


Article

Relational Priesthood in the Body of Christ: A Scriptural, Liturgical, and Trinitarian Approach

Kimberly Hope Belcher ¹ and Christopher M. Hadley ^{2,*}¹ Department of Theology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA; kim.belcher@gmail.com² Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA

* Correspondence: chadley@scu.edu

Abstract: A liturgical phenomenology of Roman Catholic priesthood based on the experience of images of priests and people in scripture and liturgy lends itself to a renewed appropriation of Vatican II and post-conciliar approaches to priesthood. The authors interpret the relational dynamics of Christ's own priesthood using the pericope of Christ's anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:1–9), followed by a phenomenological examination of the dialogical introduction to the Eucharistic Prayer or anaphora in the Roman and Byzantine Eucharistic rites. The way ordained ministry is exercised in dialogical and symbolic fashions then provides the impetus for a new look at the significance of prostration in the context of Good Friday and of the Roman Catholic ordination rite. The trinitarian implications of the unified but differentiated priesthood of the Church are the theme of the final section.

Keywords: Trinity; Eucharist; liturgy; Mark; priesthood; ministry; phenomenology; baptism; ordination



Citation: Belcher, Kimberly Hope, and Christopher M. Hadley. 2021. Relational Priesthood in the Body of Christ: A Scriptural, Liturgical, and Trinitarian Approach. *Religions* 12: 799. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100799>

Academic Editor: Christina M. Gschwandtner

Received: 17 July 2021

Accepted: 10 September 2021

Published: 24 September 2021

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* suggests that the Eucharist is above all the *locus theologicus* in which the Church's community of relations is paradigmatically performed:

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 sacrifice, 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 (Second Vatican Council 1964).¹

This interpretation cements a historical shift in mid-20th-century Roman Catholic magisterial teaching from seeing the Eucharist as the priest's rite, which laypersons might follow along with or receive the fruits from, to seeing it as the liturgy above all others that sums up the church's identity as church. A phenomenological approach to the interrelationship between the ordained minister and the priestly people, grounded in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy and the ordination rites, provides a third way that neither minimizes the distinctiveness of priestly identity nor undermines the preeminence of the participation in Christ's priesthood imparted by baptism.²

In the Vatican II and post-Vatican II magisterial documents, the ordained priest is never claimed to be ontologically different from laypeople in the Church. When *Lumen Gentium* claims that the ministerial and baptismal priesthoods "differ from one another in essence and not only in degree" but are "nonetheless interrelated" in a "participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (Second Vatican Council 1964, §10), the word "essential/essentia" must be explained with reference to common participation, that is, with phenomenology, relational ontology, or an ontology of symbols.³ Likewise, in John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), the primary ontological referent of the Church's priesthood is Christ's priesthood,

and the differences between the baptized and ordained occur within interrelated modes of participation in that one priesthood (John Paul II 1992).⁴ The works of the baptismal priesthood, generally understood in Scriptural terms, are held in common among all members of the Church: to gather gifts from the created world and offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving in return, to pray for others, to heal and restore persons to communities. The difference between the baptismal and ministerial priesthoods appears to be both formal and functional: in a configuration to Jesus Christ as priest, prophet, and king who offers sacrifice, teaches, and shepherds his people, the ministerial priesthood *ministers* to the baptismal priesthood, helping it to fulfill itself in bearing witness as prophets, living free in self-governing lives as rulers, and offering sacrifices to God as priests in the Church's sacramental presence and mission to the world.

At the same time, the communion ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church's magisterial documents is sometimes hampered by the distance from the lived experience of Christians that its language sometimes conveys, especially in particular theories of gender. For example, PDV's use of the nuptial imagery of Ephesians 5 to describe the lives of priests (§22) bears little resemblance to marriage or priestly ministry in the lived life of the Church. Putting an analytical model of gender above the lived reality of the Christian people in this document has the effect of hierarchizing complementary gender relations and gendering the hierarchical relation of Christ to the Church, which has unsettling implications for the participation of baptized women in Christ's priesthood and for the adult sexuality of priests. This exemplifies analytical theological discourse, which "responds to perceived confusion by attempting to clarify (or rule out) certain beliefs or language regarding a theological issue, creating a narrower doctrinal oasis" (Belcher 2020, p. 15). Although an analytical approach is sometimes necessary, it must be balanced with attention to the experience of Christian life in community. We propose a new phenomenology of Christian priesthood that arises symbolically and dialogically in the corporate exercise of the priesthood of Christ, seen especially in the NT witness to Jesus' ministry and in the liturgical life of the Church.

Following contemporary ecclesiologists and theologians of holy orders such as Susan Wood, John Zizioulas, Richard Gaillardetz, and others, we propose on the one hand a phenomenological reflection on the liturgical and ethical common life of the Church, and on the other hand a relational ontology derived from the order of salvation history rather than from the "substance ontology" that emerged in the Middle Ages and that is based too much on potencies "abstracted from [a minister's] relational existence within the life of the church" (Gaillardetz 2005, p. 426).

For Zizioulas, the central question regarding sacramental ordination is how ordained ministry "comes about" in the Church as a communion of persons redeemed and united by Christ in the Holy Spirit (Zizioulas 1985, p. 215). Christ has changed and continues to change us all, by virtue of baptism and Eucharist, into what he is: a priest in the new corporate "person" of the "chosen race", the "holy nation", and the "holy" and "royal priesthood" that offers "spiritual sacrifices to God" (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Within this biblical-symbolic reality, the distinctiveness of the ministerial priesthood emerges from the relational dynamics of *ministry*, moving beyond the static emphases (particularly in Roman Catholicism) on the ontological "power" that is to be transmitted and the authority to be delegated in holy orders.⁵ For Ladislav Orsy, the current Roman Catholic liturgical interpretation of the centrality of the laying-on of hands in the ordination rite communicates hierarchical rank more than it does the reception of a Christian person as "a child of God" (John 1:12) into a new communion of relations (Orsy 2004, p. 20; Boston College Seminar on Priesthood and Ministry for the Contemporary Church 2018, p. 485). As it is, the rite emphasizes a supposedly unbroken but historically unverifiable transmission of sacramental power and juridical authority from the hands of the apostles of Jesus, thus contributing to the "conferral model" of ordination outlined by Susan Wood (Wood 2000, pp. 41–43)⁶. The "central moment" of the laying-on of hands, however, is an interpretation

outside the rite. The ordination rite itself, when one brackets the interpretive tradition, may speak in a much more complex way about the interrelationships of Christian ministry.⁷

Eschewing the analytic approach with its need for perspicacious clarity, we prioritize instead a ritual–praxical approach, reflecting on the Church’s liturgical practice, strengthening that practice, and enabling full participation in it. One of the authors is a priest of the Roman and Byzantine Rites, and one a lay woman, allowing for two perspectives on the liturgical phenomena surrounding priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church. Our collaborative phenomenology itself is meant to exemplify the relational approach to ordination we call for. In the next section, we provide a ritual–praxical commentary on the passion narrative of Mark’s Gospel, chapters 14–15. The mutual exercise of prophecy and priestly ministry between Jesus and the nameless woman who anoints him with oil at his supper in Bethany before the Passion provides an entrance into a phenomenological model by subverting facile assumptions that Christ’s and the ordained minister’s exercise of priesthood are “active” while the Church’s and the assembly’s are “passive”. Rather, in this pericope, within the context of Christ’s Passion narrative in Mark, the complex interdependence of priestly callings is exquisitely visible. Our scriptural commentary is followed by a liturgical theology highlighting the ways the ordained minister dialogically raises the priesthood of the baptized to visibility, recovering it from the status of a found object, as well as (in a more commonplace observation) making the priesthood of the whole Church visible in a symbol. We conclude by showing the ways that this approach to scripture and liturgy corresponds to a robust trinitarian theology of Christian priesthood.

