express reservation of the power of confirmation and ordination to the bishops by the same Council (DH 1777, cf. 1768) is open to different interpretations.⁴⁴² Vatican II likewise describes the distinction between bishops and presbyters as an “ancient” (“*antiquitus*”) practice, but not as divine (“*divinitus*”), and allows for the possibility of confirmation by presbyters (*Lumen gentium* §26).⁴⁴³

On the practical part, Kasper points out that historically presbyters have on different occasions actually performed the same duties as the bishops, even in the case of priestly ordination. The most important evidence, for him, is the early tradition of the Alexandrian Church.

We know from Jerome, Ambrosiaster and others that up to the Council of Nicaea (325) the respective bishops of this important Church were consecrated, not by the rest of the bishops of the Metropolitan domain, but by the presbytery. It is only after the Nicaean Council prescribed in can. 4 the ordination of a bishop by at least three bishops that Patriarch

438 Cf. *Ibid.*, 198.

439 Cf. *Ibid.*, 200.

440 Cf. *Ibid.*, 201.

441 Cf. *Ibid.*, 198.

442 Cf. *ibid.*, 201.

443 Cf. *Ibid.*, 198f., 201.

Alexander banned the practice which until then prevailed in his Church. Although he himself was ordained by the presbytery, at Nicaea he was naturally recognized as bishop just as the others.⁴⁴⁴

Further examples of priestly ordination by priests as given by Kasper include: the ordinations of Irenaeus of Lyon and John Cassian, canon 13 of the Synod of Ancyra (314), the ordination power of bishops Willehad (+789) and Luidgei (+785) while they were still priests, Boniface IX's bull *Sacrae religionis* (1400) by which he granted the abbots of St. Osyth (Essex) the privilege to ordain their monks both in the minor and major orders – a privilege which was however rescinded three years later because the bishop of London objected to it (DH 1145f.), Martin V's bull *Gerentes ad vos* (1427) granting the same privilege to the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Altzelle (DH 1290), Innocent VIII's bull *Exposcit tuae devotionis* (1435) granting the Cistercian general abbot and the four proto-abbots the right to ordain subdeacons and deacons from amongst their monks – a privilege and practice which lasted till the 17th century (DH 1435), and finally, the permission granted to missionary benedictine abbots and Franciscan missionaries (15th/16th century) to ordain priests.⁴⁴⁵

For Kasper, all these practical and doctrinal facts put a fundamental question mark over an episcopal monopoly of apostolic succession and in fact over the distinction in the first place, between bishops and priests.

Either the popes of the 15th/16th centuries are victims of a theological and canonical error of their time or the priest can be an extraordinary minister of Holy Orders. Put in scholastic terms, the power to administer the sacrament of ordination would then be already given in the priest-

444 [My translation]. "Wir wissen durch Hieronymus, Ambrosiaster und andere, dass in dieser wichtigen Kirche bis zum Konzil von Nikaia (325) der jeweilige Bischof nicht von den übrigen Bischöfen des Metropolitanbereichs, sondern vom Presbyterium geweiht wurde. Erst als das Konzil von Nikaia in Can 4 die Ordination des Bischofs durch mindestens drei Bischöfe vorschrieb, verbot Patriarch Alexander die bis dahin herrschende Praxis seiner Kirche. Trotzdem wurde er selbst, obwohl auch er durch das Presbyterium ordiniert war, in Nikaia selbstverständlich als Bischof wie alle anderen anerkannt." Ibid., 199.

445 Cf. Ibid., 199f.

hood as a potestas ligata ... Besides, in the early Church, in contrast to today, the bishop was also an ordinary minister of baptism, penance, the eucharist and confirmation. Yet, all these sacraments were administered by presbyters in an ›extraordinary manner‹. Should this not be possible also for holy orders? From a systematic-theological perspective, we must assume that Holy Orders is a single sacrament for deacons, priests and bishops, and not different sacraments. That means that the different degrees of Holy Orders cannot also fall apart absolutely in their functions.⁴⁴⁶

Based on his wide interpretation of apostolic succession (succession in faith and presbyterial succession), Kasper now posits his claim of the possibility of recognizing protestant leadership offices as partaking in the ministerial priesthood: “The Lutheran Churches lost the episcopal succession during the reformation; but they retained the presbyteral succession. The first Lutheran leaders were ordained by ordained priests. Since then, the rule holds: only the ordained can ordain.”⁴⁴⁷

2) On the second point (question of validity), Kasper argues that the doctrinal tradition of the Catholic Church actually has no clear stand-

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 200f. In later years, however, Kasper backpedalled from his whole theory of presbyteral succession. He writes: “This theological view and the cases based on it have to be regarded as, at best, marginal. One may not deduce from such theological opinions and from such borderline cases a further theory of a possible presbyterial succession beyond the episcopal succession. The fact that these presbyterial ordinations required papal dispensations shows that, even though in a problematic way, incorporation into the *communio* net of the episcopate, as we would say today, was also basically maintained in these cases. Together with the many grave ills in the late Middle Ages, these borderline cases highlight the large extent of theological uncertainties and ultimately the dead end which had been reached.” KASPER Walter, *Die Katholische Kirche*, 327. English translation: *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission*, trans. by Thomas HOEBEL, London / New York 2015, 228. In fact, he denounces the phenomenon of ordination by presbyters as a maldevelopment triggered by the theological disintegration of the sacramental and juridical power of the *ordo*, and thus states categorically that it is neither a substitute for nor a second option to episcopal succession, rather a “form” (“*Gestalt*”) of it. Cf. —, Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem (1990), in: *WKGS* 15, 330–354: 341f.

⁴⁴⁷ [My translation]. “Den lutherischen Kirchen ist in der Reformation die bischöfliche Sukzession verlorengegangen; dagegen haben sie die presbyterale Sukzession bewahrt. Die ersten lutherischen Amtsträger wurden von ordinierten Priestern bestellt. Seither gilt der Grundsatz, dass nur Ordinierte wieder ordinieren können.” KASPER Walter, *Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen*, 203.

point on what is meant by invalidity of protestant leadership offices as far as the sacramental priesthood is concerned. That is, whether by “invalidity” the Church regards those offices as simply nothing or only as lacking jurisdictional authority. Neither the rejection of the Waldensians by Innocence III in 1208 (DH 794) and by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (DH 802) nor the Council of Trent is clear on this point.⁴⁴⁸ Thus, “the rejection of the validity of Lutheran ministries is a common post-Tridentine theological opinion which bases itself on the Council of Trent, but does not necessarily follow from it. It is not a binding Catholic teaching, rather a prevalent practice.”⁴⁴⁹ He, however, interprets the concrete cases where the Church has made official pronouncements on the question of validity or invalidity of ordination as revealing that “validity” here simply means legal-public approval by the Church. Such examples include the declaration of absolute ordinations as “invalid” by the Council of Chalcedon (Can. 7) [sic!] or Pius XII’s decision on the valid “matter” for priestly ordination (*Sacramentum ordinis*, 1947).⁴⁵⁰ In other words, since the Church can do and undo what is valid and not, then she also has the possibility to validate the leadership offices of protestant Churches, but: this depends on the larger question of whether she recognizes those churches as “true Churches”.⁴⁵¹ And he thinks the Church is at least open to this possibility through the *subsistit* and *vestigia* ecclesiology of Vatican II (*Lumen gentium* §8, *Unitatis redintegratio* §3). Thus, he applies here again his language of the different “degrees of density” (6.2.2) – in this case not just to the eucharist, but to the whole reality of being a Church, and *a fortiori* to the leadership offices of the protestant Churches.⁴⁵² Given this principle of the ecclesiological foundations of ministry, together with the pneumatological dimension

448 Cf. *Ibid.*, 201–203.

449 [My translation]. “Die Verwerfung der Gültigkeit der lutherischen Ämter ist eine weit verbreitete, praktisch allgemeine nachtridentinische theologische Lehrmeinung, welche sich auf das Trienter Konzil stützt, aber keineswegs notwendig aus ihm folgt. Es handelt sich dabei nicht um eine verbindliche katholische Lehre, sondern vielmehr um eine herrschende Praxis.” *Ibid.*, 203.

450 Cf. *Ibid.*, 204f.; cf. —, *Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?* 228f. Correction: canon 6, not 7.

451 KASPER Walter, *Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen*, 205.

452 Cf. *Ibid.*, 206f.

of the Church, which liberates it from a narrow-legalistic perspective, Kasper is so strongly convinced that he even holds the principle of “*ecclesia supplet*” ready in the hand in case the protestant ministries really do not meet up to the requirements for a full validity.⁴⁵³ In fact, he suggests an inner inconsistency on the part of the Catholic Church since she accepts the validity of protestant baptism and matrimony while denying the validity of their eucharist and ministry.⁴⁵⁴

6.2.2.2.3 The Meaning of “*defectus ordinis*” in *Unitatis Redintegratio* §22

Kasper later couples his defence of the presence of the priestly ministry in protestant Churches with a hint on the wording of the Council in the ecumenical document already quoted above. Once again, the major reason why they cannot celebrate the eucharist reads in latin: “*praesertim propter sacramenti Ordinis defectum*”.⁴⁵⁵ The question for Kasper is how the word *defectum* is meant to be understood. The English translation of that section of the document on the Vatican Website as already quoted above (6.2.2.2) translates *defectum* with “absence”. But Kasper points out that “absence” is not the only possible meaning. It could also be read simply as “deficit” (“*Mangel*”).⁴⁵⁶ In fact, he opts for the latter.⁴⁵⁷ In his view, the Council does not delineate the precise content of this *defectum* in the protestant Churches, but the whole context of the Council’s ecclesiology envisages a deficiency not just in their falling out of the episcopal line of succession, but in their very ecclesiological premises.⁴⁵⁸ Despite the recognition of this foundational deficiency, Kasper still sees in that very wording an implicit concession of the Catholic Church to

453 Cf. *Ibid.*, 207–209; cf. —, *Konvergenz und Divergenz in der Amtsfrage*, 212–215; cf. —, *Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem*, 351–354.

454 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Zur Frage der Anerkennung der Ämter in den lutherischen Kirchen*, 210; cf. —, *Konvergenz und Divergenz in der Amtsfrage*, 214; cf. —, *Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?* 222f.

455 [My emphasis]. *Unitatis redintegration* §22, in: AAS 57 (1965) 90–107: 106.

456 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem*, 349.

457 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene* (1992), in: WKGS 15, 355–366: 362.

458 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem*, 349f.; cf. —, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene*, 362f.

the protestant ministries, quasi-tantamount – even if only deficiently – to the sacramental priesthood: “Speaking of a deficit in the full form of the priestly ministry in fact already includes a certain amount of approval. This partial approval corresponds to a certain extent also to the initial conception of the reformers who understood ordinations outside the apostolic succession as emergency measures.”⁴⁵⁹ In other words, the *defectum* of which the Decree on ecumenism speaks about implies that the ministerial priesthood is not “completely” absent from the protestant Churches.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, he also names the protestant ministries “vestiges” of the sacramental priesthood and apostolic succession: “For just as there are vestigia ecclesiae outside the visible boundaries of the Church, there are also vestigia successionis et ministerii outside the visibly attested succession.”⁴⁶¹

6.2.3 Unity of the World

The Church is not an end in itself, rather it is God’s sacrament for the world. Hence, every thing and action in her is at the service of the salvation of the world. The Church is the sacrament of unity. Thus, it serves the unity of the world. This is the advantage of leadership as the basic model of priesthood. It locates the sense of the priesthood not only

459 [My translation]. “Die Rede von einem Mangel an der Vollgestalt des Amtes schließt ja bereits ein gewisses Maß der Anerkennung ein. Diese Teilerkennung entspricht bis zu einem gewissen Grad auch dem ursprünglichen eigenen Verständnis der Reformatoren, welche Ordinationen außerhalb der apostolischen Sukzession als Notmaßnahme verstanden.” Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem*, 351; cf. —, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene*, 364.

460 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene*, 363f. Peter Bläser notes that such a translation and interpretation of the Council’s wording (“defectum”) has “no evidence in the official documents of the Council; and the actual authors of this wording translated defectus from the onset as absence”. [My translation] As an example of the original authors, Bläser references Lorenz Cardinal Jaeger’s work on Unitatis redintegratio. BLÄSER Peter, Zur Diskussion um die Bedeutung des Amtes für den Vollzug der Eucharistie, in: *Catholica* 26/2 (1972), 86–107: 87, fn. 1; cf. JAEGER Lorenz, *Das Konzilsdekret »Über den Ökumenismus«*. Sein Werden, sein Inhalt und seine Bedeutung, Paderborn 1965, 143–145 (²1968, 201–203).

461 [My translation]. “Denn so wie es außerhalb der sichtbaren Grenzen der Kirche vestigia ecclesiae gibt, gibt es auch außerhalb der sichtbar bezeugten Sukzession vestigia successionis et ministerii.” KASPER Walter, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene*, 363f.

in the Church, but in a more encompassing context: the world. The office of unity in the Church works, at the same time, for peace and unity in the world. It gives a response to one of the deepest yearnings of humanity.⁴⁶²

6.3 The Testimony of Church History

Kasper also claims that his thesis of the primacy of leadership is confirmed by the historical development of the priestly office in the Church. In the first millennium of the Church, there was a uniform concept of the priesthood, namely, based on its symbolic and functional service for the unity of the Church. All other services in the Church were integrated into it. It was only in the second millennium that a substantial change of emphasis developed. The priestly office was no longer understood symbolically and functionally, but ontologically. It stood in itself alone, detached from the whole ecclesiastical context. It dwindled to the power of eucharistic consecration. It became isolated from the unifying power of leadership (jurisdictional authority). The *symbol* of the Church's unity became uncoupled from the unity of the Church. It was only the Second Vatican Council that made a rudimentary renewal back to the original concept.⁴⁶³

Furthermore, he argues that at the beginning of the Church, preaching was not the primary task of the priestly office. In fact, it may have been completely absent. The turn came only in the post-apostolic period. The more the direct authority of the twelve apostles faded away by their death, the more teaching shifted to the centre of what was originally an office of leadership.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 194.

⁴⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 193f.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 66.

6.4 The Difference of Christ's Priesthood: Self-Sacrifice

Before and at the time of Jesus, there have been priests in other religions. Though the New Testament though does not use the title "priest" for the leadership offices in the early Church, it expressly recognizes Jesus Christ as one. It describes him as the High Priest and sole mediator between God and man (cf. Heb. 6:20, 7:24, 8:6, 9:15, 12:24, 1 Tim. 2:5).⁴⁶⁵ The more important question, however, is on what is new about his priesthood. In order to draw out the new content, Kasper takes a step backwards and begins first with the question of the sense of priesthood in the world in general. To which question(s) and need(s) of humanity was priesthood in the religions an answer, or rather, an attempt at an answer?⁴⁶⁶ Ultimately, it is a question on the sense of religion in the first place. The human need, according to Kasper, is that man senses that the world is unreconciled in itself and is alienated from its own meaning. Man experiences this concretely in the interpersonal relationships: conflicts, violence, discord, unfaithfulness, etc. Man believes to find the reconciliation of this state of the world in his relation to the divine. It is here that the priest comes in and functions as one who has dedicated himself to the task of reconciliatory mediation to the divine. He has committed his life to establishing salvation in the midst of misery. Consequently, he sets himself apart from the normal way of life. He takes up a critical distance from the society. His setting-apart expresses itself in visible features: he is consecrated in a special ritual, receives a special honorary title, receives a special training, wears distinctive attire, etc. However, due to this sacralised separation, priesthood in the general history of religion transformed itself into the opposite. The priesthood now became a medium of irreconciliation – that which it had originally sought to overcome.⁴⁶⁷ A dialectics of self-contradiction inheres in it. Hence, it ultimately turns out to be incapable of bringing about salvation in the midst of misery.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 183.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 156.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 156f.

If priesthood should really be an answer to the human experience of misery, then it must be of a different nature than what it has been in the general history of religion. The revealed Christian religion lodges the claim to have been endowed with the differently natured priesthood for the salvation of the world. It was realized in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All the good priestly elements are taken up and perfected in him. The question is only: how?

According to Kasper, first of all, his earthly life, as described in the bible, shows a “revolutionary” image of priesthood: his life was in no way “priestly”, he was toughly against the “ritualistic-priestly traditions” of his time, he was against the “levitical laws of purity”. Instead, he joined the company of sinners. He was not “pious”, but “liberal”.⁴⁶⁸ By so doing, he criticized the religious dualism of the sacred and the profane. He surmounts the dualism, above all, by entering completely into our humanity and conquering sin.⁴⁶⁹ “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

His conflicts with the “religious people” of his time led to his crucifixion. Paradoxically, it is exactly there that he consummated, once and for all, the true priesthood, the long-awaited reconciliation and peace with God, by committing his own life for us in obedience to the Father and revealing to us God's love. The place of the consummation was outside of the ritual-sacral sphere; not in the temple, but on the cross outside in the world, in a profane place (cf. Heb. 13:13). This external profanity of the event is an overhaul of all priestly acts hitherto, and simultaneously, the establishment of a new unique priesthood which only Christ possesses. The negative consequence for the biblical-Christian priesthood then, is that it cannot be explained by ritual service. That would be merely a resumption of the pagan conception in the general history of religion.⁴⁷⁰ The positive consequence or the new content of the differentness of Christ's priesthood is now his obedient

468 Cf. *Ibid.*, 158.

469 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 183.

470 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 158f.; cf. —, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 183f.

self-sacrifice. He proclaimed it upfront (Mk. 10:45, 14:24) and the biblical authors describe it as such (Heb. 7:27, 10:5).⁴⁷¹

As already mentioned, in Jesus Christ, mission and person are the same. He *is* for others. For Kasper, this mission of pro-existence is more directly and appropriately expressed with the concept of the shepherd-service (leadership). The shepherd lives in solicitude for his sheep and sacrifices his life for them (Jn. 10:11). It absorbs the whole person.⁴⁷² To be a priest is to be a shepherd in imitation of Christ.

6.5 Humaneness and Attractiveness of the Priestly Vocation

Kasper also gives a psychological reason for the option of leadership as the basic model of priesthood. The argument states that a sacral-ritualistic image of the priesthood cannot appeal to young people. A young person on the look for an occupation cannot presage or pre-sense fulfilment and a thrilling experience in such a vocation. “If that which is special to the priestly office is reduced to the power to effectively speak certain words of consecration, then it does not portray an occupation that is humanely fulfilling, that can thrill a young person.”⁴⁷³ In the past, it was possible to open up the sense of the priesthood by recourse to sacraments because at that time, the faith was generally taken for granted. Now, that period is over. The faith has become extremely questionable. The aftermath is that it does not mean anything to the young people any longer, and even to priests themselves.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, the model of leadership offers a “desacralization and de-mythologization” of the priesthood

471 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 183.

472 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 48, 65.

473 [My translation]. “Reduziert man nämlich das Spezifikum des Amtes auf die Vollmacht, bestimmte Konsekrationsworte wirksam sprechen zu können, dann stellt das Amt keinen menschlich ausfüllenden, einen jungen Menschen begeisternden Beruf dar.” KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 188; cf. —, *Die schädlichen Nebenwirkungen des Priestermangels*, 102.

474 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Krise und Wagnis des Glaubens im Leben des Priesters* (1969), in: *WKS 12*, 173–180: 175f.

which is “humanly realizable” and justifiable in the Church’s tradition.⁴⁷⁵ Kasper emphasizes that with the concept of “desacralization and de-mythologization”, he does not mean a secularization of the priesthood as if it were no longer a sacrament. Rather, he means a perception of priesthood purified from pagan elements of the history of religions.⁴⁷⁶

475 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Neue Akzente im dogmatischen Verständnis des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 188.

476 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Funktion des Priesters in der Kirche*, 159.

II. Walter Kasper: *Munus Sanctificandi*⁴⁷⁷

6.6 Preliminary Remarks

As from 1978 latest, Kasper made a turn in his opinion. He increasingly saw in the eucharistic celebration the basic task of the priest. In 2008, he published an article in which he also describes his gradual access to ecclesiology.⁴⁷⁸ In it, he gives the reason for his earlier position by appealing to the ecclesiastical situation of the time in which he developed it, namely: the crisis of the priesthood in the years of turmoil following Vatican II Council. Three terms stand-out in his characterization of his earlier thesis: “search-movement” (“*Suchbewegung*”), “Aid to Understanding” (“*Verstehenshilfe*”), and “objective Insufficiency” (“*in der Sache zu wenig*”). According to him, his theology of the priesthood as community leadership was still a “search” in the face of the crisis of those years, just as there were also other “search-movements” then. As such, his theory was intended as an “aid to understanding” the priesthood – a help that was appreciated by many. It was, according to him, nevertheless substantially insufficient; and his later publications, show that it was not yet his “last word” on the meaning of the priesthood.⁴⁷⁹ It remains an open question whether Kasper already knew in those post-conciliar years that his definition of priesthood as community leadership was objectively insufficient, or whether this explanation is not simply a tacit, mitigated retraction of his earlier theologoumenon. As a matter of fact, a few years after this review, he explicitly tagged the

⁴⁷⁷ In this later phase, Kasper occasionally speaks of the priority of proclamation, but it is very scanty numerically and by content that it cannot be called a theological position he sustains. Cf. KASPER Walter, cf. —, *Apostolische Sukzession im Kontext der Ökumene*, 365; cf. —, *Die Sendung des Priesters* (1995), in: *WKGS 19/I*, Freiburg i. Br. 2021, 80–86: 81f.; cf. —, *Die Feier der Eucharistie* (1998), in: *WKGS 17/II*, Freiburg i. Br. 2018, 656–675: 667–669. In his earlier phase, he once simply mentioned the priority of proclamation as the position of the Second Vatican Council, while tagging *munus regendi* as the dominant “systematic point of departure” in contemporary theology. Cf. —, *Ökumenischer Konsens über das kirchliche Amt?* 221f.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Kirche Jesu Christi – auf dem Weg zu einer Communio-Ekklesiology* (2008), in: *WKGS 11*, Freiburg i. Br. 2008, 15–120: 15–34.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 26.

idea of priests as community leaders a “functionalistic” approach stimulated by the identity crisis in the years after Vatican II.

Not only the new orientation in the perception of the episcopal office but also the emphasis on the participation of the laity in the mission, of the Church created a new situation for priests. It meant saying farewell to ‘reverend’, and entailed a new understanding of the priest as a brother among brothers. Both developments led to uncertainty, in fact, to an identity crisis for many priests. They asked themselves: who are we? Not bishops, not laypeople, what then? In particular, the sacerdotal dimension of the priest, which had stood so much in the centre during the Middle Ages and in the post-Tridentine epoch, was now met with incomprehension by many, if not rejection. This often led to a more or less purely functional self-understanding of the priests as leaders of the congregation ...⁴⁸⁰

Be that as it may, the concept of community leadership or shepherd remained in some way his collective term for the priestly duties.⁴⁸¹ Nevertheless, its content tapered more and more towards the ministry of sanctification. The following are his arguments.

6.7 Pointer to Transcendence

Kasper’s starting point is the question of the indispensable role of religion in the society. History has always proved that no society can permanently be sustained without some religious point of reference in an institutional form. The ideology of a consciously atheistic and religiously indifferent society is only about a century old in history and

⁴⁸⁰ KASPER Walter, *Die Katholische Kirche*, 334 (*The Catholic Church*, 233).

⁴⁸¹ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Gemeindeaufbau und Gemeindeleitung. Pastorale Perspektiven angesichts des Priestermangels* (1991), in: *WKGS* 17/I, Freiburg i. Br. 2018, 491–510: 498–501; cf. —, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters in unserer Zeit* (1997), in: *WKGS* 12, 276–289: 282; cf. —, *Der priesterliche Dienst – Repräsentation Jesu Christi als Haupt der Kirche* (1997), in: *WKGS* 12, 290–309: 302f.; cf. —, *Unterwegs mit dem guten Hirten* (1998), in: *WKGS* 19/I, 376–381: 376f.; cf. —, *Der Wahrheit auf der Spur. Mein Weg in Kirche und Theologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 2025, 161f.

has already proved itself to be an utopia.⁴⁸² Religion is the public symbol which calls the attention of man to the super-human, to the divine, thereby giving him unity and meaning in life. Only religion can grant answers to the primordial human questions of guilt, death and meaning. The society on its own cannot provide them.⁴⁸³ Religion, if correctly understood, does not grant answers in the sense of empty promises for the afterworld. Rather, it gives consolation and hope which a life fixed exclusively to this world cannot give.

Of course, wherever we can humanly help, we must critically reject any false empty promise of the world beyond. Wherever the world beyond is declared absolutely to a future promise, even the world here becomes dismal. For, who then consoles those whom we cannot console even with all the will in the world? Who consoles those who have died long ago, who can no longer be part of the propagated kingdom of freedom? Who consoles the defeated, those who did not get their fair share in history? Finally, who consoles the privileged confronted by the inevitable suffering of humanity?⁴⁸⁴

On account of the task fulfilled by religion – giving meaning to life by directing man towards God –, priesthood, as an “office of the pontifex” (bridgebuilder) for man to God, is necessary.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, the Holy Scriptures never designates the apostles and their successors as priests, but it reserves the title for Jesus Christ, the ultimate High Priest. He fulfilled his priesthood through his whole self-commitment in suffering

482 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters* (1978), in: *WKGS* 12, 237–258: 241.

483 Cf. *Ibid.*

484 [My translation]. “Zwar muss man eine falsche Verströstung auf das Jenseits dort, wo man menschlich helfen kann, kritisieren. Wo aber das Jenseits schlechthin zur Verströstung erklärt wird, da wird auch das Diesseits trostlos. Denn wer tröstet dann diejenigen, die wir mit dem besten Willen nicht trösten können, wer tröstet die längst Verstorbenen, die nicht mehr an dem erstrebten Reich der Freiheit teilhaben können, wer tröstet die Unterlegenen und zu kurz Gekommenen in der Geschichte, wer tröstet schließlich die Privilegierten angesichts des unabwendbaren Leids der Menschheit?” *Ibid.*

485 Cf. *Ibid.*

and death on the cross. Hence, he has become the absolute pontifex of God in the world.⁴⁸⁶

His life on the cross remains the ultimate yardstick and content of New Testament priesthood. The priest is, first and foremost, a man who has committed himself in faith totally to God for the sake of the others. He lives by faith. He gains the certitude of his vocation from faith, not from earthly certainties and plans. This he can only do if he is rooted in prayer.⁴⁸⁷

The centrality of prayer for the priest's relation to God, and with it, his institutional pointer-role to God for the people, entails then, for Kasper, that the ministry of sanctification becomes the centre of his life:

The first duty of the priest is, therefore, the glorification of God – worship. Especially, the celebration of the eucharist gives expression to the fact that we ultimately do not live by our own achievements, but owe our lives and the fulfilment of our lives to God. It bespeaks that being human is fulfilled not in work and achievement, but also not in consumption or protest, rather in feast and celebration ... There can be nothing more human than to celebrate the worship of God.⁴⁸⁸

6.8 Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity

Kasper, while recognizing preaching as the first service of the priest and pastoral care as a “special” assignment, nevertheless considers the eucharist to be the unifying centre and apex of the priestly life and ministry.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 242, 251f.

⁴⁸⁸ [My translation]. “Die erste Aufgabe des Priesters ist deshalb die Verherrlichung Gottes, der Gottesdienst. Gerade in der Feier der Eucharistie kommt zum Ausdruck, dass wir letztlich nicht aus unseren eigenen Leistungen leben, sondern unser Leben und die Erfüllung unseres Lebens Gott verdanken. Hier kommt zum Ausdruck, dass Menschsein nicht in der Arbeit und in der Leistung, aber auch nicht in Konsum oder im Protest aufgeht, sondern sich im Fest und in der Feier erfüllt ... Es kann gar nichts Menschlicheres geben als Gottesdienst zu feiern.” *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 245–249; cf. —, *Der Leitungsdienst in der Gemeinde*, 112; cf. —, *Diener der Freude*, 383.

Pastoral care, the ministry of preaching, the ministry of reconciliation – all this is certainly very important and must never be neglected. And yet, the primary association of the priesthood, both in the consciousness of the Christian people and in the self-understanding of the priest himself, is with the eucharist. It is here that all the other tasks find their unity. Here, according to the Catholic understanding of the priesthood, is the heart of the life and work of the priest. The rhythm of his life finds its essential structure in his celebration of the eucharist on Sunday, the Lord's day, and wherever possible with a smaller group of persons every day. I find both these forms of celebration immensely valuable; each is a great gift of God.⁴⁹⁰

In association with this change of perspective, Kasper also understands the Christian community no longer primarily on the basis of charisms and leadership, but on the basis of the sacrament of unity at its centre, namely, the eucharist. He considers this to be more in line with the Scriptures, according to which the apostles and the early Christians gathered together regularly to pray and break the bread, especially, on the Lord's day (Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:20). St. Paul theologically worked out the ecclesiological significance of the eucharistic celebration by using the analogy of the body (1 Cor. 10:16f.). The communion of the Church is formed from the one body of Christ in which we participate through the eucharist. The life of the Church flows from the eucharistic body.⁴⁹¹ In the Eucharistic Prayer in the *Didache*, there is a request for the unity of the Church in analogy to the unity in bread: "Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom."⁴⁹² St. Augustine names the eucharist the "sign of unity" and the "bond of charity".⁴⁹³ According to Thomas Aquinas, the reality (*res tantum*) of the eucharist

490 KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 401 (*A celebration of Priestly Ministry*, 143).

491 Cf. *Ibid.*, 404f.

492 *Didache* 9,4 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 359); cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 405.

493 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 405; cf. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 26.13, trans. by Edmund HILL, New York 2009, 461.

is actually the unity of the Church. This unity is not the sacrament itself (*res et sacramentum*), but its meaning and purpose.⁴⁹⁴ In other words, a community of Christians is “essentially a eucharistic community.”⁴⁹⁵ A few years later, Kasper densifies the significance of this point even much more for the priesthood: “The eucharist is the sacrament of unity. As such it is not only the centre and summit of the life of the community, but also the central act of carrying out community leadership.”⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, the presidency of the priest at the eucharist is not something merely external or functional which can be performed by any other person. Instead, Christ acts through the person of the priest for the unity of the Church.⁴⁹⁷ The identity of the priest lies in the eucharist and all his other tasks are integrated therein.

Theologically speaking, it is obvious that the celebration of the eucharist is the heart and center of the priest’s existence, since all his other tasks either lead up to the Mass or are derived from it. Ultimately, the pastoral ministry of unity, of gathering and leading a community, means bringing people together to celebrate the eucharist. The Mass with the assembled parish is the summit and synthesis of all the tasks involved in leading a community ... A eucharistic conception and concentration of the priestly ministry and of pastoral work necessarily lead us to set a clear priority. Saint Benedict said of the Divine Office: “Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (*Rule*, chap. 43). We may apply this principle by analogy to the eucharist and say that it must always take priority. It must be the center and the source of meaning in our lives.⁴⁹⁸

From this, it follows that no community of Christians can celebrate the eucharist without a priest. It also means that the shortage of priests

494 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 405; cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh.* III, q. 73, a. 6, co., in: <https://aquinas.cc> (accessed on 28.08.2024).

495 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters*, 249.

496 [My translation]. “Die Eucharistie ist das Sakrament der Einheit. Als solche ist sie nicht nur Mittel- und Höhepunkt des Lebens der Gemeinde, sondern auch der zentrale Vollzug der Gemeindeleitung.” KASPER Walter, *Der priesterliche Dienst – Repräsentation Jesu Christi als Haupt der Kirche*, 303.

497 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 406.

498 *Ibid.*, 411–413 (*A celebration of Priestly Ministry*, 159–161).

can only be salvaged by priestly vocations, not by lay people in pastoral service.⁴⁹⁹ Furthermore, it follows also that this basic office is to be understood in a comprehensive sense together with the other priestly tasks. It ought not to be considered in isolation as ritual duty. In this context, Kasper criticizes such tendencies and practices in which lay people are constituted as community leaders, while reserving the presidency of the priest only for the celebration of the mass. Precisely by so doing, the sense of the priesthood becomes distorted. It turns its meaning again into a magic, ritualistic action. It leads back to the medieval separation of the powers of consecration and jurisdiction. On the contrary, the priest must remain the servant leader, the shepherd of the community, because the responsibility for the sacrament of the unity of the community was entrusted to him through ordination.⁵⁰⁰ For the same reason, the preaching ministry is tied unto the priesthood and cannot be separated from it. Thus, Kasper retracts his earlier opinion on lay preaching and lay celebration of the Eucharist.⁵⁰¹ Equally, Kasper is now sceptical and apprehensive about the widespread of word and communion services without priests, which are partly taken as replacements of the Sunday Masses.⁵⁰²

499 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters*, 249.

500 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Der Leitungsdienst in der Gemeinde*, 112, 115f., 121f.; cf. —, *Der priesterliche Dienst – Repräsentation Jesu Christi als Haupt der Kirche*, 303, 305.

501 Cf. *Ibid.*, 303. Here, Kasper explicitly distances himself from the Theses of Karl Rahner (anyone who performs a certain task permanently in the Church is by that very act participating in the sacramental priesthood and therefore, ought to be ordained) and Edward Schillebeeckx (in emergency situations, lay people may celebrate the eucharist without ordained priests). Kasper rather follows the teaching of Vatican II. Cf. *Ibid.*, 306; cf. —, *Der Leitungsdienst in der Gemeinde*, 115; cf. —, *Das kirchliche Amt in der Diskussion. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Edward Schillebeeckx »Das kirchliche Amt«* (1983), in: *WKGS* 6, Freiburg i. Br. 2014, 519–533; 528–533. Besides, Kasper seems to have given up his own idea of eucharistic celebration without priests already in 1973. Cf. —, *Neue Aspekte im Verständnis des Priesteramtes*, 206f.; cf. —, *Die pastoralen Dienste der Gemeinde*, 83, 89; cf. —, *Die schädlichen Nebenwirkungen des Priestermangels*, 101; cf. —, *Die Feier der Eucharistie*, 664–669; cf. —, *Sakrament der Einheit* (2004), in: *WKGS* 10, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 222–313; 231–235. See also his rejection of lay preaching in the Mass for reason of the office-character of liturgical presider. Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 389.

