

**THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**  
**REGARDING THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS:**  
**WHAT MAKES THIS MINISTRY UNIQUE?**

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## INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago I was asked to give a course to diaconal candidates on theological issues regarding the diaconate. I rapidly discovered that there was not a great deal of material that could be given to these candidates that would put some of these topics together in a simple format. In addition, I had in mind my own twenty-three years of experience as a deacon and a theology teacher wherein I experienced challenges to the diaconate and was often put in a position where I tried to explain and defend the reason for and the special role of the deacon. The I had to place the diaconate within the various ministries, both ordained and lay, in the Church. This led to my desire to write a few essays that I could actually use in deacon formation classes. As a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy, I thought that this would be a worthwhile project for partial fulfillment of this degree. In addition, given the nature of the Graduate Theological Foundation which seeks to unite pastoral and other branches of theology, I believed that it would be worthwhile to offer the theological background for such a course as well as pastoral implications.

At the heart of what I wish to propose is the conviction that whatever the diaconate may have in common with other ordained ministries and lay ministries, the office of deacon is unique. I use the term, “unique” with all the caution of Dr. John Macquairre, who in a lecture complained that Americans are careless with that expression. “Unique” means that it is truly distinct in character. That it has its own special identity. This is not to deny there are fundamental similarities. Yet, this study wishes to examine what, in the end, gives the diaconate its special identity. It is this that I would want to leave to students for the diaconate and those interested in this holy order.

The course I have in mind is an actual series of lectures of about twelve sessions that I have given in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn (as well as other dioceses.) The topics try to cover a range of themes. These include a brief history of the sacrament of orders specifically as it relates to the diaconate, the sacramentality of the diaconate. The diaconate as it relates to lay ministry, the deacon's ministry to the sick and the implications of the description of the diaconate as being "at a lower level of the hierarchy" as found in "Lumen Gentium" are explored. Women and the diaconate and contributions from other traditions along with the Trinitarian implications of the diaconate are some of the speculative concerns. Most of these have been chosen as a reaction to specific concerns. The historical focus will look at what happened to the sacrament of orders, which can explain the demise of the diaconate in the West. The sacramentality issue responds to several challenges as to whether the diaconate has its own proper "character" and the implications of this. The chapter on lay ministry is an attempt to show a proper respect for lay ministry and the lay vocation but also to respond to those who argue that we do not need deacons since "lay people can do the same thing." The chapter of the deacon's ministry to the sick looks at the question of whether deacons can anoint the sick and also the importance of "Viaticum." In addition, it will reflect on the deacon's ministry to the sick. We will look at the phrase, "at a lower level of the hierarchy" found in "Lumen Gentium" when it describes the order of deacon and asks if this is an accurate description of this ministry and what are some positive insights that can be drawn from this. Important contributions from both the Christian East and Reformed traditions are explored. This will further refine both the theological and pastoral and theological implications. The possibility and the history of women serving in diaconal ministry is examined with some suggestions for the future. Pastoral concerns will examine the deacon's role in the area of peace and justice. Not only papal documents but the

recent studies of French philosopher, Rene Girard and American Gil Bailie and what they have to say regarding violence will receive attention. We will look at the diaconate in light of the central mystery of Christian faith, the Trinity. The CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH has provided wonderful insights locating the sacraments within the Mystery of the Trinity. Therefore, we will attempt to refine what this might mean for the diaconate. Finally, we take a brief look at five “models” of diaconal spirituality reflected in five deacon saints. Of course, all of this has to be seen within the context of a “sacramental” church.”

The theological speculation of Johann Adam Mohler of the Tubingen School of the early nineteenth century and his theme of “ongoing Incarnation” has lead to a rich theology of the Church. From Jesuit theologian. Otto Semmelroth to the writings of Schillebeeckx and Rahner and finally to Vatican II, there has emerged a clear teaching that not only is the Church part of the Mystery of revelation, but the Church itself as the “fundamental sacrament.” The diaconate must be understood within this light. (Himes: ONGOING INCARNATION: JOHANN ADAM MOEHLER AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN ECCLESIOLOGY.) The diaconate cannot simply be understood as an expression of pragmatic service but a part of the very mystery of the Church.

Certainly, to many living in our post-modern world, the ministry of the Church, including the diaconate, can seen quite irrelevant. Pope Benedict XVI, in his earlier years as a theologian, was impressed by the insights of the Danish philosopher/theologian, Soren Kierkegaard. The then, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in his book, INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY, making use of Kierkegaard, writes story of the clown and the burning village (p 15). It describes a clown wearing his costume who discovers that the circus is on fire and is threatening the safety of the local village. He runs into the town, but no one pays attention. After all, he is only a clown. He

can't be taken seriously (until the village is destroyed). Such is the situation of the minister, the theologian, the religious educator of today. While the diaconate is certainly part of the mystery of the Church, it is hoped that this study may contribute to making it a more credible voice for the Church whose message can appear to be so "foolish" to contemporary ears.

