

The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion

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The last thirty-five years has seen a flourishing of a new reality in the Catholic church that few could have anticipated as the Second Vatican Council came to a close. This reality, generally referred to as “lay ministry,” has leapt ahead of theological reflection, raising a host of questions regarding the definition of lay ministry, its scope and limits, its relationship to both ordained ministry and to the activities engaged by all the Christian faithful in the fulfillment of their baptismal call. These questions are reflected in the struggle to find a nomenclature adequate to this new situation: should we speak of “lay ministry,” “the lay apostolate,” “lay ecclesial ministry,” “non-ordained ministry” or perhaps “the ministry of the baptized”? This latter question might seem fairly insignificant, a mere matter of titles, but in fact our nomenclature generally reflects an operative view of the church. In this paper I will propose the beginnings of an ecclesiological foundation for a theology of church ministry that might guide us as we consider the significance and place of these new ministries.

I. A New Ecclesiological Vision Emerging Out of Vatican II

While the Second Vatican Council made important advances in our understanding of the church, it was not able to articulate a complete, internally coherent ecclesiology. Rather in important if at times halting and uncertain steps, the council sketched out in

broad lines, the way towards a post-conciliar ecclesiology. I would like to draw attention to three features of the council's emergent ecclesiology that might be fruitful for developing the ecclesiological foundations for a theology of ministry in the church: 1) the priority of the baptismal call of the *Christifideles*, 2) the church's call to mission in the world, and 3) the church as an ordered communion.

1. The Priority of the Baptismal Call of the *Christifideles*

One of the most important initiatives of the Second Vatican Council was its attempt to find new foundations for its consideration of the church. The preparatory draft document on the church given to the bishops at the opening of the council was little more than a synthesis of that ecclesiology that had been operative throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century. As Bishop de Smedt of Bruges observed in a famous conciliar intervention, this ecclesiological perspective suffered from clericalism, triumphalism and juridicism.¹ It presupposed that the church was, as Pope Pius X put it, an "unequal society" comprised of two ranks, the clergy and the laity.² With the fundamental rejection of the ecclesiology reflected in that document, the council set upon a new course. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, offered a new framework for situating any and all distinctions in the church. That new framework or, as Kenan Osborne refers to it, "common matrix," was made evident in the well known decision to place the chapter on the church as people of God prior to the chapter on the hierarchy in the *De Ecclesia* schema. In that chapter the council members "were focusing on the common matrix, the fundamental equality and dignity of each and every

¹ *Acta Synodalia* I/4, 142f.

² *Vehementor nos*. In *The Papal Encyclicals*, edited by Claudia Carlen (New York: McGrath, 1981) 3: 47-8.

follower of Jesus....”³ This matrix is further reinforced by the council’s frequent use of the term *christifideles* to refer to all the baptized and by its appeal to the priesthood of all believers. Before there are ordained and non-ordained, clergy and lay, all church members are the Christian faithful, the baptized, called to a common discipleship in Christ. Indeed, while the council did not itself make use of this metaphor, its theological affirmation of the equal dignity of all the baptized readily suggests a view of the church as the “community of disciples.”⁴ In baptism we are initiated into Christ’s body the church and, in a sense, discover ourselves fully, our truest identity, in the life of the church. At the same time, by baptism into Christ’s body the church we are drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit into participation in the triune life of God.

All Christians, by baptism, are called in discipleship to follow the way of Jesus of Nazareth, to grow in holiness and to help further the reign of God. This commitment, far from being one among many human commitments that one might undertake, is in itself more than a religion. As the early Christians understood it, this commitment brought one into a new form of existence, a new understanding of the human vocation.

The Second Vatican Council augmented its rich treatment of the common matrix of Christian baptism and discipleship with an uneven yet still significant use of the biblical notion of charism. It is a development which was strongly advocated by Cardinal Suenens who gave a very influential speech on the subject on October 22, 1963.⁵ This

³ Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 530ff.

⁴ Years later, in a revised edition of his classic work, *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles would propose this model (Church as Community of Disciples) as a “bridge model” that drew together the fundamental features of the five models of church (Herald, Servant, Institution, Sacrament and Mystical Communion) that he had addressed in the earlier edition of his book. Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Expanded Edition, New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁵ *Acta Synodalia* II/3, 175-8.

more pneumatological line of thought is evident in the first chapter of *Lumen gentium* which considered the place of charisms in the context of the whole people of God's participation in the life of the church.⁶

The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children. He guides the church in the way of all truth and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits (LG # 4).

The theme is picked up again in the second chapter.

Moreover, it is not only through the sacraments and the ministries that the holy Spirit makes the people holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts "at will to each individual," he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts, he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church....(LG # 12)

While the terminology employed is not altogether consistent, nevertheless there is a fundamental assertion that charisms are given to all the faithful "for the renewal and building up of the church." There are clear Pauline resonances here as charisms are not presented as private gifts or talents but gifts of the Holy Spirit offered *to and for* the church *through* the individual believer (cf. 1 Cor. 12).

⁶ For a careful analysis of the council's treatment of charisms, see Albert Vanhoye, "The Biblical Question of 'Charisms' After Vatican II," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, volume 1, ed. by R. Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988): 439-68.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity returns to this topic but with an important broadening of perspective.⁷ For in this document charisms are offered by the Holy Spirit for both church *and world*:

From the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there follow for all christian believers the right and duty to use them in the church and in the world for the good of humanity and the development of the church, to use them in the freedom of the holy Spirit who “chooses where to blow,” and at the same time in communion with the sisters and brothers in Christ, and with the pastors especially (AA # 3).