502 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters*, 249; cf. —, *Der Leitungsdienst in der Gemeinde*, 124; cf. —, *Die Wahrheit in Liebe tun – heute Priester sein* (1989), in: *WKGS* 12, 259–275; 266; cf. —, *Diener der Freude*, 414–418; cf. —, *Sakrament der Einheit*, 228, 231.

6.9 Primacy of God's Mystery

In a reflection on the priesthood today, Kasper elaborates on the essence of the Church. He describes her under three aspects which he considers to be “the guiding concepts for the priestly duty”: *mysterium*, *communio*, *mission*.⁵⁰³ For the issue of the basic priestly office, the first aspect is significant: *mysterium*. The Church is first and foremost a mystery. The Vatican II Council titled the first chapter of its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *The Mystery of the Church*. The reason for choosing this title is, according to him, to move away from a “triumphalistic, clericalistic and juridical concept of the Church”.⁵⁰⁴ At the same time, understanding the Church primarily as a mystery, is an apt response for an epoch and society which believes, that everything must be rationally penetrated, and therefore, has weaned itself from a sense of the mystery of God. Man cannot live permanently in such a state. This is evident in the new quests for some religiosity, despite the overabundance of earthly satisfactions. The quest for God expresses itself in a religious pluralism and syncretism. In any case, the phenomenon bears witness to the presence of a mystery in man: he is created by God and for God.⁵⁰⁵

What is specific to Christianity is the fact that God has revealed himself definitively in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the incarnated mystery of God.

According to the witness of St. Paul and of the whole New Testament, the whole reality has been created through Jesus Christ, for him and in him (*Col. 1:16f.*). Jesus Christ is the A and O, the beginning and the end of all reality (*Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13*). He is the key, the centre, the axis and the goal of the whole history of humanity. All aspirations of history and culture converge towards him. Therefore, from Jesus Christ light is shed upon all areas of reality ...⁵⁰⁶

503 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Wahrheit in Liebe tun – heute Priester sein*, 267–275.

504 Cf. *Ibid.*, 267.

505 Cf. *Ibid.*, 267f.; cf. —, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters in unserer Zeit*, 283–285.

506 [My translation]. “Nach dem Zeugnis des Paulus wie des ganzen Neuen Testaments ist die gesamte Wirklichkeit durch Jesus Christus, auf ihn hin und in ihm geschaffen, in ihm hat alles Bestand (*Kol 1,16f.*). Jesus Christus ist das A und das O, der Anfang und das Ende

The vocation of the priest is to “interpret”, i.e., communicate and bear witness to, this mystery of God in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 16:26, Eph. 3:4f., 1 Cor. 4:1). The basic approach to the priestly office is not sociological, psychological or pedagogical, relevant though these are. Rather it is of a faith-inspired and theological nature, i.e., based on the person of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰⁷

Kasper traces the significance of such an approach for the priestly life back to the primacy of prayer, and ultimately back to the ministry of sanctification. The priestly ministry does not depend primarily on external achievements, but on a relationship of faith with God, on being-with-Jesus.

We are much still pastoral pelagians who depend on their own action rather than on God. The most important thing we can do is to give more room to God's action through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, and so not obstructing the grace of God ... Without such a spiritual effort, we can indeed ›stimulate‹ a few things in the communities, but we cannot really do or achieve anything. »Apart from me you can do nothing« (*Jn. 15:5*) ... Therefore, before being presiders of our communities, we must be prayer leaders of our communities.⁵⁰⁸

Kasper does not mention here the eucharist as the locus of being prayer leaders, but it is undoubtedly implied. For, where does the priest exercise his *prayer leadership* most supremely other than at the eucharist or in the sacrament of reconciliation? The primacy of prayer leadership

aller Wirklichkeit (*Offb 1,8; 21,6; 22,13*). Er ist der Schlüssel, der Mittelpunkt, die Achse und das Ziel der ganzen Menschheitsgeschichte, auf ihn hin konvergieren alle Bestrebungen der Geschichte und der Kultur. Von Jesus Christus her fällt darum Licht auf alle Bereiche der Wirklichkeit” KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters in unserer Zeit*, 285f.

507 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Die Wahrheit in Liebe tun – heute Priester sein*, 268f.

508 [My translation]. “Wir sind noch viel zu sehr pastorale Pelagianer, die statt auf Gott auf das eigene Tun setzen. Das Wichtigste, was wir tun können, ist, dem Tun Gottes durch Jesus Christus im Heiligen Geist Raum zu geben und uns so der Gnade Gottes nicht in den Weg stellen. ... Ohne solche geistliche Bemühung können wir in den Gemeinden zwar einiges ›losmachen‹, wir können aber nichts wirklich tun und vollbringen. »Ohne mich könnt ihr nichts tun« (*Joh 15,5*) ... Bevor wir deshalb Vorsteher unserer Gemeinden sind, müssen wir Vorbeter unserer Gemeinden sein. ›Geistliche‹ hat man früher die Priester genannt und nennt man sie heute noch oft. Sind wir dies wirklich?” *Ibid.*, 269.

underscores and concretizes the primacy of God's operation. Thus, a few years later, Kasper makes it clear that the primacy of the mystery of God and the prayer leadership of the priest ultimately means the primacy of the sacramental service of the priest:

The apostle writes: »For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes« (1 Cor. 11:26). The sacramental celebration, especially the celebration of the eucharist, is also a proclamation in sign and deed. The stewardship of the mysteries of God, therefore, takes place in an intensive way in the celebration of the sacraments, especially through the celebration of the eucharist. The eucharistic celebration is the centre and summit of priestly action. In the eucharist, we celebrate each time the ›mystery of faith‹. In it, the mystery of our faith, death and resurrection of Christ, becomes present ... Therefore, there is nothing more important for us priests, than to celebrate the eucharist and to do it as daily as possible. We should live for and from it, consistently draw new strength, trust and joy from it. No where else can we with the same density be ›stewards of God's mysteries‹ and make life in fullness accessible to the people.⁵⁰⁹

6.10 Repraesentatio Christi Capitis Ecclesiae

Kasper takes up again his earlier argument on unity which he has used for the priority of leadership and turns it into an argument for the priority of sanctification by giving a new interpretation to the New Testament notion of representation.

509 [My translation]. "Der Apostel schreibt: »Sooft ihr das tut, verkündet ihr den Tod des Herrn« (1 Kor 11,26). Die sakramentale Feier, besonders die Feier der Eucharistie, ist also Tat- und Zeichenverkündigung. Die Verwaltung der Geheimnisse Gottes geschieht darum in besonders intensiver Weise durch die Feier der Sakramente, besonders durch die Feier der Eucharistie. Die eucharistische Feier bildet den Mittel- und Höhepunkt priesterlichen Tuns. In der Eucharistie begehen wir jedes Mal das ›Geheimnis des Glaubens‹. In ihr wird das tiefste Geheimnis unseres Glaubens, Tod und Auferstehung Jesu Christi, gegenwärtig ... Es gibt darum für uns Priester nichts Wichtigeres, als Eucharistie feiern und sie möglichst täglich zu feiern. Auf sie hin und aus ihr sollen wir leben, immer wieder neu Kraft, Zuversicht und Freude schöpfen. Nirgends anders können wir in der gleichen Dichte ›Verwalter der Geheimnisse Gottes‹ sein und den Menschen das Leben in Fülle erschließen." KASPER Walter, *Sein und Sendung des Priesters in unserer Zeit*, 286f.; cf. —, *Sakrament der Einheit*, 236f.

First of all, it *does not* mean representing someone who is actually absent. It is not simply a symbolic representation. It is a representation of someone, who is actually present and operates *really* through the representative. “Jesus Christ did not institute and equip the Church only once, such that she could now ›move on‹ by herself. The Church as well as every individual Christian lives out each of its achievements completely through Christ.”⁵¹⁰ Each Christian represents Christ in a certain sense by virtue of baptism – the sacrament through which Christ lives in him. He bears witness for Christ by his life and makes him present as prophet, priest and king. In this way, he exercises his common priesthood which is grounded in baptism. He also does this by building up the Church with the charisms he received from the Holy Spirit. However, no one has the same charisms and services as the others. There are different gifts.⁵¹¹ It is at this point that the case and sense of a special priesthood comes in. The priest represents Christ in a special way. The same principle of the New Testament representation applies here: Jesus Christ is *really* the one working through the priest in preaching, administering the sacraments, and leading the people. This is so because his “cause” (“*Sache*”) and his person are not two different or separable realities, but are identical. He offers himself in a real way through the priestly ministry. “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Lk 10:16). St. Paul also describes his apostleship in the same manner: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).⁵¹²

Secondly, the priestly representation takes place in two directions. The one direction is what Kasper just described above – the catabatic movement, i.e., from Christ. The priest represents Christ before the community. For this reason, the uniqueness of the ministerial priest-

510 [My translation]. “Jesus Christus hat die Kirche nicht nur einmal gegründet und eingerichtet, so dass sie nun selbst ›weitermachen‹ könnte. Die Kirche wie jeder einzelne Christ lebt in jedem ihrer Vollzüge ganz vom gegenwärtigen Herrn her.” KASPER Walter, *Der priesterliche Dienst – Repräsentation Jesu Christi als Haupt der Kirche*, 298.

511 Cf. *Ibid.*, 296f.

512 Cf. *Ibid.*, 295f.

hood as against the common priesthood consists in the fact that he is charged with the pastoral care for other charisms and duties serving the building up of the Church. This is what St. Paul means when he writes that Christ constituted apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers in the Church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, ...” (Eph. 4:11–13).⁵¹³ The other direction, according to Kasper, is anabatic. This means that the priest represents the community of the faithful before God, not by his own power, but because Christ himself empowered the Church for it. He bestowed his Holy Spirit, and therefore, the gift of priestly office upon the Church. The Charism of priesthood is a gift to the Church, so that through it and in the Holy Spirit, she may be able to come as a Church before the Father in thanksgiving.⁵¹⁴

What all of this means for the question of the basic priestly office is: the “place” where the priestly representation is comprehensively accomplished in both directions is the eucharistic celebration.

This double character is given expression especially in the eucharist. For, on the one hand, at the eucharist, the priest acts ›in persona Christi‹ in a special way. Otherwise, he wouldn’t in any way be able to say: ›This is my body‹, ›This is my blood‹. On the other hand, at the eucharist, the priest speaks and acts also in the name of the Church. He is so to speak her speaker and leader who offers the sacrifice of praise ... The Second Vatican Council expressed this double function in the Constitution on the Church. In *Lumen Gentium* 10, it states: ›He (that is the ministerial priest) makes present the eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people‹.⁵¹⁵

513 Cf. *Ibid.*, 297.

514 Cf. *Ibid.*, 299.

515 [My translation]. “Dieser Doppelcharakter kommt bei der Eucharistie besonders deutlich zum Ausdruck. Denn einerseits handelt der Priester bei der Eucharistie in besonderer Weise ›in persona Christi‹. Anders könnte er gar nicht sagen: ›Das ist mein Leib‹, ›Das ist mein Blut‹. Andererseits spricht und handelt der Priester gerade bei der Eucharistie auch im Namen der Kirche. Gleichsam als ihr Sprecher und Anführer bringt er das Opfer des Lobes dar ... Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil hat in der Kirchenkonstitution diese Doppelfunktion klar zum Ausdruck gebracht. In *Lumen Gentium* 10 heißt es: ›Er (das ist der

6.11 The Mandate of Re-Enactment

This may be seen as the bastion of all of Kasper's arguments. He appeals simply and directly to Christ's mandate to the twelve apostles at the Last Supper:

The mandate »Do this in remembrance of me« (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24f) is addressed to the disciples, who celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus. The Council of Trent, therefore, teaches that at the Last Supper Jesus appointed his apostles to the priestly ministry (DH 1740; 1752). The Word appointment (*institutio*) is not to be understood in the sense of a formal, juridical act, rather in a deeper sense, namely, that from its inner essence the priestly ministry is established in the mandate of Christ to celebrate the eucharist.⁵¹⁶

The mandate is also not to be understood as the institution of an isolated act (transubstantiation), but must remain in the bigger context of the life and work of Jesus Christ.⁵¹⁷ The connecting factor between the bigger context of Christ's life and the special event of the Last Supper is the element of meal. During his earthly life, Jesus was often at meals with people, especially the so-called sinners. He also instituted the eucharist in the form of a meal.⁵¹⁸ The latter was, however, an intrinsically unique kind of meal. The differences are at the same time pointers

Amtspriester) vollzieht in der Person Christi das eucharistische Opfer und bringt es im Namen des ganzen Volkes Gott dar.« Ibid., 300; cf. —, Aspekte einer Theologie der Liturgie. Liturgie angesichts der Krise der Moderne – für eine neue liturgische Kultur (2010), in: *WKGS* 10, Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 15–83; 65f.

516 [My translation]. "Der Auftrag »Tut dies zu meinem Gedächtnis« (Lk 22,19; 1 Kor 11,24f.) ergeht an die Jünger, die das Letzte Mahl mit Jesus feierten. Das Trienter Konzil lehrte darum, dass Jesus beim Abendmahl seine Apostel ins priesterliche Amt eingesetzt hat (DH 1740; 1752). Das Wort Einsetzung (*institutio*) ist nicht im Sinn eines formal juristischen Aktes zu verstehen, sondern in dem tieferen Sinn, dass das priesterliche Amt von seinem inneren Wesen her im Auftrag Christi zur Feier der Eucharistie begründet ist." KASPER Walter, *Erneuerung aus dem Ursprung. Theologie, Christologie, Eucharistie*, Ostfildern 2021, 142.

517 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 401f.

518 Cf. Ibid., 402.

of the theological significance of the mandate for a eucharistic understanding of the priesthood:

1. Unlike at other meals, Jesus held the Last Supper only with the twelve (Mk. 14:17, Mt 26:20). Therefore, it was only to the twelve that the mandate was given. The evangelist Luke reinforces this fact by naming the twelve at this point “apostles” (Lk. 22:14). By so doing, he indicates that it is an “official commission”.⁵¹⁹ This is also one of the arguments Kasper uses in his rebuttal of Edward Schillebeeck’s thesis that a lay person can preside over the eucharist – a position formerly held by Kasper himself. Though Kasper notes cautiously: “Certainly, we cannot turn them [*scil.* Mk. 14:17, Mt 26:20, Lk. 22:14] into a scriptural proof for the exclusive eucharistic power of the ministerial priesthood, but still from these statements there is an indication and a New Testament foundation for the quite unanimous post-New-Testament tradition.”⁵²⁰
2. Unlike other meals, the Last Supper was a Passover meal. In it, Jesus took up both the past (exodus) and the future (the ultimate realization of the kingdom of God) which he proclaimed. By so doing, he moves the whole proclamation of God’s kingdom into the eucharist.⁵²¹ In the eucharist, the paradox of the *already* and *not yet* accomplished kingdom of God is held present.

Moreover, the word “remembrance”, as understood in the biblical world, does not merely mean a subjective recalling of the past, but also means making the covenant which Christ instituted through his death and resurrection objectively present.⁵²² In other words, the mandate is bound to a promise. We remain in the meal-communion of Christ and the dawning kingdom of God remains amongst us as long as the mandate is

519 Cf. *Ibid.*, 402f.

520 [My translation]. „Daraus lässt sich gewiss kein Schriftbeweis für die ausschließliche Eucharistie vollmacht des ordinierten kirchlichen Amtes machen, aber ein Hinweis und eine neutestamentliche Grundlage für die ziemlich einhellige nach-neutestamentliche Tradition ergibt sich aus diesen Aussagen schon.“ KASPER Walter, *Das kirchliche Amt in der Diskussion*, 529.

521 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 402, 418f.

522 Cf. *Ibid.*, 402f.

being carried out. It is the “great inheritance,” the “farewell gift” of Jesus to his Church; his enduring presence through the continually renewed celebration of the Passover.⁵²³ Thus, the central task of the priest is to draw grace from the eucharist both for himself and for the others.

The celebration of the eucharist is thus the center and summit of the life and work of those who have received the charge “Do this in memory of me.” The celebration of the Mass is the source of the priestly existence and the goal that gives this existence its meaning (*Lumen Gentium* 11: *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 6; 13). [sic!] Accordingly, the celebration of the eucharist will renew in each priest his strength, his courage, and his joy.⁵²⁴

6.12 Transference of Notion and Content: From *Sacrificium* to *Sacerdos*

As already shown above, in the post-conciliar years, Kasper uses the profanity of the terms for New Testament priesthood as an argument to discard the sanctification ministry as the basic office of the priest. In his later years, it no longer counts for him as an argument. In fact, it becomes for him a support for the priority of the eucharistic ministry, because the eucharist in the biblical testimony is intrinsically a sacrifice, not only a meal. The terminology of the report on the Last Supper also indicates that it stands in an indissoluble connection with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Mention is made of the “blood of the covenant”, a terminology borrowed from the Old Testament (Mk. 14:24, Ex. 24:8). The report also uses expressions such as “for you”, “breaking” of the bread, “shedding” of blood. Jesus’ self-commitment is a sacrifice. The report in St. John’s gospel about an outflow of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus on the cross indicates that the sacraments of baptism and eucharist have their source in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The eucharistic celebration re-enacts Christ’s one-time sacrifice

523 Cf. *Ibid.*, 403f.

524 *Ibid.*, 404. (*A celebration of Priestly Ministry*, 147).

on the cross, though not in the sense of repeating or replacing it.⁵²⁵ The Catholic theological tradition has, right from the beginning, held unto the sacrificial character of the Mass, despite individual and occasional reductions. For example, in the *Didache*, the eucharist is also called a sacrifice (θυσία) and Ignatius of Antioch uses the concept θυσιαστήριον (place of sacrifice) to designate the Christian altar.⁵²⁶

Understanding the eucharist as a sacrifice also has a straight implication for the priesthood. Given that the eucharist is a *sacrificium*, the concept of *sacerdos* (priest) was also adopted for bishops and presbyters. It is, therefore, not a relapse into the pagan idea of priesthood. It, rather, ensues from the typological interpretation of the Old Testament and from the inner logic of the New Testament priesthood. Priesthood (*sacerdotium*) and sacrifice (*sacrificium*) belong together.⁵²⁷

Here again, he emphasizes that the centrality of the eucharist in the priestly ministry is not an isolated one, but must be seen in the context of Christ's whole life. The priest is not only ordained to celebrate the sacrifice of the eucharist liturgically, but to live it out from his inner being. This is why the bishop reminds the ordination candidate during the handing over of the eucharistic gifts: "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's Cross."⁵²⁸

6.13 Eucharist: Christ in Fullness

Another reason given by Kasper for the priority of the eucharist in the priest's ministry is simply what the eucharist *is*: Christ himself in fullness. In it, Christ gives himself wholly to the faithful. It is the treasure of the Church in its fullness. Consequently, no other activity of the priest is "more important" than to make it possible for the people to

525 Cf. *Ibid.*, 407–409.

526 Cf. *Ibid.*, 409; cf. *Didache* 14,1–3 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 364–367); cf. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Magnesians* 7,2; cf. —, *Letter to the Romans* 2,2; cf. —, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4. (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 206f., 226f., 238f.)

527 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Diener der Freude*, 409f.

528 Cf. *Ibid.*, 410. English translation: *The Roman Pontifical*, 215.

participate in and live from it. It does not mean that the priest is a “sacrament-robot” merely dishing out eucharistic celebrations; rather, the celebration of the holy mass becomes a life-culture sustaining and nourishing his inner self and ministry. It is the centripetal point holding all other activities together. It becomes the source transforming the priest from within so that he himself gives his life for others, as Christ did.⁵²⁹

6.14 Priestly Friendship and the Eucharist

In a similar line of thought as John Paul II,⁵³⁰ Kasper also justifies the primacy of the eucharist in the priestly life and ministry by an appeal to Christ’s declaration of his friendship to the twelve as recorded in Jn. 15:15. The intimate relationship with Christ is the prerequisite for carrying out his mission. The link to the eucharist consists simply in the fact that Christ is the eucharist. Thus, through the celebration of the mystery, the priest is consistently and existentially incorporated into Christ’s own life.

Like the first disciples, every priest is called personally, insofar as he is with Jesus Christ and is sent by Jesus Christ (Mk 3.13 par). Gathering and sending therefore constitute the two poles of priestly existence. To put it in other words: growing in personal friendship with Jesus, and becoming, like Jesus, the friend of all people and to mediate to them through word and sacrament the friendship and communion with God. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15.13). For a deeper understanding of the priestly ministry we can depart from Jesus’ farewell discourses in John’s gospel: ‘I shall no longer call you servants ... I call you friends’ (Jn 15.15). The basis and centre of the priestly existence is the personal friendship and likening to Jesus. This means that the priest, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist in which the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ become present, is taken in an existential way into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ so that by following Jesus he gives his life completely to God and his kingdom and

⁵²⁹ Cf. KASPER Walter, *Gottes Geist erhält die Kirche* (1993), in: *WKGS* 19/I, 66–72: 70f.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Section 4.7.

as good shepherd for the people entrusted to him. In this Jesuanic and New Testament sense, the sacerdotal dimension pertains existentially to being a priest and constitutes its innermost centre.⁵³¹

6.15 Chapter Summary

Kasper gives two answers to the question of the fundamental office of the priesthood. In his earlier theology, he is a clear proponent of the primacy of the leadership ministry, basing it on arguments such as the profane terms used for priests in the bible, unity in the Church and in the world, testimony of Church history, the self-sacrificial mark of Christ's priesthood.

In his later theology of priesthood, as from 1978, he opts for the priority of sanctification in the priest's life and ministry, especially through the eucharist. His arguments include: priesthood as a pointer to the transcendent, eucharist as the sacrament of unity, the primacy of God's mystery, priesthood as a special form of representing Christ, his commission to the twelve at the Last Supper, and finally, the notional relation between sacrifice and priesthood.

531 KASPER Walter, *Die Katholische Kirche*, 334f. (*The Catholic Church*, 234).

Chapter 7:

Criticisms in Theological Literature

This chapter presents some points of criticisms by theologians and philosophers on the different positions and arguments of three authors. It is not exhaustive.

7.1 John Paul II

7.1.1 Herbert Vorgrimler: Addressees of the Re-Enactment Mandate

Vorgrimler's criticism is a pre-empted one. In his rebuttal letter to John Paul II's Holy Thursday letter to priests in 1979, he particularly focuses on the question of celibacy and the practical difficulties raised by the shortage of priests. In that context he touches upon the pope's emphasis on the necessity and indispensability of priests for the celebration of the eucharist. He takes as leverage the pope's words of encouragement to self-doubting priests:

Dear Brothers: you who have borne "the burden of the day and the heat" (Mt 20:12), who have put your hand to the plough and do not turn back (cf. Lk 9:62), and perhaps even more those of you who are doubtful of the meaning of your vocation or of the value of your service: think of the places where people anxiously await a Priest, and where for many years; feeling the lack of such a Priest, they do not cease to hope for his presence. And sometimes it happens that they meet in an abandoned shrine, and place on the altar a stole which they still keep, and recite all the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy; and then, at the moment that corresponds to the transubstantiation a deep silence comes down upon them, a silence sometimes broken by a sob... so ardently do they desire to hear the words that only the lips of a Priest can efficaciously utter. So much do they desire Eucharistic Communion, in which they can share only through the ministry of a priest, just as they also so eagerly wait to hear the divine words of pardon: *Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis!* So deeply

do they feel the absence of a Priest among them!... Such places are not lacking in the world. So if one of you doubts the meaning of his priesthood, if he thinks it is “socially” fruitless or useless, reflect on this!⁵³²

Reacting to these words, Vorgrimler probes the possible motive of the Pope for this emphasis on the indispensability of the ministerial priesthood for the eucharist. He suspects a reading of the Last Supper narrative according to which the re-enactment commission were directed by Christ only to the twelve apostles. In his own words, he asks John Paul II: “You will certainly not attempt to say, that those words »Do this in memory of me« were directed only to the eleven and their successors.”⁵³³ In other words, he is of the view that not only the twelve apostles were present at the Last Supper. He asserts as a certified fact among theologians that the Church reserved the powers of the eucharistic consecration and the absolution to the priest only later in the course of history of regulating her structure.⁵³⁴

Vorgrimler’s pre-emption about the John Paul’s conviction turned out to be true later. In the consequent years, the Pope used precisely this historical argument which Vorgrimler probably tried to forestall so to say, or rather, to prophylactically refute.

7.1.2 Karl Herbst: Priesthood without Sacraments

Karl Herbst dissents from the emphasis placed on the duty of the priest to sanctify the people of God through the sacraments, especially through the eucharist, in John Paul II’s Holy Thursday letter of 1979. He rests his arguments basically on two presuppositions:

1. Firstly, for him, Christ’s Ministry consists only in two things: Word and deed, that is, the proclamation of the Good News of the kingdom of God and healing as the manifest sign of that Good News.

532 JOHN PAUL II, *Novo incipiente*, §10 (SOCIAS James, *Letters to My Brother Priests*, 22f.)

533 [My translation]. VORGRIMLER Herbert, Über die Problematik der Argumente, in: Georg DENZLER (ed.), *Priester für heute. Antworten auf das Schreiben Johannes Pauls II. an die Priester*, München 1980, 23–34: 32.

534 Cf. Ibid.

Jesus was a herald of the Kingdom of God. This is also the precise assignment he entrusted to his apostles, nothing more, nothing less.⁵³⁵

2. The second presupposition is his definition of the content of the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. For him, this consists in two things: God's unmerited love as the source of salvation and man's repentant openness as the corresponding response.⁵³⁶

As biblical backdrop for the first presupposition, Herbst refers to Lk 4:18f., 9:1.6, Mk 3:14, 6:7, Mt 4:23, 10:1. Based on that, he argues that every other conception of the duty of the apostles is a matter of later historical accruals in the Church. Due to external influences, the duty of priests shifted from preaching and healing to cultic preoccupations. They were no longer conceived as proclaimers of the good news of the kingdom of God, as originally intended by Christ. They adopted the roles of the Old Testament and pagan priests. They became preoccupied with offering sacrifice for the atonement of sins and the administration of sacraments, understood as effecting grace by the very act of doing them (*ex opere operato*). Cultic purity replaced holiness from within and it produced the hierarchical order of the priesthood in the Church. It is this human traditional scheme that John Paul II followed in prioritizing the sanctifying office of the priesthood.⁵³⁷

As biblical support for the second presupposition, he mentions Jesus' opposition against the conflation of inner righteousness with ritualism (Mk 7:14–21) and the report in John's Gospel that Jesus himself did not administer baptism (Jn 4:2). Following this presupposition, Herbst is of the conviction that Jesus Christ himself did not see his passion and death as an expiatory sacrifice for sin, but it was a later interpretation by Jewish-Christian theologians. Christ reckoned, right from the beginning, with the fact, that anyone who radically dedicates his life for the realization of God's plan, risks being executed, even though it is against the

535 Cf. HERBST Karl, Treue zu dem Christus, der mit Jesus identisch ist, in: Georg DENZLER (ed.), *Priester für heute. Antworten auf das Schreiben Johannes Pauls II. an die Priester*, München 1980, 51–62: 55–58.

536 Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.

537 Cf. *Ibid.*, 56.

will of God. For the forgiveness of sins, God has no need of any sacrifice. He simply forgives a repentant sinner who is also willing to forgive his fellow men. Herbst concludes: nothing, including the sacraments, can replace the simple salvation scheme of God. Christ did not bring salvation in the form of sacraments. Instead, he brought it as an unmerited love offer of God, to which each human being ought to respond.⁵³⁸

7.1.3 Norbert Greinacher: Profane Salvation and Priesthood of Leadership

For Norbert Greinacher, John Paul II's traditional understanding of the priesthood (sacrifice, sanctification, the sacred) in his Holy Thursday letter of 1979 raises questions about his knowledge of the latest findings of biblical exegesis.⁵³⁹ In his criticisms, two realities are intertwined in the history of religion: salvation and of the priesthood. Man's conception of the one depends on his conception of the other. In a clear-cut rejection of the Pope's teaching, Greinacher insists that the current crisis of the priesthood precisely stems from the conception of the Catholic priesthood over the centuries in terms of sacrifice and sacrality. This he considers to be a regression to the tradition of the Old Testament and to paganism. Why?

1. Salvation in the pagan and non-Christian religions: The religions of the world right from ancient times were based on a dualistic view of the universe in which there was a clear demarcation between the sacred (places, times) and the profane. The coming and work of Jesus Christ radically put an end to the dichotomy. Salvation, the kingdom of God, or the encounter with God is no longer restricted to any special place, time or thing. The only restriction is the rejection of God's grace by the human person himself. In Greinacher's interpretation, this is evidenced in the Scriptures by the manner in which Christ relativised the significance of the temple. For instance, his word to

538 Cf. *Ibid.*, 57f.

539 Cf. GREINACHER Norbert, *Vom Priester zum Gemeindeleiter*, in: Georg DENZLER (ed.), *Priester für heute. Antworten auf das Schreiben Johannes Pauls II. an die Priester*, München 1980, 66–84: 82.

the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (Jn 4:21–23). Likewise, St. Paul sustains this view by identifying Christians as temples of God (1 Kor. 3:16f.).⁵⁴⁰ Greinacher also makes mention – without name – of an early church apologist who argued against a Jew that Christians do not have temples and altars.⁵⁴¹ Greinacher however, thinks that Christians of the early Church seem "not yet to have been matured enough" to sustain this radically new faith in the non-dualistic presence of God in the universe. Under pagan and Jewish influences, a re-sacralisation of the Church took place: Church buildings became new forms of temples and sacraments were introduced.⁵⁴² Hence, the new mission of the Church, in Greinacher's view, should be the desacralization of salvation, and therefore, of the priesthood. In this sense, Vatican II's definition of the Church as the "sacrament of salvation" would mean to let men understand that God's salvation is purely invisible, unattached to any sacred place, time or thing. Interpreting Karl Rahner's description of the eucharist as the "liturgy of the world", he defines the eucharist as only a visible sign of the fact that the mere acceptance of one's own life and death "drives" one into God's salvation.⁵⁴³

2. Priesthood of the New Testament: On the basis of his concept of salvation Greinacher argues that the priestly office of the New Testament is primarily a priesthood of community leadership, and not of cultic function or sanctification, though the celebration of the eucharist is part of the leadership role. His arguments are practically those of the earlier Walter Kasper: regulation of Charisms.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 69f.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 70. Greinacher gives no details about which Christian apologist he is referring to.

⁵⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 71f.

7.1.4 Xaver Janssen: Eucharist as Meal and the Priesthood of the Faithful

Xaver Janssen, a 67-year-old parish priest as at the time of the publication of John Paul II's Holy Thursday letter (1979), wrote a reply to the pope.⁵⁴⁵ In it he rejects vehemently the sacral view of the priesthood. He brings in a number of criticisms based on his own personal reflection of the New Testament, but they all seem to revolve around two convictions of his: the Last Supper as a *sign* and the *right* of the community of the faithful to celebrate the eucharist. His points are as follows:

1. The Last Supper was not a kind of “sacred cultic act”, but “a deeply human and generally understandable sign” (meal). It was an usurpation on the part of the Church to have remodelled the sign after pagan and Old Testament cults of sacrifice. Like Greinacher above, he cites – again without name – the early Christian apologist, according to whom Christians neither have temples nor altars.⁵⁴⁶
2. Christ never ordained priests in the sacral sense. Moreover, the New Testament designated only Christ and the community of believers as priests, and the letter to the Hebrews teaches the end and fulfilment of all priesthoods and sacrifices in the one priesthood of Christ. Christ called the Apostles and sent them to proclaim the gospel. The imposition of hands introduced in the early church served only as a kind of authentication of the passing on of the mandate to others. It was not a transfer of the power to celebrate the eucharist. There is no indication in the Scriptures that Christ instituted a special priesthood at the Last Supper. Christ did not address the words – Do this in memory of me – to the individual 12 Apostles, but to the whole community of believers. It is to the community of the faithful that Christ entrusted the celebration of the eucharist. In this, they exercise their royal priesthood. Thus, the apostles are entrusted with mission of the word, while the community takes responsibility for

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. JANSSEN Xaver, Nie darf der Dialog aufhören, in: Georg DENZLER (ed.), *Priester für heute. Antworten auf das Schreiben Johannes Pauls II. an die Priester*, München 1980, 84–92.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 85.

the sacraments. This was the conviction of the early Church, and is proved, according to Janssen, in Acts of Apostles 2:42,46: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... they broke the bread from house to house.”⁵⁴⁷ The gatherings were led by the “presbyters” who, according to Janssen, were outstanding men of the community. All these indicate that restricting the power to celebrate the eucharist to ordained priests entails divesting the common faithful of their right and responsibility to exercise their royal priesthood.⁵⁴⁸

7.1.5 Edward Kilmartin: Eucharist and the Ministerial Priesthood

In his commentary on John Paul II’s Holy Thursday letter *Dominicae cenae* (1980), he criticizes amongst other things the pope’s conviction that the ministerial priesthood was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, and thereby, posing an immediate relation between the eucharist and the priesthood. His arguments can be set systematically in three points:

7.1.5.1 A Doctrinal Flaw of the Tridentine Council

His argument here runs thus: As a doctrine and theological conviction, the idea that Christ instituted the ministerial priesthood when he instituted the eucharist and gave the order to do it in memory of him, goes back to the Council of Trent. The council conceived this, however, as a reply to a specific doctrinal challenge of the time, namely, the unclarity as regards the powers of jurisdiction and eucharistic consecration and their implications for the episcopal and presbyteral offices. In that situation, the Council defined the priesthood more strongly in terms of the sacramental power for the eucharistic celebration, thereby reducing the meaning and identity of the priesthood to a cultic one. This doctrinal decision became the benchmark of the post-Tridentine theology of the priesthood. It is this Tridentine interpretation of the Last Supper narra-

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 85f.