We live in a time with a new form of atheism. The older, more intellectual challenges to faith are no longer speaking to people. Much less do either the classical or contemporary expressions of apologetics have much of an audience. This is a new experience for Christianity where "God is missing and not missed." (Gallagher, *WHAT ARE THEY SAYING ABOUT UNBELIEF?*, p. 5.) What does speak to people is not a "what" but a "who." Cardinal Avery Dulles writes that a new form of apologetics is required for the post-modern age. This apologetics takes expression in models of faith. Witnesses speak louder than words. ("The Rebirth of Apologetics." p. 22.)

This certainly enhances the "service" character of the diaconate (which has been included in this work). Service is at the heart of the diaconate. However, while there might indeed be a real problem of deacons not performing works of service, charity and justice, there is certainly a general acceptance that these are what the diaconate is about. The challenges come from more theological concerns. Yet, none of these are of ultimate meaning unless the deacon is a person of service and a minister of justice.

No theological or pastoral evaluation of the diaconate can take place within the Catholic tradition without incorporating the recent documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy. Issuing forth from their plenary session in 1995 were two key documents, "Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons" and "Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacon" respectively. While these norms will

be examined in greater detail in the body of this study, one can say at the outset that they are the most authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church in recent years. Of course “Lumen Gentium” of Vatican II which restored the permanent diaconate to the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church (the Eastern Churches never really lost the permanent diaconate) is the most significant.. Important too was the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, “Issued ‘Motu Proprio’ Laying Down certain Norms regarding the Holy Order of Deacons” in 1972 which provided guidelines for the restoration of the diaconate and contained some positive reflections on the diaconate in the early Church. Also, the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH and the 1983 CODE OF CANON LAW in Book IV Title VI are critical documents of the Catholic Church for our purposes. These two documents have given extensive treatment of the diaconate. Individual bishops and national conferences of bishops, including those of the United States, has just issued its own DIRECTORY.

The two Roman documents offer a concise summary of Church teaching on the theological, canonical and ministerial nature of the diaconate as well as guidelines for the spiritual formation of a deacon and his unique role in the Church community. These norms are guidelines that will offer a frame of reference.

Certainly, however, we cannot ignore the most recent document issued by the United States conference of Bishops, the NATIONAL DIRECTORY FOR THE FORMATION AND LIFE OF PERMANT DEACONS IN THE UNITED STATES (2005). This formidable document offers extensive guidelines for the establishment and evaluation of permanent deacon programs. It also has an excellent presentation of the doctrinal elements of the deacon and the relation of the deacon to other ordained ministers and to lay people and religious. This Document will be reflected in this study.

We must be cognizant that we live in difficult times where the church has not been seen in a favorable light. The scandal of clergy abuse makes efforts to deepen respect for the dignity of the office of deacon (who are part of the clergy for the Catholic Church) more difficult to say the least. Challenges from post-modernism and the absence of agreed upon “frameworks” (in the language of Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor,) places all attempts to arrive at truth questionable. Indeed, Taylor would want to restore the religious dimension of culture as a corrective to a subjective emphasis on self-fulfillment. (Gallagher. P. 74). Nonetheless, as John Paul II has emphasized in “Fides et Ratio,” the mind can arrive at truth. It is hoped that in this study we will find some clear truth regarding the theology of the diaconate and its unique place in the ministry of the Church.

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**CHAPTER ONE**  
**THE DEACON:**  
**A SACRAMENTAL MINISTER**  
**IN A**  
**SACRAMENTAL CHURCH**

Before looking at specific issues and questions regarding the ministry of deacons it is necessary to reflect on the nature of ministry and what it means to minister in a sacramental Church. The deacon, as an ordained minister, shares in both the celebration of sacraments and is the recipient of a specific sacrament. The explosion of both new forms of ministry and the broadening of the term, plus newer developments of what it means to be a sacramental Church, makes it essential to look at this issue. The majority of deacons, and those who train deacons, come from less current understanding of what is being suggested by these terms. At the same time, it is crucial to remember that has been written on these topics and it is impossible to provide anything but an overview. This we will do so as to provide a context for the latter discussions that appear in this study.