Here baptismal charisms are properly correlated to the building up of the church *and* the furtherance of the church’s mission in the world.

2. The Church in Mission

Our baptism into the church means, most fundamentally, that we are baptized into the church’s mission. This mission is no mere extrinsic task imposed upon the church from without, it is the very *raison d’être* of the church. Indeed the church’s mission derives from its Trinitarian origins. Salvation history reveals to us a God who sends forth the Word and Spirit in mission as the very expression and fulfillment of God’s love for the world. God’s Word, spoken into human history from the beginning of creation and made effective by the power of the Spirit, in the fullness of time became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. The origins of the church, in turn, are inextricably linked to Jesus’ gathering a community of followers whom, after his death and resurrection, were empowered by his Spirit to continue his mission to serve, proclaim and realize the

⁷ John Haughey, “Charisms: An Ecclesiological Exploration,” in *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Doris Donnelly (The Liturgical Press, 1999), 3-5.

coming reign of God. The council writes: “Proceeding from the love of the eternal Father, the church was founded by Christ in time and gathered into one by the holy Spirit” (GS # 40).

The affirmation of the missiological character of the whole church was one of the most important teachings of the Second Vatican Council. While the council’s desire to affirm a positive theology of the laity led it to attribute to the laity a particular apostolate for the transformation of the world, there are other instances where the council affirmed that it was in fact the mission of the whole church to transform the world in the service of the coming reign of God. So, for example, while there are several texts that speak of the laity as called to be a leaven in the world, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World it is the whole church which “is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God” (GS # 40). Later in that same article the council members spoke of the mission of the church to heal and elevate the dignity of the human person, to strengthen human society and to help humanity discover the deeper meaning of their daily lives. “The church, then, believes that *through each of its members and its community as a whole* it can help to make the human family and its history still more human” (GS # 40, emphasis is mine).

I believe the pastoral constitution offered an emerging insight that it was the whole church that exists in mission in the world. This suggests that the attitudes and actions of all members of the church, including the clergy and consecrated religious, have social and political import and thus, in their own way, contribute to the furtherance of the church’s mission to the world. It is certainly the case that not all Christians will participate in the church’s mission in the same manner, but none are exempt from the

demands of their baptism to participate in this mission. The Italian theologian, Bruno Forte, insists that

the relationship with temporal realities is proper to all the baptized, though in a variety of forms, joined more to personal charisms than to static contrasts between laity, hierarchy and religious state....No one is neutral toward the historical circumstances in which he or she is living, and an alleged neutrality can easily become a voluntary or involuntary mask for ideologies and special interests....It is the entire community that has to confront the secular world, being marked by that world in its being and in its action. The entire People of God must be characterized by a positive relationship with the secular dimension.⁸

This firm orientation of all the baptized as those bound together in a common mission is a most necessary foundation for any consideration of church ministry. It serves as a vital corrective against any tendency to allow practical distinctions between the church *ad intra* and the church *ad extra* to turn into a dichotomizing separation. All church ministry is fundamentally oriented toward the church's mission to the world in the service of God's reign.

C. The Church as an Ordered Communion

Both the 1985 extraordinary synod and Pope John Paul II have referred to the notion of communion as one of the most fundamental to be developed at the Second Vatican Council.⁹ Yet in many ways, of the three ecclesiological principles I have explored here, this is the one least explicitly developed by the council. Still, one can detect an emerging ecclesiology of communion in important conciliar texts. It is most

⁸ Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1991), 54-5.

⁹ Cf. *Christifidelis laici, Origins* 18 (February 19, 1989): 570 (# 19).

evident in the council's effort to give the church a firm foundation in the triune life of God. Drawing on St. Cyprian, the council writes that the Church "is seen to be 'a people made one by the unity of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit'" (LG # 4). The innermost reality of the Church, its participation in the triune life of God, shifts from background to foreground.¹⁰ The Church's reality must be understood in the light of God's saving work through Christ and in the Spirit. The Church shares in the mystery of God to the extent that it participates in God's saving work on behalf of humankind. Through Christ and by the power of the Spirit we are invited to become adopted sons and daughters of God. The Church is not an autonomous entity, rather its very existence depends on its relationship to God through Christ and in the Spirit.

1. The Council's Recovery of the Biblical Understanding of Koinonia

The council drew its understanding of communion from the biblical and patristic concept of *koinonia* or *communio*. It played a particularly prominent role in the ecclesiology of St. Paul. His more organic view of the church suggested not just complementarity and diversity within the church but *coexistence*.¹¹ For Paul, life in Christ meant life in the body of Christ, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). There was no such thing as an individual believer understood apart from the life of the church for the church was no mere aggregate of individuals. Rather, by baptism into the Christian community one participated in a new reality, one was a new creation. Individual believers did not *make* a church; initiation into the church through faith and baptism *made* the believer. Faith and baptism introduces her into a new mode of existence.

¹⁰ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 151.

¹¹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Eucharist and Community in I Corinthians," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 4.

The council incorporated this biblical view of communion in the first chapter of *Lumen gentium*. Attending to the vertical dimension, the council affirms that it is through the mediation of Christ's Church, by the power of the Spirit, that we are drawn into the triune life of God.

This is the Spirit of life, the fountain of water springing up to eternal life, through whom the Father gives life to human beings dead in sin...The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children....By the power of the Gospel he rejuvenates the church, constantly renewing it and leading it to perfect union with its spouse (LG # 4).

In that same article we find attention to the horizontal dimension: "He [the Spirit] guides the church in the way of all truth" and unites "it in fellowship and ministry." In the Church believers experience, most profoundly, the life of communion into which all humanity is invited.