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 86–88.

tive that John Paul II re-presents in his letter, though he complements it with the perspective of the Second Vatican Council by not reducing the priestly identity solely to the eucharistic celebration.⁵⁴⁹

However, the teaching about the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper is, according to Kilmartin, a problematic one. He asserts that the modern Catholic dogmatic theology, due to new insights from the fields of modern historical researches and biblical exegesis, does no longer simply locate the institution of the ministerial priesthood at the Last Supper. It, rather, restrains from seeing a direct relation between the eucharist and the ministerial priesthood.⁵⁵⁰ Kilmartin outlines three claims which modern Catholic dogmatic theology can only afford itself about the priesthood and eucharist: firstly, there is no evidence in the New Testament as regards whether or not the office of the priesthood is a pre-requisite for the celebration of the eucharist; secondly, the New Testament qualifies the ministry of the bishop and presbyters as “priestly” not because they celebrate the eucharist, but because in *everything* they do for the Church, they are mediators of the priesthood of Christ; thirdly, it was not until the beginning of the second century, parallel to the rising acknowledgement of the centrality of the eucharist in actualizing the salvific work of Christ, that the bishop or an office holder under him started presiding over it.⁵⁵¹

7.1.5.2 A Historical Maldevelopment in the Holy Thursday Celebration

Kilmartin takes up the pope’s repeated naming of Holy Thursday as the “feast” or “birthday” of the ministerial priesthood. He traces the special association of Holy Thursday with the ministerial priesthood to a series of historical-liturgical development which, in his view, are tantamount to a clericalization of Holy Thursday. For the sake of data precision, I quote here his historical analysis in its full length:

549 Cf. KILMARTIN Edward, *Church, Eucharist and Priesthood: A Theological Commentary on “The Mystery and Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist*, New York 1981, 5–8.

550 Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.

551 Cf. *Ibid.*

The early medieval Roman episcopal liturgy of Holy Thursday was a preparation for the paschal celebration. The characteristic trait was reconciliation of penitents and, eventually, the blessing of oils for the rite of initiation. The Eucharist, originally linked with Easter before the Jerusalem innovations of the fourth century, had a place in this liturgy as a non-festal Mass. But under the impetus of medieval piety it came more and more to the foreground in the chrisem Mass of Holy Thursday. Urban IV provides one witness to this in the bull *Transiturus* (1264) which inaugurated the feast of *Corpus Christi*: “On the day of the Supper of the Lord when Christ himself instituted this sacrament, the universal Church, occupied with the reconciliation of sinners, the confection of the holy chrisem, the fulfilling of the command of the Lord to wash the feet and other things, cannot be without the celebration of this sacrament, the greatest of all!”

The sixteenth century Council of Trent, following the more common teaching of Scholastic theology, affirmed that the sacrament of the priesthood originated at the Last Supper, But this did not have immediate repercussions on the liturgy of Holy Thursday. The movement toward the formulation of an explicit liturgical reference to the relationship of the ministerial priesthood and Holy Thursday first received official encouragement in the *Ordo hebdomadae sanctae* of 1955. In the General Reform of Holy Week it is suggested that one of the themes of the evening Mass of Holy Thursday be the institution of the *ordo sacerdotalis*. A further development occurred when Paul VI made public, on February 10, 1970, two new changes in the provisional revision of the chrisem Mass of 1965. A new preface was added which refers to the priesthood of Christ, the royal priesthood of the people and the ministry of priests. In addition a form of renewal of priestly promises was inserted. Other changes are also found in the chrisem Mass of the *Missale Romanum* of Paul VI, promulgated on March 26, 1970, which point in the direction of the explicit intention to clericalize this liturgy. For example, the opening collect does not refer to the whole congregation. Setting aside the rules of the venerable Roman liturgical tradition, this prayer is made on behalf of “us” who have been given “a share in his (=Christ’s) consecration to priestly service in your Church.”

These changes in the chrim Mass correspond to what, in fact, it had become in the course of time: a clerical affair traditionally celebrated without a significant number of cathedral parishioners, to say nothing of members of other parishes of the diocese. Bu they hardly coincide with the original intention behind the renewal of the chrim Mass: to make it a celebration of the episcopal local church in its entirety as a priestly people. For this reason the reaction of the liturgists has been, on the whole, rather cool toward the shifting of emphasis to one segment of the local church in the solemn liturgy of the day, and especially to the more general description of Holy Thursday as the “annual feast of priests.”⁵⁵²

7.1.5.3 Monocausality and Christomonism

Kilmartin also argues that the origin of the Church was a process which did not just reach its completion before the death of Christ, but thereafter with his resurrection, ascension and the Pentecost event. It was only then that the Church became fully constituted because then the necessary condition for the possibility of the “abiding saving presence of God in the world” has been fulfilled. Hence, the sacrament of the eucharist is not strictly the same as the Last Supper, the latter having taken place before Christ’s death. Likewise, the offices in the Church cannot be seen as fully constituted by Christ before his death. It is only through his death, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit that they became fully constituted.⁵⁵³ In other words, Kilmartin is saying that the institution of the priesthood cannot be reduced to one single event (the Last Supper) which itself took place before God the Father completed his whole salvific mission in Christ through the Holy Spirit. He, therefore, categorizes the pope’s letter as a christomonistic interpretation of the priesthood, ignoring the pneumatological dimension.⁵⁵⁴

552 *Ibid.*, 16f.

553 *Cf. Ibid.*, 6f.

554 *Cf. Ibid.*, 7.

7.1.6 Herbert Haag: Last Supper without Priesthood

There are basically two premises from which Haag develops his criticism of John Paull II's teaching:

Firstly: According to Haag, in the early Church the celebration of the eucharist was the responsibility of the whole community of believers, not of any priests. The presiders were men or women, married or unmarried taken from the community.⁵⁵⁵

Secondly: He considers Jesus Christ not to be a priest. Nothing of that sort is evidenced in the first four centuries of Christianity. Christ neither wanted to be one nor did he institute any sacrament called priesthood (likewise most of the seven sacraments). In fact, he actively opposed the priesthood of his time. Correspondingly, neither the twelve nor St. Paul were priests. Likewise, the office of the bishop is only an invention of the Church.⁵⁵⁶

Based on these premises, he considers the identification of the Last Supper with the institution of the twelve apostles as priests to be the faulty presumption of 20th century magisterial teachings on priesthood from Pius XI down to John Paul II. In the case of the latter, he refers specifically to the argument in his 1996 Holy Thursday letter that it was at the Last Supper that Christ revealed to them the reason why he called them, namely to make them his priests.⁵⁵⁷ Haag's counter-argument consists of two points:

1. For him, there is no report in the New Testament about the Apostles exercising any priestly powers. It is reported that St. Paul participated in the breaking of the bread (Acts 20:7), but not that he presided over it. Thus, it is open to interpretation; and even if St. Paul indeed presided over the eucharist in any community, it still raises the question of where he got the authority to do that. Given St. Paul's report that the recognized leaders of the Church in Jerusalem (James, Peter and John) acknowledged the grace that he had received (Gal 2:9),

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. HAAG Herbert, *Worauf es ankommt. Wollte Jesus eine Zwei-Stände-Kirche?* Freiburg i. Br. 1997, 7.

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 7f.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 37–39.

Haag takes it for granted that the power to celebrate the eucharist – assuming Paul ever did it – could not have come from the named pillars of the Jerusalem Church, but from the mere fact of Christ having revealed himself to him (1 Cor. 9:1, 15:8).⁵⁵⁸ Haag seems to subscribe to this interpretation since he also considers it enigmatic that James the brother of the Lord became the central leading figure in the Church of Jerusalem though he did not belong to the circle of the twelve. Pushing his logic forward – that is self-revelation of the risen Christ as empowerment to preside over the breaking of the bread – then all the people to whom Christ showed himself after his resurrection must have had the authority to lead in the breaking of the bread – Mary Magdalene, the five hundred (1 Cor. 15:6) which for Haag includes both men and women.⁵⁵⁹

2. Haag argues that John Paul II's (in fact, the Church's) belief that only ordained priests can preside over the celebration of the eucharist rests on a neglect of the different names with which the partakers of the Last Supper are addressed by the authors of the Gospels. St. Luke uses the word "apostles" (22:14), St. Mark writes of "disciples" (14:12,32) or the "twelve" (14:17), St. Matthew calls them "disciples" (14:17) or the "twelve disciples", and St. John speaks of "disciples" (14).⁵⁶⁰ Haag, therefore, seems to imply that these differences in designation prove that not only the twelve were present at the Last Supper. Hence, the reservation of the power to celebrate the breaking of the bread to ordained priests is completely wrong, in his view. This neglect of the variations of names is, according to him the source of interpreting certain words of Christ as strictly addressed to the ordained priests, such as: his words to the 72 disciples – "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Lk 10:2); and "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Lk 10:16); and finally, the conferment of the power to forgive sins on his "disciples" (Jn 20:19–23).⁵⁶¹

558 Cf. *Ibid.*, 40.

559 Cf. *Ibid.*

560 Cf. *Ibid.*, 39f.

561 Cf. *Ibid.*, 40f.

7.1.7 Nilson Lea de Sá: Indeterminacy of the Institution of the Priesthood

He is actually in agreement with the primacy of the sanctification (eucharistic) ministry in John Paul II's theology of the priesthood.⁵⁶² He is, however, critical of one of his arguments that is pivotal for that position: the question of the institution. He neither outrightly rejects nor completely approves John Paul II's teaching on the institution of the ministerial Priesthood at the Last Supper. On the one hand, he questions it from a historical perspective. On the other hand, he tries to salvage it by incorporating other elements from the Pope's other writings – a sort of an extended interpretation.

7.1.7.1 The Historical Problem

Appealing to the findings of Joseph Lecuyer, Erio Castellucci and Saraiva Martins,⁵⁶³ he writes that since the time of the Church Fathers, there has been no consensus on the question of the moment when Christ instituted the ministerial Priesthood. Three opinions coexisted among them:⁵⁶⁴

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit on the resurrection day by Christ to the Apostles for the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:19–23) marks that institutive act: This, he writes, was the opinion of Origen, John Chrysostom, Ammonius of Alexandria and Hesychius of Jerusalem.
2. It took place at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4): this, according to him, was the opinion of Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome, Athanasius, and Severin of Gabala in Syria.
3. Both events of the reception of the Holy Spirit mark *together* the constitutive moment of the ministerial priesthood – the Pentecost perfecting that which was already commenced on the Easter day. He holds this to be the opinion of Gregory Nazianzen, Cyril of Jeru-

⁵⁶² Cf. LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood*, 60–63, 103f.

⁵⁶³ Cf. CASTELLUCCI Erio, *Il ministero ordinato*, Brescia 42014; cf. SARAIVA Martins, *Il sacerdozio ministeriale*, Rome 1991. He mentions no specific work of Joseph Lécuyer.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood*, 50. As regards the Church fathers and theologians to be mentioned, he makes no references to the precise works.

saalem, Cyril of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius, James of Sarug in Syria, Maximus the Confessor, Germanus of Constantinople, Nicolas of Cabasilas, Gregory Palamas, Simeon of Thessalonica, and also medieval Latin theologians of the 11th / 12th centuries like Peter Damian, Honorius of Autun, Abelard, and Richard of Saint Victor. Thomas Aquinas offers, according to him, a synthesis:

Saint Thomas Aquinas, seeking to unify the thought of the Fathers as well as Albert the Great, says that “the Apostles received the power of order before the Ascension, where it is said ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (cf. IV Sent., d. 24, q. 1, a. 2, qc 4, sed contra). A little further on, he affirms that the sacerdotal power was given mainly (*ad principalem actum*) to the Lord’s Supper with the words “Do this ...” and secondly (*ad actum secundarium*) after the Resurrection (cf. IV Sent., d. 24, q. 2, a. 3, ad II).⁵⁶⁵

In fact, the idea that the Last Supper was the institutive moment was introduced, according to Leal de Sá, not until the 12th /13th century. It was introduced, according to him, by Stephen of Autun († 1139) and Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280).⁵⁶⁶ Their basis was the liturgical practice of handing over the paten with host and the chalice with wine (*porrectio instrumentorum*) to the freshly ordained priest – a practice which until its reversion by Pius XII in 1947, was interpreted as the constitutive matter of the sacrament of ordination. They linked this practice with the Christ’s gesture of giving the bread and the wine to his apostles at the Last Supper.⁵⁶⁷

The Last Supper as the moment of the institution received an ecclesial status through the Council of Trent. Hence, he concludes that the Council is the root of John Paul II’s teaching.⁵⁶⁸ However, he does not think that it is completely a wrong view in so far as the Pope also brings in the pneumatological events to bear in his theology of the consecration of the apostles.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid., 50. Also here, he mentions no precise works.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid., 50f.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid., 51.

7.1.7.2 Extended Interpretation: The Reception of the Holy Spirit

Leal de Sá brings in two texts in which John Paul II speaks of the empowerment of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit at both events already mentioned – on the resurrection day and on the Pentecost – as constitutive of the priesthood. First from his letter to priests in 1998:

An intimate bond unites our priesthood to the Holy Spirit and to his mission. On the day of our priestly ordination, by virtue of a unique outpouring of the Paraclete, the Risen One accomplished again in each of us what he accomplished in his disciples on the evening of Easter, and set us in the world as those who continue his mission (cf. *Jn* 20:21-23). This gift of the Spirit, with its mysterious sanctifying power, is the source and root of the special task of evangelization and of sanctification which is entrusted to us.⁵⁶⁹

Then, from one of his General Audiences:

To fulfil this mission the Apostles received, in addition to authority, the *special gift of the Holy Spirit* (cf. *Jn* 20:21–22) which was manifested at Pentecost as Jesus had promised (*Acts* 1:8).⁵⁷⁰

He further supports his point with Vatican II's teaching on the Apostles and the Holy Spirit in *Lumen Gentium* §19 and §28, and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §2. In this regard, he quotes Castellucci's summary of the council's teaching:

Vatican II, although it does not deny the importance of the Last Supper in the theology of the ministry, treats its institution by no longer referring to a single episode [...], but to the global mission [...] that the Lord

⁵⁶⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Con la mente*, prologue (SOCIAS James, *Letters to My Brother Priests*, 247).

⁵⁷⁰ LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood*, 52. "Per compiere questa missione gli Apostoli hanno ricevuto, oltre il potere, il dono speciale dello Spirito Santo (cf. *Gv* 20, 21-22), che si è manifestato nella Pentecoste, secondo la promessa di Gesù (cf. *At* 1, 8)." JOHN PAUL II, General Audience on July 1, 1992, §6 in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1992/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19920701.html (accessed on 19.06.2024).

entrusted to the Apostles [...]. Institution and mission are thus perfectly united: it is in this entire apostolic mission received from Jesus before and after Easter, that we can identify the institution of the ordained ministry.⁵⁷¹

This implies, for him, that the Pope's stance on the issue of the institution of a ministerial priesthood is not a fixed dogma, but is "open" to the three positions found among the Church fathers, as explained above:

This indeterminacy from the pontifical magisterium does not seem to fall into doctrinal uncertainty, but rather manifests the dogmatic richness of the ministerial priesthood. It can be understood that the source – among the Apostles and among those who share the same priesthood – is in this double reference to Christ and the Spirit: Christ realizes it, and the Spirit animates it and makes it universal. This avoids two pitfalls: the Christological dimension giving way to an institutional determinism that may be too juridical, and the pneumatological dimension falling into a spiritualism detached from human reality.⁵⁷²

7.2 Joseph Ratzinger

7.2.1 Josef Pieper: Desacralization, Celibacy, Word-Sacrament

Under section 5.11.6.2, we saw how Ratzinger in 1968 interpreted the Vatican II's *Presbyterorum ordinis* as giving primacy to the proclamation of the word. In that context, he made an expression which has become

571 LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood*, 52. "Il Vaticano II, pur non negando l'importanza dell'ultima cena nella teologia del ministero, ne riconduce l'istituzione non più ad un solo specifico episodio ma, con più ampio respiro, alla *globalità della missione* di annuncio-sanctificazione-guida pastorale, che il Signore ha affidato agli apostoli e questi hanno a loro volta partecipato ad altri. *Istituzione e missione* risultano così saldati perfettamente: è nell'intera missione apostolica ricevuta da Gesù, prima e dopo la Pasqua (missione che continua quell'ache egli ha ricevuto dal Padre), che va individuata *L'istituzione del ministero ordinato* e quindi del presbiterato. Questa la prospettiva chiaramente adottata in *LG* 28 e ripresa in *PO* 2." CASTELLUCCI Erio, *Il ministero ordinato*, 238.

572 LEAL DE SÁ Nilson, *The Priesthood*, 52.

popular, namely, that the priest is not “a craftsman of cultic rituals” (“*Kulthändler*”), but a “meditator” (“*Wortbedenker*”) of the Word of God. The assertion triggered a history which may have contributed to its eventual retraction by Ratzinger himself. It evoked a direct and the most known criticism from his colleague (at the University of Münster), friend and philosopher Josef Pieper (1904–1997). His objections can be classified into three points:

7.2.1.1 Sense of the Sacred

For Pieper, the attempt at all to attribute to the priesthood a new fundamental duty apart from the eucharist, is in the final analysis the result of a general loss of trust in the reality of the sacred in the world. In this case, it is a lack of trust that God is present in the sacramental actions of the Church. Thus, God’s operation through the sacramental authority of the priest becomes more and more inconceivable to the modern mind.⁵⁷³ On this basis, he rejects both theses of Ratzinger and Kasper as forms of desacralization of the priesthood, though he does not mention their names or any of their works.

Moreover, I am convinced that the ultimate intellectual root of all the programmatic advocacy of “desacralization”—particularly when this “desacralization” is propounded on “theological” grounds—is nothing other than the denial of sacramentality. In other words, its root is the belief that what we still refer to as a “sacred action” is in reality a mere “show” put on by human beings, and that, viewed from an objective and “impartial” standpoint, *absolutely nothing happens* during this show, least of all the manifestation of the real presence of the divine. The inevitable consequence of this reasoning is clearly apparent. Not only does it become senseless to regard the church (as a building) as anything but what Harvey Cox called a human space, but also there no longer exists the slightest reason for regarding the priest as a “consecrated” person, as a person dedicated to the sacred. And it would be difficult to persuade me that the most profound and perhaps even the sole cause of the “modern crisis over the image of the priest”, which has given rise to

573 Cf. PIEPER Josef, *Sakralität und »Entsakralisierung«*, 406f.

so much discussion, is not, once again, the refusal or inability (an inability determined by a multiplicity of factors) to recognize and accept the relationship between the sacramental, consecratory act of the priest and the manifestation of God's presence in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice. This refusal in turn inevitably results in the need to "redefine" the distinctive function of the priest, to analyze his specific task in terms of something other than the performance of the sacramental rite: for example, in terms of the "service of the Word", of the "meditation on the Word", the "unification of the parish", social work or even in terms of revolution.⁵⁷⁴

7.2.1.2 Celibacy and the Eucharist

Pieper thinks that, though there is no essential relation between priesthood and celibacy, both are existentially and symbolically related. The celibate form of life is not an absolute requirement for the priesthood. However, since a priest is incorporated into the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ through the sacrament of ordination, it is more appropriate that this be reflected in the existential form of life as a celibate. In other words, celibacy makes sense in so far as the priestly ministry retains its character as a sacramental representation of Christ who gave his life for mankind. Celibacy loses its meaning and witnessing power, if the identity of the priest is shifted away from the eucharist in which Christ's sacrifice is sacramentally renewed.⁵⁷⁵

7.2.1.3 The Meaning of Word / Proclamation

His central point of criticism is that Ratzinger has a confused concept of "word" or "preaching". In Pieper's view, despite the interconnection between word and sacrament, there remains an essential difference which does not allow for a simple conflation of the two realities. Preaching a homily in the holy mass is simply not the same as speaking the words of the eucharistic consecration or giving an absolution in the sac-

574 Ibid. English translation in: *The Weight of Belief. Essays on Faith in the Modern Age*, trans. by Jan VAN HEURCK, Rhode Island 2019, 3–36: 18f.

575 Cf. PIEPER Josef, *Vor-Überlegungen zum Thema »Zölibat«*, 444f.

rament of reconciliation. In the sacraments, that which is proclaimed effectively takes place.⁵⁷⁶

Pieper reiterates this central criticism from three perspectives. Firstly, Ratzinger ignores the tradition for the sake of his own idea. The tradition as exemplified by Thomas Aquinas, the Councils of Trent and Vatican II, define the priesthood by the priestly powers of eucharistic consecration and reconciliation.⁵⁷⁷ Secondly, Ratzinger's interpretation of Vatican II is wrong. It is true that the Council emphasizes the ministry of proclamation. However, the priority it attributes to the word is only a priority of time: preaching comes first in time before the sacraments. We can speak of the primacy of the "Word" only in the sense of the incarnated Son of God who is the eucharist; but "Word" in the sense of preaching cannot be said to enclose other ministries.⁵⁷⁸ Thirdly, it means that the claim of the primacy of the word involves a certain confusion of the meaning of proclamation of the word. This is, according to Pieper, the case in Ratzinger's theology of the priesthood and it is a blurring of that which is specific to the ministerial priesthood.

The statement that the priest "is not to be a craftsman of cultic rituals, but a meditator of the word" is a little bit unfortunate. Truly, its author explicitly intended it to be a "drastically" exaggerated formulation; but it is precisely this wieldy catchline quality that makes it also dangerous, as can be rashly observed in the conversation with theology students. The formulation allures one too easily to embark on a false alternative. Of course, a priest should not be a "craftsman of cultic rituals" (although I don't know what that is); but he should be and *is* someone who has been authorized and called through the sacrament of ordination to ritually execute the divine mysteries in a unique way. And of course, a priest should *also* be a "meditator of the word"; no one has ever denied that ... However, in a certain sense, "meditator of the word" und perhaps even "preacher of the word" is something that every Christian should be. It may, in special cases, require a specific "commission" (*mission*) by the

576 Cf. PIEPER Josef, *Verwunderte Anmerkung eines Laien zum Thema »Priestertum«*, 451f.

577 Cf. *Ibid.*, 449f.

578 Cf. *Ibid.*, 450; cf. —, *Was unterscheidet den Priester? Ein notgedrungener Klärungsversuch*, 471.

Church, but absolutely not a priestly ordination. On the other hand, no one would claim that at ordination a priest receives the charism of meditating on the word or the charism of preaching, of the right interpretation of the Scriptures – and so on. What he really receives, and indeed he alone, by virtue of the sacrament of ordination is (above every other thing) the consecratory authority to celebrate the eucharist in persona Christi and for the whole Church. This is also the only reason for the true dignity of ordained priest. It is due to this that he differs from the common priesthood of the faithful “in essence and not only in degree”, as Vatican II teaches. I am not only surprised, but also deeply appalled to see this dignity being ironized by priest-theologians ... Even if the popular homilies at first masses of priests fall into an overly crude illustration or sentimentality a thousand times, it does not make it in any way difficult for me to call a young assistant priest, whom I could actually father, “reverend” or even “father” (*Pater, Vater, Père*). Certainly, it would never cross my mind to say that to a “meditator of the word” (or social worker or professor) no matter how ingenious he may be.⁵⁷⁹

579 [My translation]. “Den wenig glücklichen Satz, wonach der Priester »nicht Kulthandwerker, sondern Wortbedenker« zu sein habe, hat zwar sein Autor ausdrücklich als eine »drastisch« zugespitzte Formulierung gemeint. Aber gerade dieser handlich-griffige Schlagzeilen-Charakter macht ihn auch gefährlich, wie sich im Gespräch mit Theologie-Studenten rasch feststellen lässt. Allzu leicht wird man durch die Formulierung dazu verführt, sich auf eine falsche Alternative einzulassen. Natürlich soll der Priester nicht »Kulthandwerker« sein (obwohl ich nicht weiß, was das ist); aber er soll sein und er *ist* auch: ein durch das Weihesakrament zum kultischen Vollzug der göttlichen Mysterien auf einzigartige Weise Bevollmächtigter und Berufener. Und natürlich soll der Priester *auch* »Wortbedenker« sein; niemand hat das je gelehrt ... Aber »Wortbedenker« und vielleicht sogar »Verkündiger des Wortes« soll in gewissem Sinn jeder Christenmensch sein. Und dazu bedarf es zwar möglicherweise (in besonderem Fall) einer ausdrücklichen »Sendung« (*missio*) durch die Kirche, aber keinesfalls der Priesterweihe; wie ja wohl auch andererseits niemand behaupten wird, der Priester empfangt in der Weihe das Charisma der Wortbedenkung oder der Verkündigung, der rechten Schriftauslegung – und so fort. Was er wirklich, und zwar er allein, kraft des Weihesakramentes empfängt, ist (vor allem anderen) die konsekratorische Vollmacht, in persona Christi und für die ganze Kirche die Eucharistie zu feiern. Einzig hierin gründet auch die wahre Dignität des geweihten Priesters, kraft deren er sich laut *Vaticanum II* »dem Wesen und nicht bloß dem Grade nach« vom gemeinsamen Priestertum der Gläubigen unterscheidet. Es ist für mich eine nicht nur verwunderliche, sondern tief erschreckende Erfahrung, diese Würde von priesterlichen Theologen ironisiert zu sehen ... Mögen volkstümliche Primizpredigten auch tausendmal in die allzu grobe Veranschaulichung geraten oder in die Sentimentalität: es macht mir nicht die geringste Schwierigkeit, einen jungen Kaplan, dessen Vater ich sein könnte, »Hochwürden« zu nennen und

7.2.1.4 Karl-Heinz Menke's Critique of Pieper's Critique

Karl-Heinz Menke agrees with Pieper's criticism only in so far as the office of the priest cannot be simply summarized as "meditating on the word".⁵⁸⁰ However, he criticizes his critique on two counts:

Firstly: Pieper does not fully comprehend Ratzinger's concept of proclamation, which also includes its realization in the eucharist and in priestly existence.⁵⁸¹

Secondly: Pieper apparently lacks the historical knowledge of how the reduction of the priestly identity to ritual originated, namely, especially because of the medieval separation of the priestly powers of consecration and of leadership (jurisdiction).⁵⁸²

7.2.1.5 Critique of Menke's Critique of Pieper's Critique

Menke misses Pieper's point. The problem with Menke's first criticism is the following: If Pieper truly writes *only* that which Menke quotes in his own work (Menke quotes only a part), then it must be admitted that Menke is right. Unfortunately, Menke leaves out (probably unintentionally) precisely the part which exactly contains what he accuses Pieper of not having comprehended. In the same article to which Menke refers, Pieper writes:

No one denies that proclamation *also* happens in the eucharist and the sacrament of penance. No one denies that when I hear the words of absolution or the words of the body of Christ "given up for you" or allow those words to speak to me, I may possibly receive an insight that transforms me totally. Nevertheless, is the real purging of my sins and the real eating of the sacramental bread not something principally different? ...⁵⁸³

sogar »Vater« (Pater, *Father*, *Père*) – was mir freilich in der Begegnung mit einem noch so genialen »Wortbedenker« (oder Sozialarbeiter oder Professor) sicher niemals in den Sinn käme." PIEPER Josef, *Verwunderte Anmerkung eines Laien zum Thema »Priestertum«*, 451f.; cf. —, *Nicht Worte, sondern Realität: das Sakrament des Brotes*, 420–427.

580 Cf. MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Sakramentalität*, 206.

581 Cf. *Ibid.*, 205.

582 Cf. *Ibid.*, 206.

583 [My translation] "Niemand wird leugnen, dass im Vollzug der Eucharistie und des Sakramentes der Sündenvergebung natürlich zugleich *auch* Verkündigung geschieht, und dass mir, indem ich die Worte der Absolution oder das Wort vom Leibe Christi, »für euch

Pieper wants to make it clear that the interwovenness of word and sacrament does not imply the primacy of the word or a conflation of the two realities. This puts Menke's second criticism into perspective. Pieper does not claim to possess an exact knowledge of the historical factors which led to a reductionist concept of priesthood in terms of rituals. He simply indicates some problems with Ratzinger's thesis when compared with the traditional teaching of the Church.

7.2.1.6 Ratzinger's own Last Words

Pieper's criticism is not completely misguided. This can be seen as ratified in the very last essay of the Pope emeritus Benedict XVI on the topic of Catholic priesthood. In it, Benedict XVI literally refers back to his erstwhile description of the priest as a "meditator of the word". This is what he writes:

I myself, during a conference on priesthood in the Church that was held immediately after the council, thought that I had to present the priest of the New Testament as the one who meditates on the Word, and not as a "craftsman of worship". It is true that meditation on the Word of God is an important task of the priest of God in the New Covenant. Even so, this Word was made flesh. To meditate on it always means also to be nourished by that flesh that is given to us in the Most Holy Eucharist as bread from heaven. To meditate on the Word in the Church of the New Covenant always amounts to abandoning oneself to the flesh of Jesus Christ. This abandonment implies accepting our own transformation by the Cross.⁵⁸⁴

It remains an open question whether this is a retraction. In any case, Ratzinger drops here his radical oppositional concept of "meditator of the word" and "craftsman of cultic rituals", in order to give the eucharist its due significance in the priesthood, or even its priority of place.

hingegen«, höre und mir gesagt sein lasse, ein mich möglicherweise völlig umwandelnde Einsicht zuteil werden kann. Ist aber nicht die real Tilgung meiner Schuld und der reale Empfang des sakramentlichen Brotes etwas davon prinzipiell Verschiedenes?...» PIEPER Josef, *Verwunderte Anmerkung eines Laien zum Thema »Priestertum«*, 451f.

584 BENEDICT XVI, *The Catholic Priesthood*, 38.

7.2.2 Piotr Paterczyk: Reductionism

Paterczyk accuses Ratzinger of lapsing into a reductionism of the priestly office to one single dimension. The other two dimensions are in the final analysis of Ratzinger's theology not essential parts of the priesthood, rather only *forms* of ministry of the word.⁵⁸⁵ Paterczyk's criticism, however, inheres a certain self-contradiction. In the first place, he observes that: "Ratzinger speaks of evangelization as the point of construction of the priestly office, but he does not identify the priestly office as the same with proclamation of the word. This indicates the balance of his theological concept."⁵⁸⁶ However, in his summary, he concludes: "Ratzinger's interpretation of the ministry of the word remains without any consequence worth mentioning because he not only considers the proclamation of the word to be the factor grounding the identity of the priestly office, but identifies it as the same with the priestly office itself."⁵⁸⁷

7.3 Walter Kasper

7.3.1 Heinrich Schlier: The Apostolic Office and Charism

According to Heinrich Schlier, it is unbiblical to define priesthood as a charism bearing responsibility for the unity and coordination of all other charisms in the Church. Most probably, Schlier is making allusion to Walter Kasper, though he does not mention his name, for that is exactly the earlier thesis of Kasper. In his counter-argument, Schlier expounds on St. Paul's and St. Luke's distinction between office and the grace of office.

585 Cf. PASTERCZYK Piotr, *Theologie des kirchlichen Lehramtes*, 167–169.

586 [My translation] "Ratzinger spricht von der Evangelisierung als dem Konstruktionspunkt des Amtes. Er *identifiziert* aber das Amt nicht mit der Wortverkündigung, was auf die Ausgewogenheit seines theologischen Konzepts hinweist." Ibid., 164.

587 [My translation] "Ratzingers Auslegung des Dienstes am Wort bleibt jedoch ohne nennenswerte Folgen, weil er die Wortverkündigung nicht nur für ein die Amtsidentität stiftendes Moment hält, sondern sie mit dem Amt selbst identifiziert." Ibid., 168.

St. Paul is conscious of the fact that his apostolic ministry is not founded on his charisma, but is first of all a vocation from God in Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual office. That is why he uses concepts which hint at the official character of his ministry. The rite of the imposition of hands on the successors of the apostles was also introduced for this very reason. Beyond the official foundation, however, the one called by God to the office also receives the spirit of God, in order to be able to exercise the office, i.e., grace of office.⁵⁸⁸

St. Luke also makes the distinction. Firstly: the twelve did not become apostles by virtue of their charisms. God, in his unsearchable will, chose them. Jesus explicitly separated and constituted them (Lk. 6:13, 9:10, 17:5, 22:14, 24:10). Secondly: St. Luke makes this distinction even in his choice of terminology. He names the apostles' office *episkopē* – “office of supervisor” – (Acts 1:20). Thirdly: The office holders were also charismatics. They exercised the office in the Spirit of God, i.e., charismatically (cf. Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:4f., etc.).⁵⁸⁹

7.3.2 Herbert Vorgrimler: Theological Exiguity of “Leadership”

Vorgrimler first points out a theological disproportion in Kasper's idea of community leadership as the foundational office of a priest: The emphasis on leadership creates a greater impression of a sociological and ecclesiological order at the expense of the Christological and sacramental nature of the priesthood. Using leadership as leverage point of the meaning of priesthood begs the question of why that leadership needs a sacred ordination in the first place. Leading a community could as well be done without being first ordained a priest, but in the understanding of the Catholic Church and its tradition, one becomes a ministerial priest not without a sacred ordination because it is a sacrament of Christ.⁵⁹⁰

588 Cf. SCHLIER Heinrich, *Die neutestamentliche Grundlage des Priestertums*, 85f., 112.

589 Cf. *Ibid.*, 95f., 112.

590 Cf. VORGRIMLER Herbert, *Der theologische Ort des Priesters* (1969), in: *Wegsuche. Kleine Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. 2, Altzenberge 1998, 190–216: 208.