2. Scripture: Priesthood in the Gospel according to Mark

Contemporary Christians cannot read the Gospel solely in the way the authors intended it, nor the way its original auditors would have heard it. Rather, the contemporary phenomenon of the Gospel of Mark is informed by our contemporary liturgical experiences of that text and by modern considerations of gender and ordination. This liturgical fact is represented here by the way our phenomenological reading of the prophetic anointing at Bethany in Mark (14:1–9) is informed by a contemporary icon: Marko Ivan Rupnik’s mosaic in Capiago, Italy (Figure 1). Christ, fully vested, wears a stole in token of his priesthood; the woman also wears a stole. The placement of the mosaic in the chapel, halfway up along the right side, spatially communicates the character of this encounter as a preparation for the crucifixion (which occupies the central wall behind the altar). Jesus, larger than life, sits on a red and blue stool while the woman pours golden myron from her right hand onto his bowed head. A towel-like garment that resembles a stole and bears the image of the alabaster jar in her hand is tucked into the sash around her waist, and its further end wraps Jesus’ feet. The iconography enhances the evangelist’s symbolic conflation of the prophetic anointing of the head of a king or a priest with the anointing for burial, recalling Mark’s repeated use of the word *myron* (Connell 2007). It is significant that the only priestly and royal anointing Jesus receives is on the way to his death, just as his only throne and altar is his cross.

As in Rupnik’s mosaic, priesthood, prophecy, and kingship are intertwined in Mark’s Christology (O’Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 245–48). Jesus is referred to as “priest” or “high priest” in the NT only in the Letter to the Hebrews, but within the Jewish liturgical matrix of signs, he expresses his priesthood in Mark’s Gospel by means of self-offering (O’Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 17–24)⁸. Just as Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry is inaugurated by John’s baptism, the culmination of his ministry in arrest, supper, crucifixion, and proclamation begins with a prophetic anointing (14:1–9). Inasmuch as the evangelist presents Jesus as the Anointed One (Mark 1:1) and inasmuch as Jesus himself, in Mark, finally confirms this title (Mark 14:61), this anointing at Bethany—the only one in the gospel—is a revelation in the human religious idiom of what is already confirmed by God at the baptism (Mark 1:10–11).



Figure 1. “Unzione di Betania” (Anointing of Bethany), Chapel of the “Casa Incontri Cristiani” (House of Christian Encounter), Capiago, Italy, 2006, by the Atelier d’Arte e e Architettura del Centro Aletti (www.centroaletti.com). Accessed 15 July 2021. Used with permission.

Mark’s narrative contrasts Jesus’ priesthood with the actions of the high priests, particularly in Mark 11, when Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem concludes with a visit to the temple, where he “looked around at everything” before going on to the place he is staying. The next day, his act of cleansing the temple is sandwiched by the evangelist within the story of the withered fig tree that failed to bear fruit. Faith and prayer are hallmarks of Jesus’ service to God, in contrast with the Temple service of the high priests (11:17, 22–25, cf. Mark 9:23–24, 29). The latter are aware of him as a threat to their authority (11:18, 27–33, 12:12) and recognize, in Mark’s telling, that the parable of the vineyard (12:1–12) is “against them”. Jesus’ prophecy against the temple (12:2) is the summative expression of the persecution that the evangelist recognizes in his own time (12:3–37). Thus, even though the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees ask him hostile questions (12:13–27), it is “the chief priests and the scribes” who primarily wish to kill him (11:18, 14:1). By seeking to avoid any action regarding Jesus during Passover so as not to risk a riot (14:1–2), they profane the Passover by refusing to see the full significance of Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God.

Jesus’ priesthood is made manifest by means of a priestly action taken by the woman of Bethany. Rupnik’s choice to give both the woman and Christ a stole (this image is the only one in the chapel in which Jesus wears a stole) highlights her essential role of rendering visible Jesus’ hidden priesthood, which is intrinsic to his identity as Son of God, but is intentionally veiled in Mark’s messianic secret motif. Her cultic gesture of the anointing of Jesus in Bethany refers both to his impending burial (14:8) and to his priestly and kingly roles.⁹ The kingly reference echoes Moses’ pouring of a specially made perfumed chrism of olive oil compounded with myrrh and other spices (*elaion chrisma hagion myron*) on Aaron’s head for his ordination as a priest in Exodus 30:23–32 (LXX) and Samuel’s consecration of Saul and David in 1 Sam 10:1 and 16:3 (LXX) before their respective installations as king (Brown et al. 1990, §41:91, p. 625; Kittel et al. 1964, p. 615).¹⁰ Although Jesus’ messianic kingship will be implicated in his trial before the chief priests, his anointing here by the woman is most directly in preparation for his priestly ministry in the Supper and Passion. She is a prophet after the pattern of Moses, the original anointer of the priest Aaron, who is willing and able to anoint Jesus for this ministry. Instead of being the primary agent

in this Gospel event, Christ passively accepts the agency of the woman. She is doing her priestly *leitourgia* (καλὸν ἔργον; Mark 14:6), offering her sacrifice and giving her blessing, so that Jesus may perform his *leitourgia*. Before he breaks the bread in his Passover with the disciples, she shatters the jar. Before Jesus sheds his blood in the Passion, before he predicts its being “poured out” (ἐκχυννόμενον) during the Supper, the woman pours (κατέχευν) her oil upon his head. He is sealed within the covenant by the Jewish priestly matrix of signs (O’Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 1–8). At the same time, the woman’s prophetic faith allows her to recognize Jesus as Messiah: perceiving him as the Anointed, she manifests his identity by anointing him. In this action, the *myron* represents not only Christ’s identity, but also the woman’s prophetic gift of faith. Its costliness reflects the preciousness of Christ’s sacrifice (Ps 116:15), but also the supreme value of her own life given in service and witness to God. Their exercise of distinctive ministries reflects one another, each heightening the glory of the other.

Jesus extols the woman’s prophetic and priestly work in his passionate defense of what she has done for him: “Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (εἰς μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς; 14:9). Although Mark does not use the terminology of “memorial” within the Last Supper narrative, this language in the Bethany anointing scene already had eucharistic overtones for some Christian communities: “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνιμνησιν; 1 Cor 11:24). Even before Paul, the language had a cultic meaning within first-century Judaism: it is used in the Septuagint to translate “that part of a sacrifice which was burned on the altar together with the frankincense, that its fragrance might ascend to heaven and commend the offerer to God’s remembrance” (Lev 2:2–16, 5:12, 6:15) (Strong’s NT 3422: Μνημόσυνον 2011). Here, in Mark, Jesus proclaims that the preaching of the gospel is itself an anamnestic and sacrificial act, and that the woman has entered irrevocably into the revelatory narrative of what he himself is about to do.

Jesus’ self-offering via the bread and the wine for his disciples and “for many” at the Last Supper in the evening “when the Passover Lamb is sacrificed” (14:12, 22–25) becomes a cultic, priestly act by virtue of its Passover context, tying the meal to the entire covenantal logic of the OT and revealing its purposes for forgiveness, reconciliation, renewal, and celebration in the reign of God (O’Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 258–61). By the first century, the people’s celebration of Passover in Jerusalem had taken on a priestly and sacrificial meaning in their sacrifice of the lambs at the temple (see O’Collins and Jones 2010, p. 171; (Brown et al. 1990, §41:90–92, 625 and §76:122–127, 1277–1278).¹¹ Jesus’ meal with his disciples becomes his priestly interpretation of all that he has done, is doing, and will do for them, including all of his meals with sinners and his impending death (O’Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 258–62; Brown et al. 1990, §41:95, 626). It is a ritual act of self-offering in the form of his blood, a multivalent symbol of atonement for sin, of ritual cleansing of the sin of the world, and of the establishment of a covenant.¹² The anguished prayer in Gethsemane after the supper is likewise priestly in its form, in its intention for the salvation of the “many”, and in its reference to a ceremonial cup (14:25, 36). In an ironic and tragic frustration of his desire that his disciples be attentive during his prayer, they fall asleep (14:32–42), while the crowd that comes to arrest him carries out the will of the absent chief priests (14:43–50).