Thomas O'Meara, *THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY*, (p. 136) lists six characteristics of ministry: (1) it is doing something, (2) for the advent of the kingdom, (3) in public, (4) on behalf of the Christian community, (5) which is a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination, (6) that has its own limits in the diversity of ministry. Essentially, O'Meara is saying that ministry is a service which is not just any form of service, but directed toward the building of the Kingdom of God. This takes public expression in the form of words and deeds, that nourishes and expands the community, which is a gift of the Spirit, and seen as one expression in the many gifts and charismas that the Spirit gives to the Church. O'Meara is concerned with expanding the traditional view of ministry that was often something done only by the clergy (read presbyter and bishop) to a broader view. Yet, he wants to avoid labeling any good action of honest work or employment as "ministry." In other words, if everything is ministry then nothing is ministry.

Richard McBrien in his little work, *"MINISTRY: A THEOLOGICAL PASTORAL HANDBOOK*, as his own understanding of ministry. In fact, he offers four possibilities: (1) any

service done for another human being, (2) service provided by the helping professions, (3) any general service done in Christ and because of Christ, (4) any service done in the name of the Church in order to help the Church fulfill its mission. (p. 11-12) McBrien sees every ministry grounded in the gracious action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit bestows charisms that we are called to use and develop. (p. 13) Primarily, what McBrien has in mind when discussing ministry, is the category of those who have a ministry designated by the Church in order to help the Church fulfill its mission. While “Church” admits many different interpretations (local, parish, diocesan, universal) McBrien is speaking about the entire community of baptized persons who by word, worship and service, acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ. (p. 15)

McBrien stresses that the Church is called and “sent.”. The church by its nature is “missionary.” Like Christ, the Church receives a mission to establish the Kingdom of God. Ministry is exercised in all those areas (word, worship and service) with different ministries focused on specifics of the above. The work of the Church is not limited to only the sacraments and liturgy. “Diakonia” is a major service that helps the sick, poor, handicapped, oppressed, etc. (which ought to be at the heart of diaconal ministry.) Whatever ministry the Church performs, it always pertains to the Kingdom of God. McBrien describes the Kingdom of God as the redemptive presence of God active the world. (p. 19) The Kingdom is primarily the work of God, but God calls the people to share in the building of Kingdom.

Certainly, there has been a long development in both the understanding and expression of ministry. In a later chapter, we will look briefly at some historical development, especially in terms of the sacrament of orders. Certainly, we cannot provide a historical survey here except in a minimal way. McBrien reminds that a number of scholars have discovered three different phases within the New Testament. There are: (1) pre-Easter ministry which was exclusively the

ministry of Jesus, (2) first generation ministry that was both charismatic and structured, (3) second generation Christianity which had patterns that both intermingled and became more divergent at the same time. In any case, what is clear that there was considerable variety. (p. 30)

The term “hierus” (priest) is only ascribed to Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews in the sense of one who offers sacrifice. All Christians were called “priests” in 2 Peter 2-9 in the sense that all are among the elect and are God’s holy people.

In the post-Biblical Church, there still exists diversity. In Antioch, Ignatius (p. 108) shows an instance of a single bishop along with his presbyters and deacons. At the same time in Rome, the presbyters are the leaders, and in the “Letter of Polycarp to the Christians of Philippi,” there is no mention of a single bishop. What seems to have been crucial is the pattern of civil government that the Church paralleled in its own structures. By the end of the fourth century, there were five great patriarchies (Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome).

Also, by the third century, there was clear development of ordination rites as found in Hippolytus. (p. 235) Bishops, presbyters and deacons were all ordained for a particular community with a prohibition against absolute ordination by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

While in the early Church there was no rigid distinction between clergy and laity, this began to significantly change during the fourth century. Ordained ministers start to have special privileges that belonged to the ranks of civil servants. How different this was from the earlier centuries of the Church where the focus was on baptism. All of the baptized of the primitive community were “set apart”. Rademacher (LAY MINISTRY: A THEOLOGICAL, PASTOR AND SPIRITUAL HANDBOOK) writes that for the New Testament Church, ministry was in no way a separate caste. All of the baptized are seen as having a vocation to some type of ministry or mission. (p. 46) Similarly, Keenan Osborne (MINISTRY: LAY MINISTRY IN THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH) writes there is a struggle in these early communities to stress equality. Men and women are placed in parallel situations. (p. 111)

The division between clergy and laity becomes more pronounced during the Middle Ages. Canonists and theologians divided the Church into two separate states: the “ordo clericorum” and the “ordo laicorum.” (McBrien, p. 38) This division, according to McBrien, is the result of a neoplatonist influence in the Church. In addition, there was a distinction between the “power of ordination” and the “power of jurisdiction.” Orders gave the priest the power to celebrate the Eucharist and forgive sins. The power of jurisdiction has to do the authority over a diocese, parish or religious community. This distinction removed the man who was ordained from necessary connection to a particular community. Even without a call to a particular community, the priest still had the power to celebrate the Eucharist and forgive sins. Such an arrangement was unthinkable in the early Church. This led to ordination as a status symbol without any necessary intention of serving a particular community. (This theme is treated in a later chapter.).

