Article

Social Construction of the Sacrament of Orders

Anthony J. Pogorelc

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, St Mary's University, San Antonio, TX 78228, USA;
apogorelc@stmarytx.edu

Abstract: All institutions are the product of human activity. This article will consider how the development of the Sacrament of Orders is embedded in the social construction of the church as an institution, with a leadership structure and a system of symbols and rituals. Drawing on the perspectives of sociologists, theologians and social constructionists, it will focus on churches of the West with more highly developed liturgical traditions, examining the history of how this sacrament, and the clergy roles and lifestyle it initiates, has been constructed and reconstructed in response to the social forces that have influenced the church from its origins to the current day.

Keywords: ordination; social construction; sociology of religion

1. Introduction

From a theological perspective, Holy Orders may be defined as the sacrament that confers grace and authority upon certain individuals through the laying on of hands by bishops so that they may exercise ministries and carry on the mission that Christ has given to the church (*The Book of Common Prayer* 1979; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994). This article examines the Sacrament of Holy Orders from a sociological perspective.

This article is a historical overview that focuses on ordination in the more highly liturgical churches of the West. The Eastern churches and the churches of the Reformation are beyond its scope. It examines Holy Orders as a social construction and adopts the perspective that all social order is the product of human activity (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This perspective differs from a theological one in that it looks at the human side of religious institutions, drawing conclusions about the personal, social and organizational patterns that have developed through history and that influence the context and lived reality of this sacrament.

Adopting an open systems approach that considers the effects of social forces, both internal and external, on institutions, it looks at how this sacrament, and the ministerial roles and lifestyle it initiates, has been constructed and constructed anew in response to the social forces brought to bear on the church in history. While churches with highly developed liturgical traditions share similarities in their theologies of the sacrament, there are also theological differences that result from variations in church cultures as well as from the way these churches interact with national and international cultural mores.

We reflect on this sacrament at a particularly crucial time as controversies brew around ordination, its meaning and purpose. Modern thought and its views of leadership as well as movements promoting inclusiveness in regard to race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation have affected how church hierarchies, clergy and laity think about this sacrament. At the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Catholic Church engaged in a process of resourcement which sought to recover and incorporate earlier traditions into its theology and practice. At the same time, it sought to be more responsive to the modern world. This led to significant changes in the theology and ritual practices of the Roman Catholic Church, some of which have embraced aspects of modern cultures, and others which have stood against elements of these cultures. On the other hand, the Episcopal Church in the U.S. has shown considerable openness to modern thought and culture even

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though some of its members have seen this course as a repudiation of longstanding church traditions and values. Living in such a time of tension can help us to better understand the challenges of our Christian ancestors as they contributed to the construction of the religious institutions handed down to us.

Holy Orders is embedded in the social construction of the church as an institution, with a leadership structure and a system of symbols and rituals. Weber (1947) was concerned with the evolution of systems of meaning that define situations for individuals and their linkage to individual interests. He proposed three ideal types of authority: first, legal is authority rooted in the system of law; second, traditional authority is rooted in precedent; and third, charismatic authority is rooted in the power of an exceptional figure with followers. The Church views Jesus as the charismatic leader par excellence. However, the life span of charismatic authority is short, and for the product of its creative activity to survive it must be transformed into another form of authority, either traditional or legal. These forms of authority are found in various combinations in the social construction of ordination.

In history, what we have come to know as the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the product of construction and reconstruction. Ministry was an essential part of the life of the early church, yet in the New Testament, though the laying on of hands is mentioned, there is no clear indication of a developed ordination rite (Osborne 1988). A community's particular pastoral needs influenced the forms of ministry and ritual that it adopted (Cwiekowski 1988). Early leadership was based on charisma, but as one would expect, the historical process led to rationalization and, as sacramental theologian Bernard Cooke (1976) noted, moved from variety to increasing uniformity. Weber (1964) viewed organizational evolution as a movement toward increasing systematization or rationalization. In particular, he claimed that it was the function of the priest to use the charisma of the founder to shape a stable religious group.

Persistence requires habituation which makes it unnecessary to define each situation every time it is undertaken (Berger and Luckmann 1966). For the churches to grow and possess unity not only within but between different communities, the development of a reciprocal typification of actors and actions was necessary. Institutionalization requires a shared definition of the actions to be performed and the officers designated to perform them. These officers are perceived to be bearers of special knowledge and power. Reception of the ritual of ordination serves as the legitimating apparatus for this attribution of special status (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and guarantees the validity of the performance of subsequent rituals by the ordained person (Goffman 1959).

The forms taken by the Sacrament of Holy Orders are embedded in the concrete history of the church. They have evolved and developed and cannot be adequately considered apart from their expressions in concrete and culture bound communities. To begin, we turn now to a brief overview of the historical trajectory that led to the institutionalization of the charisma of Jesus into the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We will consider the history of leadership in the church, beginning with the New Testament, followed by the Patristic period, then to the scholastics and to modern times.

2. Early History

In the New Testament we see that churches in different locales are organized in a variety of ways (Dunn 1990). Here we encounter terms such as *episkopos*: Greek for overseer, which is the origin for the ministry of bishop; *diakonos*: Greek for minister which is the root of the ministry of deacon, and *presbyteros*: Greek for elder which is the foundation for the ministry of priest.

Acts of the Apostles indicates that the Jerusalem church was organized along traditional Jewish lines; James, "the brother of the Lord", presided over that church assisted by a group of presbyters (Acts 15:13 ff., 21:17). We also find a similar model in the Jewish Christian communities of Cilicia and southern Asia Minor where we read that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23). Bishops and deacons (Philippians 1:1) led the

church of the Philippians, while the Church of Ephesus may have had all three: presbyters, overseers and deacons (1 Timothy). By the end of the first century we can say that the churches had employed several structures for ministry and that they were still evolving and that roles were not clearly defined or demarcated. Likewise, they seemed to be more focused on leadership and oversight of the community than on ritual functions.