In his trial before the Sanhedrin in the city, the priests and others try to ferret out any testimony that would justify a death sentence (14:55–60), but the only testimony about himself that he finds worthy of affirmation is the Bethany anointing (14:3–9), which he affirms when he says “I am” in answer to the high priest’s final question: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (14:61). Of course, the Sanhedrin knows nothing of the woman’s testimony and anointing in Bethany, nor would they accept it. Jesus knows that the chief priests had been afraid to arrest him openly (14:49), that they have in mind his prophetic cleansing of the Temple (11:15–18), and that they fear and reject his authority (11:27–31). After countless denials of his “claim” to kingship by way of the “Markan secret” throughout the entire gospel narrative, Jesus affirms himself as the Anointed One only at

the time when it leaves him most vulnerable to lethal persecution (O'Collins and Jones 2010, pp. 248–50).

“King of the Jews” is a trap, Pilate’s political translation of “Messiah” and “Son of God” (15:1–5) (Brown et al. 1990, §41:102, 627). Barabbas (“son of the father”) is accepted as the chief priests’ “son”, while Jesus (“Son of the Blessed One”) is rejected. Sonship, kingship, and priesthood come together in Mark when Jesus “breathes his last” (15:37, *exepneusen*), acting as High Priest by entering symbolically into the sanctuary of the Temple through the rent curtain to offer his gift, which is also his sin offering “for many” (Hebrews 8:1–2, 9:11–28). In Jesus’ “blessing” of the people with the Spirit Whom he breathes out (*ek-pneō*), the centurion recognizes Jesus as the Son of God (15:39) (Aguilar Chiu 2018, p. 1026; Brown et al. 1990, §41:106, p. 628)¹³. This “temple” ministry of Jesus in his supper, passion, and cross recapitulates his entire public ministry of gathering, including, forgiving, instructing, healing, blessing, and sending people on their own missions.

Jesus and the woman of Bethany represent how all Christians must relate to each other at various times in the priestly existence of the Church, in mutual praise, blessing, and empowerment for service. Their mutuality in collaboration is essential to the exercise of priesthood in the passage. Each of them, in his or her own way, makes a gift of himself or herself to the other in praise of the other, for the sake of a project that includes them both and concerns God’s plan for their common world. The woman’s use of the expensive *myron* is not only a liturgical anointing of someone else, but also a sacrifice, that is, a gift of herself. Jesus responds by honoring what she has done in opposition to all the others.

The fact that she is a woman surely lies behind the dinner party’s rebuke for what they believe is her extravagant presumption, but Jesus’ praise of her priestly and prophetic *leitourgia* complicates any assignation of their respective genders to his ministry and to hers, to his role and to hers. Nor can their respective roles in the anointing scene be reduced to rigidly complementary tasks, surgically removed intact, and confined to analytic categories, much less be assigned in any absolute way to certain persons at the exclusion of other persons. Rupnik’s image highlights this rich mutuality that surpasses any kind of gender complementarity, any rigidly held, personally assigned distinctions between the (active) ministerial priesthood and the (passive) baptized laity. They provide models for the ontic reality of the priesthood that is Christian life: all are called upon, at various times in their lives, to proclaim the Gospel in self-sacrifice (Mark 8:34); to offer blessings and gifts to God and to others; and to consecrate the world in service to God.

The Letter to the Hebrews insists that priests cannot validly call themselves to their ministries but must be called by God and symbolically set apart by the people (Heb 5:1–6). The icon of the one set apart and consecrated for a kind of “once-and-for-all” priestly ministry in the Gospel of Mark is, of course, the person of Jesus Christ. The Church is called to participate in Christ’s priesthood, both collectively and in each of its members. Jesus’ acts of gathering people, offering hospitality, testifying to the truth, offering guidance and exhortation to his disciples, praying for others, bestowing forgiveness and blessing, and offering his life as a gift to others constitute a priestly mode of existence that all Christians are called to inhabit and enact. Some Christians are ordained to inhabit and enact this mode of being permanently and symbolically on behalf of Jesus as priest in relation to the rest of the members of the Body of Christ. The significance of the relation between these ordained members and the rest of the body is demonstrated and enacted in the church’s liturgy, to which we now turn.

3. Liturgy: The Eucharistic Paradigm

The interdependence of the ministerial priest and the priestly faithful in the Eucharist is paradigmatic for the character of the church as a whole as it participates in Christ’s priesthood. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Second Vatican Council 1963), the eucharistic liturgy manifests the nature of the church:

the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ . . . in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus

Christ, that is, by the Head and His members. From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree (Second Vatican Council 1963, §7; see also §2).

Among the liturgies by which the church exercises its priestly participation, “the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist” holds pride of place (Second Vatican Council 1963, §1). In this project, we identify two dimensions of the relational ontology that connects the ministerial priest with the assembly of which he is also a member: a dialogical and a symbolic mode.

3.1. The Dialogical Mode

Ontological models of ministerial priesthood tend to center around the liturgical moment of consecration, which is marked by the greatest possible contrast between the activity of the ordained minister and the apparent passivity of the faithful. In fact, however, in Latin eucharistic theology throughout the centuries, the whole Eucharistic Prayer, including the *verba Domini*, is the privileged time in which lay Christians participate in the presider’s act of prayer. The lay faithful, by virtue of their baptism, “take part in the sacrifice” (Second Vatican Council 1963, §10); they are moreover the *circumstantes* who offer the sacrifice of praise in the Roman Canon.¹⁴ When the priest exercises his ministry during the Eucharistic Prayer, then, he does not do so in *contradistinction* to the priesthood of the assembly, but rather *within* the priesthood of the assembly, and those who are gathered around are not *represented* but rather *participate* in the Eucharistic prayer.¹⁵

The ontic or ritual–praxical model of ministerial priesthood is visible from the opening of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, when both presider and assembly take speaking roles in the dialogue. One advantage of introducing this ritual text as a source here is its ubiquity: nearly all the classical Eucharistic liturgies since the fourth century, in both Eastern and Western Churches, use the same dialogue in almost identical forms.¹⁶ It has three exchanges, each initiated by the presider with a unison response from the assembly. The assembly’s response is such an intrinsic part of the liturgy that even when lay Christians did not verbally participate in the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, and when private masses were normalized, there had to be an acolyte present to speak the assembly’s part (Baldovin 2020; Kilmartin 1998, chp. 8)¹⁷. It was thus not only necessary that the words be said, but that they take place in a ritualized dialogue. While the presider speaks on behalf of the assembly for most of the liturgy, in this moment he must hear an audible response from another human being before he proceeds to pray the church’s priestly prayer. It is, then, a moment when the priesthood of the church is exercised in a *dialogical* fashion.

Here, we see the royal priesthood of the baptized and the ritual–praxical priesthood of the ordained acting relationally, in concert and in counterpoint with one another. On the one hand, the priest in each case invites the assembly to the act of eucharistic prayer: first, establishing the grounds of prayer in the Lord’s dwelling among his people; second, nurturing the proper disposition for this prayer; third, inaugurating the prayer itself. On the other hand, the prayer expresses the eagerness of an assembly that has already anticipated the request and has run on ahead of the invitation. For example, Balthasar Fischer comments on the Latin version of the second exchange: “The response that comes from the body of the Church is almost a mild reproach, as though the faithful were saying: ‘We’ve done long since what you are telling us to do now’” (Fischer 1990, p. 37). Even in the Eastern traditions, which tend to be more verbose, the people’s third response is often short and leads directly into the prayer itself (see Henner 2000, p. 56)¹⁸, as if to plunge right into the mystery. In the Greek, indeed, the pacing of these three responses accelerates, as if to convey the assembly’s eagerness to begin. It is worth noting explicitly that these dispositions do not necessarily represent ephemeral feelings of individual worshippers; rather, as the priest speaks from his office in the eucharistic liturgy, the people likewise speak here out of their baptism, in their proper order.