It is as a union of the vertical and horizontal dimensions that we can understand ecclesial communion as a sacrament of salvation:

All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of saving unity. In order to extend to all regions of the earth, it enters into human history, though it transcends at once all time and all boundaries between peoples. (LG # 9).

This ecclesial communion is further developed in the council's recovery of the eucharistic foundations of the church. The celebration of the eucharist effects a

communion among those believers gathered at each eucharistic celebration as all are united in the breaking of the bread. Echoing St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-7), the council writes that “...in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both expressed and achieved” (LG # 3). This is reaffirmed in article 11: “Then, strengthened by the body of Christ in the Eucharistic communion, they manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which this most holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes.” In the eucharistic *synaxis*, the Christian community proclaims in word and celebrates in ritual and symbol its most profound reality, its truest identity as a people whose lives are being conformed to that of Christ by the celebration of the paschal mystery.

2. The Church as a Communion of Eucharistic Communion

The nature of the church as communion is not limited to the *communio* that exists among the members of a particular eucharistic community. By the late second century the notion of communion was extended to describe that spiritual bond which existed among all local eucharistic communities. There was a common conviction that all eucharistic communities abided together in shared ecclesial communion.¹² For the early church, the sacrament of the eucharist brought about not only the communion of those gathered at each altar, but the communion of all local churches. This followed from the emerging eucharistic theology of the time. Wherever the eucharist was celebrated the body of Christ was actualized in a sacramental fashion.

¹² Cf. Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*; Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966); Kenneth Hein, *Eucharist and Excommunication: A Study in Early Christian Doctrine and Discipline* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1975).

Vatican II recalled this extended understanding of ecclesial communion in its treatment of the ministry of the bishop and the relationship between the local Churches and the universal Church: “Individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are modeled on the universal church; it is in and from these that the one unique catholic church exists” (LG # 23). This text, along with others, reflects a move away from that pre-conciliar, universalist ecclesiology which viewed the diocese as little more than an administrative subset of the universal church. Vatican II represented an at least tentative return to an ecclesiology in which the one universal church is manifested in the communion of local churches.

3. The Pneumatological Foundations of an Ecclesiology of Communion

The full reality of this ecclesial communion goes beyond sociological analysis for it is a communion animated by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that transformed the church of Pentecost from an aggregate group of individuals into a spiritual communion. John Zizioulas, the influential Greek Orthodox theologian and now Metropolitan of Pergamon, has noted the West’s ecclesiological tendency to focus on the church’s historical institution by Christ rather than its *constitution* by the Spirit. He writes, “institution is something presented to us as a fact, more or less a *fait-accompli*.”¹³ The result is a static conception of the church that has little place for change or development. When one considers not only the church's institution by Christ, but its *constitution* by the Spirit, new facets of the church's innermost reality appear. “Constitution is something that involves us in its very being, something we accept freely, because we take part in its

¹³ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 140.

very emergence.”¹⁴ In the Spirit's constitution of the Church, we must admit an ongoing, dynamic presence of the Spirit continuing to mold and shape the Church through the exercise of human freedom.

4. *The “Ordering” of the Church*

A much contested phrase used five times (LG # 21, 22; CD # 4, 5; PO # 7) in council documents is that of “hierarchical communion” (*communio hierarchica*).¹⁵ It seems to have been employed as a safeguard against the danger that notions of communion might degenerate into secular understandings of liberal democratic polity. Yet the qualifier “hierarchical” can serve an important purpose if we purge it of those pyramidal conceptions it gained in the thirteenth century when medieval ecclesiology employed the neo-platonic cosmology of the late fifth or early sixth century figure, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, as a structuring principle for the church. “*Hierarchia*,” a term first coined by Pseudo-Dionysius, became in the thirteenth century an ontological schema for viewing the Church as a descending ladder of states of being and truth with the fullness of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) given to the pope and shared in diminishing degrees with the lower levels of church life.¹⁶ This “hierarchology” has remained with the Church, in varying degrees, up to the present. There is an alternative view of the term hierarchy in reference to the church, however, and that is to return to its literal sense of “sacred order” (the Gk. adjective “*hier*,” mean “sacred” with the Greek

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ It appears a sixth time in #2 of the *Nota Praevia Explicativa* attached at the 11th hour to *Lumen gentium*, without conciliar approval, “by higher authority.” Walter Kasper offers a helpful discussion of the ambiguities surrounding this phrase in *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 156-61.

¹⁶ See Jean Leclercq, “Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 31; Yves Congar *L’Église dde Saint Augustin à l’époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 229-30.

noun “*arche*,” meaning “origin,” “principle” or “rule”).¹⁷ This leads to the key affirmation that the church of Jesus Christ, animated by the Spirit is now and has always been subject to church ordering as it receives its life from the God who, in Christian faith, is ordered in eternal self-giving as a triune communion of persons. At the same time there must be the recognition that the specific character of that ordering has changed dramatically throughout the church’s history. This “ordering” of the church is manifested on numerous levels.