In the Christian writings following the New Testament we continue to see terms such as bishop and deacon used somewhat interchangeably, so it is difficult to establish their clear meaning and how they correspond to the terms as they are used today. In the *Didache* (Milavec 2003), an ancient book of instructions for Christians, we see other roles of importance in the community as well. In this text, great attention is given to the ministries of apostles and prophets in the community. Scholars believe these were the ministers who presided at the Eucharist. Early communities strongly emphasized that ministry was rooted in Christ—the charismatic leader par excellence. Perceived fidelity to Christ was a primary criterion for the selection of ministers who from a theological perspective were neither self-appointed nor appointed by the community but commissioned by Christ.

With the beginning of the second Christian century we see increasing rationalization demonstrated by a clearer distinction of roles between those who preside and lay persons (laikos). We also see the first usage of the Greek word *hierus* (priest) for a Christian minister. The writings of Ignatius (2006) of Antioch testify to the increasing stabilization of the form known as the monarchical episcopate in which the bishop was designated as the chief leader of the Christian community and presider at the Eucharist. He was assisted by the college of presbyters and the deacons. The bishops Polycarp (2006) and Irenaeus (1997), writing in the middle of the second century, offer additional evidence of this stabilization of the naming and ordering of ministries with bishop as the highest rank, presbyters in the second tier and deacons in the third. The future would bring even greater institutionalization of this structure by the development of a strong theology to support it.

Origen (1979) of Alexandria, who lived from late second century to the middle of the third century, contributed to the development of a strong theology of ministry focused on spirituality. He expected bishops to be deeply spiritual and was critical of those who were not. He increasingly employed the Greek term *hierus* (priest) and used Old Testament appellations, such as Levite, to speak of the ministers of the church. A priestly aura gradually dominated the language used to define office in the church.

Tertullian (2001), a Latin Christian from Roman Africa, who wrote in the late second and early third centuries, applied the language of the Roman bureaucracy to the names and functions of ministry. His employment of established organizational concepts from his time and location to frame church ministry is typically seen in organizations seeking to increase their legitimacy and survival prospects (Meyer and Rowan 1991). Tertullian was the first to speak of the clergy as a distinct *ordo*, a class of people having an honor or dignity that carried leadership responsibilities; initially this term did not have religious overtones.

3. Ordination Rituals

Rituals have moral and social significance, which affirm the collectivity, heal divisions and bring about unity. They worship God and confer powers and delegations to God's human representatives. They legitimate structures of authority and identity and reproduce what is needed for the good of the institution (Durkheim 1915).

The oldest known written ordination ritual is found in *On the Apostolic Tradition* (Hippolytus 2015) by Hippolytus, a figure of the late second and early third centuries who lived in Rome. This early third century text contains the ordination ritual for bishops, priests and deacons and is likely to have been in use in Rome for some time. It testifies to the organization of relationships within the hierarchical order. It describes a refined ordination ritual that included rubrics and their explanation as well as prayers for the ordinand. These texts express the meaning of the acts and the roles they establish, as well as the relationship between the orders. The central ritual of ordination is the imposition of

hands by the bishop, which is followed by a prayer for the Spirit to empower the ordinand to exercise the ministry

The ordination ritual articulates the relationship between the orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon, and the laity. This can be seen in this description of the ordination of a bishop.

“Let the bishop be ordained . . . having been elected by all the people When he has been named and found pleasing to all, let the people come together with the presbyters, and any bishops who are present, on the Lord’s day. When all give their consent, they lay hands upon him and the presbyters stand in silence. And all shall keep silence, praying in their heart for the descent of the Holy Spirit”. After this, at the request of all, one of the bishops who is present, laying a hand on him who is being ordained bishop, shall pray. The consecratory prayer followed and then all exchanged the sign of peace with the newly ordained bishop, and the deacons brought forth offerings for the Eucharistic celebration Hippolytus (2015, p. 69).

Hippolytus (2015, p. 96) writes of the ordination of a presbyter: “When a presbyter is elected, the bishop should lay a hand upon his head, the presbyters likewise touching him”. Then the bishop alone said the consecratory prayer because at this time, the presbyter was primarily a counselor to the bishop and did not have an active pastoral and sacramental ministry; there is no mention of sacramental functions in the prayer. In the ordination of a deacon: “The bishop alone lays hands for the reason he is not ordained to priesthood but to serve the bishop, that he might do those things which are commanded by him” (Hippolytus 2015, p. 102).

Osborne (1988) suggests that the absence of any mention of preaching in Hippolytus’s ordination rite challenges Luther’s position on presbyteral ordination, which claims it is essential, as well as the Roman Catholic non-recognition of Anglican orders based on the absence of a mention of offering sacrifice in the *Edwardian Ordinal*, a book of rites issued by King Edward VI, the son of Henry VIII, and composed by Archbishop Cranmer, who was heavily influenced by the Protestant reformer Martin Bucer.

4. New Constructions

Due to a series of theological and jurisdictional controversies, from the fifth century on, the churches in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, with its seat in Constantinople, and Western half, with its seat in Rome, became estranged. The churches of the East continued to accord prominence to the bishop as the leader of the church. They maintained a patriarchal form of polity with an autonomous, self-governing federation of dioceses under the jurisdiction of a chief bishop or patriarch and his synod. In the West, the impact of social and economic forces led to significant reconstruction in the structure and theology of the relationship between the three orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon.

In its earlier construction, the role of deacon was a high and exalted office. Frequently deacons were principal administrative agents for bishops, and their importance exceeded that of presbyters. Already, by the third and fourth centuries, conflicts developed between deacons and presbyters, and it was the latter who won out. Eventually the diaconate became a transitional step to ordination to the presbyterate. It was restored as a permanent order by Pope Paul VI in 1967 (Cwiekowski 1995).