Secondly, the leadership analogy fosters necessarily a conception of the priesthood in terms of a status and privilege.⁵⁹¹

Vorgrimler suggests that the proclamation of the word of God as propounded by Karl Rahner would be immune to these loopholes.⁵⁹²

7.3.3 Karl Lehmann: Prematurity of the Concept “In Service of Unity”

He attributes some positive elements to Kasper’s thesis: the rediscovery of a Pauline theology of the relation between office, charism and the community, the ecumenical perspective it offers, and the new orientation it can give to priests in a time of identity crisis of the priesthood.⁵⁹³

He rejects Vorgrimler’s criticism of Kasper’s thesis as unfounded, since Kasper does not just conceive the leadership role in purely secular terms.⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, he concedes that the content of the concept of “in service for unity” is not yet sufficiently clarified in theology. It is still a kind of “empty” designation of functions. Hence, Kasper’s employment of it already renders his argument subject to avoidable misunderstandings by others.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, Kasper provides “too little” exposition of the Christian roots of that idea. Therefore, what it precisely has to do with the ministerial priesthood remains untapped.⁵⁹⁶

7.3.4 Piotr Pasterczyk: Presupposition of Faith Community and Meaning of Office

There are two relevant points in his critique of Kasper’s thesis:

591 Cf. *Ibid.*, 208f.; cf. —, Die Basis des priesterlichen Dienstes, in: Franz FURGER / Herbert VORGRIMLER (eds.), *Sollte man nicht doch bleiben? Zur Diskussion um die Amtsaufgabe von Priestern*, Luzern / München 1970, 91–146: 141.

592 Cf. VORGRIMLER Herbert, *Der theologische Ort des Priesters*, 209.

593 LEHMANN Karl, Zur Theologie der Gemeindeleitung, in: Ludwig BERTSCH *et al* (eds.), *Pastoraltheologische Informationen 1970*, Mainz 1970, 2–31: 3.

594 Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

595 Cf. *Ibid.*

596 Cf. *Ibid.*

7.3.4.1 Kerygma versus Community Leadership

The first critique rests on the relationship between the ministries of proclaiming the gospel and leading a community. The ministry of community leadership presupposes an already constituted community of believers to be led. Community leadership, in its primary literal sense, cannot mean otherwise than a community already existing through a reception of the preached gospel. However, if a community of believers is first formed by the preaching of the gospel, as is evident in the reported missions of the apostles, then it is far from the obvious to see how the ministry of the word should be considered a manifestation of the more fundamental ministry of community leadership.⁵⁹⁷

7.3.4.2 Office versus Charism

In the second critique, he argues that Kasper, in the bid to theologially ground the priesthood in community leadership, makes office and charism (or being charismatic) conterminous:⁵⁹⁸ a charism of responsibility for unity and order of the other charisms in the church. The looming pitfall is due to the more pronounced phenomenal-sociological character of community leadership, unlike the other ministries, that is, it is more palpable for us. Following the Pauline letters, it includes gifts and phenomena like healings, working of miracles, prophetic speech, speaking in tongues, etc. (1 Cor. 12:9f.), which accompany the offices of the apostles, the evangelists, the teachers, etc. Hence, the easiness by which charisms and offices could become identical is not far-fetched.⁵⁹⁹

Pasterczyk offers four reasons why it is wrong to do just that. By implication, they are the weak points of Kasper's thesis: Firstly, in the New Testament there exists also offices as such without charisms, for example, presiding over the eucharist. Secondly, the structure of office in the Church does not only consist of a functional charism, as would be the case in Kasper's idea of leadership, but it is also Christological (that is instituted by Christ) and sacramental. Both aspects do not necessarily display charismatic traits. Thirdly, charismatic gifts are often the

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. PASTERCZYK Piotr, *Theologie des kirchlichen Lehramtes*, 114.

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 115, 117.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 115f.

initial but not the most important or decisive element of the spiritual life of the community. The life of the community of believers is much more based on non-charismatic gifts such as faith and love by which they live in union with Christ. Moreover, charismatic gifts could as well have demonic origins. Fourthly, the priestly office in the Catholic Church means a sacramental representation of Christ. This means that it is a “stable sign”, not a subjectively dependent sign as in the case of a charism, though the latter may accompany it.⁶⁰⁰

7.4 Chapter Summary

Critics of John Paul II’s teaching focus mainly on the question of the institution of the ministerial priesthood at the Last Supper. They consider the direct connection he makes between the priesthood and the eucharist to be biblically and historically untenable. Joseph Pieper questions the Ratzinger’s thesis by pointing to the loss of the sense of sacramental presence and operation of God through the ministerial priesthood, the loss of the eucharistic meaning of celibacy, and the loss of a clear distinction between word and sacrament. Critics of Walter Kasper observe in his thesis a conflation of office and charism and the theological insufficiency of his idea of leadership.

600 Cf. *Ibid.*, 116f.

Chapter 8: Evaluation

8.0 Preliminary Remarks

The fact that Ratzinger and Kasper in their later years of life, especially as pastors, returned back to the traditional priority of the *munus sanctificandi*, as have been proven in the foregoing chapters, is very telling. Most probably, history has put their earlier theories to test or they might have experienced it themselves. From the 1960s onwards there have been different theological experimentations on the subject of the priesthood, including those of the earlier Ratzinger and Kasper. It is only later, after years of having seen the positive and negative outcomes of such experimentations, that John Paul II came in on the scene. This experience of the Church on priesthood is the background of his emphatic letters on the sanctification task of the priesthood. Obviously, in terms of scientific argumentation (biblical and historical), Ratzinger provides a vastly rich insight into the priesthood, much more than John Paul II and Kasper. The earlier Kasper, for the most part, rather reflects on the question from a more general-philosophical perspective, but less founded in the biblical substance and Church history.

I think that John Paul II's insistence on the sanctifying ministry of the Priest as the centripetal point of the ministerial priesthood – which is also the traditional view – is still the most plausible. It is actually enriched by some of the arguments of Ratzinger and the later Kasper. In the following, I present some reasons for this stance by commenting briefly on the arguments of the three authors.

8.1 The Ideology of “Desacralization” of the Priesthood (Re.: 5.2, 5.3, 6.5)

It is questionable to proffer the thought: priesthood must be “desacralized”, or as the earlier Kasper also adds, “demythologised”. It leaves unanswered the question of what remains really “priestly” in priesthood which differentiates it from any secular job, if the sacred is “removed”

from it. Priesthood by its very nature has to do with the sacred. The earlier Kasper, indeed, would immediately add, that he does not mean a secularization of the priesthood. In that case, however, “desacralization” becomes a fuzzy concept.

An often unexpressed, but vividly implied prejudice in the theological discussions on priesthood in the conciliar and post-conciliar years is an aversion towards attributing a divine-sacred function to a human being. It was seen as a “sacralization” of the mere human person, a sort of paganism or superstition imbued with clericalism. Hence, the current of the day emphasized a “desacralization” of the priesthood. The questioning of the mediatory role of the priesthood falls within this ambience. One may recall the homily of the young Ratzinger, already quoted in section 5.3:

The new understanding of the Scriptures in our generation has made the traditional image of the priesthood in Catholic Dogmatic Theology questionable, much more the image of the reverend as usually and effectively preached in the first masses of new priests. In it, the priest was depicted as the mediator between God and the people, and he was literally raised to a supernatural altitude (it is said that one must greet the priest first, before greeting an angel); he offers with his hands the sacrifice of reconciliation to God; he was praised as a human being on whom the power is imparted to literally force God down upon the altar with the words of consecration. This image has been shattered irrevocably. The colossal misunderstanding of the concept of mediation as well as the idea of sacrament which was included in it, has become clear to us with a piercing lucidity ... In the real life of the early Church ... nothing of such form of priesthood is to be found. To our amazement, at least no mention is made directly of a ritual power of a priest.⁶⁰¹

The earlier Ratzinger, as well as proponents of “desacralization”, seems here to confuse the sacred function of the priesthood with the popular, partly superstitious, perception of the priesthood. It is questionable to confuse the objective reality with a subjective exaggeration.

⁶⁰¹ RATZINGER Joseph, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des priesterlichen Dienstes*, 351.

The root of seeking a new focal point for the priestly ministry is the submission to the ideological pressure that the priesthood must be “desacralized”. The quest for a desacralization of the priesthood is, in this sense, a product of the influence of secularization. Hence, it may be asked if a sacred function *necessarily* implies sacralization of a person in the negative sense; if the priority of the sacred in the priesthood is objectively wrong. It is theologically inconsistent to assert, on the one hand, human cooperation with God in the history of salvation, while on the other hand, denying absolutely a mediatory role of the ministerial priesthood.

8.2 Problem of Dialectical Theology (Re.: 6.4)

Moreover, the methodological problem of the quest for desacralization of the priesthood is what Serge-Thomas Bonino recently called the “dialectical” approach in theology. “This defines Christ’s priesthood by contrasting it with all the forms of priesthood found either in the old dispensation or in religious structures that grew up outside the current of Judeo-Christian revelation.”⁶⁰² This is what the latter Ratzinger (5.13) means when he makes reference to the influence of Karl Barth’s and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology of opposition between Christianity and religion. This approach became dominant in the Protestant and Catholic theology up to the 1980s, namely, to elaborate the Newness of the New Testament by contrasting it as much as possible with the Old Testament and Judaism.⁶⁰³ Herbst’s (7.1.2) and Greinacher’s (7.1.3)

⁶⁰² BONINO Serge-Thomas, Religion and Priesthood. A Basic Anthropological Factor, in: Marc OUELLET (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol 1., Vatican 2023, 3–20: 4.

⁶⁰³ Cf. BÖHLER Dieter, Das kirchliche Amt ist biblisch. Zu Martin Ebners “Braucht die Kirche Priester?”, in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 76 (12/2022), 20–23: 20. Quoted in: SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER Ludger, Priester nach der Ordnung Melchisedeks, in: Michaela HASTETTER / Ephräm Givi LOMIDZE / Walther WLADIKA (eds.), *Das kirchliche Amt im Licht der Gottesfrage – Orient und Okzident im Dialog* (Theologische Orient&Okzident-Studien 5), Sankt Ottilien 2023, 41–57: 45.

criticisms of John Paul II's teaching rest on this principle. In contrast to the dialectical, there is, however, the "analogical" approach which is:

the application of a 'natural' religious sense that is generally held suspect by partisans of the dialectic way, which rests on the opposition between faith and religion. But faced with the risk of equivocation that threatens the dialectic approach—since it holds that the priesthood of Christ has nothing in common with the institution known as priesthood in religious anthropology—the second way has recourse instead to analogy. The priesthood of Jesus Christ assumes, purifies, recapitulates, and brings to unexpected perfection the imperfect forms of priesthood that are present in most religions, and that express, with differing degrees of success, a constitutive aspect of religious anthropology in its communitarian aspect ... God really does speak in human language, and we would be unable to hear the revelation of Jesus Christ's priesthood if it did not rest on (while deeply transforming it though without destroying it) a common notion of priesthood, which was moreover prophetically oriented toward Christ in the form it took in the Old Testament priesthood. The Letter to the Hebrews proceeds along this same line.⁶⁰⁴

The advantage of the analogical over the dialectical approach is that it "offers a clearer notion of the sacred character that Church Tradition recognizes in those who, through the consecration of the sacrament of holy orders, participate ministerially in Christ's priesthood, namely, bishops and priests."⁶⁰⁵

8.3 The Biblical Notion of "Sacrifice" (Re.: 4.1, 5.7, 5.14, 6.4)

The biblical notion of sacrifice – i.e. also in the New Testament – is *both* a spirituality (way of life) and a ritual (eucharist). The biblical tenacity of both coordinates – life and liturgical ritual – is epitomized continuously in the letter to the Hebrews. Even such recurrent biblical phrases

⁶⁰⁴ BONINO Serge-Thomas, *Religion and Priesthood*, 4f.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

as “sacrifice of praise”, for instance, is a technical cultic term taken from the Old Testament and there it is neither a “merely verbal act” nor a “purely spiritually praise”, rather “a concrete sacrifice with sacrificial meal”, and that meant for early Christian writers the eucharist.⁶⁰⁶ In the Roman Canon of the holy mass, the concept “sacrifice of praise” is used to circumscribe the eucharistic sacrifice.

Remember, Lord, your servants N. and N. and all gathered here, whose faith and devotion are known to you. For them, we offer you this sacrifice of praise or they offer it for themselves and all who are dear to them: for the redemption of their souls, in hope of health and well-being, and paying their homage to you, the eternal God, living and true.⁶⁰⁷

So John Paul II’s emphasis, following Vatican II, on the link between man’s vocation to total giving of himself to God (in response to God’s giving of himself to man at the cross/eucharist) and the priestly ministry of sanctification (4.1) is in line with the Scriptures. While Ratzinger earlier tended to tow only the spiritual line of interpretation (5.7), he later prioritized the eucharistic interpretation without neglecting the other (5.16).

John Paul II devoted one of his General Audiences to the explanation of this single phrase – sacrifice of praise – as precisely the eucharist. Both words (coordinates) draw their meaning from the Old Testament and find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection, which is continuously and effectively present in the eucharist.

1. The *sacrificial* content of the eucharist is expressed by Christ in the words of institution – words having their roots in the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament:

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. HEID Stefan, *Altar und Kirche*, 41, 167–169.

⁶⁰⁷ FOLEY Edward (ed.), *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of The Roman Missal*, Minnesota 2011, 233.

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (*Mt* 26: 28; cf. *Mk* 14: 24; *Lk* 22: 20). If these words are examined in the light of their biblical import, two significant references appear. The first consists of the expression «blood poured out» which, as the biblical language attests (cf. *Gn* 9: 6), is synonymous with violent death. The second is found in the precise statement «for many», regarding those for whom this blood is poured out. The allusion here takes us back to a fundamental text for the Christian interpretation of Scripture, the fourth song of Isaiah: by his sacrifice, the Servant of the Lord «poured out his soul to death», and «bore the sin of many» (*Is* 53: 12; cf. *Heb* 9: 28; *1 Pt* 2: 24). The same sacrificial and redemptive dimension of the Eucharist is expressed by Jesus’ words over the bread at the Last Supper, as they are traditionally related by Luke and Paul: «This is my body which is given for you» (*Lk* 22: 19; cf. *1 Cor* 11: 24). Here too there is a reference to the sacrificial self-giving of the Servant of the Lord according to the passage from Isaiah already mentioned (53: 12): «He poured out his soul to death...; he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors». «The Eucharist is above all else a sacrifice.⁶⁰⁸

2. The praise-content of the eucharist consists in the very act of Christ’s thanksgiving to his Father. The whole creation enters into this communion through man’s participation in its sacramental celebration *and* the sacramental reception of Christ himself in it:

... the Eucharist is a sacrifice of *praise*. Essentially oriented to full communion between God and man, “the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the whole of the Church’s worship and of the Christian life. The faithful participate more fully in this sacrament of thanksgiving, propitiation, petition and praise, not only when they wholeheartedly offer the sacred victim, and in it themselves, to the Father with the priest, but also when they receive this same victim sacramentally” (Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, n. 3e). As the term itself

⁶⁰⁸ JOHN PAUL II, General Audience on October 11, 2000, §2f. in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20001011.html (accessed on 12.05.2025).

originally says in Greek, Eucharist means "thanksgiving"; in it the Son of God unites redeemed humanity to himself in a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. Let us remember that the Hebrew work *todah*, translated "praise", also means "thanksgiving". The sacrifice of praise was a sacrifice of thanksgiving (cf. *Ps* 50 [49]: 14, 23). At the Last Supper, in order to institute the Eucharist, Jesus gave thanks to his Father (cf. *Mt* 26: 26-27 and parallels); this is the origin of the name of this sacrament. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ» (CCC, n. 1359). Uniting herself to Christ's sacrifice, the Church in the Eucharist voices the praise of all creation. The commitment of every believer to offer his existence, his "body", as Paul says, as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Rom* 12: 1), in full communion with Christ, must correspond to this. In this way, one life unites God and man, Christ crucified and raised for us all and the disciple who is called to give himself entirely to him.⁶⁰⁹

8.3.1 Rituality and Sacrificiality of the Eucharist and the Priesthood (Re.: 5.13, 6.12)

"Desacralizing" the priesthood would mean in concrete terms playing down those areas of the priestly duty that are ritualistic in form, i.e., the sacraments, while emphasizing the areas that are non-cultic, i.e., proclaiming the word or exercising leadership as a moderator of charisms. This approach rests also on a prejudiced notion of ritual and sacrifice as something naturally pagan or non-Christian, but this is not necessarily the case. As already shown in section 5.13 and 6.12, Ratzinger and Kasper later eschewed this view.

From a general-anthropological perspective alone, it would be *inhuman* to reduce religious cult simply to an unenlightened or non-Christianized phase of human history. The human being, in his ontological constitution as a *homo religiosus*, is not reducible to only invisible, interior motions of relationship towards God. His being-created-for-God expresses itself also externally, in rituals. Both are inseparable.

609 Ibid., §5f.

Worship activity is extremely diverse by reason of the complexity of our human nature. It ranges from the most internal actions—such as prayer of petition, which is an act of confessing God’s sovereignty—to the most external, as required by the corporal roots and the social and communitarian dimensions of our being. This external public worship is totally ordered toward internal worship. Its aim is to rouse it and nourish it, or else to express it, but—and this is the essential point—external worship is not absorbed back into internal worship. External, liturgical worship is not a mere temporary scaffold that I can and even dispense with once I have settled into the rarified atmosphere of purely internal worship. No: even when it is finalized by internal worship, external worship preserves its own specific consistency and its own specific value: it is the whole human being, in all his or her dimensions, that needs to glorify God “in spirit and in truth.”⁶¹⁰

Christ did not abrogate this human nature of relating to God, he himself being the God-man. When he celebrated the Last Supper, he did in the form of a meal, with the interior disposition of his sacrifice on the cross, but also as a ritual to be continually re-enacted “in remembrance” of him. “Remembrance” is “another technical term for a specific type of Temple sacrifice (the memorial offering).”⁶¹¹ The Israelites “remembered” the Passover event precisely by ritually celebrating it (cf. Ex. 12:14–20). As a matter of fact, the New Testament authors describe the eucharist predominantly in sacrificial and ritual terms from the Jewish religious background.⁶¹² The liturgist J. A. Jungmann notes that the “style” of the institution accounts (Mt. 26:26–28, Mk. 14:22–24, Lk. 22:19–20, 1 Cor. 11:23–25) “is set off from the familiar language of the Gospels by a certain dignity of tone and especially by its exotic semitic coloring.”⁶¹³ Despite the variations in the wordings, the reverential preservation and handing on of their core elements is due to the fact that they are “cult accounts, and they have their origin in the liturgical life of

610 BONINO Serge-Thomas, *Religion and Priesthood*, 7.

611 HAHN Scott, *Foreword*, in: PITRE Brant, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, x.

612 Cf. *Ibid.*, ix–xi.

613 JUNGSMANN Josef Andreas, *The Mass: An Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Survey*, trans. by Julian FERNANDES, Minnesota 1976, 5.

the communities."⁶¹⁴ The sacrificial-cultic language is used in St. Paul's descriptions: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7); "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25), in allusion to Ex. 24:8: "Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"

It would exceed the limits of this work to expound in details on the theme of soteriology; but it would suffice to roughly present in this context an aspect of the acts of Christ at the Last Supper from its Jewish background, as worked out by the biblical scholar Brant Pitre. Extra-biblical Jewish sources indicate that four cups were present at a Jewish Passover meal. The mixing, drinking, and blessing of the first cup – "cup of sanctification" ("*kiddusch* cup") – by the father inaugurates the Passover ritual. Then, the food items are set on the table. Then follows the mixing of the second cup – "cup of proclamation" ("*haggadah* cup") and the explanation of the exodus of experience by the father, at the end of which Psalms 113 and 114 (the first portion of the Hallel psalms) are sung. The actual eating of the main Passover meal begins with the mixing of the third cup – "cup of blessing" ("*berakah* cup"). At the end of the meal, the father says a blessing over it and it is drunk. The concluding rite of the Passover meal begins most probably with the chanting of Psalms 115 to 118 (remaining part of the Hallel hymn) which speaks of raising the "cup of salvation" and offering a "sacrifice of thanksgiving". Hence, a fourth cup – "cup of praise" ("*hallel* cup") is drunk, and it marks the completion of the Passover meal. When we read the Last Supper account, bearing in mind the above sequence, then we notice that there were at least two cups present: the second cup (Lk. 14:17) and the third cup (Lk. 14:20; 1 Cor. 11:16). What about the fourth cup? Following Pitre's analysis, Jesus did not drink a fourth cup at the Last Supper, but on the cross. In response to his words "I thirst", he received a wine on hyssop, after which he proclaimed: "it is finished". Between the Last Supper and the cross, he hinted at this on two different occasions: 1) Instead of concluding the Passover meal with a fourth cup, Jesus vows of never again drinking the wine until he drinks it anew

614 Ibid. 5f.

with his apostles in his Father's kingdom (Mt. 26:30, Mk. 14:25) 2) In his agony in the Garden, he prays three times that he may not drink the "cup". In other words, Jesus completed the Last Supper, not in the Upper Room, but on the cross.⁶¹⁵ The significance of this is that Christ's Last Supper and death are a sacrificial ritual. Pitre makes the following conclusion from his analysis:

If this interpretation is correct, then there are at least three implications for how Jesus seems to have understood his own death. First, by vowing not to drink the final cup of the Last Supper, Jesus *extended* his last Passover meal to include his own suffering and death. In this way, the Last Supper was not just a symbolic enactment of how he was going to die ... Second, by praying three times in Gethsemane for the "cup" to be taken from him, Jesus *revealed* that he understood his own death in terms of the Passover sacrifice ... Third and finally, and most important of all, by waiting to drink the fourth cup of the Passover until the very moment of his death, Jesus *united* the Last Supper to his death on the cross ... In short, *by means of the Last Supper, Jesus transformed the Cross into a Passover, and by means of the Cross, he transformed the Last Supper into a sacrifice* ... For most Christians, the idea that Jesus' death on the Cross was a "sacrifice" is a given, almost a commonplace. But this would not have been the case for any Jewish passerby who happened to witness the crucifixion. All he or she would have seen was one more torturous Roman *execution*—not a sacrifice. From an ancient Jewish perspective, in order to have a sacrifice, you need a *priest*, you need an *offering*, you need a *liturgy*. None of these were present at Calvary. What was it, then, that made the early Christians refer to the crucifixion as a sacrifice? It was the Last Supper. For all of these things—a priest, a sacrificial offering of body and blood, a liturgy—were present at Jesus' final Passover meal.⁶¹⁶

615 Cf. PITRE Brant, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, 150–168.

616 *Ibid.*, 168–170. Other biblical event indicating, against the backdrop of the Old Testament, the sacrificial self-understanding of Jesus and his institution of the eucharist include: his prophetic action of the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem (Mk. 11:15–17, Jn. 2:13–22), the coming forth of blood and water from his pierced body on the cross (Jn. 19:31–35). Cf. PITRE Brant, *Jesus, the New Temple, and the New Priesthood*, in: *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008): 47–83; 63–70.

Thus, against Herbst’s criticism (section 7.1.2), it can be plausibly argued that Christ understood his passion and death as a sacrifice. His sacrifice was not only at the cross, but already present in the *ritual* institution of the eucharist.

Likewise, Greinacher’s (7.1.3) and Jannsens’ (7.1.4) appeal to an unknown early Christian apologist who speaks of Christianity without temples and altars, is untenable. First, the presupposition that the emergence of church buildings and altars is a corruption, a re-paganization of Christianity, is itself questionable. For it rests on the assumption, that a house or a stone (table) set out for religious worship is per se pagan or anti-Christian. However, Paul seeing an altar in Athens dedicated “to an unknown God” related it to the God of the Christians who is only unknown to the pagan mind (Acts 17,22–34). Therefore, from the perspective of apologetic language, one can point out that the Christian authors speaking of the non-existence of Christian temples and altars, do not mean to say that these are inherently non-Christian.⁶¹⁷ Rather, these are apologetic attempts, though not circumspect, to say that the “worship” of Christians is different and unique from paganism, for the final meaning of “temples” and “altars” is simply the worship of the divine.

Therefore, the logic of shifting the centre of the Christian ministerial priesthood to the non-cultic elements, as a way of illustrating its uniqueness amongst other priesthoods in the history of religion, is rather unnecessary. The eucharistic celebration, being the *public* worship of the Church and encapsulating the interior acts of worship in all the celebrants (priest and lay faithful), is the primary locus of exercising the ministerial priesthood.

It is precisely in the sphere of external worship that the notion of sacredness finds its primary signification. External, social worship is a language – a system of symbolic or conventional signs by which the community that celebrates an act of worship tells itself first who the God is that it

⁶¹⁷ For a detailed list and treatment of such Christian apologists, from the First Epistle of Clement (96 or 64–70 AD) to Arnobius of Sicca († ca. 330 AD), see HEID Stefan, *Altar und Kirche*, 165–181, 189–199; cf. also LANG Uwe Michael, *The Roman Mass: From Early Christian Origins to Tridentine Reform*, Cambridge 2022, 70.

is referring itself to, and second what type of relationship it has with him. This system of signs, it goes almost without saying, varies considerably depending on times and locations, in other words depending on the different cultures. Nevertheless, it obeys a general “grammar,” and an essential aspect of this is the principle of consecration or being set apart as sacred. The community removes certain items or persons from common use and transfers them symbolically to the domain of God. These “consecrated” realities then become the sign of the presence of a transcendent, holy, separate God who is not “disposable” or manipulable, but who himself disposes all things according to his own free will. The principle of consecration culminates in the supreme act of external worship, which is sacrifice ... Around sacrifice, a whole signifying system of consecrations of places, times, objects and persons is put in place. This is where the priesthood as an institution appears. Within the worshipping community, which is itself consecrated and identified by means of initiation rites, certain people—priests—are set apart and consecrated to offer the sacrifice of the community and distribute its fruits to all. This consecration implies for priests a specific way of life that is visible as such to others, and that recalls, in the very heart of the society, the primacy of the religious and worship dimension in human life. The Christian priesthood takes up after its own fashion, analogically, this dimension of the sacred that belongs to the priesthood as a natural religious institution ... The eucharistic sacrifice is the summit of Christian worship ... The eucharistic sacrifice is, first, an external public act of worship accomplished by priests who are consecrated in order to carry out that sacred action ...⁶¹⁸

8.4 Priestly Mediation (Re.: 5.2, 5.3)

The central concern of Ratzinger’s earlier view on Christ’s mediation (5.2) is to free it from all ritual accretions from Old Testament and paganism and then apply the same principle to the ministry of the apostles and their successors (5.3). In essence, he argues that Jesus as the Mediator between God and man has nothing to do with rituals, and

given the weak and unclear usage of the word in the New Testament, priests are not to be seen as mediators.

What has been said under 8.3 and 8.3.1 on the new meaning of sacrifice applies equally to the new meaning of mediation. Mediation in the New Testament is not divested of rituality again because the Christian sense of sacrifice draws its force and meaning from the sacrifice which God himself has provided right from the Old dispensation up to its culmination in Christ – on his cross and in the eucharist. Indeed, Christ is not just a mediator. Rather as the Son of God, he is God's mediation in person. But his mediation does not exclude participation. Priests are “mediators” by participation in the one sacrifice of Christ. St. Paul succinctly affirms Christ's unique mediation *and* the priestly participation in the same mediation when he writes to the Corinthians that it is “God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5,18–20).

8.5 Institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood (Re.: 4.2, 5.16, 6.11)

The institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper is the most important argument for John Paul II (4.2) and the later Kasper (6.11). Ratzinger later also arrived at that conclusion (5.16). It is also the most criticized argument especially as defended by John Paul II.

John Paul II's argument can be summarized in three steps: 1) At the Last Supper, Christ bequeathed to the whole Church the mystery of his body and blood 2) In doing so, he entrusted it, however, into the responsibility of the twelve – the mandate 3) Through that mandate, he instituted the sacrament of the priesthood.

The Council of Trent, which is John Paul II's main reference point here, teaches exactly the same: while instituting the eucharist, Christ also instituted the twelve as his priests who are to be offering in a sac-

ramental manner his life sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of the world.⁶¹⁹ The Council condemns the denial of this teaching as heresy.

If anyone says that by the words “Do this in remembrance of me” [*Lk 22:19: 1 cor 11:24*] Christ did not establish the apostles as priests or that he did not order that they and other priests should offer his body and blood, let him be anathema [*cf. *1740*].⁶²⁰

Again, Pitre points out that the mandate is actually rooted in the Old Testament Passover ritual in which only priests offered the sacrifice. Hence, the mandate is in effect a constitutive act installing the twelve as priests.

When he told the disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25), he was echoing the command of God to keep the ancient Passover as a “remembrance” forever (Exodus 12:14). By means of these words, he was commanding his disciples to perpetuate this new Passover sacrifice in the future. Although we might miss it, by means of this command, Jesus was in effect restoring the original priesthood of the twelve tribes of Israel. As any ancient Jew would have known, only the priests could “pour out” the blood (Matthew 26: 27 – 28); yet that is precisely what Jesus commanded the Twelve disciples to do in memory of him.⁶²¹

Kasper’s argument (Section 6.11) draws to attention three other factors – these are actually presupposed by John Paul II: 1) Jesus celebrated the institution of the eucharist only with the twelve. It is one distinguishing feature between the Last Supper and other meals which Jesus attended 2) From this, it follows that the mandate to re-enact it and the responsibility for this farewell gift was given to the twelve 3) By designating the twelve at this point as “apostles”, St. Luke indicates that it is an installation into an office.

619 DH 1740.

620 DH 1752.

621 PITRE Brant, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, 73.

The fact that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper only with the twelve is unambiguously noted by the New Testament authors. St. Mark begins his story of paschal meal prepared by the apostles with the words: “When it was evening, he came with the twelve” (Mk. 14:17). The same is the case in the gospel of St. Matthew: “When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve” (Mt. 26:20). This has already been pointed out by Kasper (6.11). Hence, Vorgrimler’s argument against John Paul II (7.1.1) that the addressees of the words of commission were not only the twelve, is untenable or at least bears the burden of proof. In the same vein, the concept “apostle” introduced by St. Luke in this context is indeed referring to the twelve because the overall context of the events at the Paschal meal and Gethsemane revolves tightly around Jesus and his twelve (cf. Mt. 26:37–45, Lk. 22:8,31, Mk. 14:33). Beyond that, it is a truism in biblical exegesis, that St. Luke was the first to narrow down the initial meaning of “apostle” to the twelve (especially in the Acts of the Apostles).⁶²²

8.6 The Call of the Twelve and their Institution as Priests (Re.: 4.3, 5.6)

The earlier Ratzinger interprets the priesthood of the twelve apostles basically from their experience of being called out (“made”) by Jesus (Mk 3:13–19, Lk 6:12–16) [5.6]. In contrast, John Paul II interprets the call of the twelve, including the event of their being “made” the twelve, as the beginning of a journey whose goal and completion is accomplished at the Last Supper: the *reason* for their call was that may become priests, but it was not until at the institution of the eucharist that they became priests (4.3). In other words, John Paul II, is saying that until the moment of the institution of the eucharist, the twelve were simply

⁶²² Cf. SCHNACKENBURG Rudolf, *Evangelium nach Markus I*, Düsseldorf 1966, 224, Fn. 51; cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Jesus von Nazareth. Von der Taufe*, 269; cf. MENKE Karl-Heinz, Das sakramentale Denken verdunstet, in: Christoph BINNINGER et al (eds.), »Was ER euch sagt, das tut!« *Kritische Beleuchtung des Synodalen Weges*, Regensburg 2021,89–96: 95; cf. SCHLOSSER Marianne, Warum die Kirche keine Frauen weihen kann, in: Christoph BINNINGER et al (eds.), »Was ER euch sagt, das tut!« *Kritische Beleuchtung des Synodalen Weges*, Regensburg 2021,97–103: 99.

“the called” – in today’s language one would say “candidates for the priesthood”.

It is not evident, how alone the selection (“making”) of the twelve by Jesus already constitutes the priesthood, as the earlier Ratzinger claims. Certainly, it is a constitutive act, an act of new creation (*epoiesen*), indicating God’s gathering of the new twelve tribes of Israel.⁶²³ The creation of the twelve tribes of the new Israel, of course, implies the new common priesthood of the people of God, given that the old twelve tribes of Israel were a kingdom of priests to God (Ex. 19:6), and the Levitical priesthood was only later instituted by God through Moses (Ex. 28 and 29). It does not, however, *immediately* and *fully* suggest the institution of a ministerial priesthood.

John Paul II’s interpretation is more plausible. One could synthesize both views by distinguishing between the initial call to discipleship, the election of the twelve out of the crowd of disciples, and the commission at the Last Supper. The three events form a cumulative process of the vocation of the twelve. First, Christ calls them to leave their occupations and get to know him. In a second step, he clearly separates and elects them as representative of the new Israel in its fullness. Finally, he constitutes them as priests. This “distinction” is not meant to mean three exclusively separated acts, but the deepening and unfolding of the one and the same call. It is in this sense, that one may understand the Council’s words in its decree on mission: “From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus ‘called to Himself those whom He wished; and He caused twelve of them to be with Him, and to be sent out preaching (Mark 3:13; cf. Matt. 10:1-42). Thus the Apostles were the first budding – forth of the New Israel, and at the same time [*simulque*] the beginning [*origo*] of the sacred hierarchy.”⁶²⁴

John Paul II’s teaching (in line with the Council of Trent) that the institution of the twelve as priests took place precisely at the Last Sup-

623 Cf. LOHFINK Gerhard, *Braucht Gott die Kirche? Zur Theologie des Volkes Gottes*, Freiburg 1998, 202f. It is interesting to note that as at 1965, Ratzinger held the circle of the twelve to be not an office, but only a symbolic formation of the pre-resurrection period which became “functionless” after the Pentecost event. Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das Geschick Jesu und die Kirche*, 130.

624 *Ad gentes* §5.

per can also be supported by a synoptic reading of three events in the Scriptures, namely: the story of the call, the Paschal meal and Christ's Post-Paschal farewell message. When Jesus called the first apostles away from their normal occupations, he immediately attached a promise to his call: "I will make you fish for people" (Mt 4:19, Mk 1:17, Lk 5:10). The first suggestive meaning of the title "fishers of men" is: to win over people. In the context of the Scriptures, it means to convince people of the Kingdom of God / Jesus Christ. St. Mark also writes that Jesus called them in order to send them out to proclaim the gospel (Mk 3:14). However, at the Paschal meal, i.e., towards the end of Christ's co-existence with the twelve, it becomes clear that proclaiming the gospel involves something more than just "speaking". It involves the commission to celebrate the eucharist in remembrance of Christ. Shortly before the Last Supper, Christ announced how much he has been desiring to eat the Passover meal with them before his passion (Lk 22:15). In reverse conclusion, this means then that if he had not celebrated this specific Passover meal with them, the *reason* for their call would have only been fulfilled halfway or probably not. The essence of "fishing for men" would remain unfulfilled without the celebration of Christ's sacrifice. Furthermore, when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven after his resurrection, he recapitulated to the twelve once again their mission, i.e., the content of "fishing for men" to which he has called them:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28:19f.)