The most fundamental ordering of the church occurs at baptism. Baptism does not just make one a different kind of individual, it draws the person into a profound ecclesial relationship within the life of the Church as a follower or disciple of Jesus sent in mission to the world. When we consider the sacraments of initiation as a unity then we recognize that initiation carries with it its own anointing, “laying on of hands” and entrance into eucharistic communion. To be initiated into the Church is to take one’s place, one’s “*ordo*,” within the community, the place of the baptized. As Zizioulas puts it, “there is no such thing as non-ordained persons in the church.”¹⁸ To be baptized is to be “ordained” into a very specific ecclesial relationship along with all who profess the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The relationship established in Christian initiation unfolds in three dimensions. Vertically, if you will, we are baptized into communion with God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Yet this relation is inseparable from our horizontal relationship with all our

¹⁷ See Terence Nichol’s helpful treatment of different notions of hierarchy in church tradition. Terence Nichols, *That All May Be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997). This view of the church as an ordered communion parallels in some ways Ghislain Lafont’s presentation of the post-conciliar church as a “structured communion.” See his *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Zizioulas, 215-6.

brothers and sisters in baptism who constitute together a communion of believers. These two dimensions of the ecclesial relation established in Christian initiation (baptism/chrisation/eucharist) must be conjoined with a third dimension, the movement outward toward the world as sent in mission. This three-dimensional ecclesial relation established by Christian initiation offers us our primal identity as Christian believers and it can never be abandoned even as we may be called into some new ecclesial relationship.

In addition to that most basic of ecclesial orderings established in Christian initiation, the presence in the church today of numerous institutes of religious life, secular institutes and societies of apostolic life, along with the emergence of the “new movements” (e.g., Focolare, the Neo-Catechumenal Way, the St. Egidio community, Communion and Liberation, Opus Dei) suggests that church order provides a diversity of concrete ways of giving evangelical witness to the gospel. Along side this ordering of evangelical witness there exists within the church an ordering of ministries as well. It is this ministerial ordering that we will need to consider in further detail in the second section of this essay.

II. The Ministerial Ordering of the People of God

In this treatment of Christian ministry I propose a middle ground between the pre-conciliar identification of ministry with holy orders and the more contemporary tendency to consider any and all Christian activity as ministry.¹⁹ Ordered church ministry is a reality broader than the ministry of the ordained (though inclusive of it) and narrower than Christian discipleship. Ordered ministry refers to any and all ministries that, once formally undertaken, draw one into a new ecclesial relationship within the life of the

¹⁹ Thomas F. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (Revised edition, New York: Paulist, 1999), 150.

church; that is, in undertaking an ordered ministry one is ecclesially re-positioned. I will develop this notion in more detail below when I develop more explicitly the relational foundations of ministry.

A. Ministry as “Ecclesial Re-Positioning”

The ecclesial re-positioning involved in the entrance into ministry will (or should) involve, in some measure, all of the following: a) a personal call, b) ecclesial discernment and recognition of a genuine charism, c) formation appropriate to the demands of the ministry, d) some authorization by community leadership and e) some ritualization of this ministry as a prayer for the assistance of the Holy Spirit and a sending forth on behalf of the community. Let us consider these in turn.

Ministry generally begins with the manifestation of some charism for the building up of the church in mission. Of course every Christian possesses charisms to be exercised in their daily life. These charisms may appear quite ordinary (making them no less vital) such as the charism of parenting²⁰ or imbuing the atmosphere of one’s workplace with the values of the gospel. At other times these charisms may take on a more dramatic and even public character as in the evangelical witness of Dorothy Day. The exercise of these charisms, however dramatic, does not call for undertaking any new ecclesial relationship for the sake of the Church and its mission beyond that constituted by baptismal initiation. However, there are other charisms, the manifestation of which does suggest the suitability of entering into a new, public, ecclesial relationship within the Church.

²⁰ See Wendy Wright, “The Charism of Parenting,” in *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century*, 85-101.

What distinguishes these many ordered ministries from the more basic activity of all the baptized in fulfillment of their baptismal call? For a Christian activity to qualify as an ordered ministry it would seem that ministry must be related to a sense of some distinctive public relationship within the community. The public character of this ministry is evident in the way in which we tend to hold such ministers to a higher moral standard. We recognize the possibility that their moral failings, because of their public character, might be a cause of scandal.

Consider the case of the person who in sharing her faith with family and friends manifests great passion and insight. Members of her local community recognize this charism for sharing the faith, a charism already being exercised in her life, and so call her to exercise this charism in a public ministry of the Church as catechist. In some cases an individual may sense the presence of this charism as a personal call to service and offer themselves to the Church. At other times it is the community itself, in its processes of ecclesial discernment, that will first recognize the presence of a given charism and call that person into ordered ministry. In any case ministry begins with the recognition by the individual and/or the community of an already existing charism. The failure to recognize that evidence of a charism must *precede* one's entrance into an ordered church ministry has done great harm to the life of the church. Particularly as regards the ordained, the Church has too frequently suffered from the inadequate ministrations of well meaning priests and deacons called to ministry because of their personal holiness or eagerness to serve but without evidence of a recognizable charism for the ministry they have undertaken.

Karl Rahner's theology of grace provides a helpful insight into this. Rahner insists that "sacraments of consecration" (e.g., baptism, confirmation, penance, orders) always presuppose a grace *always already present* but now sacramentally manifested in the believer in a new way. He writes:

What really happens in such a sacrament of consecration is the historical manifestation and the sociologically concretizing specification in the dimension of the visible Church of a holiness and consecratedness which has always existed inescapably in that person in the form of an offer in virtue of God's salvific will.²¹

With respect to ministry, Rahner suggests that adult baptism itself offers an analogy.

To deal with this question we must not start out from the model of infant baptism but must think of individual sacramental events in space and time as they occur in and with adults. But it is obvious here with reference to baptism and penance that these sacraments, even for traditional theology, without detriment to their efficacy, come upon a person who has already accepted in freedom the grace always offered to him and is justified.²²

If we understand a personal charism as a tangible manifestation of grace, then the call to ordered ministry involves the recognition of a prior graced disposition to exercise a given ministry.