Historian Phyllis Zagano (2020) has studied extensively the role of gender and the construction and reconstruction of the diaconate. In Romans (16:1), Paul refers to “our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae”. Zagano agrees with Hippolytus in distinguishing ordination to the diaconate in kind from ordination to the episcopate and presbyterate. She also traces to the medieval period explicit strictures to the sacramental acknowledgement of women’s ministries.

From the fifth century, as the Christian population grew, the presbyter, now more commonly known as a priest, assumed many of the bishop’s responsibilities in leadership and liturgy. The priest, not the bishop, became the ordinary minister of the Eucharist.

Likewise, the ritual of the Mass evolved in a way such that the actions of the assembly became less essential and the priest became the sole active party.

In the medieval period, the political and social transformation of Western Europe institutionalized these tendencies even further. The decline of the Roman Empire by the end of the fifth century set the stage for the rise and fall of the German kingdoms. In the face of weak papal authority, the Carolingian Emperor Charlemagne, who reigned in the late eighth century, was the actual head of Western Christendom.

From the fifth to the twelfth centuries in Europe nearly all wealth was landed, and most people lived under an economic system called seigniorialism—near absolute rule by the lord of the land—and a social system called feudalism. These systems had profound effects on the organization of the church. In this structure, the landlord was an all-important figure. People depended on their relationship with him for their livelihoods, and he was in charge of all aspects of their lives, including religion. These lords were more powerful than most bishops. Their power was a contributing factor to the severance of the connection between the bishop and the priest and was a factor in the increasing visibility and role of the priest as the ordinary liturgical figure in the Western church.

The churches on the lord's land were his property and known as autonomous proprietary churches. The priest was tied to and beholden to the landlord who selected him. While ordination was still conferred by the bishop, the lord appointed the priest to his church. The role of the priest was not leadership of the community, this might challenge the status of the lord, but only as a liturgical functionary for the celebration of the Mass and sacraments.

Appointed by the lord for a religious task, the priest was a member of a special class; he was directed to avoid women, hunting, taverns and weddings. His perceived personal holiness and distinctive dress brought him special privileges. The priest became the central liturgical figure in a church while the bishop, who was removed from a close connection to actual religious communities, became a distant administrator rather than the central leader and liturgical figure of a local church. This significant reconstruction of church structure would also have serious implications for theology.

In the eleventh century, the reforms of Pope Gregory VII put an end to the feudal structuring of ministry. However, he did not restore the centrality of the bishop in the structure of local churches in the West. Rather he centralized papal power, increasing its temporal and spiritual powers (McBrien 1981). Establishing a monarchical form of governance, Gregory solidified in the church a hybrid of traditional and legal authority, placing the pope at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. This structure encouraged bishops to focus on their relationship with the pope rather than on collegiality with one another. In the administration of local churches, bishops saw themselves as delegates of the pope.

Developments in theology legitimated the transition from a monarchical episcopal ecclesiology to one more centered on the cultic power of the priest. From the thirteenth to the twentieth century, scholastic theology was hegemonic in the Catholic Church. Its focus was on the sacramental power of the priest. The essence of priesthood was perceived as first the power to consecrate bread and wine, and second the power to absolve sins (Aquinas 1947). Priests were perceived as different from lay people because they had the power to consecrate, and in doing so depended on no power but God alone. Peter Lombard (Rosemann 2004), a twelfth century theologian, defined ordination as *signaculum*: a ritual imparting spiritual power and office. Later the term *signaculum* was perceived as something like the character given at baptism. The ordained person was considered ontologically changed through reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Because the power to consecrate was given with ordination to the priesthood, this office was now seen as preeminent. While both priests and bishops were seen as possessing this essential power, what distinguished a bishop from a priest was that he was delegated additional power of jurisdiction that expanded his authority and enabled him to ordain priests. Thus, the episcopate was no longer viewed as an office in itself, but rather as priesthood with expanded authority.

The Protestant reformers challenged the scholastic's assertion that priests were ontologically different from laymen. They stressed the common priesthood of all, and that ordination meant the power to preach. In response, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) affirmed the scholastic theology of the priesthood without modification. For the next six centuries, the perspective that the essence of priesthood was liturgical activity rather than leadership of an ecclesial community remained hegemonic.

In the mid-twentieth century, the emergence of new historical and biblical scholarship contributed to developments in theology, including new reflections on the theology of ministry. We will now look at the Second Vatican Council and its influence on the reconstruction of ordained ministry.

5. Vatican II and the Social Reconstruction of Ordination

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was an event that initiated significant change in the Catholic Church. It set in motion a major shift in the way the church related to the wider world, as well as in how it conducted its inner life. In regard to the ordained ministry, the theological reforms of Vatican II expanded the theology of the priesthood beyond Trent's narrow focus on its cultic dimensions and revived a more patristic vision of the offices of bishop, priest and deacon, their relationship to one another, and their relationship to the people of God. In this sense the council initiated a new dynamism. To go forward, the church sought to reclaim and root itself in its earlier traditions. In the early church, leadership of the community qualified one to preside over its liturgical and sacramental life. Vatican II sought to restore the theological link between leadership and sacramental ministry.

The Documents of Vatican II (Abbott 1966) speak of ordained ministry as embedded in the community of the faithful. Before one is ordained, through baptism one shares in the priesthood of the faithful. Those to be ordained are called from the community, and now through ordination share the priesthood of Christ in an additional way. According to the theology of the Council, this does not place them in a superior position above the faithful but officially empowers them to foster the common priesthood. Berger and Luckmann (1966) distinguish between primary socialization where an individual is introduced to the basic world of membership in an institution and secondary socialization which imparts a special knowledge that enables one to carry out a particular role. The ordained have become part of a profession whose purpose is to nurture and build the entire body of Christ. They are to be the servant-leaders of the People of God in Christ.