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. (Mk 16:15f.)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

In these Post-Paschal farewell words, both elements of “fishing for men” are specified: sacrament and word. John Paul II’s insight that they were first of all *called*, but then *in order to* become priests, is, therefore, biblically tenable. The proclamation of the word precedes the sacrament – they were called to do that. Nevertheless, it is only when they became priests that they received the sacramental power. It is also significant that before then, other disciples also took part in every other task (evangelization, healing, casting out of demons), but it is only after the twelve have been constituted as priests that they received the authority to forgive sins. In this sense, one can concur with Marc Cardinal Ouellet that the two events in which the apostles received sanctifying powers from Christ – the Last Supper *and* the empowerment to forgive sins (Jn 20:19–23) – constitute together the institution of the ministerial priesthood by Christ:

The sacrament of holy orders is clearly instituted by God in Christ’s two commands at the Last Supper and on the evening of his resurrection: “Do this in remembrance of me,” and “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” The *exousia* (*potestas*) of the ordained minister proceeds from the Spirit of the Father raising Christ from the dead and conferring on him from then onward a power that radiates from his transfigured humanity. He can communicate that power by his physical breath, which the Church will later express by the imposition of hands enabling ministers to announce the word with authority, and to administer the sacraments for the building up of the Church.⁶²⁵

It is true that Vatican II does not locate the institution of the priesthood in any one event, as Erio Castellucci and Nilson Leal de Sá argues (7.1.7.2). It does not, however, imply that the Vatican II disparages the traditional viewpoint, as Castellucci seems to suggest. The Council simply does not address the issue.

⁶²⁵ OUELLET Marc, The Holy Spirit and the Priesthood of Christ in the Church, in: Marc OUELLET (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol. 1, Vatican 2023, 113–137: 129.

8.6.1 On Kilmartin's Assessment of Holy Thursday Liturgy (Re.: 7.1.5.2)

If, as has been argued above, the ministerial priesthood was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, then the emphasis given to the priesthood on Holy Thursday Liturgy, is not a clericalization as Kilmartin claims (7.1.5.2) but the inner logical consequence (even if historically belated) of the relationship between the eucharist and the priesthood. From the biblical point of view, the development of the liturgy of Holy Thursday as the “birthday” of priesthood appears theologically justifiable (and probably historically unavoidable) because Christ’s institution of the “new covenant” at the Last Supper entails also the institution of a “new priesthood”. In other words, the Kilmartin’s assessment of Holy Thursday liturgy as an unfortunate clericalization of common Christian patrimony calls into question his very own theology of the institution of the eucharist. It is biblically speaking – both in the Old and New Testaments – impossible to decouple one from the other. The exegete Anthony Giambrone makes on this point a sound judgement of which I consider it appropriate to quote in its full length. In one stroke, it shows a value difference between institution of the twelve and their “call” and at the “Last Supper” as well as the necessary link between the latter and Holy Thursday.

Jesus’ own Christological reconfiguration of Israel is visible in multiple ways. The choice of the Twelve is entirely symbolic of a re-created Israel, with the twelve tribes united and gathered around the Messiah. The transformation of the Passover into the Eucharist illustrates even more brilliantly this reconfiguration. Out of the feast that stood at the heart of the identity of the Jewish people, of its entire history of salvation and its future hope, Jesus creates a rite that represents and makes present his own personal passion. The announcement, made during the meal, of a New Covenant that would replace the Old, a testament sealed “*in my blood*,” as Jesus says, is presented as the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy and the mediation of a new Moses. “See, days are coming—oracle of the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31 NABRE. The institution of the Eucharist

thus illustrates, perhaps more clearly than any other gesture of Jesus, his intention to inaugurate a new economy of salvation from within the old regime. To this extent, nothing could be more accurate than to locate Jesus' institution of the priesthood at this key moment. Theologically, the priestly character of Holy Thursday is a direct function of Jesus' *anamnesis* command—"Do this in remembrance of me." A share in his own high priestly action on the altar of the cross. The moment this mystical conjunction is embraced for the sacramental reality that it claims to be, a priestly service is established, binding Jesus' own priesthood to the earthly continuation of the cult he inaugurated. Christ's founding of the Church and his institution of its priesthood are inextricably intertwined events. In fact, there is not one without the other.⁶²⁶

Besides, that connection in the Holy Thursday liturgy is historically not an invention of the liturgical reforms of the 20th century, as Kilmartin would have it. Already, in the 8th century, the Councils of Germany (April 21, 742; can. 3) and Soissons (March 2, 744; can. 4) prescribe that all priests working in parishes are obliged to submit obediently to their bishops. And to foster this concretely, the councils stipulate amongst other things that on Holy Thursdays every priest should render an account of his work to the bishop and request for Chrism oil.⁶²⁷

626 GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood: Priestly Participation in the One Sacrifice for Sins*, Grand Rapids 2022, 271.

627 "Decrevimus quoque secundum sanctorum canones, ut unusquisque presbiter in parrochia habitans episcopo subiectus sit illi, in cuius parrochia habitet, et semper in quadragesima rationem et ordinem ministerii sui, sive de bapismo sive de fide catholica sive de precibus et ordine missarum, episcopo reddat et ostendat ... Et in cena Domini semper novum crisma ab episcopo querat, ut episcopum testis adsistat castitatis et vitae et fidei et doctrine illius." WERMINGHOFF Albert (ed.), *MGH: Legum Sectio III. Concilia, Tomus II, Concilia Aevi Karolini, Pars I*, Hannover 1906/1997, 3. "Et uniusquique presbyter qui in parrochia est, episcopo obediens et subiectus sit, et semper in coena Domini rationem et ordinem ministerii sui episcopo reddat, et crisma et oleo petat." *Ibid.*, 35. Cf. HARTMANN Wilfried, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankreich und in Italien*, Paderborn 1989, 51f., 57f.

8.7 Serving the Common Priesthood Primarily through the Eucharist (Re.: 4.4)

John Paul's argument that the ministerial priesthood is a pro-existence for the common priesthood (4.4) correlates with what has been said in 8.3. It is also in line with the teaching of Vatican II. The distinction made by the Council in *Lumen gentium* §10 between the common and the hierarchical priesthood begins first with a description of the former. In the description, "sacrifice", i.e. in the biblical sense of giving oneself, is a central notion of priestly existence.

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light [cf. 1 Pt.2:4-10]. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God [cf. Acts 2:42-47], should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God [cf. Rom. 12:1].⁶²⁸

To this extent, it is unambiguous that Christian priesthood (common or hierarchical) has its defining identity in the commitment of one's life to God. The adjoining famous section on the essential difference between both priesthoods now explains that the ordained priest serves the priestly people of God through the three offices. While it does not yet expressly prioritize the sanctification ministry, one cannot miss the greater emphasis devoted to it:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sac-

628 *Lumen gentium* §10.

rifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.⁶²⁹

In fact, some paragraphs later the line of thought from sacrificial life to the primacy of the eucharistic sacrifice is completed *expressis verbis*. The *place* where all the life sacrifices of the priestly people of God coalesce and find access to the God the Father is the sacrifice of the eucharist celebrated by the priest.

For besides intimately linking them to His [*scil.* Christ's] life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” [1 Pt. 2:5]. Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.⁶³⁰

Likewise, in *Presbyterorum ordinis* where sacrifice/commitment of one's life is emphasized as the quintessence of the common priesthood, the eucharist is upheld as the prerogative ministry of the ministerial priest. For through this ministry, he brings the sacrifice of the faithful into contact with Christ's sacrifice which sanctifies it. Even the ministry of preaching has as its ultimate goal the sanctification of the faithful's life sacrifices in the eucharist.

629 Ibid.

630 Ibid., §34.

In the measure in which they participate in the office of the apostles, God gives priests a special grace to be ministers of Christ among the people. They perform the sacred duty of preaching the Gospel, so that the offering of the people can be made acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Through the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel, the People of God are called together and assembled. All belonging to this people, since they have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, can offer themselves as “a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1). Through the ministry of the priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ. He is the only mediator who in the name of the whole Church is offered sacramentally in the Eucharist and in an unbloody manner until the Lord himself comes. The ministry of priests is directed to this goal and is perfected in it. Their ministry, which begins with the evangelical proclamation, derives its power and force from the sacrifice of Christ. Its aim is that “the entire commonwealth of the redeemed and the society of the saints be offered to God through the High Priest who offered himself also for us in his passion that we might be the body of so great a Head.”⁶³¹

8.8 The Logical Conclusion of a Eucharistic Ecclesiology (Re.: 4.5, 5.15, 6.13)

If it is true that the eucharist is the source of the Church's life – *ecclesia de eucharistia* –, then its logical consequence is that eucharist is the primary locus of priestly service, in so far as it is only an ordained priest that can preside over the eucharistic celebration. John Paul II follows this logic to its end without much theological sophistications when he argues that the ministerial is also a pro-existence for the eucharistic presences of Christ in the Church and in the world (4.5). Kasper later came to it (6.13).

Ratzinger's case takes a longer course. Interestingly he discovered the eucharistic ecclesiology of the Church Fathers right from the time of his doctorate study on St. Augustine, and has maintained that line

631 *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2.

of thought, but he was *at first* not consistent in drawing its significance for the ministerial priesthood.

During the years of Vatican II, Ratzinger published commentaries on each session of the Council. One big merit which he accords the Council is its teaching on the nature of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). According to him, the Council took a course different from Robert Bellarmine's anti-reformation ecclesiology which exaggerated the visible character of the Church. The Council did not also take up the concept of the body of Christ, in the sense given to it by Pius XII in the encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943) as an image of the organic structure of the Church. Instead, the Council uses the term "body of Christ" in the sense of the faith community brought together in the eucharistic worship.⁶³² Ratzinger takes this eucharistic ecclesiology to its logical conclusion for the priestly ministry, namely, a ministry of the eucharist:

From this point of view, too, the ecclesiastical ministries are defined. They thus appear as a plurality of ministries. Ministry in the Church essentially involves presiding over and preaching during the divine liturgy. It therefore involves a ministry of service. It serves as the table of the Lord's supper. A person who presides over a worshipping community is traditionally called a "bishop." Auxiliary functions, such as that of priest (presbyter) and deacon, were later additions. The Church, made up of communities whose function is divine worship, is accordingly built up from a community of bishops ...⁶³³

That means: what the bishop does at the eucharistic celebration explains his ministry. Here, Ratzinger clearly defines the priestly ministry through the eucharist. Already, in 1963, he indicates that the eucharistic body of Christ as source of the life of the Church is also the starting

632 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Das Konzil auf dem Weg. Rückblick auf die zweite Sitzungsperiode des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils (1964)*, in: *JRGS* 7/1, Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 359–415: 373f.; cf. —, *Ergebnisse und Probleme der dritten Konzilsperiode*, 429f.

633 RATZINGER Joseph, *Ergebnisse und Probleme der dritten Konzilsperiode*, 430. (*Theological Highlights*, 138).

centre of any conception of the priestly office in the Church.⁶³⁴ However, he seems to have easily overlooked this and focussed more intensively on a preaching priesthood.

In 1965 he published a paper on the ecclesiology of the Church Fathers. In it, he takes up again the issue of the secular titles for the ministers in the New Testament. This is interesting because the paper has a sub-section with the title “Ecclesiastical Ministry and Eucharistic Ecclesiology” (“*Das kirchliche Amt und die eucharistische Ekklesologie*”) and another sub-section with title “Ministry and Word” (“*Amt und Wort*”).⁶³⁵ For Ratzinger, three essential factors emerge from the eucharistic ecclesiology of the Church Fathers: the hierarchical structure of the Church, the apostolic succession within the college of Bishops, and the uniting function of the papacy in the Church as *communio*.⁶³⁶ Within this context, Ratzinger writes that the Church Fathers’ concept of ministry is “not far” from the eucharistic ecclesiology. It is part of their understanding of the Church as the body of Christ.⁶³⁷ He describes the Church as “tent” of the incarnated word of God, i.e., of the body of Christ; word and sacrament constitute together the essence of the Church. Nevertheless, Ratzinger concludes that the word is more fundamental. It is the basis of the Church Fathers’ theology of ministry.⁶³⁸

This subtle inconsistency in Ratzinger’s eucharistic ecclesiology has been noted by Aidan Nichols:

A eucharistic ecclesiology naturally gives much attention to the Church’s ministerial pattern, since no eucharistic celebration can be without its president, the ‘one who gives thanks’. Yet, oddly enough, Ratzinger’s own theology of ministerial office does not take its rise from reflection on the

⁶³⁴ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Kirchenbegriff und die Frage nach der Gliedschaft in der Kirche* (1963), in: *JRGS* 8/1, 290–307: 299.

⁶³⁵ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Der Kirchenbegriff im patristischen Denken*, 649–663.

⁶³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 658–661.

⁶³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 662.

⁶³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 662.

eucharistic assembly, as with the pure eucharistic ecclesiology of the Orthodox tradition, but from a wider, if more diffused, picture of the Gospel community.⁶³⁹

As we have seen (5.15), Ratzinger overcame this inconsistency in his later years. In 1980 (after his “turn”) Ratzinger wrote an article⁶⁴⁰ in which he reflected briefly on his discovery of the eucharistic ecclesiology during doctorate studies. Although there is no mention of the priesthood in the article, one can notice in it how indispensable the sacrament of the eucharist has become for his whole thinking on the Church. As he himself remarks, the article is rather an “autobiographical” presentation of his own pre-occupation with the subject.⁶⁴¹ While studying St. Augustine’s ecclesiology, it became clear to him that:

for the Church fathers, the eucharist and the Church are not like two things standing beside each other, rather, they thoroughly merge into each other. No doctrine of the eucharist exists apart from that of the Church, rather both are the same. The Church comes into and remains in existence as a result of the Lord communicating himself to humans, entering into communion with them and thus, bringing them into communion with each other ... That is why the Church always originates around an altar.⁶⁴²

Especially, the last sentence provokes the thought: if the altar is the place of origin of the Church, then it implies a grave significance for the priesthood which bears the responsibility for the altar. Going further, he writes that “it gradually became apparent [to him], how the

639 NICHOLS Aidan, *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, New York 2005, 139.

640 Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Gemeinde aus der Eucharistie* (1980), in: *JRGS* 1, 548–550.

641 Cf. *Ibid.*, 548.

642 [My translation]. “Auf diese Weise wurde mir sichtbar, dass bei den Vätern Eucharistie und Kirche nicht wie zwei verschiedene Dinge nebeneinanderstehen, sondern durchaus ineinanderfallen. Es gibt nicht eine Lehre von der Eucharistie und eine solche von der Kirche, sondern beides ist dasselbe. Kirche entsteht und besteht dadurch, dass der Herr sich Menschen kommuniziert, in Kommunion mit ihnen tritt und sie so zur Kommunion miteinander bringt ... Deswegen entsteht Kirche jeweils um einen Altar herum.” *Ibid.*, 548f.

whole structure of the Church results from the eucharistic centre and how nothing anymore could be understood, if one does not start from there.”⁶⁴³ Here again, the direction of thought is obvious: If priesthood is an essential part of the Church’s structure, and the whole Church structure in turn has its roots in the eucharist, then it is more coherent to consider the sanctifying ministry as the fundamental ministry of the priest. If nothing anymore could be understood without taking the eucharist as starting point of theology, then it also holds for the theology of the priesthood.

Moreover, it is pertinent to note that the consequence of a eucharistic ecclesiology for the theology of the priesthood is ecumenically significant, because the Orthodox Church’s understanding of the priestly ministry is eucharist-centred.⁶⁴⁴

8.9 Eucharist: Source, Means and Summit of Proclamation and Governance (Re.: 4.6, 5.5, 5.9, 6.8)

It follows from the foregoing argument that the eucharist is the source which fills proclamation and governance with divine life, since the whole life of the Church depends on it. This is exactly John Paul’s view (4.6). For the later Kasper, it is the sacrament of the unity of the Church (6.8).

Ratzinger’s earlier theology of the ministerial priesthood was strongly stimulated by Luther’s criticisms of the priesthood in the Catholic Church.⁶⁴⁵ He took Luther seriously. However, the earlier Ratzinger, in the bid to accommodate the Lutheran criticism without

643 [My translation]. “So wurde mir Schritt um Schritt sichtbar, wie die ganze Kirchenverfassung aus der eucharistischen Mitte folgt und wie eigentlich nichts mehr zu verstehen ist, wenn man nicht von da ausgeht.” *Ibid.*, 549.

644 On that see: KOCH Kurt, *The Ecumenical Challenges of the Priesthood*, in: Marc OUELLET (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol 1., Vatican 2023, 167–183; 167–171.

645 On this topic, see: DONOVAN Daniel, *What Are They Saying*, 63f.; cf. FAZIO Giuseppe, *Il sacerdozio ministeriale*, 195–218; cf. BUTLER Sara, *The Priesthood*, in: Daniel CARDÓ / Uwe Michael LANG (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, Cambridge 2024, 195–210: 195.

jeopardizing the Catholic understanding, developed a theology of the sacramental word (5.5, 5.9) which in the final analysis both leaves an unclear difference between sacrament and word in their respective rites as well as subordinating eucharist to preaching.

As already noted in section 5.11.3, for Luther the priesthood is essentially about preaching. Philipp Melancthon, Luther's representative and fellow, already wrote in 1530/31: "But if ordination is understood starting from the ministry of the Word, we would not be reluctant to call ordination a sacrament."⁶⁴⁶ Ratzinger's effort to incorporate the concern for the word and thereby retrieve, so to speak, the lost value given to the proclamation of the word in the Catholic priesthood, is best summarized in his text quoted at the very beginning of chapter five of this work where he says that the fundamental task of the priest is proclamation, but then within this framework, the sacrament of the eucharist is "central". This is interesting because it raises the question of what exactly Ratzinger means by *centrality* of the eucharist in preaching. It is to be noted that for John Paul II, the *centrality* of the eucharist means that it is the very source of preaching and leading, while for the earlier Ratzinger, it is the key *part* of preaching.

As regards the *munus regendi*, it is noteworthy, that Ratzinger, responding as pope to a question on the possibility of increased participation of women in Church governance, argues that the governance of the Church is done by Christ himself precisely through the sacraments, especially the eucharist. In other words, the impossibility of ordaining women as priests in the Church also implies the impossibility of the governance of the Church by women, even if they can be incorporated into governance to some extent.

We can say that the issue is this: the priestly ministry of the Lord, as we know, is reserved to men, since the priestly ministry is government in the deep sense, which, in short, means it is the Sacrament [of Orders] that governs the Church. This is the crucial point. It is not the man who does

⁶⁴⁶ MELANCHTHON Philipp, *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae XIII*, in: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen ⁷1976, 139–404: 293, 42. Quotation and English translation from: KOCH Kurt, *The Ecumenical Challenges of the Priesthood*, 176, 182, Fn. 25.

something, but the priest governs, faithful to his mission, in the sense that it is the Sacrament, that is, through the Sacrament it is Christ himself who governs, both through the Eucharist and in the other Sacraments, and thus Christ always presides. However, it is right to ask whether in ministerial service – despite the fact that here Sacrament and charism are the two ways in which the Church fulfils herself – it might be possible to make more room, to give more offices of responsibility to women.⁶⁴⁷

8.10 The Eucharistic Context of Jn. 15:15 (Re.: 4.7, 5.6.1, 6.14)

John Paul II (4.7), Ratzinger (5.6.1) and Kasper (6.14) make a case for the primacy of the eucharist in the priesthood by interpreting Christ's words of friendship in Jn. 15:15 as being specific to the twelve in the context of the institution of the eucharist. In other words, the friendship Christ is speaking of here is something specific to the priesthood, and therefore, its Last Supper background points to the primacy of the eucharist in the priestly ministry. From the perspective of biblical exegesis, this argument is rather living on the edge because its exegetical presuppositions – the Last Supper as its context – lacks ironclad clarity in the Scriptures. One can plausibly argue both for or against such interpretation. For a balanced exegesis which would both support it but at the same time takes cognizance of the inherent problems, I follow here the commentary of the American New Testament scholar Raymond Brown (1928–1988).

The major exegetical issue that calls such an interpretation into question is the question of the historical setting: Jn. 15:15 falls within the portion of John's Gospel fittingly identified as Jesus' "Last Discourse" (chapters 14 to 17) – an appellation which, however, denotes not a uniformly chronological transcript of Jesus' words, rather a combination of the "actual Last Supper sayings of Jesus with material from the [*scil.*

⁶⁴⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with Members of the Roman Clergy on March 2, 2006, 7, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060302_roman-clergy.html (Accessed on 26.05.2025).

his] public life”⁶⁴⁸ An intra-text indicator of the fact that precisely the 15th chapter of John’s gospel is among those sections which the author may have brought in from the public life of Jesus into the Last Supper setting is the ending of the 14th chapter (verses 30 and 31) with words which, when cross-referenced with the other gospels, indicate the transition from the Last Supper context into the agony in the garden: “The mention of the coming of the Prince of the world resembles Luke xxii 53 where Jesus acknowledges that the moment of his arrest is the hour of the ‘power of darkness.’”⁶⁴⁹ More vividly, verse 31 indicates the spatial and chronological departure from the Last Supper context into Gethsemane: Jesus says to them – “Rise, let us be on our way” (Jn. 14:31; cf. Mk. 14:42).⁶⁵⁰ Moreover, after this point, the flow of the narration is temporarily interrupted: “The clear indication of the end of the meal, which should logically be followed by 18:1, serves us notice that the following three chapters of discourse can scarcely be considered part of one long speech spoken historically at the Last Supper.”⁶⁵¹ “The last line of 31 was the ending of the original Last Discourse ... the final editor did not want to tamper with this ending and so, despite the fact that he was creating an awkward sequence, added additional form of the Last Discourse after 31.”⁶⁵² If this is the case, it means that the Last Supper is not the historical context of Christ’s declaration of friendship to his disciples.

The inherent exegetical content that would lend plausibility to John Paul II’s and later Ratzinger’s and Kasper’s interpretation include:

1. The act of election: In the very next verse following the declaration of friendship, Jesus says to them: “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so

648 BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary*, Minnesota 1988, 75; cf. also BEUTLER Johannes, *Das Johannesevangelium. Kommentar*, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 374.

649 BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John (XIII–XXI)*, New York 1970, 656.

650 Cf. *Ibid.*, 656; cf. BEUTLER Johannes, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 413f.

651 Cf. BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 78; cf. BEUTLER Johannes, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 374f., 417.

652 BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John*, 656; cf. —, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, New York 2003, 84.

that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (Jn. 15:16). Brown draws attention to the fact that the Greek word *τιθέναι* (to appoint) – translated here as “to choose” – is the same word used in verse 13 for “laying down one’s life”; hence, it linguistically unites both “the commissioning of the disciples and the example of love that Jesus gave them”.⁶⁵³ In fact, there is an exegetical view point which “suggests that the Greek verb may reflect the Heb. *sāmak*, ‘to lay [hands] on, ordain,’ the verb used in later Judaism of the ordination of a scholar or rabbi. *Sāmak/epithenai* are used respectively in MT and LXX Num viii 10 for the ordination of the Levites and in Num xxvii 18 for Moses’ commission of Joshua.”⁶⁵⁴ While the whole context naturally favours the view that those Jesus’ “friends” (vs. 14 and 15) in this speech are all Christians who live in union with him by faith and love, and not just a special group of persons within the Christian group,⁶⁵⁵ it does not necessarily exclude the possibility that his specific addressee here are the twelve apostles. For in the last verse (27) of the same chapter, Jesus addresses his immediate audience as those “who have been with him from the beginning”, and these are clearly the twelve.⁶⁵⁶

2. Eucharistic Overtones: Brown argues that while the allegory of the vine and the branches in Jn. 15 alludes *primarily* to the disciples’ union with Jesus by faith and love, it also *secondarily* symbolises the sacrament of the eucharist. Though Jesus did not originally make the speech at the Last Supper, the very fact that John places it in that context suggests that he has the reference to the eucharist in mind.⁶⁵⁷ Brown gives a number of reasons for the validity of this reading.
 - a. The imagery of the vine would readily evoke association to the eucharist given that the syntagma “fruit of the vine” is used to designate the cup of the Last Supper, not only in the gospels

653 Cf. BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John*, 664f.

654 Ibid., 665.

655 Cf. Ibid., 682f.

656 Cf. Ibid., 683. BEUTLER Johannes, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 429, interprets the Johannine theme of “election” of the twelve by Jesus (Jn. 6:70, 13:18) in this direction.

657 Cf. BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John*, 672–674.

- (Mk. 14:25, Mt. 26:29), but also in the early Christian eucharistic prayer as recorded in the *Didache* (9,2).⁶⁵⁸
- b. A central theme in the allegory of the vine and the branches is that of *bearing fruit*. Apart from the context of that allegory, Jesus speaks of *bearing fruit* only once again in the gospel of John, and it is in reference to his death: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). Since Jesus’ sacrificial death is a stable feature of the institution narratives in all the gospels, it means that with the “fruit” of the vine, John is alluding here again to the cup of the eucharist.⁶⁵⁹
 - c. A juxtaposition with the *locus classicus* of the eucharist in John’s gospel (6:51–58) shows a strong connection: “In particular, xv 5 with its ‘He who remains in me and I in him’ echoes vi 56: ‘The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.’ In xv it is implied that life comes to the branch through the vine; so in vi 57 we hear: ‘The man who feeds on me will have life because of me.’ In xv 13 Jesus speaks of one’s laying down his life for those he loves; in vi 51 he says: ‘The bread that I shall give is my own flesh for the life of the world.’ The ‘I am the living bread’ of vi 51 and ‘I am the real vine’ of xv 1 form a Johannine diptych not unlike ‘This is my body’ and ‘This is my blood.’”⁶⁶⁰

658 Cf. *Ibid.*, 673. Joseph Ratzinger also shares this view: “In this chapter 15 we have the Discourse on the Vine: the Lord does not speak explicitly of the Eucharist. Naturally, however, behind the mystery of the wine is the reality that he has made himself fruit and wine for us, that his Blood is the fruit of the love born from the earth for ever and, in the Eucharist, this Blood becomes our blood, we are renewed, we receive a new identity because Christ’s Blood becomes our blood. Thus we are related to God in the Son and, in the Eucharist, this great reality of life in which we are branches joined to the Son and thereby in union with eternal love becomes our reality.” BENEDICT XVI, Visit to the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary on the Occasion of the Feast of our Lady of Trust on February 12, 2010: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100212_seminario-romano-mag.html (accessed on 22.05.2025).

659 Cf. BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John*, 673.

660 *Ibid.*

8.11 The Question of Christ's Layman Status (Re.: 5.1)

As we have seen in section 5.1, one of the theses on which Ratzinger's earlier conviction rests is this: for the fact that Jesus was not in any way a member of the priestly caste both in his Jewish background as well as in the general history of religion, therefore, his new priesthood is not to be aligned with the ritual priesthood of the Old Testament. A careful exegesis of the Old Testament data on priesthood, however, reveals a certain deficit in such an interpretation, as shown by Giambrone. In his exegesis of the priestly book of Leviticus 8–10, he highlights the role of Moses in the institution of Aaron's priesthood. Moses presides over the priestly ordination ceremony, but it does not seem that he himself had been ordained a priest. In any case, the Pentateuch is silent on that, though he is from the tribe of Levi (Ex. 2:1) and is called a priest (Ps. 99:6) as well as his descendants (cf. Judg. 18:30).⁶⁶¹ In other words, even though Moses was most probably not a priest in the juridical-Jewish sense, and yet a priest in some mysterious way, he was the "*high-priest maker*", just as he was the "covenant-maker" between God and the people of Israel (Ex. 24:4–8).⁶⁶² Giambrone further corroborates this point with the biblical examples of kings being priest-makers. A vivid example is King Solomon. He not only dedicates the temple and consecrates the altar of sacrifice (1 Kg. 8) – all these are priestly responsibilities –, but he also intrudes (in fulfilment of a prophecy: 1 Sam. 2:35–36) into the priestly line by replacing Abiathar the incumbent priest, not with the rightful successor and son Eleazar, rather with Zadok (1 Kg. 2:26–27, 35).⁶⁶³ The king's actions have their authority not from the king himself, but from the divine who appoints the king; and it is the same authority which stands behind Moses' role as priest-maker:

In the royal ideology of the ancient Near East, of course, it was not simply the king's own personal authority that grounded a temple-*cum*-priest-

⁶⁶¹ Cf. GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 51.

⁶⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 52, 112.

hood. It was the patron god (or gods) who, through the king, simply executed the heavenly plan for a divine abode ... In Leviticus 8, it is likewise the Lord himself who, through Moses' agency, divinely establishes the tabernacle priesthood. The sevenfold repetition that Moses acted just "as the Lord commanded" makes this emphatically clear.⁶⁶⁴

The divine authorization, however, does not only empower the king to institute temple and priesthood, but also uses the later reversely to legitimize the royalty itself – a sort of circuitous-mutual ratification.

Because it is ultimately divine authority that stands behind the creation of a priesthood and a cult of service to the gods, the relationship of priestly to regal authority is more complex than what might appear from what has been said. For kings will also be anointed by priests: Solomon by Zadok, for example (1 Kings 1:39). To appreciate this circular exchange of legitimation, it is essential to appreciate that an ancient Near Eastern king's royal status was itself contingent upon his god-granted, higher-than-high-priestly power of establishing a temple in which that god might dwell, equipped with a full cohort of liturgical servants. A king was not settled upon the throne until he had created such a divine abode and erected a placating divine service in his realm. This alone would hold the surrounding chaos at bay ... In this sense, one is confirmed as king precisely and only insofar as one already possesses that supreme priestly power necessary to erect a temple-*cum*-priesthood.⁶⁶⁵

Based on these data from the world of the Old Testament, and a Christian hermeneutics of it, if then Jesus is the fulfilment of Moses as suggested by Matthew's Gospel and he embodies God's royalty (kingdom), then the thesis of Jesus as a "lay man" should be put in a circumspect perspective: Jesus is the priest-maker of the New Covenant and juridical priesthood is not a condition for him just as it was not for Moses and the Kings. His juridical lay-status is in no way an argument for the priority of the word over the sanctification. In fact, the opposite is more

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 53.

likely the case: priority of the eucharistic ritual in the priestly ministry. Thus, I agree with Giambrone's conclusion:

In view of these reflections it becomes manifest why contemporary portrayals of Jesus as a “layman” whose priestly identity would be an ungrounded fabrication of Jesus are not only polemically formulated but profoundly confused. It is of inherent meaning that, like Moses the priest-maker, Jesus—at least according to his fleshly descent—is not and actually *cannot* be a priest. To found a priesthood, Jesus must stand beyond it in the manner of a king. And as Hebrews says, “It is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests” (Heb. 7:14). Jesus is accordingly at this level (and still more than Moses) a royal figure whose own priestly ministry inevitably stands beyond the priesthood that he institutes. Yet, like Moses and all priest-making kings ... Jesus participates in an extraordinary way in the same sacrificial activities and sanctifying functions by which his new priestly order is erected.⁶⁶⁶

Giambrone further develops the same point from another perspective – a perspective we already found in the later Ratzinger (5.13), namely the relationship with John the Baptist and its significance for Christ's priesthood. He writes: “As with Solomon, anointed by Zadok, a circular transaction will be exchanged between the Judahite Jesus and the priestly John ... In all essentials, the model is strikingly upheld.”⁶⁶⁷

8.12 The Problem of the Profane Terminology of the New Testament (Re.: 5.4, 6.1)

For the earlier Ratzinger and Kasper, the absence of any sacred title for the New Testament ministers in the Christian communities serves as evidence for the desacralized nature of Christian priesthood, and

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid. On Christ's priesthood as developed in the seventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, see further: SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER Ludger, Die reine Opfergabe, in: *IKaz* 53 (2024) 276–286: 284f.

⁶⁶⁷ GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 53.

therefore, the less significant role of liturgical rite in defining the priesthood.⁶⁶⁸ One may, however, ask: How really profane were the so-called profane terms used by the New Testament authors for the priestly ministry? The claim that these were purely secular titles which had nothing to do with religion is actually untenable. Two observations suffice:

8.12.1 Religious Connotations of the Profane Titles

Jean-Robert Amogathie has recently pointed out that the *presbyteroi* at least at the time of Jesus Christ were the “elders” in the Jewish circles. These elders were also among the religious authorities alongside the scribes and the high priests, as also indicated in the New Testament:⁶⁶⁹

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders [τῶν πρεσβυτέρων] and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Mt. 16:21)

When day came, the assembly of the elders [τὸ πρεσβυτέριον] of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. (Lk. 22:26)

The next day their rulers, elders [τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους], and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. (Acts 4:5f.)

I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, as the high priest and the whole council of elders [τὸ πρεσβυτέριον] can testify about me. (Acts 22:4f.)

668 This was not the opinion of only Ratzinger and Kasper. It has been a popular opinion since the post-conciliar years till date. Cf. KÜNG Hans, *Wozu Priester?* 108f.

669 AMOGATHIE Jean-Robert, Priesthood according to the Fathers of the Church, in: Marc Ouellet (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol 1., Vatican 2023, 35–50: 37.