The Council of Trent (1545) in response to the Reformation emphasized the priesthood of the ordained over the priesthood of the people of God. They saw the church as pyramidal structure of pope, bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity. This view went right into the twentieth century. In the writings of Pius X, XI and XII, we see the same focus. (McBrien, p. 41) Everything was seen as coming from above. “Ministry” was a Protestant expression and the term “minister” was the clerical title of a Protestant pastor.

Vatican II tried to restore the notion of “ministry” as “service.” “Lumen Gentium” states that there are a “variety of ministers” in the Church. (par. 18) The whole Church is seen as the “People of God”. All share in the threefold ministry (“tria munera”) of Jesus as priest,

prophet and king. (par. 30 and 31) Whatever “power” a minister has, it is always in service of the people of God. In the “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity”, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ by baptism. (par. 3) However, “Lumen Gentium” still insists that the ordained priesthood differs in “essence” and not merely “degree” from the priesthood of the people of God. (par. 10) The faithful exercise their priesthood by offering the Eucharist, in receiving the other sacraments, offering prayer, self-denial and works of charity. Nevertheless, there was an emphasis on ministry as service. What needs to be also made clear is that the bishops at Vatican II went to great length to state that all of the baptized, confirmed and Eucharistic Christians are “christifideles”. The bishops did not use the term “lay” to describe this common matrix of Gospel discipleship. (Osborne, MINISTRY, p. 593) The documents of Vatican II used the term “tria munera” to describe every form of mission and ministry that flows from the sacraments of initiation. The significance of baptism is what needs to carefully be examined. If all ministry flows first from the sacrament of baptism, we need to rediscover the primacy of baptism. Following this and very much included is the implication and the nature of the Church as a “sacramental” reality. It is only in this context that the meaning of baptism as a sacrament and Holy Orders as one of the sacraments make sense.

Leonard Boff’s little book, SACRAMENTS OF LIFE: LIFE OF THE SACRAMENTS, provides a helpful context to understand that sacramental nature of the Church. Boff essentially argues that the sacramental nature of the Church only be appreciated in a much larger context of a “sacramental world.” (One cannot help but recall that this is also Rahner’s theology of “sacrament” but which the liturgy of the Church” reflects the “liturgy of the world” (seen in Shelly’s work cited in the bibliography.) In Boff’s book, ordinary things such as coffee mugs, cigarette butts, and homemade bread become “sacramental” when they make present and recall

significant people and events in our lives. In a very moving chapter, Boff describes a former school teacher who, for Boff, was a “sacrament” of God’s love and compassion. Boff then discusses Christ as the “sacrament of sacraments” of God’s presence (making use of Schillebeeckx’s CHRIST: THE SACRAMENT OF ENCOUNTER WITH GOD.)

Perhaps, one excellent way to further explore this “sacramental” dimension to the Church and its ministers is by taking a look again at Rademacher (LAY MINISTRY). In chapter seven of this work, the author discusses the “sacrament of the human.” and the sacredness of matter. Rademacher traces the history of “dualism” that has infested Western thought as a result of the influence of the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. This religion which divided reality into two spheres, matter which is evil and spirit which is good, found its way into Christianity by a series of heresies which still continue to plague the Church today. In the time of Augustine, the Church had to deal with the dualism of the Manichees while in the twelfth century, the same problem arose in the Albigensian heresy. Over the centuries, religions have divided the world into the sacred and secular. While as humans we need to have signs of the presence of the sacred, the Holy One refuses to be limited since the Holy One is the Source of both. This creates a schizoid spirituality and removes ministry from the arena of everyday life. In addition, ministry seems to flow from the divinity of Christ and not his humanity. There is a division between the “secular” and the “sanctuary.”

Yet, at the heart of Christian teaching is the doctrine of the Incarnation which declares that the gulf between heaven and earth, between the natural and supernatural and between the sacred and secular has been overcome. While there has been a tendency to dualism, at the same time Catholics have given a special place to both sacraments and to sacramental. “Matter” is able to reveal the sacred. Rademacher writes that we need to take seriously the reality of the

humanity of Jesus as being truly sacramental. (p. 131) He states: “To see humanity as truly sacramental, we need first to see the humanity of Christ as sacramental and salvific.” (p. 131) Rademacher continues that it is because of his humanity that Christ is able to save us and not in spite of it. Because of Christ’s continuing presence in the humanity of his baptized people, he can renew people through their ministry.