In *The Documents of Vatican II* (Abbott 1966), the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, views the priesthood as first a service and ministry rather than as a lifestyle with a particular status. To stress this, the document placed ministry ahead of lifestyle in its title. As we have seen historically, even the word presbyter does not have the same sacral overtones as priest. This document also employed the systemization of the three-fold offices of Christ: prophet, priest and king, first found in Eusebius and later in the writings of John Calvin (2008), as the means to structure its theology of ministry. For both bishops and priests, sharing in the prophetic functions of Christ is listed before the liturgical and leadership elements. Howard Bleichner (2004) sees this as a significant change that enlarged the ordained ministry. In doing so, the council fathers explicitly introduced into the post Vatican II priesthood a relationship of tension between the roles of prophet and priest.

Weber (1964) constructed the priestly role in legal and traditional modes. Its purpose was to organize a stable institution. The priest is generally a conservative figure, an organization person. In contrast, Weber described the prophet as the prototype of charismatic leadership and an agent of change. At the heart of the prophet's role is the proclamation of a morally legitimated break from normative order. The prophet does not reference precedent as the basis of his authority but claims to be the agent of a higher source of moral authority. The prophetic vocation calls for a total response and a deep commitment to transformation. The Vatican II theologian Karl Rahner (1968) who advocated a prophetic

vision of the priesthood, saw the ordained person's mission of proclaiming the word of God as central. He also noted that the interaction of charism and office—the prophetic and the priestly—in the church inevitably leads to conflict and tension, and this is exactly what Vatican II's pairing of prophet and priest did so.

The period following Vatican II became a time not only of evolution but also of revolution in the priesthood. In pre-conciliar times, the essence of the priest's role was defined as sacramental, what sociologist Dean Hoge ([Hoge and Wenger 2003](#)) and others referred to as the cultic model of the priesthood. The call to a prophetic priesthood led priests to work for change both in society and in the church; the prophetic priest saw his place in the midst of the people. This was encouraged by the fact that at this time, wider forces in society were challenging legal and traditional authority and established power relations while promoting greater egalitarianism. Priests stood in the forefront of the civil rights movement, marching with ministers of all denominations and the laity in the quest to bring about racial justice. Priests also understood their prophetic mission as challenging social structures of injustice that perpetuated racism, economic inequality, war and sexism.

In response to this new call for a prophetic priesthood, priests like Robert Drinan, S.J. ran for the U.S. House of Representatives to work on behalf of social justice. The efforts of priests in the transformation of civic communities became intensified. Msgr. Jack Egan of Chicago, an activist pastor, founded an Institute for Pastoral and Social Ministry in collaboration with the University of Notre Dame. Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C. was known not only as an outstanding educator but also as a challenging voice supporting reform in the church and in society. There are many other examples.

These priests and many others influenced by Vatican II's expansion of the role of the priest adopted a model that Hoge ([Hoge and Wenger 2003](#)) called the servant-leader model of the priesthood in which the priest leads by working in collaboration with the laity to address both the issues of the church and society.

This post-Vatican II model was a source of tension between many priests and their bishops, who may have assented to the documents of the Council at the ideational level while never dreaming of their implications at the behavioral level. While some priests saw themselves as fulfilling their prophetic mission, some bishops saw them as guilty of insubordination ([Seidler and Meyer 1989](#)). The scope of the prophetic breakthrough did not confine itself to the extra-ecclesial realm but also embraced the internal life of the church. Priests rebelled against the separation from society first demanded by feudal lords, and later by some bishops and pastors. Some priests moved out of the rectory and challenged the privileges of clerical life. Others questioned the discipline of mandatory celibacy, and even married. When in 1968 the pope reaffirmed the church's established teaching on artificial contraception, there were protests by priests around the world. This relationship of tension between some who believed they were answering the call of Vatican II to be prophetic and others who believed they were being faithful to the traditions of the church was to continue for decades.

6. Reconstruction of the Relationship between Offices

From a theological perspective, Vatican II sought to reclaim earlier understandings of the relationships between bishops, presbyters and deacons. The Council insisted on the sacramental character of the episcopacy, calling it the fullness of priesthood and making it the fundamental category for understanding ordained ministry. The Council also stressed that the episcopate is a collective reality. By virtue of his ordination, a bishop becomes a member of the college of bishops, which, with and under the Bishop of Rome, has responsibility for the universal church.

Like the call to a prophetic priesthood, the renewed theology of the episcopate had the potential to prompt a reconstruction of the relationship between bishops as the leaders of local churches and the Vatican. The development of collegiality could have made way for a departure from the extreme centralization that characterized the church's rule by the pope and his curia before the Council ([Burns 1992](#)). Historically this was not the

case, and episcopal collegiality according to theologians and other scholars has remained underdeveloped. Greeley (1977) noted that the social profile of the priests selected to be bishops indicates that they are generally the most deferential to traditional authority and that this would make it unlikely for them to challenge the status quo in the interest of promoting greater collegiality.

When a priest is ordained, he joins the order of presbyters who, with the bishops, have a responsibility for the universal church. Vatican II states that priests can only be understood in and through their relationship to bishops, and bishops can only be understood in relationship to priests. Presbyters render the bishop present in the local community (*Lumen Gentium* 28: *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5). Bishops and priests are meant to work together to shepherd the local church.

Some theologians critiqued the tendencies of some Vatican II texts to over-subordinate presbyters to the episcopate and stressed that historically, priests enjoyed relative independence and collegiality among themselves (Rahner 1968). Tavard (1983) claimed that history favored the fundamental identity of priesthood and episcopacy rather than an intrinsic difference between them.