Likewise, the title *proistamenoí* designates the religious leaders in the respective seats of the Essenes group. We find this instance in Hippolytus of Rome's description of their practices:

They have in each city a presiding officer [προεστῶτα] who spends the contributions on preparing clothes and food for them. Their robes and clothing are discreet. They do not possess two overcoats or two pairs of sandals. Whenever their current attire grows old, another set of clothes is supplied. They do not buy or sell at all: the one who has gives to him who has not; and the one who has not receives.⁶⁷⁰

Ratzinger himself later (as Pope emeritus) conceded that the titles were not completely without religious connotations. According to him, the word *apostolos*, while being a technical term in the Greek political ambience, was used in pre-Christian Judaism “to interconnect the secular function of an envoy, responsibility to God, and religious significance. In this context, it designates an envoy authorized by God and appointed for a task.”⁶⁷¹ The Greeks also called their gods *episcopoi* (protectors) and the Septuagint (the first and oldest Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses it both as a name for God as well as in the general sense of an “overseer.”⁶⁷²

Moreover, the New Testament itself already indicates that the purportedly profane titles actually find the fulfilment of their religious backgrounds in Christ. Ratzinger later recognizes this. In 1960 he was still very much convinced that the word “ordo” remains the more appropriate Catholic term than “priesthood” (*sacerdotium*), because the latter designates something religious of human origin and therefore externally blurs the radical difference between the new reality in Christ and the priesthood of other religions:

⁶⁷⁰ HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME, *Philosophoúmena* 9, 20 (*Refutation of all Heresies*, trans. by David LITWA, Atlanta 2016, 674–677).

⁶⁷¹ BENEDICT XVI, *The Catholic Priesthood*, 27.

⁶⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 27f. In both cases, he refers to: KITTEL Gerhard (ed.), *ThWNT* I, Stuttgart 1933, 406 and *ThWNT* II, Stuttgart 1935, 610. The Old Testament texts: Wisdom 1:6, Job 20:29, Isaiah 60:17, cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik* VII, 478.

One can in no way identify the New Testament office, which is in fact New Testament service, with the phenomenon of priesthood in other religions. It is by nature something totally different. That it resembles priesthood factually, purely as a phenomenon, does not derive from its nature, but from the fact that a perfect fulfilment of being in the world of concrete appearances always remains impossible. It comes from a breaking-in of the individual element which is not of Christ. So it is that, to this day, the sixth sacrament is called, in the language of the Church, not *sacerdotium*, but *ordo*.⁶⁷³

The platonic tang in that explanation is striking. In any case, in 2022 Ratzinger wrote his final word on Priesthood. In it, the radical dichotomy between *sacerdotium* and *ordo* disappears in a hermeneutics of continuity between the Old and New Testaments:

The destruction of the Temple walls, caused by man, is accepted in a positive way by God. There are no more walls, because the Risen Christ has become, for mankind, the space in which to adore God. In this way, the collapse of the Herodian Temple signifies that now nothing more comes between, on the one hand, the linguistic and the existential space of the Mosaic legislation and, on the other hand, the space of the movement gathered around Jesus. The Christian ministries (*episkopos*, *preybteros*, *diakonos*) and those that were regulated by the Mosaic law (high priests, priests, Levites) from now on stand openly side by side. The former can now be identified in relation to the others in a new clarity. Indeed, the terminological equivalence comes about rather quickly: *episkopos* designates the High Priest, *presbyteros* the priest, *diakonos* the Levite.⁶⁷⁴

He substantiates this terminological marriage with the first epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (96 A.D.) which teaches:

673 RATZINGER Joseph, *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit*, 80 (*The Open Circle*, 93).

674 BENEDICT XVI, *The Catholic Priesthood*, 34.

We are obliged to carry out in fullest detail what the Master commanded us to do at stated times. He has ordered the sacrifices to be offered and the services to be held, and this is not in a random or irregular fashion, but at definite times and seasons.... Special functions are assigned to the high priest; a special office is imposed upon the priests; and special ministrations fall to the Levites. The layman is bound by the rules laid down for the laity.⁶⁷⁵

8.12.2 The Absence of the Title ἱερεὺς: Identity Formation and Distinction

The reason for the avoidance of the title “priest” for the twelve apostles and their successors in early Christianity is more subtle than an outright rejection of ritual. It was rather intended to avoid confusing the new priesthood with that of Jewish and pagan religions.⁶⁷⁶ Christ’s death and sacrifice on the cross does not immediately suggest to the human mind any connection to pagan priesthood. “Phenotypically, Christ’s priesthood has nothing in common with the priesthood of the pagan milieu.”⁶⁷⁷ For instance, the fact of female priesthood in pagan religions has no symbolic continuity in Christ.

If Christ and the bearers of the apostolic office were designated as priests for reason of adjusting the expanding Christianity to its pagan surrounding, then, women priesthood would have been the logical consequence. For: »The office of the high priestesses in the emperor cult was also open for women, and it was so, not because they were the wives of the high priests, as was initially thought, but definitely in its own right.⁶⁷⁸

675 CLEMENT OF ROME, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* XL, 1–5. Quoted in: BENEDICT XVI, *The Catholic Priesthood*, 35. Cf. (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 96–98).

676 Cf. ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Verantworteter Glaube. Theologische Beiträge*, vol. 1, Buttenwiesen 1999, 119–122; cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 478, 483f.; cf. GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 212–236.

677 [My translation]. MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Sakramentalität*, 203.

678 “Wäre die Bezeichnung Christi und der Inhaber des apostolischen Amtes als Priester der Anpassung des sich ausbreitenden Christentums an das pagane Umfeld geschuldet, dann wäre das Frauenpriestertum die logische Konsequenz gewesen. Denn: »Das Amt von Oberpriesterinnen im Kaiserkult stand auch Frauen offen, und zwar nicht, wie man

In other words, by avoiding the title “priest” for priests, the early Christians were also conceptually setting their faith identity off from pagan faith. The earlier Ratzinger has already indicated this fact, but he interpreted it as a criticism of cult. The argument here, however, is that the primary intention of the early Christians was not simply a criticism of ritual in favour of proclaiming the word. Lang appears to read Justin Martyr’s description of the eucharistic celebration in this sense:

Another peculiarity of Justin’s *First Apology* is the generic phrase ‘he who presides’ (ὁ προεστώς), by which he avoids any technical terminology for office-holders in Church (he does, however, mention deacons later). In all probability, it is the bishop or presbyter who preaches after the scriptural readings and leads the Eucharistic prayer.⁶⁷⁹

Capelle-Dumont takes the mystery of the incarnation as a principle to buttress this point. In so far as the mystery is marked by temporality, that is, occurred also within the dimension of time, it did not simply “delete” what has *been* in time (salvation history), though it “subverted” it.⁶⁸⁰ Analogical cases are the gradual but definite Christian assimilations and transformation of the terms *philosophy*, *theology* and *reli-*

zunächst annahm, als Gattinnen von männlichen Oberpriestern, sondern durchaus im eigenen Recht.“ Ibid., 203, Fn. 454. He quotes KLAUCK Hans-Josef, *Die religiöse Umwelt des Urchristentums II: Herrscher- und Kaiserkult, Philosophie und Gnosis*, Stuttgart 1996, 66. In this regard, it is also instructive that Forum III of the German Synodal Path demanding for the admission of women into the Catholic priesthood also resorts to the argument about the absence the term “priest” for the twelve in New Testament. While claiming a disjunction between the acts of the historical Jesus and those of the post-Easter Christian community, Forum III also argues that the identity of the twelve as “apostles” and the subsequent emergence of the male ministerial priesthood in the Church is due to the Gospels (especially Luke’s double work) which, though written much more later, effectively surmounted the earlier charismatic ideal of the Christian Community as reflected in the Pauline epistles. Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Decisions of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redен_Beitraege/beschluesse-broschueren/Englisch/Synodaler-Weg-EN-Decisions.pdf (accessed on 26.04.2025), 83–87.

679 LANG Uwe Michael, *The Roman Mass*, 62; cf. JUSTIN MARTYR, *First Apology* 67,4–6.

680 Cf. CAPELLE-DUMONT Philippe, Ministerial and Baptismal Priesthood. Theological Issues and Pastoral Challenges, in: Marc OUELLET (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol. 1., Vatican 2023, 92–107: 102.

gion. They weren't original Christian terms, but Christianity adopted them over long centuries by "subverting their previous semantic layers, not deleting them".⁶⁸¹ The same holds for the concept "priesthood" in Christianity:

The New Testament takes up the concept of priesthood afresh since it is part of the working of the covenant, both old and new. That the priesthood of the new covenant fulfils that of the old covenant was clearly understood with regard to the condemnation in 144 of Marcion, who had urged the abandonment of the Old Testament as obsolete; and also with reference to the notion of fulfilling. Fulfilling the Old Testament law brings about an insoluble tension between rupture and continuity. Thus the newness of the priesthood of Christ *neither abrogates the Old Testament priesthood, nor acts as a linear development of it*. Its newness brings rupture, and *it is this rupture that constitutes the fulfilment*. It is by this very tension that the priesthood of Christ is a "revelation." The Old Testament priesthood is revealed in the revelation of the priesthood of Christ. And it is in that revelation, where the rupture participates in the fulfilment and summing-up, that the ministerial priesthood is located.⁶⁸²

In all, it must of course be noted that the New Testament did not absolutely ignore the title priest. It used it for Christ and for Christians in general. This fact alone, makes the argument with profanity of terms questionable. A downplaying of the ritual character of the New Testament priesthood is foreign to the New Testament. Such a view is based probably on a one-sided interpretation of the Pauline theology.

It is quite right that the letter to the Hebrews regards the Christ-event as the definite reconciliation of humanity with God, a reconciliation which makes all sacrificial rites of the post-exilic temple ritual superfluous. With this assessment, however, one readily ignores that the Christ-

⁶⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 102f.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 103.

event is described in ritual categories in the same letter to the Hebrews. Christ is the high priest who sacrifices and is at the same time the sacrifice (Heb. 9:11f., Eph. 5:2, Phil. 2:8).⁶⁸³

8.13 Earlier Ratzinger's Insight on the Re-Union of Word and Sacrifice in the New Priesthood (Re.: 5.8)

As we have seen in section 5.8, Ratzinger argues that in Christ the bifurcation in Judaism of the teaching of the word (rabbis) and liturgical worship (priests) was overcome. The argument in itself is very illuminating. But the point of interest here is that earlier Ratzinger tends to *move* from this premise to a certain diminution of cultic priesthood, in order to uphold the priority of the word. There is, however, a biblical exegesis of the mentioned bifurcation which actually suggests more plausibly that the opposite was the case. Giambrone makes a convincing case showing that the said re-union of the prophetic and the priestly (as well as the kingly) was already under way in the visions of the prophets Zechariah and Malachi, as well as in the book of Sirach.⁶⁸⁴ Moreover, of greater interest for our purposes is Giambrone's discovery that the said re-union takes the direction of a complete renewal of the institutional priesthood into which the prophetic ministry gets integrated. In other words, it is an envisaged fusion in which the cultic priesthood (understood in a wholistic sense) becomes more decisive. I limit myself here to a summary of his explanation of the figure of the high priest Joshua in Zechariah's visions. In the wake of the Israelites' return from the Babylonian exile and the beginning of the Second Temple period, Zechariah had three visions about Joshua the high priest who also returned from

683 "Richtig ist dass, der Hebräerbrief das Christusergebnis als die endgültige Versöhnung der Menschheit mit Gott betrachtet, die alle Opferriten des nachexilischen Tempelkultes erübrigt. Bei dieser Feststellung wird aber gern übersehen, dass das Christusergebnis in demselben Hebräerbrief in kultischen Kategorien beschrieben wird. Christus ist der Hohepriester, der zugleich der Opfernde und die Opfergabe ist (Hebr 9,11ff; Eph 5,2; Phil 2,8)." MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Sakramentalität*, 203.

684 Cf. GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 116–145.

exile: Joshua's vindication from Satan's accusation and his re-clothing (3:1–10), the two olive trees (4:6–14) and his coronation (6:9–15). All three are driven by one concern, namely, to streamline the priesthood and its relationship to kingship of David's dynasty, given that there was no longer any king since the exile. Thus, Joshua's priesthood introduces so to speak a new phase in salvific history.⁶⁸⁵ Relevant for our purposes is especially the first vision. In it, God defends the high priest against the accusations of Satan. The precise content of the accusation is not given, but is not far-fetched. Given the steady tradition of alarms and warnings from the prophets against the cultic (idolatry) and moral (exogamy) decline of priest and people, the exile must have been a period when the bottom was hit. This is encapsulated by the image of the "filthy clothes" which God commands to be taken off the high priest. So, two important realities are addressed here. On the one hand, there is Satan as the ultimate driving force working to destroy God's plan for his priests and people. So, God's defence of Joshua is an intervention setting boundaries for Satan. On the other hand, the gesture of removing the filthy clothes from the high priest reveal the removal of guilt, as stated in the vision itself (3:4). Thus, the ritual re-clothing and especially the placing of the turban on his head indicates, beyond the purification, a sort of divine re-institution of his priesthood and the people of God, especially as there are elements highly suggestive of a connection with the ritual of the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, Zechariah's vision is not only about Joshua the high priest. Mention is made in 3:8 of his "colleagues" sitting before him. In other words, his co-priests. They are designated as "men of *môpēt*" (omen), that is men of prophecy. Hence, Giambrone, relying on the studies of Carol and Eric Meyers, considers a visionary fusion of the prophetic into the priestly ministry, a new era of "prophetic priests."⁶⁸⁷ He quotes the mentioned authors:

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 118f.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* 119–127.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.

Whereas in the preexilic period the prophets loomed as the ultimate recourse in the seeking of God's purposes, the emerging status of the Torah literature as the community rule in the post-exilic period gave to the guardians and promulgators of that literature, namely the priests, the function of communicators of divine will that had previously rested with the prophets.... Zechariah's utilization of the phrase "men of portent" thus reflects the process of priestly absorption of a function previously associated chiefly with the prophets.⁶⁸⁸

Hence, Giambrone's conclusion:

In other words, far from foretelling the end of the *priesthood*, prophecy foresees its own eclipse! For most scholars, the second half of Zechariah (chaps. 9–14) already represents a move in this fateful direction of the dissolution of classical prophecy into apocalyptic ... The long arc traced from pre- to postexilic prophecy within the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets is itself adequate to measure something of this movement and transformation. In the new order Zechariah foresees, the priests will be the "men of omen," the source of the divine instruction that the prophets fault the earlier priests for failing to give. This role of the priest-scribe as a neo-prophetic (i.e., neo-Mosaic) personage, the prime dispenser of divine communications, is seen clearly in the figure of Ezra, who in the manner of a new Moses reads the Torah to all the people (Neh. 8:1–3). Ezra's overt casting as a priestly neo-Moses fits within a broader scheme closely linked to Deuteronomy 18. The *raising up* of the "faithful priest" in 1 Samuel 2:35 is of foundational importance in this regard for the way it interprets in an explicitly priestly direction the *raising up* of a "prophet like Moses" announced in Deuteronomy 18:15. In depicting Samuel, the Deuteronomist further plays with a "*priest* like Moses" twist on Deuteronomy 18:15. Similarly, in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65—in direct contrast to the decision in 1 Maccabees 4:46 and a self-serving Hasmonean reading of Deuteronomy 18:15—unresolved halakic disputes are allowed to stand until a *priest* bearing the Urim and Thummim should "arise." The

688 MEYERS CAROL / MEYERS ERIC, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, New York, 1987, 200. Quoted in: GIAMBRONE ANTHONY, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 127f.

most important and overt priestly appropriation of Deuteronomy 18:15 appears in *Testament of Levi* 18 ... The Gospel will build directly upon this whole tradition. We thus meet once more, under another, now quite expressive angle, a fusion of charismatic and official functions ... Against such a background we can better understand the remark about Caiaphas in John's Gospel: "He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied" (John 11:51).⁶⁸⁹

8.14 Ratzinger's Interpretation of the Apostolic Succession (Re.: 5.10)

Ratzinger makes of the Church Father's resort to "apostolic succession" an argument for the primacy of proclamation since the successors of the apostles were so to speak guarantors of orthodoxy against the Gnostic current (5.10). There are at least two problems with this move:

1. Ratzinger extends this theological principle of the Church Fathers beyond their own intention. The challenge of Gnosticism was first and foremost a *doctrinal* heresy, i.e., the battle between the Church and Gnosticism falls under the aspect of teaching – the proclamation of the word (which no doubt has practical consequences). And the Church Fathers rightly identified the successors of the apostles as the reference points for discerning orthodoxy, but they did not seem to imply that the ministry of the word is *more essential* than the ministry of the eucharist. They simply provided the rightful response to the precise and foundational error of Gnosticism, namely, its ahistorical and inventive distortion of Christ and Christianity. To stretch that response further into the question of the primacy of proclamation over that of sanctification and leadership in the ministerial priesthood, is Ratzinger's own move, not the Church Fathers'.
2. Ratzinger argues that the Greek word used for *tradition* – διαδοχή – was also used for *succession*, and this means that the word is bound to the office holder, and therefore, implies the primacy of the word

689 GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 128f.

in the priestly office. The problem here is actually that Ratzinger tacitly identifies *tradition* simply with *proclamation* alone. In the New Testament, there at least two important instances where St. Paul speaks of the *tradition* he received and handed down to others. Both instances reveal two different contents of *tradition*.

For I handed on [παρέδωκα] to you as of first importance what I in turn had received [παρέλαβον]: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that ... (1 Cor. 15:3–5).

Evidently, St. Paul is listing out here the *contents* of the gospel he is preaching – *things* to be believed in. He begins that section by stating his intention of reminding the Corinthians the “good news” (vs. 1), the saving “message” (vs. 2) that he preached to them. The issue here is *doctrine*.

But then prior to this, he addressed a practice among the Corinthians: the abuse of the eucharistic meal with the communal meal:

For I received [παρέλαβον] from the Lord what I also handed on [παρέδωκα] to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. (1 Cor. 11:23–27).

In this case, *tradition* is obviously not just doctrine – but also a concrete ritual action – which no doubt also has a doctrinal implication. Yet, the focus here is the *ritual action* as such which Christ instituted and mandated the apostles to be doing (= ministry of sanctification). Hence, it is quite implausible to use the concept of *tradition* to advocate a primacy of the ministry of the word.

8.15 Ratzinger's Analysis of the Devaluation of the Episcopacy (Re.: 5.11)

The whole section of 5.11 is Ratzinger's historical argument for his thesis. In essence, it states that the primacy accorded the ministry of sanctification in the priesthood was actually a maldevelopment resulting from the fact that priestly ordination gradually replaced episcopal ordination as the primary reference point of the ministerial priesthood. The logic can be formulated in three steps:

- A. Initially, the Church's understanding of the bishop was primarily a proclaimer of the word.
- B. From the Medieval period onwards, the bishop became gradually equated with the priest theologically.
- C. As a result, the idea of sacrifice associated with "priesthood" gradually overshadowed the proclamation of the word.

The problem here, however, is that on a careful reading, Ratzinger's historical analysis does not actually succeed in showing that C is the outcome of AB. It only succeeds in appositely exposing two things majorly:

1. How the ministry of sanctification became *isolated*, i.e., the priest was increasingly seen lopsidedly as one whose identity consists *only* in consecrating the sacrifice of the altar.
2. How the priestly ministry of the word became increasingly neglected and practically accorded an inferior or even negligible value.
3. Besides, the premise with which Ratzinger begins his historical assessment – primacy of the ministry of the word in the originally conception of episcopacy – is a questionable theological opinion, as has been argued in this research.

8.16 Christ' High Priestly Prayer and the Institution of the Priesthood (Re.: 5.16.2)

The same exegetical problem of the historical context of Jn. 15:15 (8.10) applies in principle to Jn. 17:17,19 which for Ratzinger also expresses the

institution of the ministerial priesthood by Christ (5.16.2). Applying it here, it means: If the high priestly prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 did not take place historically within the context of the Last Supper, then the connection which Ratzinger makes between Christ's request for the consecration of the apostles in the truth and the primacy of the eucharist would be probably if not off the table. But if the opposite is the case, then it is an ingenious insight. Probably, an absolute certainty here from the perspective of biblical exegesis may be unattainable. In any case, there are two additional observations in support of Ratzinger's interpretation:

1. Given the (probable) context of the Last Supper, it is more probable that those for whom Christ is praying for here are first and foremost the twelve (Jn. 17:1–19). Later (from vs 20) he prays for all Christians:⁶⁹⁰ "I ask not only on behalf of these [= the twelve], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word ..." (Jn. 17:20).
2. The concern of Christ's prayer for the twelve is their *assignment* in the world. Hence, the sanctification/consecration in truth which he requests for them "is not simply a purification from sin (see xv 3) but is a consecration to a mission; they are being consecrated inasmuch as they are being sent."⁶⁹¹ Read against the background of consecration in the Old Testament, the idea of priestly consecration gains more force: "... the consecration of the disciples is directed toward their mission ... This is in harmony with the OT understanding of consecration; for example, Moses, who himself has been consecrated by God (Greek of Sir xlv 4), is told in Exod xxviii 41 to consecrate others so that they may *serve* God as priests. The disciples are to be consecrated so that they may serve as apostles, that is, as ones sent."⁶⁹²

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. BROWN Raymond, *The Gospel According to John*, 758.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 762.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 765.

8.17 Eucharistic Prayer II (Re.: 5.17)

As shown (5.17), Ratzinger argues that the words of the Eucharistic prayer II (taken from the *Traditio Apostolica*) – “*gratias agentes quia nos dignos habuisti astare coram te et tibi ministrare*” – do not refer to the physical position of the priest during the eucharist celebration, but simply technical terminology from the Old Testament indicating the primary duty of the priest. Indeed, the Old Testament roots of those words in relation to the primacy of liturgical worship in the priestly ministry may be tenable, but the disconnection from the physical stance of the priest is unnecessary and may not stand a historical scrutiny. The theological import of “*astare*” does not necessarily exclude a physical meaning. While the question of whom the “*nos*” (we) is referring to (only the celebrant or all the people?) is still a controversial one,⁶⁹³ there is a greater historical warrant to believe that “*astare*” *also* has to do with the standing posture of the priest.⁶⁹⁴

8.18 Kasper’s Reduction of the Priesthood to a Charism of Unity (Re.: 6.2)

Kasper’s earlier position – priesthood as a moderating charism for other charisms for the sake of the unity – can hardly be defended against the tag of functionalism. Even though he calls the priesthood both an office and a charism, his approach does not justify or clarify why there is still a difference (also biblically) between office and charism. Kasper’s proposal would mean, for instance, that a parish priest who does not succeed in reconciling different charisms (which may turn out to be purely individual interests!) is not fit for the priesthood.⁶⁹⁵ In this case then, priesthood is purely a charism or human capability. Thus, I think

693 Cf. BALDOVIN John, *History of the Text and Rite*, in: Edward FOLEY (ed.), *A Commentary on the Order of the Mass of the Roman Missal*, Minnesota 2011, 311–316: 311; cf. POWER David, *Theology of the Latin Text and Rite*, in: Edward FOLEY (ed.), *A Commentary on the Order of the Mass of the Roman Missal*, Minnesota 2011, 317–325: 323f.

694 Cf. HEID Stefan, *Altar und Kirche*, 226f.

695 Cf. SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 465.

that the criticisms levelled against his thesis by Schlier (7.3.1), Pasterczyk (7.3.4.2) and Vorgrimler's (7.3.2: first paragraph) are trenchant.

Moreover, some practical consequences which the earlier Kasper deduces from this conviction are not only in opposition with Catholic doctrine, but also have dubious justifications. The most relevant for our research is the issue of eucharist celebration by a non-ordained person. They three texts which he refers to as historical evidences (6.2.2, nr. 4) do not provide that evidence.

1. 1 Cor. 14:16 does not in any way make mention of lay presider of the eucharist and Kasper does not explain why he thinks it is the case.
2. It is debatable whether in the early Church, a person's confession of his faith under persecution factually elevates him automatically into the presbyterate without any sacramental ordination (*Canons of Hippolytus* 6).⁶⁹⁶ In any case it proves nothing about the primacy of leadership as against sanctification nor lay presidency at the eucharist.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. *Traditio Apostolica* 9 (FC 1, 238f.). Moreover, a major controversial point among scholars on the matter is that it is not clear whether such non-ordained confessors were ministerially engaged or only honorary priests. "While some scholars saw here [*scil.* Tr. Ap. 9] a proof-text for the phenomenon of honorific *ipso facto* appointments of confessors into active ministry with or without formal duties, others disagreed and argued that they received only the honour of the presbyterate, not the active ministry. In my opinion, the latter interpretation appears to be closer to the intentions of the *Traditio* [*sic!*] *apostolica*. The church order only stipulates that the gifts of the Spirit were considered as equal to the laying on of hands by the bishop during the ordination of a presbyter or a deacon. These gifts are the source of the confessor's spiritual authority for which a public confession before a judge and/or sufferings for the name of the Lord were constitutive elements. In other words, public confession is considered as a kind of 'spiritual ordination' directly administered by the Holy Spirit. This 'spiritual ordination' is equal in honour (dignity), and only in honour, to the honour of a presbyter ordained by the bishop by the imposition of hands. An *ipso facto* appointment to active ministry or a membership in the presbyter's college by virtue of being a confessor is not suggested here. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case. Specifically, the remark that the confessor 'shall not have hands laid on him for diaconate or presbyterate' indicates a separate act or distinct appointment to active ministry. It is not appointment, which is unnecessary, but the imposition of the hands during the installation. Moreover, the explicit mention of 'diaconate' in this context would make no sense, if the confessor would have *ipso facto* been promoted by an honorific appointment into the active ministry of presbyterate." HANDL András, From Slave to Bishop. Callixtus's Early Ecclesial Career and Mechanisms of Clerical Promotion, in: *ZAC* 25/1 (2021), 53–73: 62f. Bernard Botte's observation is in principle the same, cf. BOTTE Bernard, *Hippolyte de Rome: La Tradition Apostolique d'après les anciennes versions* [SC 11], Paris 1968, 27f.

3. Kasper makes reference to *Didache* 10,7 – “But permit the prophets to give thanks however they wish”⁶⁹⁷ – in his justification of the possibility of the celebration of the mass by a lay person. It is within the broader context of his proposal of “community leadership” as the fundamental office of the ministerial priest. Apart from the still controversial question in contemporary research on whether the prayer recorded in chapters 9 and 10 of the *Didache* is actually a eucharistic prayer due to the absence of an explicit anamnesis and the words of the institution at the Last Supper,⁶⁹⁸ the textual context does not necessarily support Kasper's move. Kasper's suggestion loses its legitimacy by the very fact that the author of *Didache* in the next chapters unambiguously predicates the said prophets as “apostles” and “high priests” of the Christian community:

Now concerning the Apostles [ἀποστόλων] and the prophets [προφητῶν], deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night's lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet ... But every genuine prophet who wishes to settle among you is worthy of food ... Take, therefore, all the first fruits of the produce of the wine press and threshing floor, and of the cattle and sheep, and give these first fruits to the prophets, for they are your *high priests* [ἀρχιερείς].⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁷ *Didache* 10,7 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 361).

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. LANG Uwe Michael, *The Roman Mass*, 56f.

⁶⁹⁹ *Didache* 11,3–6; 13,1–3 (HOLMES Michael, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 362–365); cf. GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 242. Based on this fact, Jean-Robert Armogathie's recent interpretation (cf. *Priesthood according to the Fathers of the Church*, 36f., 40), which would align with that of Kasper, appears dubious. According to him, the three central seats of the early Church respectively gave priority to a different office of the ministerial priesthood: in the Alexandrian tradition it was the teaching of the word, in the Antiochian tradition it was the eucharistic sacrifice, and finally in Jerusalem / Rome it was rather leadership. He locates evidence of the Alexandrian / Eastern tradition in *Did* 10,7 (also in Origen).

Giambrone thus explains that “these itinerant figures have an explicit cultic function, for they are invited to preside at the Eucharist.”⁷⁰⁰ Interestingly, after his turn, Kasper re-interpreted his earlier interpretation of *Didache* exactly in the same way. In his already mentioned rebuttal of Schillebeeckx theory, he writes:

The text witnesses which Schillebeeckx bring up in order to cast doubt on the unanimous tradition and justify his own contrary thesis are in no way sufficient. In some cases, they are simply false. This applies especially to the older witnesses which he brings up: 1. The statement of *Didache* [scil. 10,7] that prophets celebrate the eucharist. It is not evident that these prophets were charismatic lay people. In *Didache* 13,3 they are designated as arch-priests.⁷⁰¹

8.19 Interpreting Vatican II (Re.: 5.11.6.1, 5.11.6.2)

One major factor in the earlier argument of Ratzinger is the recourse to Vatican II as defining the priesthood from the ministry of the word. He appeals precisely to *Lumen Gentium* §20 and §26, and *Presbyterorum ordinis* §4. However, this does not seem evident.

Lumen Gentium §20 begins with the words: “That divine mission (*Missio illa divina*), entrusted by Christ to the apostles ...”, referring with “that” (*illa*) back to what was expounded in the preceding article 19. There, the Council describes “that divine mission” wholistically:

⁷⁰⁰ GIAMBRONE Anthony, *The Bible and the Priesthood*, 242.

⁷⁰¹ [My translation]. “Die Textzeugnisse, die Schillebeeckx anführt, um die Einhelligkeit der Tradition in Frage zu stellen und um seine gegenteilige These zu begründen, reichen keinesfalls aus. Sie sind teilweise einfach falsch. Das gilt besonders von den älteren Zeugnissen, die er anführt: 1. Die Aussage der *Didache*, wonach Propheten Eucharistie feiern. Es ist nicht erwiesen, dass diese Propheten charismatische Laien waren. In der *Didache* 13,3 werden sie als Erzpriester der Gemeinde bezeichnet.“ KASPER Walter, *Das kirchliche Amt in der Diskussion*, 529f.

He [*scil.* Christ] sent them first to the children of Israel and then to all nations, so that as sharers in His power they might make all peoples His disciples, and sanctify and govern them, and thus spread His Church, and by ministering to it under the guidance of the Lord, direct it all days even to the consummation of the world. And in this mission they were fully confirmed on the day of Pentecost ...⁷⁰²

In article 20 itself, the Council articulates again the whole expression of that mission:

Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.⁷⁰³

Hence, *Lumen Gentium* §20 simply does not lend itself to an interpretation giving primacy to the proclamation ministry.

Ratzinger's earlier interpretation of *Lumen Gentium* §26 is also an imposition of his own theology on the text. To repeat, he writes:

The third and last section of the article focuses on the whole issue of the episcopal duty to »sanctify«. This duty is first explained first as the authority to preach the Word, and then, before every other thing, as the responsibility of the bishop for all other sacraments.⁷⁰⁴

Before coming to the third and last paragraph of the article, the article as a whole begins by establishing the primacy of the eucharist in the bishop's ministry:

⁷⁰² *Lumen gentium* §19.

⁷⁰³ *Lumen gentium* §20.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. RATZINGER Joseph, *Ortskirche und Gesamtkirche*, 697f. For German original, see section 5.11.6.1.

A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is “the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,” especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows.⁷⁰⁵

The second paragraph emphasizes further:

Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop, to whom is committed the office of offering the worship of Christian religion to the Divine Majesty and of administering it in accordance with the Lord’s commandments and the Church’s laws, as further defined by his particular judgment for his diocese.⁷⁰⁶

Finally, the mention of the ministry of the word in the third paragraph does not in any way give it a priority over the sacramental service.

Truly, there are places in *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus* the Council gives the ministry of teaching a certain fundamentality. It uses the characterization „eminence” for the duty of preaching amongst the other duties: “Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place.”⁷⁰⁷ However, it also designates the celebration of the eucharist as the main (“*maxime*”) duty of the priest: “They exercise their sacred function especially in the Eucharistic worship or the celebration of the Mass ...”⁷⁰⁸ As pope, Ratzinger later comes back to this particular text to uphold the primacy of the holy mass in the priestly ministry.⁷⁰⁹

In *Prebyterorum ordinis*, there is a differentiation in the kinds of priorities as regards the ministries of the word and sanctification making the fundamentality of the latter to protrude more vividly. The differentiation in priority consists in this: the ministry of the word normally

705 *Lumen gentium* §26.

706 *Ibid.*

707 *Lumen Gentium* §25; cf. also *Christus Dominus* §12.

708 *Lumen Gentium* §28.

709 Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Pastoral Visit to Palermo: Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious and Seminarians on October 3, 2010: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101003_palermo-cattedrale.html (accessed on 22.05.2025).

precedes and paves the way for the fruitful reception of the sacraments. “Their ministry, which begins with the evangelical proclamation, derives its power and force from the sacrifice of Christ.”⁷¹⁰ This statement seems to be to be a yardstick for whatever follows in the document as regards the three offices. It is in this sense of the antecedental priority of the ministry of the word that the more detailed depiction in the first paragraph of the second chapter is to be understood:

The People of God are joined together primarily by the word of the living God. And rightfully they expect this from their priests. Since no one can be saved who does not first believe, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all. In this way they fulfill the command of the Lord: “Going therefore into the whole world preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15), and they establish and build up the People of God. Through the saving word the spark of faith is lit in the hearts of unbelievers, and fed in the hearts of the faithful. This is the way that the congregation of faithful is started and grows, just as the Apostle describes: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).⁷¹¹

Having said this and given the right context, the fundamentality of the ministry of sanctification now protrudes more vividly:

The other sacraments, as well as with *every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate*, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through his very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to men who are thus invited and encouraged to offer themselves, their labors and all created things, together with him. *In this light, the Eucharist shows itself as the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.* Those under instruction are introduced by stages to a sharing in the Eucharist, and the faithful, already marked with

710 *Presbyterorum ordinis* §2.