Perhaps the best defense to the notion that a sacramental, baptized Church is at the basis of all ministry is found in the writings of Keenan Osborne. Osborne has made extensive use of the earlier theology of Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx. Both of these men have emphasized that Jesus is the “primordial sacrament” and the Church is the “basic sacrament.” Osborne mentions that here we are in areas of “theological opinion.” (THE CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION, p. 81) Nevertheless, the bishops of Vatican II did describe the Church as a “kind of sacrament” in “Lumen Gentium”. Osborne argues that it is especially in his humanity that Jesus is “the baptized”, and that if Jesus is the primordial sacrament of baptism and that the Church is basic sacrament of baptism. (p. 81) While Osborne has developed this concept in a rather elaborate way, we can say in summary that what means to say that Jesus is “the baptized” is to that Jesus in his humanness in the anointing of his baptism indicates God’s presence in an immense way. It is the immersion of Jesus into God’s own self. Jesus properly speaking, is the only one who is “baptized”. (p. 81) Jesus is the original baptism. All of the “baptisms” are derivative from “the baptized.”

From this, it follows that the Church is not only the focus of the celebration of baptisms for people, but is radically a baptized Church. (p. 88) Just as the humanness of Jesus reveals the presence of God, the Church speaks of the real presence of the “baptized one.” Because all

Christians share in the presence of the one Lord, regardless of race, sex, etc., all share in the one baptism.

Osborne reflects on the “Lima Document of the World Council of Churches” which accepted that by baptism all Christians are united to Christ in a basic bond of unity and thus united to the Church and with each other. Osborne goes on to say that is so, the Church itself is the sacrament of the “baptized one.” By being the sacrament of the “baptized one” who makes the presence of God real by his humanity, the Church itself is the sacrament of this same presence.

Osborne elaborates that the sacraments celebrate what God has been doing and what God continues to do. (p. 92) In the baptismal event, we are celebrating in a serious way the “already” and the “not yet” aspect of salvation history. For Osborne this means human existence is always in a process of transformation, whether for better or worse. The individual joins a community to help him in this process. This creates a new set of relationships between the people of God and the individual human being. Through this community, God is present to the individual in a new way. The individual enters into a more loving relationship with Christ.

By the celebration of baptism, there is a transformation for the better. The individual deliberately joins the eschatological community of the Church who welcomes this person into their midst. At the same time the individual enters into a more loving relationship with Christ, and God is present to the individual in a more loving way. (Osborne, *THE CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION*, p. 93) The individual shares in a new way in the life of God, the Lord is present to the individual as “the baptized.”

In Osborne’s book, *SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES: A COMPANION TO THE NEW CATECHISM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS*, Osborne stresses that in baptism, “...all the

limitations of nature, culture, race and sex are transcended. However, there remains even in the Church, and not just society, a certain ‘racism’ ... and ‘sexism’.” (p. 58) Osborne sees a clear clash between what is taught about the baptismal equality of all people and the actual practice of the Church.

Certainly we would want to include here Rahner’s sacramental ecclesiology. For Rahner, a sacrament is present when an essential aspect of the Church becomes effectively present. (Rahner. P. 419). The Church is the sacrament that is the bearer of that “eschatologically victorious word” that brings about salvation. Individual sacraments take place against the background of the “liturgy of the world” (a “graced human life.”) ( Duffy, p. 203) What a beautiful image with which to see the diaconate (we will write on this later) .

The NATIONAL DIRECTORY teaches that the Sacraments of Initiation “...ground the common vocation of all Christ’s disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world.” (p. 14) The DIRECTORY emphasizes that communion and mission go together. All the baptized share in mission of the Church.

This initial chapter has attempted to provide an overall context of ministry and to see the locus of the sacramentality of the deacon (which will be explored in later essays) as being rooted in the “sacramentality” of the Church. The ministry of the deacon must be seen as within the wider context of ministry of both the ordained and non-ordained. In addition, the fundamental equality of all the baptized as sharing in the life of the “Baptized One” must be held in the forefront. We are a sacramental people who belong to a sacramental Church. Unless, the “sacramentality” of the deacon and his (perhaps some day also “her”) ministry is seen in this wider context, the whole understanding of his function role will be, to say the least, quite

truncated. To close with a quote from Keenan Osborne (SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES, p. 132), in describing how religious educators should present the sacrament of orders, he writes:

“I would suggest that religious education teaches should return again and again the mission and ministry of Jesus and the mission and ministry of the Church itself. It is only here that one finds the basis for all discussion of the threefold ministry (‘tria munera’), whether that of the priesthood of all believers or that of the ordained ministry.”