In restoring the diaconate, making it a permanent order as well as a transitional step to the priesthood, Pope Paul VI (1967) drew on the church's early traditions to give definition to this ministry. First, the deacon is to promote the church's ministry of service, and to be for the community a sign of Christ who came to serve. Second, he is to be a minister of the word by preaching and teaching. Finally, he is to minister at the liturgy as a reminder of the intimate connection between worship and service.

7. Construction and Reconstruction of the Rite

Durkheim (1915) suggests the words and structure of rituals express the meaning of the relationships they are meant to forge. The theologian Yves Congar (1967) held that the ordination ritual is more than historical continuity with the apostles; it is an act of Christ that builds up the church here and now. To express the theological developments of Vatican II, it was necessary to construct anew the rituals of the church. This meant not only translating them from Latin into the vernacular but also revising the prayers that were used so that they reflected the renewed and enlarged theology of orders.

The rite of episcopal ordination in the Catholic Church was modified to include the consecratory prayer found in *On the Apostolic Tradition* (Hippolytus 2015, pp. 73–74) that highlights the apostolic succession of bishops and the collegial character of the episcopate. Pre-Vatican II rites for ordination to the priesthood were dominated by a focus on the cultic functions of a priest. In the Tridentine rite the bishop's instruction to the ordinand emphasized that the priest is ordained to offer sacrifice, to bless, to guide, to preach and to baptize and that he is subordinate to the bishop. In the revised rite the collaborative relationship between priest and bishop is clearly drawn. The revised rite of ordination to the diaconate reflects its restoration as a permanent order in the church (SCRIBD 2009).

It is a longstanding tradition that a bishop is the minister of the sacrament of holy orders. Rubrics going back to *On the Apostolic Tradition* (Hippolytus 2015) explain the relationship between the orders and why bishops are the proper ministers of ordination. Going back to the rite found in Hippolytus, the laying on of hands is the central and visible sign of the sacrament. Through history, additions were made to the ordination rite that clouded the centrality of this action. To clarify this matter even before Vatican II, Pope Pius XII declared this: "We determine and ordain: the matter of the holy orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopate is the laying-on of hands alone". (Pope Pius XII 1947, #3).

8. Socialization of the Ordinand

The socialization of those preparing for ordination has been constructed in varied ways over time. From the earliest times, the church sought to admit to official ministry only those who had demonstrated an appropriate level of spiritual and human development. Descriptions of such criteria appear in biblical books like The First Letter of Paul to Timothy.

The seminary model employed by modern churches has its roots in legislation passed in the 16th century at the Council of Trent (Ellis 1965). The institution of the seminary established a region in which skills necessary for the performance of the clergy role may be acquired and practiced (Goffman 1959).

Fichter (1961) described the clergy role as a profession. Such professional work cannot be routinized, requires specialized knowledge and competence, is focused on assisting people and is highly valued in the culture. The training program of religious professionals is formation for a way of life and membership in a culture. Its performance must communicate adherence to high standards that demonstrate respect for the recipients of the service as well as decorum: moral standards appropriate to the exercise of fiduciary responsibility (Goffman 1959).

This socialization normally consists of an extensive period of seminary formation, which generally includes completion of a degree in theology, such as the Master of Divinity, as well as a period of formation focused on human and spiritual growth, and the acquisition of pastoral competencies. It usually involves a period of residency in a seminary. Here, candidates for ordination are taught by and often live with a theological faculty, many of whom are ordained themselves. In many seminaries, the Liturgy of Hours and the Eucharist are celebrated daily, and regular spiritual direction and celebration of the sacrament of penance are provided as essential parts of the seminary program.

Social learning theory—which postulates that all behaviors are learned and that most human behavior is learned through the observation of models—offers a theoretical model to understand the structure of seminary formation programs. When a high level of respect exists between a learner and a model, the model's impact is increased (Bandura 1977). Familiarity is a consequence of proximity and a prerequisite to the learning of preferences and desires. It is likely for individuals to learn from those with whom they regularly associate and for whom they feel trust and admiration.

The regular association with the faculty as well as with those who are ordained and fellow candidates for ordination contributes to the formation of a distinct social network. Churches, like all formal organizations, contain social networks, and seminaries are a locus for their construction. Social networks are primary bases for the development of social identity, which conveys a sense of personal belonging and normative expectations associated with one's position. Social networks are frequently formed on the basis of homophily, which means that people with like characteristics tend to connect to one another. These can be personal characteristics or social locations in organizations (Kadushin 2012).

Finke and Dougherty (2002) claim that time spent in the seminary contributes to the formation of a distinct spirituality, professional identity and level of commitment that distinguishes the clergy from the laity. Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe this secondary socialization as the internalization of an institution-based subworld. The seminary seeks to create an environment that forms individuals who are capable and ready to embrace the public role of professional minister. Fichter (1961) noted similarity between the high levels of organizational control exerted by the church on the training of clergy and the control exercised by the military in training its members.

A potential danger that can result from this type of training is that it has the potential to limit the capacity of some of the ordained to effectively relate to those outside of clerical social networks. This is known as clericalism, which establishes social distinctions between officials and members in religious organizations and constructs the former as superior and the latter as subordinate (Pogorelec 2015). In churches, many social networks collaborate, but they can also work in opposition. Sexual abuse scandals and their cover-ups are an example of social networks protecting the interests of insiders and working against those on the outside, impeding the ability of a church to exercise its normative mission (Pogorelec 2020).

Concerns about the limiting aspects of specialized socialization and its potential to socially construct closed networks have been a longstanding concern. From a phenomenological perspective, Hegy (2019, p. 13) asserts that "clergy and laity often live in different life-worlds and may talk past one another". Pope Pius XII expressed his concerns about this

matter more than a decade before Vatican II: “it is necessary to diminish gradually and with due prudence the separation between the people and the future priest in order that when he receives Holy Orders and begins his ministry, he will not feel himself disoriented—a thing that would not only be harmful to his soul but also injure the efficacy of his work” (Fichter 1961, p. 95). The construction of seminary pastoral programs and a year of internship to support ongoing involvement with parishes are structures meant to address this concern.