As the woman in Mark 14 inaugurates Christ's priestly ministry, which propels him on to the unimaginable sacrifice of the *via crucis*, so the first exchange activates and catalyzes the assembly's priestly participation in Christ. "The Lord be with you" is at once an acknowledgment and an invitation: it recognizes the Lord among his people, and it also lifts up their priestly identity¹⁹. The Christian's participation in Christ's priesthood is ontologically permanent and unchanging, but this participation can be phenomenologically buried and muddled when we are "worried and distracted by many things" (Luke 10:41), becoming "a found object" (Marion 2015, pp. 122–27). Jean-Luc Marion's language of forgiveness repairing "a deficit of visibility in the first gift" is helpful here (Marion 2015, p. 143). This invocation—literally, an entering into the calling—"labors for the phenomenality of the gift" (Marion 2015, p. 143); like Christ's anointing with myron, it prepares the assembly for the work of self-offering. The celebrant restores the visibility of the assembly's primary priestly vocation: like Christ's priesthood in Mark, theirs pre-exists the invocation, but the celebrant's work in visibly manifesting it (even *for their own eyes*) is, like the woman's work, a priestly act. The people's response, "And with your spirit", clearly demonstrates their ability to enter into a similar priestly work: as the priest has re-manifested the priesthood of the assembly, so the assembly lifts the finite priest from the condition of being worried and distracted by many things. The shorter dialogues throughout liturgical rites, whether expressed as "The Lord be with you" in the Roman Rite or "Peace be with all" in the Byzantine Rite, are a smaller ritual-praxical echo, inaugurating the church's united, priestly offering of, e.g., the scriptures.

The manifestation of the baptismal participation in Christ's priesthood is elaborated in the second exchange of the eucharistic dialogue: *Sursum corda*, as the Latin has it, "hearts up!" The *orans* posture that ritually supports this exchange is an embodied, symbolic act uplifting the baptismal priesthood. Fischer points out the Christocentric pattern of Augustine's interpretation of the *Sursum corda* in his Easter homilies (Fischer 1990, p. 37). For example, a number of the homilies begin with the analogy of the way the baptized have grown like grain, been threshed and ground and moistened and baked like bread. "You have now, as it were, reached the chalice of the Lord You are there on the table; you are there in the chalice. You are this body with us [the clergy], for, collectively, we are this body. We drink of the same chalice because we live the same life" (Augustine of Hippo 1951, pp. 322–23). Because of the shared life, Augustine says, "you heard the *Sursum cor* [sic] The whole life of true Christians is an uplifting of the heart It means trust in God, not in yourself" (Augustine of Hippo 1951, p. 324). Before the assembly addresses the eucharistic prayer to the Father, they must lift up their hearts to be united with the risen and ascended Christ: "It is right and just for us to give thanks to Him who caused us to raise our hearts up to our Head" (Augustine of Hippo 1959, vol. 38, p. 197; see Fischer 1990, p. 37). This suggests that the *Sursum corda* is a ritualization of the active priesthood of the baptized assembly; for Augustine, the *Sursum corda* is limited to the baptized (Augustine of Hippo 1951, p. 324).²⁰ The *Dominus vobiscum* expresses the belonging of the catechumen and the baptized to Christ, but the *Sursum corda* expresses a deeper participation in Christ's priesthood.

From the *Sursum corda*, we may conclude that it is the celebrant's proper expression of priestliness to open the priestly vocation of Jesus Christ to those who bear it already: namely, the baptized. Using the Markan anointing as a model, the ministerial priest at this moment plays the role of the woman who anoints Christ in preparation for his self-sacrifice. As she met Jesus on his way to the cross, she took up and transformed anointing traditions in order to manifest his identity as the Anointed One. Similarly, the priest, at this moment, meets the assembly (of whom he is also a member) on their way to the thanksgiving for the cross. He bears the responsibility of manifesting to the assembly (and to the world) who they are.

The third exchange is most closely connected to the eucharistic work that is lauded as the priestly exercise of both minister and people: *Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro* expresses the essence of what it means to serve the Creator as a priestly people. It looks

both backwards and forwards. Augustine links it to the assembly's act of lifting up their hearts: "this uplifting of the heart is a gift from God, not a natural endowment of your own. Therefore, when you respond that you have your hearts up to God, the priest immediately says, *Domino Deo nostro gratias agamus* . . . for, if God had not lifted them up, we would be groveling on the earth" (Augustine of Hippo 1951, p. 324). Louis-Marie Chauvet, on the other hand, emphasizes the way this injunction represents "the narrative program that sets the text of the Eucharistic prayer in motion"; that is, the Eucharistic Prayer is most fundamentally a communal work of bestowing thanks or glory on God the Father (Chauvet 1995, p. 268). This phrase, then, both defers the gift of participation in Christ's priesthood to the Holy Spirit (see Belcher 2020, p. 96) and establishes the primary character of the assembly's priesthood, which is to offer to the Father the sacrifice of thanks and praise.

The eucharistic prayer

(a) gives thanks to God for the act of creation, and paradigmatically for the redemptive reunification of the alienated cosmos with its loving creator accomplished in Jesus Christ; (b) is the joint action of the whole eucharistic assembly with its liturgical leaders, in which they act on behalf of the whole created order; (c) thereby is also the *offering* of the whole creation back to God in Jesus Christ; and (d) accomplishes the extension into the present of the eschaton inaugurated by Christ's life, death, and resurrection (Belcher 2020, p. 149).

In the eucharistic prayer, the Christian body undertakes a priestly mission towards creation, the covenant, and their own identity as children of God. That they do so by giving thanks expresses that this mission is a gift always held as something coming from and being returned to Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This third invitation, then, shows that within the priesthood of the whole Church, the ordered minister participates by issuing the invitation to the assembly to live out the ministry to which they are called. Moreover, the invitation is necessarily periodic, for the constancy of the priestly calling of the People of God is in tension with their finitude, which requires this calling to be lived out rhythmically in various modes. The sacramental mode, in which the ordered minister issues an invitation to "be what you are" as Augustine puts it, is a recitation of the life of Christ to reveal the sacrificial character of all the modes of lay life: they "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" *by means of* giving thanks in the Eucharistic offering (Second Vatican Council 1964, §10). It is the minister's proper priesthood to evoke and arouse the royal priesthood of the baptized, and it is the proper character of the baptismal priesthood to even forestall this invitation by recalling themselves to their own participation in Christ's priesthood.

The offering proper to the Christian priesthood is a work of thanksgiving: to offer the good gifts to God, in the Christian cosmology, is to be converted from a grasping disposition towards the world to an open-handed dispensation of God's creation. God's own gifts are received by God's people only in order to be offered back to God for the life of the world. Implicit in this new cosmological stance is a similarly receptive and magnanimous understanding of the covenant and even of self. God's people are called to be royal priests not for their own salvation, but for the reconciliation of the world with God in Jesus Christ. Like Paul, Christians should wish that we ourselves were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of our kindred according to the flesh (Rom 9:3).²¹ Thanksgiving is, then, not only a mode of prayer but the essential character of Christian priesthood: instead of offering our own things to be destroyed or made holy, Christian sacrifice reveals God's own things as what was already holy and given over to us (Chauvet 1995, pp. 307–10; Ratzinger 2000, pp. 27–28).

The dialogical dynamic of the Eucharistic paradigm is also visible in the dynamics of the liturgical year, which provides moments to repair a deficit of visibility by recovering and manifesting the Christian and priestly identity of the assembly. The Easter season provides many examples. In the West, in the Easter Vigil Liturgy of the Word the assembly

“renews their baptismal covenant, identifying its givenness with God (as their inheritance) before assisting at the initiation of new members later in the service” (Belcher 2020, p. 88). Deferring ownership of the covenantal participation itself to God is one way of reentering the humility necessary for the true priesthood of Christ. In the East, the Trisagion of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is replaced during Easter: just after the Small Entrance, following the troparia (hymns of the day) and a silent prayer, the celebrant leads the assembly in the hymn, “All of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia” (Mateos 2016, p. 178). The Small and Great Entrances of the Byzantine Rite also have a dialogical structure, wherein priesthood is characterized by a going out towards one another, literally, a turning towards one another. In this chant, the assembly raises up their priestly vocation into visibility, in a liturgical response to the celebrant’s prompt. Again, as in the dialogue, the ritual–praxical difference between priest and people manifests their joint participation in the sole priesthood of Christ.