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**DIACONAL MINISTRY  
IN RELATIONSHIP TO  
LAY MINISTRY**

Several years ago, in an interesting discussions with some Canadian men and women engaged in ministry, a discussion ensued regarding the distinction between lay and ordained ministry. A particular aspect that kept emerging was the “commissioning” of lay people (women and men) by several Canadian Bishops as administrators of parishes, assigned to preach, baptize, perform weddings, conduct funerals and communion services. A couple of times one heard the comment that the local bishop decided to appoint lay people rather than ordain deacons. The argument was that “...since lay people could do everything a deacon could do, the bishop saw no reason to have deacons”. Attempts were made to explain something of the significance for “ordination” for the Catholic tradition, but it seemed to have little or no impact. It appears that this thinking has a considerable foothold not only in Canada but many other places in the world. One hears that in the continent of Africa, many bishops feel the same. Certainly, the situation in Latin America with its thousands of base communities would hold similar attitudes. Indeed, deacons are made to feel at times that they are impeding the development of “lay ministry” and are more of a nuisance than a help. To all of these this chapter would like to make something of a response. Its hope also is not to in any way diminish “lay ministry” but rather to encourage a more active lay role in the Church. However, it does wish to represent the teaching of the Church regarding the role of the deacon as it relates to lay ministry.

One can certainly remind of notions we have already examined. Among these we could turn again to Kenan Osborne’s *MINISTRY: LAY MINISTRY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH* and William Rademacher’s *LAY MINISTRY: A THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL HANDBOOK* (with a “Forward” by Joan Chittister). Both of these works contain fine summaries of the history of lay ministry and a solid appreciation of the fact that all “Christifideles” (Christ’s faithful) are called to discipleship. That all share an equal dignity of

membership in the Church and that the “tria munera”, the threefold task of sharing in the mission and work of Christ as “priest, prophet and king” apply as much to the non-ordained as to the ordained. However, there are some elements of both these popular works that are problematic.

First, there is a loss of appreciation of any significance of an “ontological” significance to the Sacrament of Orders. In addition, one senses an impression that when the priests die off that the Church will be forced to have other men and women in the community designated to preside over the Eucharist. Certainly one can applaud the effort to stress the common matrix that all members of the Church have as “Christifideles” (which is fully endorsed by this writer and who tries his best to regularly preach and teach this doctrine). On the other hand, one is left with the impression that ordination is of little value and certainly there is no significant difference between ordained and non-ordained ministries in the Church. Certainly there is no desire to endorse a renewed “clericalism” which has been a serious detriment to the Church. However, understanding the special significance of the sacrament of orders is not “clericalism”. In fact, in many ways, it seems that there has been a real effort to “clericalize the laity” which has been a subtle depreciation of the vocation of the lay person. Comments to the effect that the diaconate is a “wonderful opportunity for the layman” are terrible insult to the lay vocation which implies that the laity find their fulfillment in ordination.

In addition, more recent teachings on the part of the various dicasteries of the Vatican have raised significant questions about the term “minister” and how this might be distinguished as applied to the ordained and applied to the lay person. In the “Instruction on Certain questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest,” (August 15, 1997) a decree signed by all eight dicasteries of the Vatican, a number of clarifications were issued. It certainly affirmed the role of lay people in the work of

evangelization and sanctification. Yet, the document emphasized the distinction between the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood of all the baptized. It is further said that the non-ordained do not have a right to the tasks and functions reserved to the sacred ministry of the cleric.

In commenting on the instruction, Pope John Paul II stated that while the shortage of priests has led to the development of new roles for the non-ordained, there needs to be a clarification. This is done in the hope to eliminate the ambiguity about the tasks that belong properly to the ordained and those which do not. Further, the term “ministry” needs to be clarified. In applying the term “ministry” to the non-ordained, there is confusion in expressing the doctrine of the faith. Only by virtue of sacred ordination does ministry have a univocal meaning (Hitchcock, 5 of 5).

Further, in John Paul’s apostolic exhortation, “Christifideles Laici,” the Pope, par. #23, writes “...a person is not simply a minister by performing a task. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives a particular participation in Christ, shepherd and Head.”

In an address that John Paul gave in April of 1994 on the participation of the laity in the priestly ministry, the Pope recognizes that the term “ministry” is being used in reference to the laity in virtue of the priesthood of baptism. The Pope goes on to say that the language is confusing since the specific “ontological” effect that unites the ordained priest with Christ the shepherd is not received by those not ordained. John Paul teaches that the term “ministry” can only be permitted by the fact that lay people, by baptism, share in the one priesthood of Christ. Yet, it is only in the ordained priesthood that it receives its univocal meaning. (par. 4) This writer wants to argue here that this includes the ordained deacon. Lay people certainly share in the priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ordained priesthood is at the service of the “common”

priesthood. The role of the ordained is to enable the baptized to exercise their priesthood. Lay people certainly can do ministry. Yet, as “Christifideles Laici” teaches, this does not make lay people “ministers” in the absolute sense that the ordained are ministers. That is, the ordained are set apart by ordination to minister to the priestly people of God. Included are deacons who are ordained to “minister.” Baptism doesn’t confer a ministry as such. All the baptized are called to share in the apostolate. Not all lay people (indeed only a small minority) feel called to do ministry. Lay people are called to transform temporal realities, to make the world more just. Lay people are called to do those actions in business, economics, social action, politics, etc. that prepare for the establishment of God’s Kingdom. That is no second rate vocation.