Having called a baptized believer into a new ministerial relationship in service of the church and its mission, it will be necessary for the church to offer the necessary

²¹ Karl Rahner, "Consecration in the Life of the Church," in *Theological Investigations*, volume 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 67. "Consecration" translates the German, "*Weihe*," which however, also carries the sense of "initiation," "dedication" or even "re-dedication," thus explaining Rahner's categorization of "sacraments of consecration."

²² *Ibid.*, 64.

formation. For some ministries (e.g., extraordinary minister of the eucharist) this may require little more than a training weekend. For those preparing for presbyteral ministry it may require years of seminary formation. In any case, successful formation leads to some form of church authorization. Finally, there is the recognition that all ministries are exercises of charisms on behalf of the community and therefore deserve the prayer and sending forth from the community in some ritual form, whether it be sacramental ordination, installation or commissioning. The distinction between these three will be explored below.

B. Recovering a Relational Ontology of Ministry

This relational conception of ministry has been developed most provocatively by John Zizioulas in his treatment of ordained ministry. His approach has the merit of looking beyond scholasticism, with its tendency to consider the minister in isolation from the community, to the patristic tradition. There we find a thoroughly relational perspective in which ordination was concerned with the concrete Christian community. Through the ritual action associated with ordination the *ordinati* were brought into a new relationship within the community; ordination called one into a new ministerial relation and, in light of that new relation, conferred the power necessary for the fulfillment of that ministry.

Absolute ordinations, the practice of ordaining an individual apart from a call to serve a local Church, were prohibited in the early centuries of Christianity. Ministry did not exist as a power or reality in its own right but only as linked to pastoral service. The relational character of ordained ministry was confirmed in the eucharistic context in which all ordinations were to take place. Ordination did not make sense except as

conducted within the liturgical life of the Church. Zizioulas draws on the wisdom of this earlier tradition and suggests that the theological significance of ordination lies neither in the conferral of sacramental powers on the individual being ordained (a standard scholastic approach within Catholicism) nor the delegation of authority from the community to the individual (a perspective common to many Protestant traditions). Rather ordination brings the one being ordained into a fundamentally new ecclesial relationship, beyond that established by their Christian initiation. Moreover, this new ecclesial relationship, established through sacramental ordination, cannot imply the renunciation of that relation established in Christian initiation. The demands of baptism continue for the ordained. What results from sacramental ordination is a twofold relation. St. Augustine articulated this quite well in one of his sermons:

What I should be for you fills me with anguish; what I can be with you is my consolation; Because for you I am a bishop; but with you a Christian. The first points to my duty, the second to grace. The first shows the danger, the other salvation.²³

Note that the prepositions “for” and “with” signify the dual relations established by baptism and ordination. Both Christian initiation and ordination can only be considered adequately from within this relational ecclesiology of communion.

James Puglisi’s careful study of the ancient ordination rituals of the Western church confirms our analysis. In the conclusion of the first volume of his study he writes:

Throughout this study we have seen that the process of ordination includes a complex of actions and roles which inaugurate new, personal,

²³ St. Augustine, *Sermon*, 340.

and enduring relationships between the new minister, his Christian brethren and God. Moreover, in the early church the ordained ministry was seen in the context of a sacramental and Trinitarian ecclesiology in which ordination is presented as one of the communal, liturgical, and juridical actions through which the Church is built up.²⁴

In the second millennium the operative theology evident in later ordination rituals suggests an important shift as “eventually, the meaning of ordained ministry was disjoined from its concrete and communal ecclesial context, finally becoming autonomous: the minister could perform certain actions outside of any ecclesial context, and these actions could be considered valid.”²⁵

This shift in the understanding of ordination and ordained ministry in the second millennium was metaphysically underwritten with what we might refer to as a “substance ontology” that attended primarily to those changes effected in a particular individual (whether through baptism or ordination). Many Western treatments of sacramental character have succumbed to the limitations of such a substance ontology, namely that it makes ontological claims on the individual abstracted from his or her relational existence. The alternative need not be a rejection of ontology itself but the shift to a “relational ontology” in which attention is drawn not to the isolated individual, but to the person-in-relation. Here the ontological change brought about by baptism, and the sacramental character thereby conferred, can only be appreciated adequately with respect to the ecclesial relationship constituted by baptism. In keeping with traditional Catholic theological reflection we can affirm the ontological effects of sacramental ordination.

²⁴ James Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), I: 205.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

However, any such “ontological change” is grounded not in the conferral of powers on an individual but on the reconfiguration of the person into a new ecclesial relation.

There is, of course, a sense in which we can speak legitimately of the conferral of ministerial power at ordination. But it is not the conferral of power which makes the ordained minister, rather it is the reconfiguration of the person into a new ministerial relationship that requires that empowerment by the Holy Spirit necessary for the fulfillment of that ministry. The new “empowerment” is a function of the new ministerial relationship. Karl Rahner observes, for example, that the most fundamental (but not sole) identity of the priest is to be a pastor. “He must, then, have all the powers which necessarily belong to such a leader of a Church in a particular locality in the light of the theological nature of the Church as such.”²⁶ The powers follow from his particular ecclesial relationship.

Every authentic ecclesial action, exercised within an authentic ecclesial relationship, is effective only because it is empowered by the Spirit. An ecclesiology of communion does not place the Christological and pneumatological in opposition but rather attends to both from a more developed Trinitarian perspective. The Church is indeed the body of Christ, but it is so only because it is constituted as such by the Holy Spirit who animates the Church and “gifts” it in service of its edification and in view of its mission to the world. This more pneumatologically informed ecclesiology demands a fundamental reconsideration of the nature and exercise of power in the Church.