The periodic retrieval of the gift of participation in Christ’s priesthood by means of the variations of the liturgical year prevents the assembly from taking possession of the gift, unconcealing it (see Marion 2015, pp. 128–31; Belcher 2020, pp. 86–88). Similarly, the dialogical character of the priestly relation between minister and assembly has the theological purpose of keeping each member of the assembly, cleric and lay, from complacency and pride. The relation between minister and assembly should allow both to recognize the origin of Christian priesthood in the Godhead, mediated by Christ’s humanity, and to offer to one another and receive gratefully from one another the works of priesthood.

3.2. The Symbolic Mode

The second mode of relation of the ministerial and baptismal priesthood is *symbolic*. For example, at the beginning of the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord, the ordained celebrants, priest and deacon if present, “go to the altar in silence and, after making a reverence to the altar, prostrate himself or, if appropriate, kneel and pray in silence for a while. All others kneel” (Catholic Church and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2011, Friday of the Passion of the Lord, number 5). The prostration looks back to the ordination rite, making it a prime locus for reflection on the nature of the ministerial priesthood; however, it also serves as a representative intensification of the assembly’s kneeling and an anticipation of the veneration of the cross later in the rite. The symbolic character of this ritual action was especially notable in Holy Week 2021, when both the lay and the ordained author returned from nearly a year away from in-person communal liturgy to participate in the Triduum. Under COVID-19 restrictions, it was impossible for the assembly to touch or kiss the cross at the veneration. The lay author’s assembly did process towards and genuflect before the cross, an embodied symbol that pointed towards the more intense prostration of the celebrant. The ordained author presided at a parish on Good Friday 2021 under similar conditions: the congregation were not even able to process forward. In the opening prostration, it was all the more clear that the priest-presider had to embody in that moment and throughout the liturgy what the congregation had come there to do, and to facilitate their participation in the whole service as best he could. Whereas the prostration normally serves as an anticipation of a privileged touch, here the absence of some of the gestures of veneration that the assembly generally uses symbolically highlighted the intensification of those gestures in the prostration. The intensification of the assembly’s gestures of veneration by the celebrant, and his postural performance for the sake of the congregation, became all the more visible in the absence of some of the ways lay participants can generally express their veneration. The body of the ordained minister became, by necessity, a synecdoche of the body of the whole assembly.

In her liturgical phenomenology, Christina Gschwandtner speaks of the significance of liturgical posture and gesture as a transformation of the whole person:

Liturgy seeks to transform who we are as a whole by training the body—and through it the mind, emotions, and affects—to be attentive to something other or beyond itself, to be “stretched out” before “God”, to be “bent into” a shape

that allows it to be receptive to the call addressed to it in liturgy. The postures of veneration—bending, kissing, prostrating—are postures in which the body experiences itself directed and oriented toward another corporeally (Gschwandtner 2019, p. 93; internal quotations from Saliers 1994, p. 28).

When we speak of “symbol” in the liturgical context, we mean to follow the rich contemporary use of that language in sacramental theology to speak of the human body as a real symbol in the world of the being of the human soul (Rahner 1966, pp. 221–52; see also Chauvet 1995). In liturgy, not only the individual body, but also the social body of the assembly and the ecclesial Body of Christ are at “full stretch” before God.

The celebrant’s prostration embarking on the Good Friday liturgy expresses an individual experience of being stretched out before God, but it also extends the assembly’s liturgical interiority, and thus expresses the covenant identity of the whole ecclesial body. As filial awe and anamnetic reverence are one aspect of the church’s priesthood, the celebrant serves not only as a symbol but more precisely as a synecdoche of the ecclesiological body of Christ. The prostration, in addition to its relevance exteriorizing the presider’s personal interiority, intensifies and renders visible the veneration of the entire assembly. The prostration of this one member of the body stretches out the whole assembly before the cross, where all members cannot, physically or logistically, exteriorize their internal devotion in their personal bodies.

The Good Friday prostration honors the cross as a “sign of expansion” in the human form that the Son of God takes on for the sake of the full participation of the Christian and the Church. According to Balthasar, Christ’s incarnate priesthood on the cross includes not just the Church but the whole world in an act of self-giving to the Father (von Balthasar 1979, p. 13). The Church is likewise cruciform in their participation in this priestly work.

The prostration in Roman Catholic ordination, to extrapolate from the Good Friday experience, presents the specifically ordained mode of being (the ontic reality of ordained Christians) as a symbolic representation of the priestly identity of the whole church. Both canonically and symbolically, the critical moment of the rite occurs with the laying-on of hands. Following the examinations and commitments, before the hand laying and its prayer, the candidates in each ordination rite (deacon, priest, bishop) prostrate themselves, while the assembly kneels or (during Easter) stands, singing the Litany of Saints. As on Good Friday, the posture of the ordinand is an intensification of the assembly’s kneeling: in terms of the postural communication, it stands as a synecdoche of an assembly “‘stretched out’ before ‘God’ . . . receptive to the call addressed to it” (Gschwandtner 2019, p. 93). The Litany of Saints, on the other hand, points to the heavenly assembly, which is dialogically invoked by the congregation singing over the ordination candidates. Moreover, the saints individually named serve as exemplars of the candidate for ordination, but collectively they are symbolically represented by the assembly. If the priest-celebrant meets the assembly going to the altar and addresses them with “lift up your hearts”, here the assembly confronts the candidates on the way of the cross and convokes the heavenly assembly to lift them up for the good of the whole Church, praying, “Strengthen us in your service . . . Bless these chosen men, make them holy, and consecrate them for their sacred duties” (Catholic Church and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1980, ch. IV). In this ritual gesture, then, the assembly plays the prophetic and priestly role of the woman in Mark 14, lifting into visibility the ordinand’s participation in Christ’s priesthood. As a result, this gesture that precedes the hand laying expresses both relational qualities of ordinand and baptized assembly: dialogically, the assembly brings the ordinand’s vocation into visibility; symbolically, the ordinand’s prostration intensifies the embodied postural disposition of the assembly. Moreover, by invoking the communion of saints, the Litany brings in an eschatological framework, relativizing the work of bishop, priest, and people by pointing to the heavenly liturgy, which is signified by but transcends the early liturgy. As a result, clerical and lay difference is subordinated to the difference between the living and the dead, or between the mortal and the immortal realm.

In more frequent liturgies, the symbolic dimension is visible in more quotidian forms, often integrated with the dialogical mode. In the Roman gathering rite, for example, after the dialogical and unison prayers of the Penitential Rite and the Gloria, the Collect crowns the synaxis or convocation action of the liturgy by a jointly dialogical and symbolic moment. The celebrant dialogically invokes the assembly's priestly participation: "Let us pray". Then, after a pause for interior prayer and reflection, he proceeds to a symbolic or synecdochical proclamation of the Collect, which gathers the spirits of the baptized into a single collective agent. Theologically, this occurs by means of their participation by the Holy Spirit in the priesthood of Jesus Christ: the minister's ordained, symbolic relationality is active in his representation of the priestly prayer of the whole. The Collect prayer engages specifically with the liturgy of the day, and thus aligns the assembly's baptismal gifts with the varying dynamics of the liturgical year mentioned above, and prepares the body of Christ for a renewed vocation through the proclamation of the word. The assembly actively confirms their priestly participation in this prayer by a unison "Amen". In daily ways in daily liturgies, as in climatic ways in more solemn liturgies, the relational difference that unifies ordained and baptized into the one priesthood of Christ is liturgically manifest.

Both the symbolic and the dialogical mode of the ordained priesthood are *relational*: to exercise the ministerial priesthood symbolically or dialogically is to lift up the priesthood of the baptized, so that the whole church may express in action the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Ordained relationality is not determined by contrast alone, as if what makes the ministerial priesthood priests is the ability to perform actions that are restricted from lay baptized. Rather, the order of priests lifts up the priestly mission of the assembly by opening a space where the assembly can perform its internal devotion to God, by means of the symbolic disposition of the body of the presider. By the symbolic mode, as by the dialogical mode, the relation between the priesthood of the ordained and that of the convocation of the baptized renders visible the priesthood of the whole church.