711 *Ibid.*, §4.

the seal of Baptism and Confirmation, are through the reception of the Eucharist fully joined to the Body of Christ. Thus the Eucharistic Action, over which the priest presides, is the very heart of the congregation.”⁷¹²

The Council reminds priests that in all their catechetical and educative assignments, the eucharist remains pivotal: “No Christian community, however, is built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist; from this, therefore, all education to the spirit of community must take its origin.”⁷¹³ The eucharistic sacrifice is the centripetal point of the priestly ministry: “. . . as they fulfill the role of the Good Shepherd, in the very exercise of their pastoral charity they will discover a bond of priestly perfection which draws their life and activity to unity and coordination. This pastoral charity flows out in a very special way from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This stands as the root and center of the whole life of a priest.”⁷¹⁴

Besides, the order in which the latest ordinary teachings office of the Church has presented the ministry of the priest is sometimes interpreted as granting precedence to the ministry of the Word: Articles 25, 26, and 27 of *Lumen Gentium*, Articles 4, 5 and 6 of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, as well as articles 888–892, 893, 894–896 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church all respectively present the ministry in the following order: preaching, sanctification and governance.⁷¹⁵ This structure however is not the prerogative answer of the Council, since the content of that structure actually gives priority to the sanctification ministry.⁷¹⁶ David Meconi has recently pointed out that 22 out of 24 references to *Presbyterorum ordinis* in the Catechism of the Catholic Church repose in the part dedicated to the “celebration of the Sacred Mystery” – a context which indicates that *Catechism* understands the council’s teaching on priesthood as being primarily a ministry of sanctification.⁷¹⁷

712 [My emphasis]. *Ibid.*, §5.

713 *Ibid.*, §6.

714 *Ibid.*, §14.

715 Cf. For example: PASTERCZYK Piotr, *Theologie des kirchlichen Lehramtes*, 102.

716 This point has also been emphasized by BECKER Karl, *Wesen und Vollmachten*, 147f., 160–162.

717 Cf. MECONI David Vincent, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, in: Matthew LAMB / Matthew LEVERING (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, Oxford 2017, 170–190: 182.

This structure-content shifts of priority can as well be explained in the Aristotelian-Thomistic terms, as Benoît-Dominique De La Soujeole does: the ministry of the word is *efficiently* prior, while sanctification is prior by way of *causal finality*.

The first *munus* is always that of preaching, because its end is faith, either to be brought to birth or to be nourished. In this context, the charge of sanctifying comes second, because it will only be fruitful for those who receive it in faith. What distinguishes the first from the second is, accordingly, efficient causality: the ministry of preaching leads to the sacraments. Here sanctifying is designated as the main charge, which subordinates the other to itself, very especially when it is accomplished in the eucharistic celebration. The Sacrament the Eucharist, indeed, “contains the entire spiritual good of the Church” (PO 5), being at once the source (Christ present) and summit (building up the “whole Christ”) of all ministry (LG §11 and PO 5 §2). Here the principal is distinguished from the subordinate by reason of the final cause.⁷¹⁸

The final cause is always in act right from the start though not necessarily immediately perceived in the causality process.

Sometimes also, the magisterial documents use the title *sacerdotium* synonymously with one of the *munera* interchangeably, namely the *munus sanctificandi*, as is the case in the documents of the Vatican II Council. This possibly indicates a presupposed fundamentality of the sanctifying ministry as that which is most specifically priestly. This interpretation, however, judged from the whole teaching of the council, is not necessarily compelling and should not be pushed too far.⁷¹⁹

718 DE LA SOUJEOLE Benoît-Dominique, The Sacramentality of the Episcopate, in: Marc OUELLET (ed.), *A Fundamental Theology of the Priesthood. Proceedings of the Symposium Sponsored by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations*, vol. 1, Vatican 2023, 186–197: 188.

719 Cf. BECKER Karl, *Wesen und Vollmachten*, 135–139.

8.20 Chapter Summary

Certain premises and contents of some arguments in the earlier theologies of Ratzinger and Kasper do not seem to be justifiable. In the final analyses, some actually render the primacy of the ministry of sanctification more plausible. The issues evaluated include: the ideology of “desacralizing” the priesthood, the problem of a “dialectical” theology of the priesthood, the ritual and sacrificial character of the eucharist and the priesthood, the religious connotations of the presumed “profane” titles in the New Testament, the implication of a eucharistic ecclesiology for the priesthood, the unclear remnant of the theology of “sacramental word”, Vatican II’s teaching, the biblical justifiability of the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper, the distinction between calling and institution. In all these however, the existential role played by the individual charism of a priest relativizes in a certain sense any theoretical prioritization of any of the three *munera*.

Chapter 9: A Topical Context of the Research Question: The German Synodal Path

9.0 Preamble

The German Synodal Path is one of the contemporary “big” events in Western Catholicism which raises major questions about the Catholic priesthood. As such, it provides a topical context for seeing the relevance of the research question. The German Synodal Path held in five assemblies (I: 30.01. – 01.02.2020, II: 30.09. – 02.10.2021, III: 03. – 05.02.2022, IV: 09. – 11.09.2022, V: 09. – 11.03.2023) mapped out four major topics for its envisioned renewal of the Church, each topic assigned to a particular preparatory forum:

1. “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint participation and involvement in the Mission” (Forum I)
2. “Priestly existence today” (Forum II)
3. “Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church” (Forum III)
4. “Life in succeeding relationships – Living love in sexuality and partnership” (Forum IV)⁷²⁰

It is noteworthy that three of the four issues directly concern the ministry of the priest, then interlocked with different aspects of the Church’s life. In other words, none of those thematic areas is handled without a background theology of the priesthood.

The goal of this chapter is not at all to work through the whole material on priesthood produced by the German Synodal Path. Rather, the

⁷²⁰ THE SYNODAL PATH, Brief der erweiterten Gemeinsamen Konferenz an Papst Franziskus vom 14. September 2019, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2019/2019-147a-Brief-der-erweiterten-Gemeinsamen-Konferenz-an-Papst-Franziskus.pdf (accessed on 14.04.2025); cf. —, Minutes of the First Synodal Assembly, 5, 9–15, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente/Reden_Beitraege/SW-Synodalversammlung-I-Protokoll-engl.pdf (accessed on 07.04.2025).

goal is to search for a possible perspective of the synod on the precise question of this research work, as well as to see if and to what extent it follows the path of any of our three authors or not. In other words, the question is: Does the German Synodal Path in all its talks on priesthood emphasize any of the three *munera* as the primary office of the ministerial priesthood? For our purposes, only certain materials majorly from Forum I, and to a lesser extent from Forums II and III are relevant. The materials from Forum III are in principle the same, the specific difference being that everything is examined under the feminine aspect, culminating ultimately in the demand for the priestly ordination of women (but that is beyond the scope of this research). In what follows, I try to decipher the synod's presupposed or attendant answer, if any, to the question of this research, by working through its reform visions on each *munus*.⁷²¹ But first, let's get the view of the German the Synodal Way on the relationship of the three offices to each other.

9.1 Separation of or Participation in Powers

In view of the crises in the Western Catholic Church and the explosion of the sexual abuse, a fundamental premise of the German Synodal Path is: power and authority in the Church must become democratically structured and deconcentrated so as to stop and forestall the systematic abuses of power and authority in the Church.⁷²²

In the working document (First draft on 10.09.2019⁷²³; second draft on 20.01.2020⁷²⁴) prepared by Forum I for the first Synodal Assembly, the three *munera* of the priesthood are identified as the precise loca-

721 In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, documents from later Synodal Assemblies which do not offer anything new to what has already been said in the former documents are not further analysed.

722 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 33–35, 45, 47f.

723 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Arbeitspapier des vorbereitenden Forums Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche. Gemeinsame Teilnahme und Teilhabe am Sendungsauftrag, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/bildmaterial/themen/Synodaler_Weg/Arbeitspapier-Stand-10.-Sept.-2019_Forum-Macht.pdf (accessed on 14.04.2025).

724 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche – Gemeinsame Teilnahme und Teilhabe am Sendungsauftrag, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/SW-Vorlage-Forum-I.

tions of power manifestation in the Church. It shows itself “aesthetically” in the liturgy, “rhetorically” in the proclamation of the word of God, and “pragmatically” both in Church leadership as well as in the extra-ecclesial activities.⁷²⁵ All three loci has been infested by clerical monopoly, thus, the need for a “course of renewal” (“*Erneuerungskurs*”) which enables all the faithful to participate in all three powers.⁷²⁶ It is the bonding-together of power and priestly ordination that created not only the possibility of power abuse and abuse cover-up, but also the disenfranchisement and infantilization of the lay faithful in the effective spread of the gospel.⁷²⁷ Drafters of Forum III’s working paper, for instance, see a connection between the feminine absence in leading positions and the clerical sexual abuses.⁷²⁸ Hence, “the participation of all members of the people of God and a binding separation of powers is a key for the vitalization of the common participation of all the faithful in the mission and mandate of the Church.”⁷²⁹ The justification pillars mentioned for such an analysis and prognosis of the Church include: the new testament picture of the followers of Christ, the common priesthood of the people of God (baptism, confirmation), the diversity of charisms in the one Spirit, principles of democracy (separation and mutual control of powers, transparency, accountability, consultation, equal rights, etc.), Christian anthropology (responsibility, human dignity and right, gender equality).⁷³⁰

pdf (accessed on 08.04.2025). I paraphrase and quote only from this second draft because apart from the introduction attached to it, it is only a verbatim republication of the first draft.

725 Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.

726 Cf. *Ibid.*, 3, 14.

727 Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

728 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Arbeitspapier des vorbereitenden Forums Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche, 4, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/bildmaterial/themen/Synodaler_Weg/Arbeitspapier-Stand-10.-Sept.-2019_Forum-Frauen.pdf (accessed on 15.04.2025); cf. —, Vorbereitendes Forum III: Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche, 3f., in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente/Reden_Beitraege/SW-Vorlage-Forum-III.pdf (accessed on 15.04.2025).

729 [My translation]. “Die Partizipation aller Mitglieder des Gottesvolkes und Gewaltenteilung, die verbindlich wird, ist ein Schlüssel, damit die gemeinsame Teilhabe aller Gläubigen am Sendungsauftrag der Kirche mit Leben erfüllt wird.” THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 5.

730 Cf. *Ibid.*, 5, 6, 9, 15.

The authors of the working paper of Forum I insistently write off the current state and theology of the ministerial priesthood as a product or rather image of the 19th century theology and monarchy, which has nothing to do with the Scriptures and tradition of the Church.

In their current form all the three dimensions are characterized by a clericalism which does not sufficiently grasp the ideas of the Second Vatican Council, but takes its bearings especially from the historically evolved tradition of the 19th century.⁷³¹

The criticism targets a Church-idea popular in Germany which is characterized by a charging of the ordained ministry as a “holy authority” (*sacra potestas*) integrated into a hierarchy in which the faithful are one-sidedly seen as being dependent on priests. This institutional arrangement, however, exists not so much due to a Catholic necessity as to an antimodern feeling. It is by no means an expression of a centuries-long and seasoned tradition, rather largely a new invention after the enlightenment. The conglomeration of sacramental, legislative, executive, administrative and juristic power is only a development of the 19th century ... The organisation of the Catholic Church since the 19th century is strongly based on the model of a monarchy.⁷³²

731 [My translation]. “Alle drei Dimensionen sind in ihrer aktuellen Gestalt von einem Klerikalismus geprägt, der die Impulse des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils nicht genügend aufnimmt, sondern sich insbesondere an der geschichtlich gewachsenen Traditions-gestalt des 19. Jahrhunderts orientiert.“ *Ibid.*, 3. The authors appeal readily to the teaching of Vatican II, but they disagree with it on one point: the essential difference between the ministerial and the common priesthood despite the mutual dependence and relation of the two – a disagreement which actually rests on a peculiar misinterpretation of the text. “Dass das Priestertum des Dienstes sich vom gemeinsamen Priestertum, die Kleriker sich von den Gläubigen „dem Wesen, nicht dem Grade nach“ (*essentia, non gradu*) unterscheiden (*Lumen gentium* 10), weist eine hierarchisch-ständische Asymmetrie zwischen Klerikern und Gläubigen auf.“ *Ibid.*, 12.

732 [My translation]. “Die Kritik zielt auf ein in Deutschland weit verbreitetes Kirchenverständnis, das sich durch eine Aufladung des Weiheamtes als ‚heilige Gewalt‘ (*sacra potestas*) auszeichnet, eingebunden in eine Hierarchie, in der einseitig die Gläubigen von Priestern als abhängig gesehen werden. Diese institutionelle Ordnung verdankt sich aber weniger einer katholischen Notwendigkeit als vielmehr einem antimodernen Affekt. Sie ist keineswegs Ausdruck einer jahrhundertelangen und bewährte Tradition, sondern auf weite Strecken eine neue Erfindung nach der Aufklärung. Die Zusammenballung von sakra-

It will be a question for another work to query into the tagging of “19th century” ecclesiology and theology of the priesthood. The point relevant for our question is the problem identified as such by the authors of the working paper. It consists in – to use an imagery – in the throwing in of all elements of power and authority into the one basket of ministerial priesthood. Based on this, the only way forward is to sort out those individual elements of power again and put them into different baskets – separation of powers. However, at this initial stage, the separation is understood not absolutely, but in a *loosened* sense such that the lay faithful’s participation in it may be more effective and manifest in its own right. The major focus is on the *munus regendi*.

A decisive task is this: not to bind power of governance and the power of decision-making exclusively to priestly ordination and not to wall it off from the communion of the faithful (*communio fidelium*), but to place it in the wholeness of the Church which in all its members is the priestly people of God.⁷³³

mentaler, legislativer, exekutiver, administrativer und juristischer Vollmacht ist erst eine Entwicklung des 19. Jahrhunderts ... Die katholische Kirche ist seit dem 19. Jh. stark nach dem Vorbild einer Monarchie organisiert.” Ibid., 8f.

733 [My translation]. “Eine entscheidende Aufgabe besteht darin, die Leitungsgewalt und Entscheidungsmacht nicht exklusiv an die Weihe zu binden und von der Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen (*communio fidelium*) abzuschotten, sondern gut im Ganzen der Kirche zu verorten, die in all ihren Gliedern das priesterliche Volk Gottes ist.” Ibid., 17. It is pertinent to note that I translate the German word “Entscheidungsmacht” or “Entscheidungskompetenz” with “power of decision-making” simply because this is how the Synodal Path generally translates it in the official English versions of its documents. One can observe this by comparing the English versions which will be quoted hereafter with their German Originals – both are available in the official website of the German Synodal Path. However, it is also important to note that this general translation as power of decision-making is not very helpful since there is canonically a difference between decision-making and decision-taking as noted by the International Theological Commission: “... it is necessary to distinguish between the process of *decision-making* through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation, and *decision-taking*, which is within the competence of the Bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility.” INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018) §69 in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html (accessed on 14.08.2025). In the above quotation, it seems to me that decision-taking corresponds more appropriately to the expressed intention of the German Synodal Path.

In governance the power of decision-making should not be exercised without being sufficiently accounted for before the lay faithful and shared with them. In doctrine, no authority of interpretation and judgement may be exercised without being squared in dialogue with the competence of theology and the sense of the faith on the part of the people of God. In the liturgy, sacral power should not be orchestrated whereas it is necessary to give God alone the glory and to allow the priestly dignity of the whole of God's people to find expression. In governance, clerical power should not be spiritualised in order to immunise it both against criticism as well against the demand for limitation, control and accountability.⁷³⁴

In its basic text at the Second Synodal Assembly, Forum I attempts to clarify more on which “power” is being referred to as needing separation. It takes cue from the traditional-canonical distinction between “power of ordination” (*potestas ordinis*) and “power of governance/jurisdiction” (*potestas regiminis/iurisdictionis*). The power of ordination comes with priestly ordination, divinely ordered, and it is for the administration of sacraments especially the eucharist and the absolution from sins.⁷³⁵ The power of governance, based on divine and Church law, is the power “to lead the Church, and so to promote the life of the Church in faith.”⁷³⁶ It is in the later that the drafters of the foundational text locates the three separable powers based on the model of democ-

734 [My translation]. “In der Leitung soll Entscheidungsmacht nicht ausgeübt werden, ohne hinreichend vor den Gläubigen verantwortet und mit ihnen geteilt zu werden. In der Lehre darf keine Deutungs- und Urteilshoheit geltend gemacht werden, ohne dialogisch in geklärten Verfahren mit der Kompetenz der Theologie und mit dem Glaubenssinn des Gottesvolkes abgeglichen zu werden. In der Liturgie darf nicht sakrale Macht inszeniert werden, während es gilt, Gott allein die Ehre zu geben und die priesterliche Würde des ganzen Volkes Gottes zum Ausdruck kommen zu lassen. In der Leitung darf klerikale Macht nicht spiritualisiert werden, um sie sowohl gegenüber Kritik als auch gegenüber der Forderung nach Begrenzung, Kontrolle und Rechenschaftspflicht zu immunisieren.” THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 10.

735 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of the Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Basic Text (Draft File), 23, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redden_Beitraege/05_3.1_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Grundtext-Lesung.pdf (accessed on 22.04.2025).

736 Ibid., cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 44.

racy: “The power of governance includes legislative (potestas legislativa), judicial (potestas iudicativa) and executive power (potestas executiva vel administrativa).”⁷³⁷ Hence, they advocate:

We are convinced that, for the sake of the vocation of all God’s people, the monistic structure of powers must be overcome according to which the legislative, executive and judicial powers are bundled exclusively in the office of the bishop, and where all leadership authority at the level of the parish lies with the parish priest, who whilst he can delegate this partially to others, can also reassume it at any time in the event of a conflict occurring.⁷³⁸

The attempted power distinction leaves us with three impressions:

1. There is a clarification at two levels. On the one hand, it becomes clear that the desired *separation* applies to powers *within* the *munus regendi*. On the other hand, the whole complex of reforms as regards the two other *munera* (sanctification and teaching) is not a matter of *separation*, but increased *participation* by the laity.
2. Nevertheless, the clarification harbours in itself a deeper separation, namely, the isolation of at least the *munus regendi* from the other two. The third point makes it more obvious.
3. By compartmentalizing and dissolving the power of Church governance in purely socio-political terms, the drafters decouple it implicitly from sacramental ordination. Furthermore, the ministry of the word is completely left out. It is not allocated to any of the two orders of power. Thus, they unravel again an inclination towards the prioritisation of the sanctifying ministry, though in an isolated sense.

In the redrafted basic text at the Third Synodal Assembly, one can observe an attempt to mitigate the power theory as presented at the Second Synodal Assembly. The drafters acknowledge at least that sep-

⁷³⁷ THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 23; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 44.

⁷³⁸ THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 26.; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 46.

arating the power of governance from the ministerial priesthood is inconsistent with the Catholic doctrine.

It is true that a contradiction between the power of ordination and the power of leadership or jurisdiction would run counter to Catholic ecclesiology. But a stronger differentiation guaranteeing more transparency and control as well as more participation and cooperation is possible and necessary. The aim is better participation and involvement of all the baptised and confirmed in the life and mission of the Church.⁷³⁹

In its further explanation, one observes a certain confusion or rather conscious blending of two horizons of the Church's nature: the classical model of the three *functions* of the Church (*martyria, leiturgia, diakonia*) is dealt offhand as the threefold office:

Canon law caters for essential differentiations which show that the assumption of important tasks in worship (liturgy), in the proclamation (*martyria*) and in Caritas (*diaconia*) may not be understood as a privilege of ordained ministers of the Church. Rather, all faithful are called by their baptism and encouraged by their confirmation to take their share in the fulfilment of all three tasks (*tria munera*). This is shown by many examples from practice and the law.⁷⁴⁰

We now look at the practical realisations of the separation of (or rather participation in) powers as suggested in the document.

739 THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of the Synodal Forum I "Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission" for the Second Reading at the Third Synodal Assembly (3 – 5 February 2022) for the Foundational Text "Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the mission", 13, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/englisch-SVIII/SV-III-ENG_SynodalForumI-Foundational-text-Powerand-separationofpowersintheChurch-Second-reading.pdf (accessed on 25.04.2025).

740 Ibid., 13f.; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 44f. For clarity on the distinction between the two and the consequences of such confusing them, see WOLLBOLD Andreas, *Grundvollzüge oder dreifaches Amt?* 58–63.

9.2 Munus Docendi

Two critical suggestions from the preparatory document of Forum I are: Lay preaching in all liturgical gatherings (including the eucharist), and “autonomous” (“*mit Eigenverantwortung*”) lay leaders of word services for specific communities.⁷⁴¹ At the Second Synodal Assembly, the emphasized argument of Forum I for lay homilies in the eucharistic celebration is that the utilisation of the gifts and charism of the lay faithful would increase the “theological and spiritual quality” of homilies such that they meet the high expectations of today.⁷⁴² Reference is made back to the history of lay preaching in Germany until the 1980s as a positive experiential value.⁷⁴³ Thus, the German bishops are enjoined to get “permission (*indult*) from the Holy See to amend the Sermon regulation in force today in such a way that the preparation and delivery of the sermon can also be taken on in Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and feast days by faithful who are both theologically and spiritually qualified, and who are commissioned by the bishop.”⁷⁴⁴

For the drafters in Forum III, the Church remains incredible to the world in her preaching mission as long as she does not allow women to also “officially” preach the word – given that women “represent the half part of the human race.”⁷⁴⁵ In concrete terms, the demand is that women “regularly” preach in every form of liturgical gathering: dialogue homilies, preaching at diocesan liturgical gatherings, homily in the mass.⁷⁴⁶ Emphasis is placed on allowing “qualified” lay people to

741 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 19f.

742 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Action Text “Sermon Regulation” (Draft File), 1f., in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente/Reden_Beitraege/09_3.5_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.Predigtordnung-Lesung.pdf (accessed on 24.04.2025).

743 Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.

744 *Ibid.*; All the reform suggestions were adapted in the final decisions of the Synodal Path, cf. —, *The Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 125–129.

745 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum III: Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche*, 6.

746 Cf. *Ibid.*, 6, 9.

preach in the holy mass “by virtue of their competence”.⁷⁴⁷ Mention is made of the possibility of lay men and women taking over the *statio* (introduction) at the beginning of the holy mass.⁷⁴⁸ It is also suggested that women be part of doctrinal decisions and judgements in the Church’s magisterium.⁷⁴⁹

9.3 Munus Regendi

9.3.1 Problem of Clarity of Concept

When it comes to the *munus regendi*, the notion as used in the preparatory document of Forum I passes through a number of differentiations which in the long run reveals a certain self-contradiction and unclarity.

- i. There is *munus regendi* in the sense of administrative power of decision-making, demarcated from the *munus sanctificandi*.

Sacramental power and administrative power of decision-making are closely related but they may not be made identical. Wherever this differentiation is missing, there appears a system of power which is closed in itself and not open for the community of the faithful in decisive issues. In such a system the access to power is exclusive and linked up with the conditions of admission to the ordained ministry. Then women as well as married men are in principle shut out from an equal participation.⁷⁵⁰

747 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodalforum III „Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche“: Arbeitstext für die Regionenkonferenz*, 11f.

748 Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.

749 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum III: Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche*, 3.

750 [My translation]. “Sakramentale Vollmacht und administrative Entscheidungsmacht stehen in enger Verbindung, dürfen aber nicht identifiziert werden. Wo es an dieser Unterscheidung fehlt, zeigt sich ein Machtsystem, das in sich geschlossen und in den Entscheidungsfragen nicht für die Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen geöffnet ist. Der Zugang zu Macht ist in einem solchen System exklusiv und an die Zulassungsbedingungen zum Weiheamt gekoppelt. Frauen sind dann ebenso wie verheiratete Männer prinzipiell von einer gleichberechtigten Mitwirkung ausgeschlossen.” THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 10.

- ii. There is *munus regendi* in the sense of power of governance (leadership) *as such*, also demarcated from the *munus sanctificandi*.

Sacramental power and the power of leading are not automatically bonded to each other in the Catholic Church. They can be differentiated and separated according to the respective duties and relative to the competences.⁷⁵¹

- iii. A differentiation is made between the “shepherd ministry” of the bishop and the “power of governance” as such. The authors reassure that “the shepherd ministry of the bishops as well as the parish priests is undisputed in the Catholic Church.”⁷⁵² But then they immediately append that “the shepherd ministry does not justify an absolutism in the exercise of the ecclesiastical power of governance. Rather it needs a nuanced structurization which encompasses not only mandatory consultation but also common and shared competences of decision-making.”⁷⁵³ Likewise, in its final decisions, it asserts: “Church law currently provides that only bishops have decision-making rights at synods. This restriction must be overcome without denying the bishops pastoral leadership ministry. The synodality of the Church is more than the collegiality of the bishops.”⁷⁵⁴

Two different kinds of differentiation are brought in by Forum II:

- a. At the Second Synodal Assembly, the Forum defines the content of the *munus regendi* specific to the ordained priesthood as the responsibility for the unity of the Church, its deepest und highest

751 [My translation]. “Sakramentaler Vollmacht und Leitungsmacht sind in der katholischen Kirche nicht automatisch aneinander gebunden. Sie können entsprechend den jeweiligen Aufgaben und im Verhältnis zu den Kompetenzen differenziert und geteilt werden.” Ibid., 8f.

752 [My translation]. “Der Hirtendienst der Bischöfe wie auch der Pfarrer ist in der katholischen Kirche unbestritten.” Ibid., 17.

753 [My translation]. “Der Hirtendienst begründet keinen Absolutismus in der Ausübung kirchlicher Leitungsgewalt. Er bedarf vielmehr einer differenzierten Strukturierung, die nicht nur verbindliche Beratung, sondern auch gemeinsame und geteilte Entscheidungskompetenzen umfasst.” Ibid.

754 THE SYNODAL PATH, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 48.

framework being the eucharist. “This ministry of unity which is indispensable for the Church is *the* unique feature of the priestly ministry.”⁷⁵⁵ In fact the explanation given is reminiscent of the earlier position of Kasper: Priestly leadership is described as consisting in the discovery and mobilisation of the different charisms and gifts of the faithful for the unity of the Church.⁷⁵⁶ An understanding of participation in leadership deeper than that of Forum I is revealed in the statement: “Leadership is more than mere decision-making competence.”⁷⁵⁷ The sacramentality, as against a functionalistic conception, of the priesthood is repeatedly emphasized, though not without self-contradictions.⁷⁵⁸

- b. At the Fourth Synodal Assembly: *munus regendi* is defined as consisting primarily in the *munus docendi* in the bid to distinguish the former from purely administrative tasks.

Priestly leadership does not merely consist of being a pastor, but is rather to be understood in theological terms as a teaching ministry. Proclaiming the Gospel is the primary task of the leadership ministry. It is a much lamented dilemma of the pastoral profession that administration and organisation overshadow the necessary pastoral care and spiritual leadership.⁷⁵⁹

755 THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum II “Priestly Existence Today” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Basic Text (Draft File), 8, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Reden_Beitraege/14_4.1_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-II-Grundtext_Lesung.pdf (accessed on 24.04.2025); cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 69.

756 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 8; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 70.

757 THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 8; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 70.

758 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Fourth Synodal Assembly: Foundational Text*, 11, 12, 15, 17; cf. HAUKE Manfred, Eine innere Aushöhlung des Weihpriestertums, in: Christoph BINNINGER et al (eds.), *An den Früchten erkennt man den Baum. Der Synodale Weg als Scheideweg*, Regensburg 2025, 95–98: 96.

759 THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum II “Priestly Existence Today” for the Second Reading at the Fourth Synodal Assembly (8–10 September 2022) for the Foundational Text “Priestly Existence Today”, 5, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Reden_Beitraege/englisch-SV-V/ENG_SV-V-Synodalforum-II-Grundlagentext_Les2.pdf (accessed on 26.04.2025); cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 70.

9.3.2 Reform Suggestions in the Preparatory and Regional Documents

The end-product after these differentiations is a Pandora's box: What are the boundaries between "shepherd ministry", "power of governance", "power of decision-making"? The embedded unclarity and self-contradiction becomes manifest in the list of the concrete content of the administrative power of decision-making meant to be removed from the sole hands of the bishop/priest and opened up for the equal participation of all the faithful. It includes practically everything in the priestly ministry except the celebration of the sacraments: leading communities as such, selecting and commissioning lay people to pastoral services, occupancy of leadership positions, appointing bishops, Church governance, administration of the personnel, distribution of finances, "fixing the big ecclesio-political and pastoral lines", law-making, jurisprudence.⁷⁶⁰

The reform suggestions of Forum III in its working paper in this regard include: women leading a parish alone or in a team though the "pastoral responsibility" remains in the hands of the priests (what demarcates this pastoral responsibility of the priest from the sole leadership of a lay woman is not specified), leading ordinariates and general vicariates, participating in the appointment of bishops, joint spiritual direction of a lay woman and a priest in associations, authoritative participation in bishops' conferences.⁷⁶¹ The authors of the document appeal to can. 517 §2 of the current codex as the canonical sanction of their vision.⁷⁶² Further reforms are formulated in its working text for the regional conference:

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 17–19.

⁷⁶¹ Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum III: Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern*, 9f.

⁷⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 9. Their interpretation and suggestions clearly go beyond what the canon specifies. The canon in question states: "If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care." Can. 517 §2 CIC/1983, in: *Vatican Website: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/cdc/index.htm>* (accessed on 19.07.2024).

1. In certain pastoral situations, the bishop should commission a lay person to lead the parish(es) either “alone” or “in a team”⁷⁶³
2. The “pastoral responsibility” which, in the preparatory document was left in the hands of the priest alone, is now taken back: it should be shared both by these lay person(s) as well as the priest appointed by the bishop.⁷⁶⁴ The text categorically states that the priest “leads the pastoral care (lat.: *curam pastoralem moderetur*), but is not the parish priest of the pastoral unit. In many areas the parish lay officer and the priest stand on the same level. Both are accountable to the bishop.”⁷⁶⁵ In other words, the priest in such a set-up is only a moderator of different equal functions, but has no authority *by virtue of his priestly ordination*. The question is whether there can be moderation without specific authority, and *a fortiori* whether the latin “moderetur” of can. 517 § 2 CIC/1983 is meant to be understood in that sense. In any case, for the authors of the text, it is not even the Church’s magisterium that determines who does or decides what, rather the “diocesan rules.”⁷⁶⁶ Making reference to Thomas Schüller

763 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodalforum III „Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche“: Arbeitstext für die Regionenkonferenz*, 8.

764 Cf. *Ibid.*, 8f.; cf. —, Presentation of Synodal Forum III “Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church” for the Second Reading at the Fourth Synodal Assembly (8–10 September 2022) for the Implementation Text “Presence and Leadership – Women in the Church and in Theology”, 2, 4, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/englisch-SV-IV/ENGL_SV-IV-Synodalforum-III-Handlungstext.PraesenzUndLeitung_Second-reading.pdf (accessed on 25.04.2025). The suggestion was dismissed by the Holy See, cf; —, *Forum II: Fourth Synodal Assembly: Foundational Text*, 5; cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Instruction: The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church* (July 20, 2020), in: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/0391/00886.html#ing> (accessed on 17.04.2023). For the canonical justification: cf. OHLY Christoph, *Innere und äußere Verfasstheit der Katholischen Kirche*, in: Christoph OHLY / Ludger MÜLLER (eds.), *Katholisches Kirchenrecht*, Paderborn 2022, 207–321: 287; cf. —, *Der Pfarrer als Pastor Proprius der ihm übertragenen Pfarrei und die pfarrliche Hirtensorge*, in: Andreas GRAßMANN / Wilhelm REES (eds.), *Der Pfarrer ein herausgeforderter Amtsträger. Aufgaben, Rechten, Pflichten und Perspektiven eines kirchlichen Berufs*, Regensburg 2023, 21–36: 27–33.

765 [My translation] “... der die Hirtensorge leitet (lat.: *curam pastoralem moderetur*)”, aber nicht Pfarrer der Seelsorgeeinheit ist. Pfarrbeauftragte/r und Priester stehen in vielen Bereichen auf gleicher Stufe. Sie sind beide dem Bischof rechenschaftspflichtig.” THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum III: Fourth Synodal Assembly: Implementation Text “Presence and Leadership – Women in the Church and in Theology”*, 9.

766 Cf. *Ibid.*, 2, 4.

and Jena-Claude Périsset (Apostolic Nuntio to Germany from 2007 to 2013), it designates the moderator priest as having the “managerial responsibility” (“*Führungsvollmacht*”) and the parish lay officer as possessing the “authority to act” (“*Handlungsvollmacht*”) – a sort of power of attorney so to speak.⁷⁶⁷ Whatever this distinction exactly means, a factual example from the Diocese of Osnabrück is given as its implementation:

In the Diocese of Osnabrück for instance, an episcopal statute regulates the respective duties ... The duties of the parish lay officer includes among other things caring for the realisation of the basic services (diaconia, proclamation, liturgy), caring for the development and implementation of pastoral goals in the parish, supporting the moderating priest in his responsibility for the sacramental duties, supervisory function over all co-workers, promoting voluntary responsibility. The duties of the moderating priest include among other things spiritual direction and support of processes and participants in the parish, caring for the fixing of pastoral goals together with the parish lay officer, exercising the duties bound up with the power of ordination, responsibility for the celebration of the sacraments.⁷⁶⁸

It is interesting that in the list of the duties of the priest, those “duties” tied to ordination is a separate item from the “responsibility” for the sacraments. What those duties tied to ordination are is not spelt out in concrete terms. One wonders, whether they are something altogether different from the administration of the sacraments. Juxtaposing the

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, Fn. 14.

⁷⁶⁸ [My translation]. “Ein bischöfliches Statut regelt z. B. im Bistum Osnabrück die jeweiligen Aufgaben ... Zu den Aufgaben der/des Pfarrbeauftragten gehören u. a. die Sorge für die Verwirklichung der Grunddienste (Diakonie, Verkündigung, Liturgie), die Sorge für die Entwicklung und Umsetzung pastoraler Ziele in der Pfarrseelsorge, die Unterstützung des moderierenden Priesters in dessen Verantwortung für die sakramentalen Vollzüge, die Dienstvorgesetztenfunktion gegenüber allen Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern, die Förderung ehrenamtlicher Verantwortung. Zu den Aufgaben des Moderierenden Priesters gehören u. a. die geistliche Begleitung und Unterstützung der Prozesse und Beteiligten in der Pfarrei, die Sorge für die Festlegung pastoraler Ziele zusammen mit der Pfarrbeauftragten/dem Pfarrbeauftragten, die Ausübung der an die Weiehvollmacht gebundenen Aufgaben, die Verantwortung für die Feier der Sakramente.” *Ibid.*

job description of the parish lay and of the moderating priest, one cannot but get the impression the former actually has more authority in his hands to lead the parish.