Different types of seminary organizations provide formation for ministry. One type is a total institution that segregates candidates for ordination and conducts most aspects of the formation program within the institution. Students in these organizations tend to be exclusively male. A second type is a mixed institution that hosts a variety of programs that may include an ordination track, formation for lay ministry and or advanced theological degrees. Students in these institutions may be male and female, married and single. Anderson and Bellitto (2019) suggest that the latter type of institution would be less likely to facilitate the transmission clericalism. Empirical research on this proposition is needed.

9. Ordination and Theology

Ordination is a public act that transforms the individual’s perceptions of self and the religious community’s perceptions of that individual. An ordained person is perceived as endowed with certain spiritual powers, and incorporated into a college of ministers with like powers. Membership in such a group erects boundaries between members and nonmembers. It confers varying levels of authority over others in the church. It also creates an official and binding relationship of obedience to one’s ecclesiastical superior. In both the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church, the ritual of ordination contains a promise of obedience, for deacons and priests to their bishops, and for bishops in the Roman Catholic Church to the Pope. In the Episcopal Church, a bishop makes a promise to act collegially with the other bishops.

The acceptance of ordination implies acceptance of certain responsibilities such as pastoral action, teaching and worship. Bernard Cooke (1976) asserts that the ordained person makes Christ, who is already present in the community and world, sacramentally visible. Through ordination, one becomes part of a collegium responsible for liturgical leadership and for witness to the apostolic faith. The pastoral leadership of bishops and presbyters is essential and should focus on fostering and coordinating gifts and talents of others. Ordained ministry must operate in collaboration with a whole range of other ministries.

The theology of ordination expresses the spiritual dimensions of this transformation. Since at least the twelfth century, ordination has been said to confer spiritual power and impart a sacramental character: an indelible mark imprinted on the soul. From a theological perspective, it is said to construct a new relationship with Christ, for the ordained person now acts “*in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Christ the head of the Church”. From this perspective ordained ministry was perceived not only as functional but also as ontological: it reconstructs the identity and status of the ordained (Congar 1967; Galot 1985).

Karl Rahner (1968) held that Christ calls and gives a mandate to ordained ministers, with the sacrament conferring office, communicating the powers required to exercise it, and the personal grace without which its exercise will be fruitless. For Rahner, the spiritual ontology of ecclesial office must be accompanied by a complementary life. He drew a link between the quality of the person, competence and spirituality, saying that an ordained minister must have an experience of God as well as the capacity to lead others to such an experience. One cannot preach effectively unless one strives to live what one preaches.

Ordination also affects the individual’s structural relationship with the church. The Vatican II documents stress that the episcopate and the presbyterate are collective realities. Vatican II affirmed that the episcopate is the fullness of priesthood, and that presbyters are members of an order meant to cooperate with the bishop in the breadth of his responsibility for the church. Likewise, the ministry of both implies responsibility for pastoral leadership in and to the church such as preaching, teaching and liturgical and ritual functions.

10. Models of Priestly Ministry

Hoge and Wenger (2003) have studied Roman Catholic priests and proposed two models of how priests of different age cohorts construct the ministry. One model, the “cultic model”, is based on a prototype suggested by theologian James Bacik (1999). Rooted in a Tridentine theology, this model primarily views a priest as one who provides the sacraments, lives a distinctive lifestyle constituted by celibacy, adheres to a prescribed prayer form (the Liturgy of Hours), lives in a rectory, and wears clerical garb. The main task of the priest in this model was to celebrate the sacraments and insure good order in the parish. A clear personal and social identity was attached to this model. Priests were members of a plainly defined subculture, and the boundaries drawn between priests and the laity were clear. Regular ceremonial occasions provided opportunities for priests to pray in public and then repair to a back region where they could recreate together. A weekly day off and vacations were also spent in a back region with a circle of one’s closest priest-friends. Relationships with the laity were supposed to be formal (Goffman 1959).

The second model is called the servant leader model. Based on the work of Robert Schwartz, in his book *Servant Leaders of the People of God* (Schwartz 1989), and embedded in the spirit of Vatican II, this model stresses the rootedness of ordained ministry in the common priesthood and the importance of collaboration with the laity. However, Schwartz also points out that the documents of Vatican II uphold an ontological distinction between the ordained and the laity and construct a strong theological bond between priests and the bishop.

Hoge and Wenger (2003) report differences between cohorts of priests in their findings. They claim that priests formed in the ethos of Vatican II, ordained mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, have adopted the servant-leader model. On the other hand, starting in the 1980s, they say that younger priests are tending to adopt a cultic model.

As Bleichner (2004) indicated, Vatican II enlarged the scope of the priesthood by modeling it on the offices of prophet, priest and king. While Hoge and Wenger have suggested that younger priests have returned to a pre-Vatican II model, I would suggest that later cohorts are selectively emphasizing the priestly dimension of the Vatican II theology by their focus on liturgical ministry and their penchant for stronger lines of demarcation from the laity, and generally giving less emphasis to the prophetic dimension. Earlier post-Vatican II cohorts did just the opposite by tending to stress the prophetic over the priestly.

While *Presbyterorum Ordinis* stressed the relationship of ordained ministry to the priesthood of the faithful and consciously adopted the less sacral term of presbyter in its discussion, subsequent social forces such as the impact of secularism in Europe were seen as a threat to priestly identity. The 1971 Synod of Bishops addressed the topic of priesthood and produced a document, *On Ministerial Priesthood*, that readopted some of the more sacral language of priesthood in its discussion (Donovan 1992).