In reflection on the character of the ordained priesthood, it is important to balance the symbolic with the dialogical. Excessive emphasis on the symbolic at the expense of the dialogical prepares the ground for an understanding of the cleric as a *proxy* for the assembly, rather than a *catalyst and member of* the eucharistic priesthood of Christ. As the Roman Church learned over centuries, this excessive specialization injures the body of the assembly, inasmuch as they become alienated from their own proper mode of Christian sacrifice. It also harms the spirituality of priests, since it conceals the receptivity or givenness of the priesthood, which is intrinsic to all participation in Christ's priestly mission.

In theological reflection on priesthood, the church can and should emulate the ritual-praxical eucharistic exchange by a similar fluidity, thinking both of the dialogical and the symbolic character of the minister-assembly relationship. In a ritual-praxical mode, it was right and just for the post-conciliar generation to exalt the priesthood of the baptized and the ordained priest's dependence on and participation in that priesthood, and it remains right for this to be a primary focus of priestly formation and spirituality today. Paradoxically, to uplift the baptismal priesthood belongs to the relational ontology of the ordained. At the same time, just as the pre-Vatican II presumption of priestly hierarchy expressed a ritual-praxical, not an ontological reality, the baptismal priesthood, likewise, is not something that exists in autonomous isolation. Rather, the two expressions of the church's priesthood are priestly in their relation to one another.

4. Economic Trinity: The Priesthood of the Church

A relational ontology of priesthood, like any Christian relational ontology, must point to the personal relations of the triune God as they are revealed in the economy of salvation. Christian priesthood is exercised by the people of God unitively, not by ordained priests towards the baptized from which they are ontologically distinct, but rather mutually, interdependently, and by means of encounter. In Mark, we found a mutual dynamic of lifting up priestly identity into visibility and confirming it in the community's memory, and in the liturgy, we found the differentiated repetition of this identity in dialogical and

symbolic modes of relation. How do these factors stem from and reveal the trinitarian relations and their extension into the created order?

Christian priesthood is a mediated participation in Christ's divine sonship in a creaturely mode. Within the Trinity in se, there is no mediation as such, but the differences among the divine persons within their unity in the divine nature serve as a foundation for priestly mediation. The Word's exemplarity for creatures is the origin of priesthood; within the fallen world, even before the incarnation, the Son's exemplarity for creation and equal, filial relation with the Father designates him the proper mediator. His exemplarity is especially visible in the Paschal Mystery of his birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit (on the birth of Christ as an aspect of the Paschal Mystery in the Western tradition, see [Houselander 2017](#); [von Balthasar 1991](#)). The Word's priesthood thereby perfects creation, such that the ontological difference between creatures and the Godhead is expressed in filial love rather than division. Perfected creatureliness reflects the Word's relation with the Father, including both difference and communion. Within creation, the human race expresses in a priestly way the Son's sonship and stewardship over the creatures and symbolizes the Word's relation to the Father, which is exercised through receiving and giving gifts and giving thanks to the Father ([Rahner 1997](#), pp. 23–38; [Rahner 1966](#), pp. 221–52; [Schmemmann 1997](#); [von Balthasar 1994](#), esp. pp. 246–249, 361–406).

The mutuality and interdependence of ordained and baptized ways of being reflect the unitive differentiation of the Three Persons, and the duality of exemplarity and equality is suggested imperfectly by the intertwined dialogical and symbolic modes of the liturgy. The overemphasis on the symbolic mode, to the point of proxy, corresponds to a subordinationist model of the Trinity, whereas the fluidity of both modes better reflects the orthodox understanding of the processions. Moreover, the doubled mutuality of the dialogical mode, in which the assembly at ordination raises up the priesthood of the priest and symbolizes the communion of saints, maintains a focus on the receptive and thus properly creaturely quality of the ordained minister's participation in Christ's priesthood.

The pneumatology of Christ's priesthood makes this interdependence still more clear. The anointing of the humanity of the Word with the Holy Spirit makes his unity with the Father the prototype for the destiny of every creature (Col 1:12–20). If the Christ who has come into the world is the mediator who offers the restored creation back to the Father, then the Holy Spirit who hovers over the waters of creation and of baptism is the mediation itself. It is the Spirit who establishes Jesus as the Christ in relation to us at every phase of his existence, and so Zizioulas claims “without risk of exaggeration . . . [that] Christ exists only pneumatologically” ([Zizioulas 1985](#), pp. 110–11). The Spirit constitutes Jesus as the Christ on earth in his conception (Matt 1:18–20; Lk 1:35), descends upon him in his baptism to reveal him as the Beloved Son of God (Matt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; Jn 1:31–32), fills him and drives him into the desert to fast and pray (Matt 4: 1; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1), leads him back to Nazareth and anoints him to prophesy and preach (Lk 4:14–18), and fills him with the power of prophecy and prayer (Lk 10:21–22) ([Bultmann 1968](#), p. 364)²². It is the Spirit of prophecy, symbolized by the very precious *myron* in her alabaster jar, who inspires the woman of Bethany to recognize and anoint Christ's priesthood. Christ's priesthood, as an aspect of his humanity and his office as head of the church, is communicated to Christians by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit.

This pneumatological Christology resonates with what Hans Urs von Balthasar calls the “trinitarian inversion”, namely, the inversion of the Son's position vis à vis the Spirit before and after the Resurrection and Ascension ([von Balthasar 1988](#), pp. 364–65). By picturing such an “inversion”, Balthasar attempts to preserve a traditional linear procession model of trinitarian relations while meeting the demands of how the economic Trinity appears in salvation history. The Spirit anoints and sends the incarnate Son as the Christ in the economy, thus actualizing the historical Christ-event for us, while after the Ascension, the risen and glorified Christ sends the Spirit on the disciples ([Sachs 1993](#), pp. 648–49, 51). The trinitarian inversion reflects Christ's human experience as priest in the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's anointing prepares the Incarnate Word, as a human person, for

the self-sacrifice of the Supper, Passion, Cross, and death; then, the Risen Lord, whose name is highly exalted (Phil 2:9), grants the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Holy Spirit then becomes the relation between Christ and the Church, as well as among the members of the body. As the “heart” of the Church (Aquinas 1947, 3.8.1, re. obj. 3), however, the Holy Spirit also establishes structural connections among the members for the greater participation of the whole in the priestly exercise of Christ’s mission, including structured relationships between the clerical orders and the rest of the baptized. These Spirit-filled relations constitute Christians’ faithful response to how Christ lives among them in the power of the Spirit, by which Christians participate in the holy task of bringing creation to fulfillment.

Kilmartin’s adaptation of David Coffey’s “bestowal” model of the trinitarian relations and processions contributes to a pneumatological model of priesthood in two ways (Kilmartin 1988, p. 131).²³ First, a trinitarian ontology of bestowal serves as a more mutually relational foundation for priesthood and enriches a focus on sacramental grace proceeding from God to humanity that would be too myopic without it. Ordained priesthood is best understood as an aspect of human participation in Christ’s loving worship of the Father by which the world is healed and united with itself and God, rather than an external condition imposed upon the priest with no relational dimension. The second benefit of the bestowal trinitarian model is that the Holy Spirit’s economic mode of presence includes the aspect of the communicable grace of Christ given to the whole Church (Kilmartin 1988, p. 171). Kilmartin views the works of the Spirit in Jesus’ life as the Father’s bestowal of the Spirit upon him in an act of anointing, which presupposes the assumption of his human nature by the eternal Word in the incarnation (Kilmartin 1988, pp. 164, 161–62)²⁴. In his humanity, in his life, mission, and Paschal Mystery, Jesus experiences the Spirit as grace, so that the Church’s experience of the Spirit as grace is a participation in his mission as Messiah. He receives this grace in a human way, as the love of the Father for him, and bestows love upon the Father in grateful response in a human mode (Kilmartin 1988, p. 169). In this way, we can see Jesus’ love for the Father in the economy of salvation as a proper, creaturely expression of the intra-trinitarian procession of the Spirit from the Son back to the Father in loving response (Kilmartin 1988, pp. 131–32).