3. The above leadership model for parishes should be extended to the level of deaneries and regions. A factual example is again provided in this regard: the dean of the deanery Recklinghausen in the Diocese of Münster is not a priest alone, but together with a female pastoral assistant.⁷⁶⁹
4. The dual-leadership model should be also extended to seminaries. The rectorship should be held both by a priest and a lay woman. Likewise, women should be regularly appointed as spiritual directors in seminaries.⁷⁷⁰
5. Women should be included in the Cathedral Chapter.⁷⁷¹

9.3.3 Reform Suggestions at the Second Synodal Assembly

9.3.3.1 A Superintendent Diocesan and Parish “Synodal Council”

In the action text of Forum I on “Joint consultation and decision-making”, it is proposed that a “Synodal Council” be established. The Synodal Council together with the bishop builds the highest authoritative instance in the diocese. The same obtains at the parish level through a Parish Synodal Council. The recurrent key terminologies here are: co-consultation, co-decision, co-determination.

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Fn. 15.

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14; cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Action Text “Involvement of the Faithful in the Appointment of the Diocesan Bishop” (Draft File), 2, in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/06_3.2_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.BestellungDesDioezesanbischofs-Lesung.pdf (Accessed on 22.04.2025).

The bishop issues a framework regulation for his diocese in which the joint responsibility of the faithful and of the bishop is bindingly regulated by the rights of coconsultation and co-decision of representatively-elected faithful. The pastoral situations, which differ regionally, are also to be taken into account when issuing this code, as are the previous experiences and structures of the local church. In order to secure the rights of co-consultation and co-decision, a Synodal Council of the diocese is either newly established or further developed from the existing councils. This council jointly discusses and decides on all matters of diocesan significance. Such topics include pastoral planning and future perspectives, crucial financial decisions, as well as central changes in personnel planning and personnel development ...

For the parish, the bishop issues a model code in his diocese for the voluntary commitment entered into by the parish priest. This bindingly regulates the joint responsibility of the faithful and of the parish priest via rights of co-consultation and co-decision of representatively elected faithful. This code either establishes new Synodal Councils in the parishes, or further develops the existing councils (Synodal Council of the parish). The parish priests are required to undertake to abide by this code in all important decisions – in particular pastoral planning, as well as in important personnel and financial decisions – against the background of can. 127 CIC in conjunction with can. 275 § 2 CIC, insofar as the binding faith and legal order of the Church is not affected. Details of the code such as the *modus operandi* and the decision-making procedures are determined by the bishop with the consent of the Synodal Council of the diocese.⁷⁷²

In other words, the Diocesan Synodal Council shares the *munus regendi* with the bishop, in some sense, even above the bishop. Likewise, the

772 THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Action Text “Joint Consultation and Decision-Making” (Draft File), 2f., in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/file-admin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Reden_Beitraege/07_3_3_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.GemeinsamBeratenUndEntscheiden-Lesung.pdf (accessed on 23.04.2025).

Parish Synodal Council does the same with the parish priest. The content of the action text can be divided into two areas: the *raison d'être* of the envisioned Synodal Council and its job in concrete terms.

1. **Reason of Existence:** The general theological justifications are common place: common vocation and different charisms, participation of all the faithful in the threefold office of Christ.⁷⁷³ What is striking, however, is the picky references to Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law.

It is noted that “all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.” (LG 32, can 208 / CIC1983).⁷⁷⁴ But the adjoining words of the Council are left out which speak of the “distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God” – a distinction which “bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need.”⁷⁷⁵ The clause “since pastors ...” is disjointed from its foregoing context and isolated and then inserted into the drafters’ own network of theological stepping stones to the edifice of a “Synodal Council.”⁷⁷⁶ The same article from Vatican II further designates the collaboration of the lay faithful in the ministry of the priest as a support to the priest: “Pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the other faithful. These in their turn should enthusiastically lend their joint assistance to their pastors and teachers” (*“hi autem alacriter Pastoribus et doctoribus sociam operam praestent”*).⁷⁷⁷ It is not the role of co-decision and the like, or even of an overseeing Synodal Council.

In the same manner, three canons are summarily coopted for justifying the Synodal Council. Where the Canon law stipulates that on Church issues the lay faithful can and ought to make their opinion

773 Cf. *Ibid.*, 1.

774 *Ibid.*

775 *Lumen Gentium* §32.

776 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodal Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Action Text “Joint Consultation and Decision-Making”*, 1.

777 *Lumen Gentium* §32.

known to their pastors with respect,⁷⁷⁸ the action text concludes that:

It is therefore also part of the task of a bishop to create binding structures of participation and co-determination of the faithful in the diocese that he leads on the basis of their responsibility (cf. can. 212 §3 CIC) in all essential questions of the Church's life and of the Church's mission, and to make decisions in binding interaction with the synodal bodies of the diocese. A path to make this interplay of shared responsibility and leadership ministry binding consists in the self-commitment of the bishop and of the parish priest.⁷⁷⁹

Further, the action text applies can. 127 CIC/1983 – which prescribes the consultation and consent of a lawfully selected group of persons for the validity of juridical act by a superior, *if* this is required by law – to the establishment of a Synodal Council.⁷⁸⁰ The same is done with can. 129 CIC/1983 which, however, simply states the participation of lay faithful in governance as a *possibility* and at a *cooperative* level, not as an obligation or as co-determiners.⁷⁸¹ Here, laws for exceptional cases are manipulated as norms for regular cases.

2. **The Job Description:** While the Synodal Council is co-chaired by the bishop and an elected lay person, the Synodal Council has the power to change the bishop's decisions or take decisions independently of the bishop – though the consent of the latter is required for the legal effectiveness of the decisions. In the case whereby the bishop refuses his consent to the decision even after re-consultation and a two-thirds majority vote against him, the last resort is a

778 Can. 212 §3 CIC/1983.

779 THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodal Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Action Text "Joint Consultation and Decision-Making"*, 2.

780 Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.

781 Can. 129 CIC/1983: "§1. Those who have received sacred orders are qualified, according to the norm of the prescripts of the law, for the power of governance, which exists in the Church by divine institution and is also called the power of jurisdiction. §2. Lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power according to the norm of law."

“conciliatory procedure”⁷⁸² – whatever that means is not clarified. The same applies at the parish level.⁷⁸³ Every parish and diocese is expected to give an account to the bishop cum Synodal Council about the implementation and development of this model of leadership in their jurisdictions.⁷⁸⁴ In other words, the diocesan Synodal Council is accountable only to itself. There is no higher instance.

In Forum I’s action text on accountability, it becomes clear that the *munus regendi* of the bishop/priest is completely absorbed into the Diocesan Synodal Council. For the bishop and his priests are accountable to the Synodal Council not just about the model of leadership but about their whole pastoral work and the Synodal Council even has the power to initiate the process of resigning a bishop or priest if he “fails” to meet the goals that have been worked out together with the Council.

Each bishop and each parish priest submits to the Synodal Council of his diocese or parish a progress report on the past four years, one year before the end of the term of office of this council. In particular, the parish priest reports on how and to what extent the concrete goals and deadlines that were adopted have been achieved within the diocese or parish. After this has been debated, he asks whether the members of the Synodal Council, firstly, concur with his report and, secondly, that they express their confidence in him. If the question of confidence is not answered positively by at least half of the voting members of the Synodal Council, a special meeting of the council is held, presided over by an external chairperson. This meeting identifies the reasons for not reaching an agreement, and seeks to develop the instruments needed to re-establish the conditions for cooperation in a spirit of trust. The third parties who are (to be) entrusted with chairing the meeting are decided on pro forma by the Synodal Council at the beginning of its term of office. The bishop or parish priest submits at the next meeting of the Synodal Council how he intends to solve the problems that have arisen and to increase

782 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodal Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Action Text “Joint Consultation and Decision-Making”*, 3.

783 Cf. *Ibid.*, 3f.

784 Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

the willingness of the faithful of his diocese or parish to cooperate with him. After a debate, the faithful are again asked whether they agree with this presentation. If two-thirds or more of the voting members answer negatively, the matter is referred to an arbitration board established for the diocese or parishes. If the Synodal Council finds with a two-thirds majority that confidence is not restored even after a decision has been taken by the arbitration board, this is considered to constitute a request to the bishop to offer his resignation to the Pope, or to the parish priest to offer his resignation to the bishop, as the case may be.⁷⁸⁵

9.3.3.2 National Synodal Council

Forum I calls for the establishment of a “Synodal Council of the Catholic Church in Germany”.⁷⁸⁶ It should be realised by latest March 2026.⁷⁸⁷ The structure of the diocesan and parish Synodal Councils culminates finally in an umbrella organization *above* the diocesan structure. The principles are the same *mutatis mutandis*. A major new cue is taken from the *synodal* nature of the Church, defined as “joint consultation and decision-making”, “a spiritual process that helps us to hear God’s Word today and to promote evangelisation through discernment of spirits, prayer and the exchange of arguments . . . enabling the members of God’s people to discover, contribute and interconnect their specific spiritual gifts.”⁷⁸⁸ The major job of the supra-diocesan national body

⁷⁸⁵ THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Action Text “Framework Regulation for Accountability” (Draft File), 2f., in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redden_Beitraege/11_3.7_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.RahmenordnungFuerRechenschaftslegung-Lesung.pdf (accessed on 24.04.2025).

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the First Reading at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September – 2 October 2021) for the Action Text “Sustainable Strengthening of Synodality: A Synodal Council for the Catholic Church in Germany” (Draft File), in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redden_Beitraege/13_3.9_SV-II-ENG_Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.SynodalitaetNachhaltigStaerken-Lesung.pdf (accessed on 24.04.2025).

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *The Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 117.

⁷⁸⁸ THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Action Text “Sustainable Strengthening of Synodality”*, 1; cf. —, *The Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 117.

is to ensure by “the power of the Holy Spirit” the implementation of and improvement on the decisions of the German Synodal Path in the Catholic Church in Germany in view of witnessing to Christ.⁷⁸⁹

The Fourth Synod Assembly passed a resolution to establish this Synodal Council. Its self-definition reads as follows:

As an advisory and decision-making body, the Synodal Council shall advise on major developments in the Church and in society, and shall take fundamental decisions of supra-diocesan significance on pastoral planning, future perspectives and budgetary issues of the Church that are not decided at the level of the dioceses.⁷⁹⁰

In other words: the essential decisions in the Church should be reserved not to the bishops but to this council as the supervisory unit of the dioceses. The leadership authority for the Synodal Council itself is shared by both a bishop (president of the German Bishops' Conference) and a lay person (President of the Central Committee of German Catholics).⁷⁹¹ It is thus not surprising that the Vatican evaluates this proposed Synodal Council as a Board which wishes to replace the governing authority of the bishops' conference as well as the individual bishops in their respective dioceses.⁷⁹² In a retrospective view of the resolution, Thomas Söding enthusiastically describes the expected novelty

789 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum I: Second Synodal Assembly: Action Text “Sustainable Strengthening of Synodality”*, 2.

790 THE SYNODAL PATH, Presentation of Synodal Forum I “Power and Separation of Powers in the Church – Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission” for the Second Reading at the Fourth Synodal Assembly (8–10 September 2022) for the Implementation Text “Sustainable Strengthening of Synodality: A Synodal Council for the Catholic Church in Germany”, 2: in: https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/Dokumente_Redene_Beitraege/englisch-SV-IV/ENGL_SV-IV-Synodalforum-I-Handlungstext.SynodalitaetNachhaltigStaerken_Second-reading.pdf (accessed on 09.07.2024); cf. —, *The Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 118.

791 Cf. *Ibid.*, 1f.

792 Cf. PAROLIN Pietro / LADARIA Luis / OUELLET Marc, *Letter* (January 16, 2023), 2f., in: https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2023/2023-009a-Brief-Kardinalstaatssekretaer-Praefekten-der-Dikasterien-fuer-die_Glaubenslehre-und-fuer-die-Bischoefe.pdf (accessed on 17.04.2023). This letter reiterates the teaching of Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* §21 which states that episcopal consecration confers the three offices *together*. Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.

in church leadership using an imagery: The croisiers of the individual bishops are dwarfed; their power of leadership should be transferred to the Synodal Council.⁷⁹³ The Synodal Council calls the shots, while the bishops follow suit. Dorothea Schmidt expresses it ironically: “In the future, the ZdK [Central Committee of German Catholics] will pasture the episcopal sheep.”⁷⁹⁴

9.3.3.2.1 Excursus 5: Kasper and the Issue of a National Synodal Council

Interestingly, the National Synodal Council in the form proposed by the German Synodal Path has to some extent its theological precursor in Kasper of the 1960s and 70s. Kasper takes his cue from the teaching of Vatican II on the so-called “pastoral council”:

It is greatly desired that in each diocese a pastoral commission will be established over which the diocesan bishop himself will preside and in which specially chosen clergy, religious and lay people will participate. The duty of this commission will be to investigate and weigh pastoral undertakings and to formulate practical conclusions regarding them.⁷⁹⁵

Kasper, however, identifies a problem of unclarity in the Council’s texts. Firstly, there is a problem of terminology: it sometimes speaks of “pastoral commission” (just as in the passage above), but other times it speaks of “lay commissions/councils”. For instance, in the Decree on the Lay Apostolate:

⁷⁹³ Cf. SCHMIDT Dorothea, *Vierte Synodalversammlung. Feindliche Übernahme der Kirche* (11.09.2022), in: <https://www.die-tagespost.de/kirche/synodaler-weg/feindliche-uebernahme-der-katholischen-kirche-art-232116> (accessed on 17.04.2023)

⁷⁹⁴ [My translation] Ibid. For a compact critical review of the proposal of Forum I by the perspective of legal expertise (secular and ecclesiastical), see MÜCKL Stefan, *Synodale Selbstermächtigungen*, in: Christoph BINNINGER *et al* (eds.), *An den Früchten erkennt man den Baum. Der Synodale Weg als Scheideweg*, Regensburg 2025, 91–94.

⁷⁹⁵ *Christus Dominus* §27; cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 32.

In dioceses, insofar as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres, and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity. While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises. Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, interparochial, and interdiocesan level as well as in the national or international sphere.⁷⁹⁶

Secondly, there is a problem of content: the Council does not, according to Kasper, clearly describe the specific difference between such a pastoral council and other councils/commissions such as the presbyterial council, the cathedral chapter, etc.⁷⁹⁷ In other words, Vatican II does not seem to have a “unified, well thought out, and harmonious master plan” of what it means by such commissions.⁷⁹⁸ Thus, Kasper’s proffered solution for overcoming these unclaritys is that we dare to go hermeneutically beyond teaching of the Council:

In order to solve this problem, we should not adhere like slaves to the texts of the Council, if we do not want to quickly get lost in aporias which are hardly resolvable ... If we want to make headway here, we must indeed willingly take up the propitious recommendations and approaches of the Council. But we will also have to courageously go beyond what is said there.⁷⁹⁹

What this concretely means can be seen in Kasper’s own proposal for a diocesan synodal council. While Vatican II sees (as in the text above

796 *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26; cf. cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 32.

797 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 32f.

798 Cf. *Ibid.*, 31f.

799 [My translation]. “Für die Lösung dieser Sachprobleme kann man sich nicht sklavisch an die Konzilstexte halten, wenn man sich nicht sehr schnell in kaum lösbaren Aporien verlieren will ... Wenn wir hier weiterkommen wollen, müssen wir die verheißungsvollen Anregungen und Ansätze des Konzils zwar bereitwillig aufgreifen. Wir werden aber auch mutig über das dort Gesagte hinausgehen müssen.” *Ibid.*

from *Christus Dominus* §27) the diocesan pastoral council as a desirable possibility and recommends it to the bishops, Kasper thinks that this is insufficient because it still leaves the decision and authority to the bishops.

This provision of the Council still leaves many questions open. Not only are the merely discretionary and directory statutes unsatisfactory such that the summoning and authority of the council in the end unilaterally is dependent on the responsible bishop.⁸⁰⁰

For him, the diocesan pastoral council should not just be an advisory board but should have the governance of the Church as its primary duty. The rest of his words literally pre-empts those of the German Synodal Path half a decade later.

Seen from our foundational deliberations, the first position for the governance (and not just for deliberation) of the ecclesiastical life in the future must be accorded to this synodal council. It is in it alone that the whole people of God in the unity and diversity of their charisms are represented. It is here that initiatives ought to come from and it is here that decisions ought to be taken. Therefore, this pastoral council ought to supplant more and more the old councils such as the cathedral chapter and the spiritual council. It ought to have the right to the pertinent information and the right to decision-taking. That does not rule out that the charisma of the priestly office as well as other charisms retain through adequate legal back-ups their own proper responsibility in those areas which have to do with their specific assignment respectively.⁸⁰¹

800 [My translation]. "Diese konziliare Bestimmung lässt noch sehr viele Fragen offen. Unbefriedigend sind nicht nur die bloßen Kann- und Soll-Vorschriften, so dass die Einberufung und die Kompetenz dieses Rates am Ende einseitig vom zuständigen Bischof abhängt." Ibid., 32.

801 [My translation]. "Von unseren Grundlagenüberlegungen aus gesehen müsste diesem Seelsorgerat für die Leitung (und nicht nur für die Beratung) des kirchlichen Lebens in Zukunft die erste Stelle zukommen. In ihm allein ist das ganze Gottesvolk in der Einheit und Vielheit seiner Charismen repräsentiert. Von hier müssten also die Initiativen ausgehen und hier müssten die Entscheidungen fallen. Dieser Seelsorgerat müsste deshalb auch immer mehr an die Stelle der alten Gremien wie Domkapitel und Geistlicher Rat

Somewhere else he writes: “The post-conciliar parish and diocesan councils must have co-deciding and not only advisory role ... we would be envisioning a greater separation of powers ...”⁸⁰²

Finally, Kasper envisions the establishment of a *supra-diocesan* National Synod based on the same principles, a major caveat being that he still placed it under episcopal governance (president of the bishops’ conference).⁸⁰³

However, half a decade later, when the German Synodal Path now elaborates on these ideas and also *hermeneutically goes beyond* what Kasper in his own hermeneutic outstripping of Vatican II taught, Kasper withdrew his support. He rejects the proposal of the German Synodal Path to institute a supra-diocesan Synodal Council. According to him, the implementation of such an idea would mean “a collective resignation of the bishops” both dogmatically and practically.⁸⁰⁴

9.4 Munus Sanctificandi

9.4.1 Administration of the Sacraments: Towards a Constriction to Eucharist and Reconciliation

It is noteworthy that the drafters of Forum I’s working document recognize the *munus sanctificandi* as restricted to the ordained priesthood. This is made obvious not only in the repeated distinction of power of governance / decision-making from the sacramental power (9.3.1), but also in an explicit statement: “Presiding over the celebration of the eucharist and the pledge of reconciliation are bound to priestly ordi-

treten. Er müsste das Recht zur entsprechenden Information und zur Entscheidung haben. Das schließt nicht aus, dass dem Charisma des Amtes wie den übrigen Charismen überall dort, wo es um das je Spezifische ihres Auftrages geht, durch entsprechend rechtliche Absicherungen die ihnen allein zustehende Verantwortung erhalten bleibt.” Ibid., 32.

802 [My translation]. KASPER Walter, *Amt und Gemeinde*, 55.

803 Cf. KASPER Walter, *Kollegiale Strukturen in der Kirche*, 33.

804 Cf. SCHMIDT Dorothea, Synodaler Rat. Kardinal KASPER: “Aus Ungeist kommende Idee” (05.07.2022), in: <https://www.die-tagespost.de/kirche/synodaler-weg/kardinal-kasper-eine-aus-dem-ungeist-kommende-idee-art-230112> (accessed on 17.04.2023).

nation. Only the bishop can ordain deacons and priests.”⁸⁰⁵ In fact, they exclude it from the concrete suggestions for structural reforms.⁸⁰⁶

In the final decision of the Synodal Path, Forum II asserts that the reason for the existence of the ministerial priesthood in the Church is actually for the ministry of the sacraments: “The Church need priests because she lives from the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the celebration of which is presided over by a priest. The priest is ordained (“consecrated”) so that he as a person stands for Jesus Christ himself presiding over the celebration of the sacraments. His ministry aims to ensure that all the baptised and confirmed live out their common priesthood, in the celebration of the Eucharist and in all their lives.”⁸⁰⁷ This recalls exactly one of the arguments of John Paul II (4.4).

There is, however, an obvious tendency in the reform proposals of the German Synodal Path to limit the scope of sacramental administration bound with sacred ordination to the minimum of only four sacraments: eucharist, reconciliation, confirmation, and holy orders (the last two are not explicitly mentioned in the documents). Due to the increasing shortage of priests in the Western Church, it is proposed that lay administration of baptism and lay assistance at matrimony also become the norm alongside that of priests.⁸⁰⁸ In addition to that, using especially the deadlock of the corona pandemic as pretext, Forum III, demands in its working document that lay pastoral workers be permitted to administer even the sacrament of anointing of the sick (a sacramental power strictly bound up with the priestly ordination):

These pastoral workers [*scil.* community and pastoral assistants] are among other things in an intensive contact with families of baptizands, sick persons and their relatives or young couples. However, the fact that the pastoral workers are not allowed to also administer the sacraments can lead to a painful breach in the pastoral care for these people. The

805 [My translation]. “Der Vorsitz der Eucharistiefeier und die Zusage der Versöhnung sind an die Priesterweihe gebunden. Nur der Bischof kann Diakone und Priester weihen.“ THE SYNODAL PATH, *Vorbereitendes Forum: Macht und Gewaltenteilung in der Kirche*, 6.

806 Cf. *Ibid.*, 18.

807 THE SYNODAL PATH, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 65.

808 Cf. *Ibid.*, 128f.

experiences during the corona pandemic prompt us to think anew about the sacramental presence of the Church. It [*scil.* “the sacramental presence of the Church”] cannot be viewed only in connection with sacramental ordination (office of the ministerial priesthood). The diaconal and pastoral devotion to human beings in their life situations already has a sacramental character. It would be coherent if the sacramental character of this devotion would be solidified in such a way that also a female pastoral worker could in individual situations also administer for eg. the sacrament of baptism if wished ... Over and beyond that, pastoral worker and also the faithful wish that it be made possible for non-ordained men and women in pastoral work to administer the sacrament of anointing the sick. Especially pastoral workers in hospitals pronounce this necessity out of their contact with the sick and the dying.⁸⁰⁹

9.4.2 Constriction of the Doctrine of *Repraesentatio Christi* and *Character Indelibilis* to the *Munus Sanctificandi*

In the basic text of Forum II at the Second Synodal Assembly, the meaning of the sanctifying ministry of the priest is dictated and explained through a concentration on the doctrine of *representatio Christi*. In essence, the position defended by the drafters is that the priest acts in this capacity (“recedes behind Christ”) *only* when he is celebrating the

⁸⁰⁹ [My translation]. “Diese Seelsorger_innen sind u. a. im intensiven Kontakt mit Familien von Täuflingen, Kranken und deren Angehörigen oder jungen Paaren. Allerdings kann es in der seelsorglichen Begleitung dieser Menschen zu einem schmerzhaften Bruch kommen, wenn die Seelsorger_innen nicht auch die Sakramente spenden dürfen. Die Erfahrungen in der Corona-Pandemie geben Anlass, neu über die sakramentale Präsenz der Kirche nachzudenken. Sie kann nicht nur in Verbindung mit der sakramentalen Ordination (Weiheamt) gesehen werden. Die diakonische und seelsorgliche Zuwendung zu den Menschen in ihrer Lebenssituation hat bereits eine sakramentale Dimension. Stimmig wäre es, wenn der sakramentale Charakter dieser Zuwendung sich darin verdichten würde, dass auch eine Seelsorgerin in der konkreten Begleitung nach Wunsch das Sakrament – z. B. der Taufe – spenden könnte ... Darüber hinaus besteht bei pastoralen Mitarbeiter_innen wie auch bei Gläubigen der Wunsch, dass Frauen und Männern ohne Weihe in der seelsorglichen Begleitung ermöglicht wird, das Sakrament der Krankensalbung zu spenden. Vor allem Krankenhausseelsorger_innen benennen aus ihrem Kontakt mit den Kranken und Sterbenden heraus diese Notwendigkeit.” THE SYNODAL PATH, *Synodalforum III: „Frauen in Diensten und Ämtern in der Kirche“: Arbeitstext für die Regionenkonferenz*, 1f.

sacraments, especially the eucharist. Outside those moments of administering the sacraments, there is no difference between the representation of Christ by the priest by power of ordination and that of the lay faithful by virtue of baptism.⁸¹⁰ The drafters are conscious of the fact that this is not in line with the Catholic magisterial teaching: “It is clear in Magisterial texts that the “repraesentatio Christi” by the priest is not limited solely to the sacramental celebration of or presiding over the Eucharist, but concerns the entire priestly existence.”⁸¹¹ Reference is made to the teaching of John Paul on this in *Pastores dabo vobis*:

In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ – the head and shepherd – authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation – particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd.⁸¹²

To come square with the discrepancy, the drafters pit against it a text from Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*:

The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. The configuration of the priest to Christ the head – namely, as the principal source of grace – does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions “do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others.”⁸¹³

810 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 6f.; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 67–69.

811 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 6f.

812 JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §15. Wrongly quoted as §14 by Forum II. Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 6f.; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 68.

813 FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §104, in: *Vatican Website*: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#_ftnref74 (accessed on 24.04.2025); cf. AAS 105/12 (2013) 1021–1137: 1063.

Now, this text and its context (§104) is trying to make a distinction between a function and holiness and the existential import. By power of ordination, priests represent Christ sacramentally, but it does not make them holier than others or some sort of super-humans. The two areas are not conflated. They are distinct, though related: the function is in service of the call to holiness. However, the drafters of basic text of Forum II make something else out of the text of Pope Francis: both levels – priestly representation of Christ by ordination and the common call of all to holiness are subtly made synonymous by implication. It is not said *expressis verbis*, rather both levels are subsumed terminologically under “*representatio Christi*”:

The representation of Christ, which results from baptism, is thus not increased through ordination as a priest. In his representation of Christ, the priest serves that of the whole people of God.⁸¹⁴

In the foundational text of Forum II at the Fourth Synodal Assembly, a footnote is added declaring the ontological meaning of *character indelibilis* conferred by ordination as a relict of an overhauled Aristotelian philosophy, which has been instrumentalised for the exaltation of the priestly ministry. Unless one performs some “hermeneutical” operations on it, it would no longer make sense today.⁸¹⁵ And indeed, the Forum gives an example of such a hermeneutically updated reconstruction of the ontological meaning of priestly representation of Christ by power of ordination:

It is therefore important to recall the meaning and the purpose of the ontological statements: If the Lord brings about grace and salvation in the Church through the sacraments, then the effective potential of the sacramental-priestly ministry must be existent independently of the moral disposition of the minister. This could however only be expressed in ontological categories. Perhaps an image helps to understand this:

Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 7; cf. —, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 69.

814 THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Second Synodal Assembly: Basic Text*, 7.

815 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Forum II: Fourth Synodal Assembly: Foundational Text*, 15.

There is a road, a path to salvation, and it is secured with guard rails. The ontological reflections are, as it were, guard rails for reflection: If the believing person is so disposed, the administration of the sacrament by the priest can only be one thing, namely the mediation of salvation, regardless of the circumstances. However, if one confuses the reflections that are supposed to protect the lasting effectiveness of the priestly action with reflections that have the priestly state at their centre, then one confuses the road and the guard rail. But engineers who know how to make guard rails are neither road workers nor vehicles, nor the drivers who use the roads. The Church has unfortunately trained far too many engineers who only know how to build guard rails and crash barriers, and has sadly neglected road construction, vehicle construction, as well as driving instruction.⁸¹⁶

A dissection of the above squiggly explanation and imagery for sacramental representation of Christ is telling:

1. It is acknowledged that it is a reality different from the moral status of the priest.
2. Then, this independent reality and its relation to the person of the priest is not explained – in other words the distinction between sacramental *seal* (= a word which means protection of “validity”, “intactness”, sign of being owned by somebody, of being commissioned with a specific authority, of a configuration) and sacramental *grace*.⁸¹⁷ Not a word is said about it. Rather, the explanation leaps over into the plane of imagery to explain the relationship between the reality itself and salvation: What is meant with (but, according to the authors, for ages wrongly termed) *character indelibilis* (“ontological reflections”) is described as “guard rails” of the road salvation, while the “road” itself stands for the “mediation” through the sacraments as administered by the priest. In other words, *character indelibilis* is not so much a reality *in* the priest himself through ordi-

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., Fn. 41.

⁸¹⁷ On this distinction which applies also to baptism and confirmation as well as its biblical-theological foundation, see: SCHEFFCZYK Leo / ZIEGENAUS Anton, *Katholische Dogmatik VII*, 144–151.

nation as only a relation, only a medium safeguarding grace. Thus, the “hermeneutical” operation does not just modify or update the ontology. It completely ignores it, or rather throws it away. It has therefore been rightly accused of being nothing but a “relapse into nominalism of the late Middle Ages” – the very thing the Council of Trent fought against.⁸¹⁸ The whole accusation in the remaining part against the Church for training only engineers for guard rails, but not for road and vehicle constructions and all what not, only has meaning for one who accepts the option of nominalism.

The Church’s ontological understanding of the priestly *character indelibilis* is something different: ordination imprints *in* the priest an indestructible identity of Christ the Priest and Head of the Church, such that by the power of this sacramental conformity to Christ he *re-presents* Christ before and in the community of believers.⁸¹⁹

9.5 Chapter Conclusion

The concept of the priesthood that emerges after all the differentiations and reform suggestions on the *munus regendi* of the priesthood does not seem to be sustainable generally, but at least it is obviously suggestive in one direction: the priority of the sanctification ministry. Since the preaching of the word in the eucharistic celebration should be assigned also to the trained lay people and there is no clear positive content of the shepherd ministry divested of all possible powers of decision and governance, the celebration of the sacraments (with the attendant constrictions) simply emerges as the “take-home” of the

818 Cf. HAUKE Manfred, *Eine innere Aushöhlung des Weihepriestertums*, 96. Basically, the philosophical root of the German Synodal Path’s approach to Catholic doctrines is nominalism, cf. MENKE Karl-Heinz, *Protestantisierung der Kirche in Deutschland?* in: Christoph BINNINGER *et al* (eds.), *Unterscheidung der Geister. Klarstellungen zum Synodalen Weg*, Regensburg 2023, 127–131; cf. GERL-FALKOVITZ Hanna-Barbara, *Der große Durchbruch in der Sexualmoral?* in: Christoph BINNINGER *et al* (eds.), *Unterscheidung der Geister. Klarstellungen zum Synodalen Weg*, Regensburg 2023, 135–137.

819 Cf. BINNINGER Christoph, *Funktionär oder Gesandter Christi?* in: Christoph BINNINGER *et al* (eds.), *»Was ER euch sagt, das tut!« Kritische Beleuchtung des Synodalen Weges*, Regensburg 2021, 79–83: 81.

ministerial priesthood *à la* German Synodal Path. Thus, while Forum III, in the final decisions of the Synodal Path, accuses the Church of late Antiquity and the scholastic period of having aberrated the original meaning of Christian priesthood by interpreting it as a “sacerdotal-cultic” ministry for “offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass”,⁸²⁰ the German Synodal Path itself actually still retains the same “aberration” since it is the only *munus* it leaves intact for the ministerial priesthood. One major difference to the views of John Paul II, Ratzinger and the later Kasper is the separation of the three *munera*. For our three authors, however, they are clearly a tripartite unity, and therefore inalienably tied up with sacramental ordination. With this perspective of the German Synodal Path, one can readily agree with Thomas Marschler’s gauge: While any of the three positions on the fundamental ministry is justifiable as long as it maintains its “perichoretic character”,⁸²¹ “the concentration on the sanctifying ministry and the sacramental power conferred on the priest makes possible in the most clear manner till today the distinction between the Christ-representation by virtue of priestly and episcopal ordination and the Christ-representation of all the faithful ...”⁸²²

820 Cf. THE SYNODAL PATH, *Decisions of the Synodal Path*, 98.

821 MARSCHLER Thomas, *Der priesterliche Dienst*, 370.

822 [My translation]. “Die Konzentration auf den Heiligungsdienst und die dem Presbyter dafür verliehenen sakramentalen Vollmachten ermöglicht bis heute in klarster Weise die Unterscheidung der durch Priester- und Bischofsweihe begründeten Christusrepräsentation von der Christusrepräsentation aller Getauften ...” *Ibid.*, 369.

Conclusion of the Research Finding

The major conclusion and findings of my research consist in five major points:

1. John Paul II consistently defends the primacy of the *munus sanctificandi*.
2. Joseph Ratzinger has a turn in his theology: from arguing for the primacy of the *munus docendi* to defending the primacy of the *munus sanctificandi*.
3. Walter Kasper also makes a turn in his theology: From arguing for the primacy of the *munus regendi* to supporting the primacy of the *munus sanctificandi*.
4. Having considered the different arguments, the author himself concludes and submits in agreement with John Paul II, as well as with the later Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper, that the ministry of sanctification is the fundamental *munus* of the ministerial priesthood. In his view, the most plausible scriptural foundation for it, remains the institution of the priesthood by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. It is further supported by Church history and doctrine.
5. The German Synodal Path – as a topical case study – in its reform vision wittingly or unwittingly accords the *munus sanctificandi* the primacy of place in the priestly ministry.

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The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was the first extraordinary Magisterium to use the theological formula of the threefold of office (*triplex munus*) of Christ (Priest, Prophet, King) to explain the ministerial priesthood. It triggered a theological search for the foundational job of the priesthood from which all other priestly duties take their bearing: Is it sanctification through the sacraments, proclamation of the word, or governance of the people of God? In other words, is it theologically possible and justifiable to attribute a certain primacy/priority to any of these three dimensions of the priestly life and duty? This research is an attempt to find the answer by studying the contributions of three authors from the theological field, each advocating for one of the three offices.

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