It is easy to forget that “power” is itself an analogous concept that can be used in many different senses. Within the life of the Church power can be defined as *the*

²⁶ Karl Rahner, “Pastoral Ministries and Community Leadership,” in *Theological Investigations*, volume 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 75.

capacity to fulfill one's baptismal call and engage in effective action in service of the church's life and mission. Ministerial power is only intelligible as a subset or specification of ecclesial power. Effective Christian action demands that we act out of a particular relationship within the Church. To be a member of the Christian community, to live in *communio*, is in itself to be "empowered" for daily Christian living and for service of the Church's mission. This is the exercise of ecclesial power in its most fundamental sense. The power we receive through baptism/chrisamation enables us to fulfill our calling as disciples of Jesus. We are empowered to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to pursue holiness, to love our neighbor, to care for the least, to work for justice, and to build up the body of Christ through the exercise of our particular gifts in service of the Church.

The Spirit's empowerment of all the baptized in service of the Church's mission is the only adequate starting point for any theology of *ministerial* power. Any new empowerment, beyond that oriented toward our common discipleship, must be strictly a function of our entrance into some new ecclesial relation. Power cannot be considered apart from a concrete ecclesial relationship.

C. Ordered Ministries beyond Ordination

To sum up the position I have developed to this point, the Church is an ordered communion and as such is not merely the aggregate of autonomous individuals who happen to form a group or community. The Church is constituted as a communion of persons-in-relation. Both sacramental initiation into the Church and sacramental ordination are concerned with specifying particular ecclesial relationships within this communion.

Is the ministerial ordering of the community to be limited by those orderings constituted in Christian initiation and sacramental ordination? This seems to be the case for Zizioulas. However, a consideration of early church life suggests a real diversity of ministries within the life of the church. In the early church the privileged role of the bishop lay in his unique ministry of *episkope*, the pastoral oversight of a eucharistic community in which the bishop functioned as the chief judge and witness to the apostolic faith, the servant of the unity of that community and the agent for bringing that community into communion with other eucharistic communities. By the third century the presbyter gradually was given a share in this ministry of oversight, though limited to oversight over a particular community. Indeed, in time, the presbyter would eclipse the bishop as the principal agent of pastoral leadership over a local community. However, whether in the case of the bishop or later the presbyter, eucharistic presidency followed from their *de facto* pastoral leadership over a community. Their ecclesial relationship to the local church was decisive. The empowerment for sacramental ministry was offered in view of their ecclesial relationship as leader of the community.

The diaconate was, of course, a different case entirely because the deacon was not ordained to pastoral leadership of a eucharistic community but rather to public service of that community as an assistant to the bishop. While this involved no empowerment for sacramental ministry beyond that possible, in principle, for all the baptized (that is, those sacramental ministries that have no essential relationship to presidency over a eucharistic community), the deacon's ministerial relationship to the community did change as he became the iconic public embodiment of Christ the servant.

It is true that by the end of the second century the ministries of bishop, presbyter and deacon were distinguished from other ministries. However, up through the middle ages one continues to find evidence of other “orders” within the life of the church: readers, virgins, widows, catechumens, penitents, etc. What these groups shared was “a distinctive place in the church’s public gathering, especially its worship...”²⁷ In the middle ages, as the basic distinction between the clergy and the laity became more pronounced, the above mentioned “orders” were eclipsed by a hierarchically configured set of ministerial orders. These orders, minor and major, were structured as a *cursus honorum* in which the minister was expected to ascend the ranks, culminating in ordination to the priesthood. In the church of Rome this *cursus honorum* took the following form: porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte (the minor orders), followed by sub-deacon, deacon, presbyter and bishop (the major orders).²⁸ Originally these “minor orders” referred to real responsibilities in the life of the church. Consequently, Winfried Haunerland observes, there was a

more ancient insistence that everyone who was to be ordained a presbyter had previously to prove himself through successful efforts in other ministries—this ultimately yielded to the formal demand that the presbyter must go through all the levels of orders but without at all

²⁷ David Power, “Church Order,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 216. For further studies into the history and contemporary significance of the “minor orders” see Winfried Haunerland, “The Heirs of the Clergy? The New Pastoral Ministries and the Reform of the Minor Orders,” *Worship* 75 (July, 2001): 305-20; Bruno Kleinheyer, “Ordinationen und Beauftragungen,” in *Sakramentliche Feiern II, Gottesdienst der Kirche*, vol. 8, edited by Emmanuel v. Severus and Reiner Kaczynski (Regensburg: Pustet, 1984), 7-65; Walter Croce, “Die niederen Weihen und ihre hierarchische Wertung,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 70 (1948): 257-314: .

showing experience and dedication by actually exercising any of those ministries connected to the minor orders.²⁹

While a contemporary ecclesiology of communion must reject the ascending hierarchy of orders presupposed in the middle ages (and still common in many circles today), it may be fruitful to return to the notion that within the life of the church ministerial ordering need not be limited by sacramental ordination. Even the briefest appraisal of our contemporary church situation, particularly here in the United States, suggests that there are many Christians who are engaged in ministries that place them in a distinctive relationship within the life of the church. From parish catechists to diocesan directors of Christian formation, from parishioners who bring communion to the sick on behalf of their community to full-time campus ministers and hospital chaplains, we are witnessing today a diverse ordering of ministries that extends that ecclesial order already evident in the ministries of deacon, presbyter and bishop.