The Church corporately and Christians individually receive the Spirit in the form of grace and love from God and return the Spirit in their creaturely, filial regard. In the book of Acts, the Spirit descends upon the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) and drives it on mission throughout the world to do the works of Christ. However, in this descent the Spirit is also sent, or “bestowed”, by the risen Christ in a theandric, sacramental, and priestly act of the Incarnate Word (Kilmartin 1988, p. 171). The coming of the Spirit is the sacramental grace that flows from the High-priestly ministry of the risen Jesus, who intercedes eternally in the heavenly sanctuary. For Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, the Body of Christ is constituted and given the gifts of order by the Holy Spirit, Who is the bestower of gifts. The risen and ascended Jesus is also the giver of gifts, and now after the Ascension the Spirit itself as a triune Person is given by Jesus. He sends the Spirit from the Father for the purpose of humanity’s new divine filiation vis à vis the Father, with Jesus himself as the divine Brother. Jesus “gives *himself* eucharistically”, but in the sacrament of baptism he also “enables [God’s new children] to participate in his proceeding from the Father. . . . [T]he grace of sonship is always identical with the bestowal of the Spirit of Christ” (von Balthasar 1988, p. 366). The sending of the Spirit is “a prolongation of the inner Trinitarian answering love of the Son for the Father. In the risen Lord it takes the form of a supreme act of love of the Father and all humanity in the Father, for it is ordered to enable humankind to love the Father in, with, and through the one Son” (Kilmartin 1988, p. 171). The bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church and the world by the risen Son from the Father is thus an expression of the Son’s eternal priesthood.

The trinitarian foundation we have discussed here grounds the Eucharistic Paradigm of Section 3. The primary priestly identity of the Church that is established by the indwelling of the Spirit received in baptism is most fully expressed when the assembly is

gathered with its bishop or his representative for Eucharistic worship. This worship is inherently both dialogical and symbolic, as we argued in Section 3. The gift of baptism initiates individuals into Christ's filial love, but they exercise Christ's priesthood in the receiving and giving of creation paradigmatically by meeting in common. The Holy Spirit mediates the baptized Christian's relationship to Christ (participation in his Paschal Mystery), to the Father (filial love), and to other Christians (sibling love: see [Chauvet 1995](#), p. 277). There is no lack in this baptismal gift, but because the fullness of its visible expression requires the convocation of the assembly, ordination brings the ordinand into a new set of relations. It does not interrupt or hinder the action of the baptismal relations, but through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the ordinand both inhabits his baptized fraternal love for his fellow Christians and receives the authority to symbolically represent and dialogically invoke them to express their unity by the joint exercise of their priesthood. The anointing of ordination does not set deacons, priests, and bishops apart, but sets them in relation with the Spirit-infused Church. In the ordination rites, candidates receive a new set of relationships mediated in the Holy Spirit's love, as well as distinctive charisms that allow one to raise up the whole priestly people into their priestly vocation, including at least dialogical and symbolic modes, in liturgy and in the other dimensions of ministry.

5. Conclusions

The priestly ministry of Christ and the Church's participation in it by the grace of the Spirit is for the sake of the world, for its own recapitulation in Christ in an eternal communion of shared life with God. This is consistently the theology of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents. Without a robust connection to the Church's daily reflection on Scripture and constant liturgical life, however, this theology remains existentially unfulfilled. There is little evidence that efforts in the rejuvenation of liturgy for the promotion of priestly vocations work, particularly when these efforts and the resulting liturgical practices seldom reflect the Church's existence as a communion-in-relation. Vocations have also been promoted in hierarchical, clericalist, fundamentalist, and institutionalist ways—a trend that is becoming distressingly more common. However, those are not the vocations we need, and they do not often reflect the experienced reality of Christians in the Church. National surveys on homiletics in parish masses across North America are enough to bear this out (see for example [Searle and Legee 1989](#), p. 10; [Lebvre 2013](#), pp. 31–34).

By reflection on the scriptural pericope of the woman at Bethany within the broader Messianic perspective of Mark, and by reflection on the Church's liturgical life, especially the celebration of the Eucharist in the Roman and Byzantine Rites and the Roman ordination rites, we have suggested a trinitarian approach to priesthood that maintains unity by means of difference. The whole Church participates in Christ's priesthood by means of differentiated relations, and these relations are mediated by the Holy Spirit, just as the relationship of the Church to Christ and that of the Son to the Father are differentiated unities mediated by the Holy Spirit. These relations are visible in the Church's life by means of dynamic prophetic and priestly acts of witness, not only from ordained to baptized but in both directions. In the liturgy, it is actualized in dialogical and symbolic acts of relation, whereby the whole priestly people is united to its Head to offer Creation back to the Father in anticipation of the fulfillment to come.

Author Contributions: Both authors contributed substantially to every section. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The authors are grateful to the Centro Alletti (www.centroalletti.com) for their permission to use the "Unzione di Betania" (Anointing of Bethany) mosaic in Capiago, Italy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ When *Lumen Gentium* reflects in a more “ontological” register on the nature of priesthood, it speaks of the People of God and the episcopate instead of about the presbyterate.
- ² Our phenomenological approach relies on treatments of priesthood in John Baldovin, Louis-Marie Chauvet, Edward Kilmartin, Richard Gaillardetz, Susan Wood, and John Zizioulas. In addition to these interlocutors, we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their helpful comments.
- ³ John Baldovin has noted the “serious postconciliar division . . . between those who emphasize the power that priests receive at their ordination and those who argue that the primary manifestation of Christ’s priesthood is that of the baptized who are called to join Christ in offering the world back to the Father” (Conn and Baldovin 2019, pp. 26–27).
- ⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §12–13. The relational emphasis in the present interpretation is affirmed in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1547.
- ⁵ This position is not inconsistent with the official doctrinal notion of some kind of “character” being imparted at priestly ordination. One could think of the ministerial priest as conformed to Christ in a special way without making ontology the primary category for the difference.
- ⁶ The origin of the laying-on of hands in the imperial *cursus honorum* explains in part its focus on rank and power.
- ⁷ “Bracketing” here derives both from the phenomenological work of Jean-Luc Marion, especially (Marion 2002, 2015), and from the ritual studies approach of “ritual in its own right” (Handelman and Lindquist 2005).
- ⁸ O’Collins and Jones refer to the totality of Jewish ritual symbolism as the “Jewish matrix.”
- ⁹ The parallel pericopes in Matt 26:7, Luke 7:38, and John 12:3 are quite different.
- ¹⁰ *Myron* is a scented oil used for perfume, embalming, medical treatment, and several other purposes. See Exodus 29:7–9 and 30:24–33 (LXX) for the full description of the making and uses of this oil.
- ¹¹ The history of the celebration of Passover in both nomadic–pastoral modes not involving either priests or altars for and in its later association with the Temple in Jerusalem is complex. By the time of Mark’s Gospel, Passover had become a major pilgrimage feast in Jerusalem, calling for the slaughtering of all the lambs to be done at the Temple at twilight at the very beginning of the feast.
- ¹² Jesus’ blood as a precious gift that cleanses from sin—in addition to establishing a new covenant—is alluded to only in the supper institution narrative in Matthew (26:28).
- ¹³ The Gentile centurion, who is not expected to believe or to know the Scriptures, nonetheless recognized God’s glory from the Cross. Jesus’ “ex-spriation” in conjunction with the “unveiling” of the Holy of Holies in the Temple and the centurion’s proclamation of Jesus’ identity in the words of the Gospel’s opening line (Mk 1:1) speaks of God’s Self-revelation to the world beyond Israel.
- ¹⁴ “Memento, domine, famulorum famularumque tuarum et omnium circum adstantium quorum tibi fides cognita est et nota devotio qui tibi offerunt hoc sacrificium laudes” (7th century). In the later medieval sacramentaries and missals, the lack of visible lay participation led to this phrase being expanded: “qui tibi offerunt vel pro quibus tibi offerimus”.
- ¹⁵ Edward Kilmartin notes the prevalence of this interpretation of the assembly’s participation in the Eucharist prayer as co-offerers and co-celebrants (if not “concelebrants” in today’s sense) in early Greek and Latin liturgies, an interpretation eventually obscured in the West and only now recovered (Kilmartin 1998, pp. 22, 140, 190, 331–32). In his comments on *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §7 and earlier Latin and Byzantine eucharistic prayers, Yves Congar emphasizes the common participation of the whole assembly in the *epiclesis* to the Holy Spirit to descend upon the offering and assembly (Congar 1983, pp. 234–36).
- ¹⁶ For the most important treatment of the history and development of the anaphoral dialogue, see (Taft 1986, 1988, 1989).
- ¹⁷ Theologians struggled with the contrast between private masses in the Middle Ages and the inherited notion of the assembly.
- ¹⁸ In the Slavic Byzantine traditions, on the other hand, this response is often chanted in a lengthy setting: “it is right and just to worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Trinity, one in substance and undivided”. This often takes so long that the priest is finished with the (silent) Preface and launches the people directly into the Sanctus just when they have finished.
- ¹⁹ The Byzantine rite greeting, a quotation of 2 Cor 13:14 incorporating “Father” as an elaboration of “God”, serves the same ritual purpose.
- ²⁰ The practice of the *disciplina arcani* is presumed to have kept at least some of the neophytes from knowing what would happen at this part of the service.
- ²¹ Paul speaks here of his fellow Jews, but we extend the meaning in this case to the human race.
- ²² The Pentateuchal legislation on the economic redistribution in the jubilee year (ἐνιαυτὸν δεκτόν, v.18) is certainly behind the quotation from Deutero-Isaiah, but Jesus introduces himself here as the one with the authority to bring it about, making him more than a prophet, indeed, also a kind of priest (Houston 1987, pp. 45–46). Joseph Fitzmeyer is cautious about interpreting the verb “anointed” to mean “Messiah” in reference to Jesus here because of the kingly and political associations with the word.