Furthermore, there has even been confusion within the Magisterium regarding the term “ministry.” In the document, “Ministeria Quaedam”, issued by Pope Paul VI in 1972, the Pope changed what were the minor orders to “ministries” and that they were in the future to be conferred on “laymen.” While candidates for the diaconate and priesthood were required to receive them, men not destined for Orders could receive the “ministry” of lector and acolyte. They were not, however, to be conferred on women. This restriction meant, in practice, that at least in the United States, bishops only conferred these ministries on candidates for Orders. Both men and women were made “extraordinary ministers” of the Eucharist and acted as lectors without formal installation by the bishop. Yet, Paul VI used the term “ministries” while referring to installed (by bishops) to lectors and acolytes. This contributed to the notion that those who performed these ministries were “ministers.”

Of course, this Vatican and papal teaching issued by the eight dicasteries did not go unchallenged. To begin with, since the 1980’s, the U.S. bishops have been using the expression “lay ecclesial ministry.” This gradually led to the expression of “lay ecclesial minister.” Thus,

lay ecclesial ministers could be seen as having a call from God to bring their gifts and experiences. They are formed by the church and assume a public role. (In recent years this author has had the experience of teaching courses in moral theology to a group of lay ecclesial ministers in the Diocese of Brooklyn). The U.S.C.C. has issued a document in 1999, “Lay Ecclesial Ministry” which outlines the role and function of lay ecclesial ministers. Again, there is not always a clear distinction between ordained ministers and those of the laity who share in ministry.

Helen Hitchcock quotes a number of bishops who took serious issues with the Vatican document. Auxiliary Bishop Francis Murphy of Baltimore said the document was permeated by fear. Bishop (now Cardinal) Karl Lehmann (Germany) said the document promoted an atmosphere of distrust while Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany was “disappointed” because the document seemed to be dismissive of lay ministries. (Hitchcock, 2 of 5)

Nevertheless, Vatican correspondent Greg Burke reminds us that the concern of the document is the “laicization” of the clergy and the “clericalizing” of the laity. While both the ordained and the non-ordained share in the priesthood of Christ, the ordained ministry is established on the foundation of the apostles and is a sacred power for the service of the faithful. (Burke, 2 of 4) While the Vatican documents are primarily referring to the presbyter (priest), as will be argued, the deacon has his own unique share in the apostolic succession. This bestows on the deacon his own proper (along with the bishop and presbyter) share in the ordained ministry of teaching, sanctifying and service leadership (the latter being the deacon’s primary focus.)

We need to return to an expression used a bit earlier, that is the term “ontological.” The term “ontological” as used to describe the meaning of the sacramental character received in ordination (or for that matter, baptism and confirmation). It is much questioned and challenged

by many contemporary sacramental theologians (such as Schillebeeckx). This writer believes that this term deserves a renewed consideration. There is a profound metaphysical insight that is being expressed by insisting of the ontological significance of the sacramental character. A common interpretation of the sacramental “character” is that it simply means that the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Orders are not to be repeated. Yet, metaphysically what is being argued is that “action follow being.” The Thomistic insight, no matter how dated it might appear to some, is that the sacramental character enables one to do what that would not be able to do otherwise. The character that one receives at baptism, confirmation or Orders enables one to participate in different ways in the priesthood of Christ. In the teaching of Thomas, they (characters) are instrumental powers. (O’Neill, p. 94) The character is not immediately concerned with “giving grace.” Rather, its first function is to enable the person to share in the priestly work of Christ, whether in the common priesthood or the ordained priesthood. The deacon receives the sacramental character of Orders in his own unique participation in the Sacrament of Orders. This makes him “properly” a minister. He along with the presbyter and bishop is set apart to minister to God’s priestly people. He is no longer a layman no matter how much his lifestyle resembles the lay person. (It is good to remember that in the Eastern Catholic Church priests are often married and hold secular jobs to support their families.) Being married and holding secular employment is not what distinguishes clergy from laity. It is the reception of Orders and all that this implies. Yet, one can never get tired of reminding that the ordained exist for the service of those who exercise the priesthood of baptism.