Pope St. John Paul II (1978–2005) adopted a prophetic role and encouraged priests to be his followers rather than to make their own applications of a prophetic priesthood. Formed in a Polish Church that stood in opposition to Nazi and communist governments, he saw strong centralized ecclesial identity as a force for good in the world, and saw strong priestly identity as essential to bolster it. In his worldview, papal authority was meant to expound the prophetic vision, and others were called to follow. He believed this model that enabled the Catholic Church to be a force in Poland was applicable to the entire church. He also strengthened a cultic orientation toward the priesthood.

A traditional leader in the Weberian sense, Pope John Paul II believed that what he perceived as a post conciliar leveling of the distinction between the clergy and laity would be harmful to the church. Concerned about numbers of priests, their ages and quality, he viewed the influence of secularization and being overly concerned about temporal matters to undermine priestly identity. In addition, a charismatic leader who attracted the affection of many young people, Pope John Paul II was a towering figure who set forth a conservative vision of the priestly ideal and attracted many young men to it. Bleichner (2004) said that

his election ushered in a new period that tightened rules and ended discussion about changes in the priesthood, even leading to a slight increase in seminary enrollment. By and large, however, only men whose ecclesiological views matched his applied.

Pope Francis, elected in 2013, is the first pope from Latin America and a Jesuit who places social ministry at the center of priestly ministry. It is still too early to tell how this will affect the construction of priestly ministry over time.

In his discussion of paradigm shifts, Kuhn (1970) discusses an in between time after a new paradigm has challenged an older one, and both coexist in tension while it is unclear which will prevail. Indeed, historical and social forces are continuing to interact, and the form of priestly ministry in this present time remains under construction.

11. Relationship between the Ordained and the Faithful

We will now consider the relationship between the baptized who share in the common priesthood of Christ and the ordained who additionally participate in the hierarchical priesthood. The sacrament of Holy Orders establishes a structure of leadership for the church community and provides ministers to sustain the sacramental system. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says priests represent Christ—Head of the Church before the assembly of the faithful—but they also act in the name of the whole church when offering the Eucharist sacrifice (#1552). However, this does not mean priests are delegates of the community (#1553).

Rahner (1968) stressed that those who are ordained are called from the midst of the community; the Priesthood of Christ is shared by all the faithful, not just the ordained. Acknowledging the social conditions of Western society where churches are in the category of voluntary associations, he added that the authority of the ordained person depends not so much on the fact of office as on the free response of the community, and therefore to a great extent on the office holder's own spiritual gifts and personal authority.

Distinctively, Tavard (1983) speaks of the ordained person as an elder who is a trusted representative of community and should be esthetically acceptable to them. The acceptance of the ordained by the lay faithful receives less emphasis in the Catholic tradition but is stronger in Protestantism. Jackson Carroll (2006) notes that clergy are on firmer ground when they are trusted by the laity and are perceived as having personal authority. He refers to this conferral of credibility from the bottom up as "a kind of 'second ordination.'"

The Second Vatican Council's call for increased participation by the laity was greeted with great enthusiasm in North America with its highly educated laity. Immediately after the Council, the language of ministry, with its roots in the New Testament term diakonia, overshadowed the language of priesthood. Lay involvement was a key factor in the liturgical renewal. Lay people sought theological education, and some institutions that once called themselves seminaries described themselves more generally as schools preparing people for ministry, not exclusively for the priesthood. Team ministry developed and the laity and priests worked together side by side.

Many in the laity no longer perceived priests as standing on pedestals and ceased to define respect as distance and formality. The laity respected priests for their competence, not merely for their roles. This led to questions about what is distinctive about ordained ministry. Can ordained ministry be treated in isolation or only in relation to other forms of ministry? Should its focus be sacramental or leadership or the coordination of all the ministries in the community?

Some theologians, such as Bernard Cooke, saw a pronounced divide between the ordained and the laity as a serious deviation from the authentic ideal of the early Christian community that needed to be overcome for the church to effectively respond to the needs of the modern world. According to Cooke (1976) the existence of a clerical group endowed with sacred power through ordination and placed over against a passive laity did not do justice to the New Testament, nor did it offer hope for the renewal that the contemporary situation of the church and world demanded. Effective leadership required collaboration between the ordained and the laity. The meaning of the universal priesthood of all believers,

according to Tavad, calls everyone to contribute to ecclesial ministry in some way. The centrality of sacraments presupposes the communal or social dimension of the church.

Researchers indicate that the Catholic laity want to be active participants in the life of the church and do not see it as the domain of the ordained. A national survey of Catholics (D'Antonio et al. 2001) documents that a majority of the laity favor more democratic decision making in the Church. This includes decisions about finances in the parish, having a say in who is selected as their parish priest, and on the categories of persons the church can ordain.

The faithful value the ministry of the ordained, and for that reason they want the current shortage of priests in the Catholic Church to be meaningfully addressed. They do realize that there are administrative tasks in the parish that could be delegated to the laity. The 2001 national survey documents an increasing acceptance of lay parish administrators. However, few Catholics approved of having Mass in their parishes less than once a week. Likewise, a reduction of the availability of priests to minister to the sick and dying was not acceptable.

The national survey also showed that lay Catholics are more concerned about having an adequate number of priests and do not value what they perceive as unnecessary limitations on who can receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Seventy one percent indicated they would accept the ordination of married men, and 77 percent said they would accept the return to active ministry of priests who married. There is also increasing acceptance for the ordination of women.

In January 2002, a major scandal concerning the abuse of minors by some members of the clergy and its systematic cover-up by some members of the hierarchy became public. It gained national attention and shattered the credibility of the clergy and hierarchy. In the past, many members of the clergy were treated as traditional leaders beyond reproach. They possessed authority and taught the strictest of sexual ethics; sex outside of marriage and homosexuality were condemned. The scandal led many faithful lay Catholics to feel that they had been taken for fools. The attitudes of many lay Catholics toward the clergy shifted from respect to suspicion. Subsequent scandals have only exacerbated this disposition. Today, many doubt the remorse of the hierarchy. Ordained ministers have joined the ranks of other public figures whose fall from grace is not unexpected. These scandals have had consequences and have led to decreased participation by later cohorts.