It may be helpful to consider three different categories of ordered ministries constituted by three different forms of liturgical ritualization: ordained ministries, installed ministries, and commissioned ministries.³⁰ In the tradition of the church, three ministries were gradually acknowledged to involve the kind of substantive ecclesial re-positioning that merited sacramental ordination. These ordained ministries were linked in a unique way to an apostolic office, that church office concerned with preserving the

²⁹ Haunerland, 309.

³⁰ In a similar fashion, Thomas O'Meara proposes that "[p]erhaps one should speak of three kinds of activities by which an individual is commissioned in the church: ordination, installation, and presentation." While acknowledging the three ordinations of deacon, presbyter and bishop, O'Meara adds that "[I]nallation is for ministers who have an extensive education and whose ministry is full-time in the parish and diocese, while presentation is for readers, acolytes, visitors of the sick, assistants to other ministries." O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 224. His latter two categories correspond almost exactly to what I refer to as installed and commissioned ministries.

apostolicity of the church and the unity of faith and communion. There can be no doubt, however, but that the church was and is built up by more than these three unique ecclesial relationships.

The significance of non-ordained ministries exercised in the church has been granted in contemporary church documents. Yet the current tendency to refer to these non-ordained ministries as “lay ecclesial ministry” and/or “lay ministry,” while representing an advance, needs to be re-considered from the perspective we have developed here. The term “lay” is only with difficulty shorn of its past historical associations with a kind of ecclesial passivity. To define a ministry as “lay” is almost reflexively to define it by what it is not, a ministry proper to the ordained. While the bishops at Vatican II worked mightily to develop a positive theology of the laity, the fruit of their work can better be read, I believe, as a positive theology of *all the baptized*, the *christifideles*, as followers of Jesus and members of the people of God.³¹ Since the council, laudable attempts have been made to develop a positive theology of “lay ministries,” and/or “lay ecclesial ministries.” I suggest that qualifying ministry as “lay” tends to vitiate the construction of such a theology.

Finally, it is difficult to recognize the significance of the qualifier “ecclesial” in the term, “lay ecclesial ministry” as it would appear that all ministry in the church has an essentially ecclesial referent. Is it possible to develop a nomenclature for the exercise of ministry by those who are not ordained that is more theologically coherent? I believe the larger ecclesiological perspective offered in this essay, with its stress on the church as an

³¹ See Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinction.” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999): 115-39.

ordered communion, provides such an opportunity by speaking not only of ordained ministries but of installed and commissioned ministries.

1. Installed Ministries

Pope Paul VI, in *Ministeria quaedam*, extended the scope of ministry in the church beyond those subject to sacramental ordination. In that document he suppressed all minor orders, did away with the sub-diaconate, and created two new “installed ministries” that were to have a permanent status and were open to baptized males.³² He specifically created two ministries, lector and acolyte, subject to a formal ritual installation. On the one hand, the descriptions offered for these ministries were quite rich, going far beyond the limited liturgical exercise often associated with them in the United States. On the other hand, the selection of “lector” and “acolyte” as installed ministries was less a response to the real needs and actual ministerial forms of the church today and more a “restitution of offices from the ancient church.”³³ This important papal initiative was further compromised when Pope Paul continued to require those pursuing ordination to the diaconate and/or presbyterate to first be installed to the ministries of lector and acolyte, thereby continuing a residual *cursus honorum*. Still, the pope did propose that episcopal conferences could petition for the addition of other public ministries. The American bishops have made little use of these installed ministries (apart from those pursuing ordination) nor have they petitioned for the creation of other installed ministries, largely because the pope limited these ministries to males.

³² *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI* (New York: Pueblo Pub., 1976) 726-39.

³³ Haunerland, 310.

In spite of the obvious limitations evident in the proposal of *Ministeria quaedam*, this initiative had in mind the possibility of formal church ministries that would be 1) exercised by the baptized independent of the process of preparing for ordained ministry, 2) were more or less stable (a canonical condition for a ministry to qualify as an ecclesiastical office), 3) required extended ministerial formation and 4) were subject to ritual authorization in the form of an installation. The intention, it would appear, was to establish stable ministries not unlike the “lay ecclesial ministries” that have been the subject of so much discussion in the United States.³⁴

There would seem to be much to commend the reinvigoration of Pope Paul’s initiative. This would first require that the bishops’ conferences petition for a change in the current policy that limits these installed ministries to males, a restriction that is without theological justification. It would also require a call for a new installed ministry or ministries, (e.g., pastoral associate) that corresponds to the situation of the many baptized currently exercising formal ministries in the Church that are fairly stable, demand significant ministerial formation and just financial remuneration.³⁵ Within a church becoming ever more diverse, there is much to commend the regionalization of such ministries. In North America these might include directors of Christian formation, youth ministers, family life ministers, RCIA directors and liturgists, among others. In Indonesia, there is a real ministry of exorcism being engaged; in Latin America there are the *delegados de la palabra*, and in Africa there is the concrete leadership of local

³⁴ See NCCB Subcommittee on Lay Ministry, *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1999); Zeni Fox, *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997).

³⁵ For similar proposals see Hauerland, 311 and Hans Bernard Meyer, “Laien als liturgische Vorsteher: Stelen wir die richtigen Fragen?” in *Wie weit trägt des gemeinsame Priestertum? Liturgischer Leitungsdienst zwischen Ordination und Beauftragung, Quaestiones disputatae* 171, edited by Martin Klöckener and Klemens Richter (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 11-19.

communities consigned to the *bokambi*.³⁶ Were these *de facto* ministries to be made subject to installation on a regional basis in the fashion apparently envisioned by Pope Paul VI, the nomenclature of “lay ecclesial ministry,” currently used with respect to those lay persons exercising significant, stable ministries in the church, might give way to the more helpful term, “installed ministries.”