However, the kingly implication is too strong to rule out entirely, especially in the context of the many references in Luke's text to Jesus' divine and Davidic-kingly origins (1:27; 1:32; 1:69; 2:4; 2:11); (Fitzmyer 1981, pp. 529–30; see also Talbert 1982, p. 49).

23 "The Spirit, as constituted, proceeds from the Father and Son [in the linear model]. But, in the manner of the bestowal, the Father bestows the Spirit on the Son and the Son bestows the Spirit on the Father as the answering love"; Kilmartin depends here on (Coffey 1979).

24 Kilmartin points to the 5th-century descriptions of Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine of the incarnation of the Word as a work of the Father by the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit (who, for Augustine, it must be admitted, are only accorded these special roles in the divine economy by way of "appropriation"); see (Kilmartin 1988, p. 166).

References

- Aguilar Chiu, José Enrique. 2018. Mark. In *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Richard J. Clifford, Carol J. Dempsey, Eileen M. Schuller, Thomas Stegman, Ronald D. Witherup, Joseph William Tobin and José Enrique Aguilar Chiu. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1947. *Summa Theologica*; Benziger Brothers. Available online: <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/> (accessed on 20 July 2021).
- Augustine of Hippo. 1951. Sermon 6 (Denis), The Holy Eucharist. In *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons*. Fathers of the Church v. 11. Translated by Denis J. Kavanagh. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, vol. 11, pp. 321–26.
- Augustine of Hippo. 1959. *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Fathers of the Church v. 17. New York: Fathers of the Church.
- Baldovin, John F. 2020. Mass Intentions: The Historical Development of a Practice: [Mass Intentions—Part One]. *Theological Studies* 81: 878–82. [CrossRef]
- Belcher, Kimberly Hope. 2020. *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism: From Thanksgiving to Communion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boston College Seminar on Priesthood and Ministry for the Contemporary Church. 2018. To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry. *Origins* 48: 484–93.
- Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. 1990. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary (NJB)*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. 1968. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Catholic Church and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1980. *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, vol. 2.
- Catholic Church and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2011. *The Roman Missal*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Chauvet, Louis-Marie. 1995. *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Coffey, David. 1979. *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit*. Sidney: Catholic Institute.
- Congar, Yves. 1983. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Volume III: The River of the Water of Life (Rev 22:1) Flows in the East and in the West*. Translated by David Smith. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Conn, James J., and John F. Baldovin. 2019. Jesuits and Eucharistic Concelebration. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 51: 1–16.
- Connell, Martin F. 2007. The Gift of Myrrh to a Church That Smells. *Studia Liturgica* 37: 217–33. [CrossRef]
- Fischer, Balthasar. 1990. *Signs, Words & Gestures: Short Homilies on the Liturgy*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. 1981. *The Gospel according to Luke*. Anchor Bible. 1964 v. 28–28A. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Gaillardetz, Richard. 2005. Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Diaconate. *Worship* 79: 419–38.
- Gschwandtnr, Christina M. 2019. *Welcoming Finitude: Toward a Phenomenology of Orthodox Liturgy*. Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Handelman, Don, and Galina Lindquist, eds. 2005. *Ritual in Its Own Right: Exploring the Dynamics of Transformation*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Henner, Jutta. 2000. *Fragmenta liturgica Coptica: Editionen und Kommentar Liturgischer Texte der Koptischen Kirche des ersten Jahrtausends*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 5. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Houselander, Caryll. 2017. *The Passion of the Infant Christ: Critical Edition*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Houston, Walter. 1987. 'Today in Your Very Hearing': Some Comments on the Christological Use of the Old Testament. In *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*. Edited by L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright. Oxford: University Press, pp. 37–50. [CrossRef]
- John Paul II, Pope. 1992. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. (Kilmartin 1988) Kilmartin, Edward J. 1988. *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward.
- Kilmartin, Edward J. 1988. *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward.
- Kilmartin, Edward J. 1998. *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*. Edited by Robert Daly. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey William Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, and Ronald E. Pitkin. 1964. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Lebvre, Elizabeth. 2013. What Makes a Parish Worth Sticking Around? In *U. S. Catholic*, 78th ed. April, sec. 4.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. 2002. *Being given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. 2015. *Negative Certainties*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Mateos, Juan. 2016. *The Liturgy of the Word*. History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom; v. 1. Fairfax: Jack Figel, Eastern Christian Publications.
- O'Collins, Gerald, and Michael Keenan Jones. 2010. *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ*. Oxford: University Press.
- Orsy, Ladislav. 2004. The Church of the Third Millennium. An Exercise in Theological and Canonical Imagination: In Praise of Communion. *Studia Canonica* 38: 5–36.
- Rahner, Karl. 1966. Theology of the Symbol. In *Theological Investigations IV: More Recent Writings*. Baltimore: Helicon, pp. 221–52.
- Rahner, Karl. 1997. *The Trinity*. New York: Crossroad Pub.
- Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI). 2000. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Sachs, John R. 1993. Deus Semper Major—Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam: The Pneumatology and Spirituality of Hans Urs Von Balthasar. *Gregorianum* 74: 631–57.
- Saliers, Don E. 1994. *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. 1997. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Searle, Mark, and David Legee. 1989. *Of Piety and Planning: Liturgy, the Parishioners, and the Professionals*. 6. Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Institute for Church Life.
- Second Vatican Council. 1963. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ('Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy').
- Second Vatican Council. 1964. *Lumen Gentium*, ('Dogmatic Constitution on the Church').
- Strong's NT 3422: Μνημόσυνον. 2011. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*. BibleSoft: Available online: <https://biblehub.com/greek/3422.htm> (accessed on 20 July 2021).
- Taft, Robert F. 1986. The Dialogue before the Anaphora in the Byzantine Eucharistic Liturgy. I: The Opening Greeting. *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 52: 299–324.
- Taft, Robert F. 1988. The Dialogue before the Anaphora in the Byzantine Eucharistic Liturgy. II: The 'Sursum Corda'. *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54: 47–77.
- Taft, Robert F. 1989. The Dialogue before the Anaphora in the Byzantine Eucharistic Liturgy. III: Let Us Give Thanks to the Lord. It Is Fitting and Right. *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 55: 63–74.
- Talbert, Charles H. 1982. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*. New York: Crossroad.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1979. *Heart of the World*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1988. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. IV. The Action. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1994. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. IV. The Action. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1991. *Unless You Become Like This Child*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Wood, Susan K. 2000. *Sacramental Orders*. Lex Orandi Series. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Zizioulas, Jean. 1985. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Contemporary Greek Theologians, no. 4. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.