12. Who Can Receive Holy Orders?

Since the nineteenth century, there has been controversy about the level of women's participation in churches in the U.S., but in most religious bodies, it was almost taken for granted that men would be the recipients of ordination. From a structural functionalist perspective, it was assumed and men were assigned to instrumental tasks which took place in the public realm, while women were assigned to expressive tasks which took place in the domestic realm. Developments in modern thought challenged these assumptions. According to Misra and Panigrahi (1995), between 1977 and 1993, both women and men in the U.S. have showed a substantial increase in pro-feminist sentiments. With the organization of the women's movement, resistance to the social structures that perpetuated inequality took institutional form.

Today in the industrialized Western nations, many believe that full membership in an organization requires individuals and members of minority groups to have access to the highest levels of leadership (Kanter 1977). The exclusion of a class of persons from opportunities to accede to a position of authority is considered discriminatory (Ruane and Cerulo 1997; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Modern thought on the role of women in society has impacted the members of all churches, challenging forms of social organization and making controversial, previously-taken-for-granted assumptions about the privileged status of men. These developments have framed the way North Americans think about the admission of women to Holy Orders, making it an issue of gender equality (Chaves 1991). They

have also affected the way American Catholics view the Vatican's teaching on women's ordination.

The Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church model two different responses to these social changes. In the Episcopal Church, women were ordained deacons in 1970 and priests in 1976; however, implementation was the choice of particular dioceses. In the 1990s, the value of the theological position that women should not be ordained was affirmed, yet ultimately in 1997 the canons regarding the ordination, licensing and deployment of women were deemed mandatory, and noncompliant dioceses were told to report on their progress toward full implementation (Armentrout and Slocum 2000). Subsequently, the ordination of openly homosexual persons as priests and bishops has stirred further controversy in the Episcopal Church in the U.S.

The Roman Catholic Church has taken a conservative approach to the ordination of women that was strongly underscored during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) says that only a baptized man (*vir*) validly receives sacramental ordination. The Catechism offers this reason: "The Lord Jesus chose men (*vir*) to form the college of the twelve apostles and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry . . . The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible" (#1577).

This statement clearly reflects the position taken by both Pope John Paul II and his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, who in the 1977 *Vatican Declaration on Women in the Ministerial Priesthood* wrote this: "The Church in fidelity to the example of the Lord does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination" (Pope Paul VI 1977, *Origins* 6, p. 517). In 1994, Pope John Paul II more forcefully reiterated this position: "I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful" (Pope John Paul II 1994, *Origins* 24, p. 49). Subsequent popes have followed this line.

These papal statements were a response to those who advocated for, or were at least open to, the ordination of women. Following the Council, theologians as prominent as Karl Rahner wrote in favor of extending the pale of ordained ministry, saying that all people who exercise leadership in an official way with a stable church community should be ordained regardless of sex or marital status. Pope Paul VI's statement was issued shortly after the Episcopal Church elected to ordain women priests. In the Vatican II era, theologians in the Roman Catholic Church raised this issue as a matter for discussion. Osborne's 1988 volume on the history of the ordained ministry suggested from a scriptural perspective the question of the ordination of women was unanswerable. What can be known from the New Testament leaves the question open-ended. (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1976).

In the United States, explanations of the Vatican's teaching have stressed that it is not meant to challenge general assumptions about women's equal status but that it is *sui generis*. The then National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine issued a clarification on the 1994 papal text:

The church has clearly affirmed the equal dignity of woman and men, and the equality of baptized women with baptized men. Ordination to the ministerial priesthood, however, is a distinct gift. It is not essential for salvation and is given not for one's own salvation, but for the service of God and of the church. In accepting and handing on this gift, the church is bound by fidelity to the example of Christ to reserve ordination to males who have experienced this call (NCCB Committee on Doctrine 1998, *Origins* 28, p. 349).

The Catholic Church also requires the discipline of celibacy for most of its ordained ministers. The Catechism says this: "all the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, with the exception of permanent deacons, are normally chosen from among men of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain celibate" (#1579). One notable exception to this is ministers from other Christian denominations who want to become Catholic and seek to continue their ministries. These men are provisionally ordained before they are allowed to commence ministry in the Catholic Church.

While increasing numbers of women have entered seminaries seeking ordination in Protestant churches, the roles they have received are in many cases subordinate to those of male clergy. Lummis and Nesbit (2000) have extensively studied women clergy across denominations and have found that they are more likely to remain in rural pastorates or as assistants in larger congregations. It is less common for them to accede to a senior pastorate. Males may also undermine up and coming women by sabotaging them or altering rules and structures to limit them. In general, opportunities for clergy women have not equaled those of men. In the Episcopal church, ordained women have created their own informal structures to empower women (Nesbitt 2019).

13. Conclusions

The sacrament of Holy Orders is a ritual and a lived reality embedded in particular communities of faith and expressed through particular ministerial roles and lifestyle. We have seen that this sacrament has been constructed and reconstructed over time. It has been subject to what Max Weber described as the process of rationalization with its development from diverse and less formal expressions, focused on the leadership needs of a particular community, to firmly fixed offices constructing formal relationships between the office holder and community. Throughout history, social forces within and outside the church have influenced the lived reality of Holy Orders. Such forces have impinged on the relationship between the Eastern and Western churches and on the formation of the churches that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. They can also be seen to influence the varying forms that the bond between bishops, priests and deacons have taken, as well as the relationships of ordained ministers with the laity. Modern social attitudes about inclusion have contributed to controversies about who should be admitted to this sacrament. Even attempts to reclaim earlier traditions take place in a modern context, and the issues of time and place will continue to influence development of the lived reality of this sacrament.

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