The pursuit of the formalization of these ministries as installed ministries is not merely a matter of institutionalization, it is also an attempt to restore the liturgical dimension of any and all ecclesial re-positioning. A ritual of ministerial installation, though not strictly speaking a participation in sacramental ordination, would not for that reason be empty of meaning. As Haunerland notes, a ritual of installation would still be “a participation in the sacramental, basic form of the church.”³⁷ Moreover, such a ritual, following the analogy of sacramental ordination, would serve to formalize the minister’s new ecclesial relation within the community, and would include a ritual of communal “sending” and an epicletic prayer for the assistance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Thomas O’Meara has insisted that the employment of some ritual of installation affirms that “[m]inistry begins normally with public and liturgical recognition.”³⁸ Marcel Metzger’s study of the ancient document, *Apostolic Constitutions*, led him to conclude that in the early church virtually all ministries were subject to some kind of ordination or

³⁶ Haunerland, 313-4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 317. Haunerland speaks of a “commissioning” rather than an “installation.” As will be evident in the next section, I prefer to reserve the term “commissioning” to a third category of ordered ministries in the church.

³⁸ O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 222.

blessing.³⁹ A full recognition of the significance of installed ministries as ordered ministries in the church would seem to demand an appropriate ritualization.

2. Commissioned Ministries

Beyond those ministries that demand significant ministerial formation and a high degree of stability (ordained and installed ministries) there are still other ordered ministries, the undertaking of which does still place one in a new ecclesial relationship. These might include parish catechists, liturgical ministries for proclaiming God's Word (lector), leading the community in sung prayer (cantor), distributing communion to those present at the eucharistic assembly and those absent due to infirmity (special ministers of the eucharist), providing for liturgical hospitality and order (ushers, greeters). These ministries imply a new degree of accountability, a specialized formation and a demand for some formal authorization that distinguishes them from the exercise of other baptismal charisms evident for example in parenting or daily Christian witness. At the same time these ministries will generally be governed at a more local level. The determination of the specific requirements for formation, the particular form the ritualization of their ministry will take (liturgical commissioning) and so on will generally occur at the level of the parish or the diocese.

It is possible to conceive of these three sets of ordered ministries in terms of their place in the life of the universal Church. Over the centuries the three ordained ministries of deacon, presbyter and bishop have become foundational ministries exercised throughout the universal Church. The reservation of sacramental ordination for these three ministries reflects their foundational character. Beyond these ministries, we can

³⁹ Marcel Metzger, "Ministères, ordinations, clergé et peuple dans les 'Constitutions Apostoliques,'" in *Ordination et ministères* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1995), 209.

recognize installed ministries particular to certain regional Churches and subject to the legislation of regional and/or national episcopal conferences. Finally there would be commissioned ministries, the legislation of which would largely be reserved to dioceses and parochial life.

III. Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to establish some ecclesiological foundations in service of the development of a theology of ministry that might do justice to the great flourishing of new ministries we are experiencing in the Church today. I believe that too many theological responses to this new reality mistakenly begin with the distinction between cleric and lay person as their starting point. The starting point proposed here for a theology of ministry is not holy orders, but the community of the baptized called to share a common mission to proclaim, serve and realize the coming reign of God. This community fulfills its mission as an ordered communion founded on the mission of Christ and constituted by the gifting of the Spirit. As a Church Christians are called into relationship 1) with one another, 2) with God in Christ by the Spirit, and 3) with the world as sent in mission. This set of primal relationships is established by our baptism and lived out in Christian faith. Any furthering ordering within the Church beyond that established by baptism exists strictly in service of this primary relationality. This perspective calls into question any ecclesiological schema dependent on a strict separation of the intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial, secular and sacred, clerical and lay. All the baptized participate in that ordered communion which is the Church sent in mission. All ordered church ministry exists in service of the building up of this Church in mission.

The theological articulation of that which is distinctive to the various ordered ministries in the Church goes beyond the scope of this article. To some extent this will be addressed in other essays included in this volume. The ecclesiological foundations proposed here do relativize without completely obviating the distinctions which must necessarily exist among the various ministerial orders (*ordines*). Certainly our tradition has singled out, over time, three ecclesial relationships in service of the baptized that are ecclesially configured through sacramental ordination. The ministries of bishop, presbyter and deacon have changed dramatically in their signification over the centuries.⁴⁰ They can be distinguished from other ministerial relationships, at least in part, by their unique participation in an apostolic office, that is, an office oriented toward the exercise of *episkope* or ecclesial oversight in the preservation of the apostolic faith and ecclesial communion.⁴¹ Yet a central presupposition of the perspective sketched out in this essay is that sacramental ordination does not exhaust the ministerial ordering of the people of God. There are other ministries or orders, entrance into which also constitutes a new ecclesial relationship subject to ecclesial discernment, formation, authorization and ritualization.

The focus on “ordered ministries” recognizes a certain fluidity in the differentiation of ministries in the church. The specific ordering of ministries has changed dramatically in the past and will doubtless change further in the future. What must remain consistent in the midst of these changes is the fundamental orientation of the

⁴⁰ This has been demonstrated well in Kenan Osborne’s essay included in this volume.

⁴¹ The question of how the diaconate relates to the apostolic office of the church is a difficult one and cannot be addressed adequately here. The deacon’s role as assistant to the bishop in the early church suggests some connection to the exercise of the ministry of *episkope*. At the same time, there is little or no evidence of deacons themselves engaging in the pastoral oversight of a eucharistic community.

whole Church to the fulfillment of the mission of Christ and the ordering of ministries in service of this mission.