While Schillebeeckx prefers a “functional” understanding, John Paul has repeatedly underscored this “ontological” understanding. In “Pastores dabo Vobis” the Pope writes that the priest acts “in persona Christi” (in #11). Regarding priests, this what enables the priest to act as

leader of the Eucharistic assembly. The priest is most certainly ordained to share in Christ's role as shepherd. But it is the sacramental character which empowers him to fulfill this. The Pope underscores this ontological appreciation of ordination. John Paul writes "...the specific ontological bond which [unites the ordained priest to] the priesthood of Christ the high priest and good shepherd." (par. 18) And in the same exhortation the Pope writes "...the priest shares in Christ's consecration and mission in a specific and authoritative way, through the sacrament of holy orders, by virtue of which he is configured in his being to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd." In the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, (par. 1570), it teaches that deacons too receive the sacramental character which cannot be removed and that they are configured to Christ the Servant. Hence, at least one of the most formal expressions of the Magisterium is insisting that all the ordained, including deacons, are touched by a special and permanent gift of the Holy Spirit, that forever changes them. The character does not simply "permit" them to engage in some ministerial functions. By virtue of the sacrament of orders, the ordinary Magisterium is clearly teaching that the ordained are ontologically changed in their very being. In a recent article entitled "in Persona Christi Capitis", we find, "We can use an analogy. Just as the human nature of Christ is personalized by its union with the person of the Word, so is the priest, by the virtue of his sacramental consecration, configured in his being to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd (6/7)."

While deacons are not ordained to be the shepherds of the community they also receive the sacramental character of orders and in their case are configured to Christ the Servant, and are touched in their very being by their ordination. One sometimes hears that deacons can do no more than lay persons (including lay Religious) and therefore receive no new sacramental power.

This is said because lay people “can do” everything that a deacon can do with permission. Lay people can, in the Code of Canon Law (1983) baptize, witness marriages, preach, give some blessings, expose (but not Bless) with the Eucharist and distribute the Eucharist. Of course the first response is that lay people can only do these ministries in an “extraordinary” capacity in the absence of the ordained minister. The deacon does them by virtue of the orders he has received. Further, we have already mentioned that the sacramental character of the diaconate inserts the deacon in a new way into the priesthood of Christ. As Liam Walsh remarks concerning the meaning of the sacramental character, “...It marks one on a very deep level of the personality...” (p. 94). Similarly, Aidan Nichols using the theology of Walter Kasper sees the notion of character as stressing the call to service. It is so deeply stamped into the nature of the person that it is not an addendum to the person but rather is an essential aspect of who they are (Nichols, p. 79). (Again we would remind the faithful share by Baptism in the common priesthood of Christ also in their very being. The Sacrament of Confirmation or Chrismation deepens and extends this priesthood by the reception of the fullness of the “eschatological” Spirit.)

Here we see one of the primary distinctions between deacons and lay people. While it is true that lay people on occasions can officiate at liturgical ministries (e.g. baptisms, marriage, etc.) for which deacons are the ordinary minister, lay people do not perform these ministries as “proper” to the common priesthood of the faithful. That is because they are not “ministers” in the univocal sense of the term. Because deacons have received the sacramental character of Orders, they are ministers in the full sense of the term. Lay people minister more in the sense of being “peer” ministers. This is in no way to dismiss the needed and extensive work done by lay people who often are more competent in many areas than deacons in visiting the sick, religious education, etc. What this is simply saying is that deacons have been inserted by the reception of

the sacramental character of orders into the priesthood of Christ in a manner distinct from the lay person. The word “proper” is chosen carefully. Certainly God can call a lay person to this work in the church. However, the term “proper” means that which flows immediately and directly from one’s participation in the priesthood of Christ. “Proper” (not second class) work of the lay person, as previously mentioned, is the sanctification of the world (in ways as far more difficult task) by means of the “common” (again not second class) priesthood of the faithful.

One example of the above is the ministry of preaching. While lay people on occasions are permitted to preach, and while in fact in many communities and parishes non-ordained give the homily, canon law and liturgical law restrict preaching (at least in most occasions in the celebration of the Liturgy) to the priest or deacon. This no doubt is offensive to some non-ordained since it might be perceived as sexist or as clericalism. From a sacramental perspective this is not the situation. (We will explore ordination of women to the diaconate a bit later.) Priests and deacons are given, by virtue of their ordination, a sacramental character, which places them in a special relationship to the Bishop. This provides the necessary aptitude to assist the bishop in his task of preaching and teaching. They share in his apostolic role as teacher of the community. This is not a question of simply a natural aptitude. It means both the priest and deacon are in an essentially distinct relation with the bishop that the lay person is not. Ordination unites the priest and deacon to the bishop’s role of shepherd and head and priest and deacons share, in diverse ways, the ministry of the bishop. (O’Neill, p. 102) Of course sacraments do not act magically. Ordination does not replace the need for deacons (and priests) to be carefully trained in theology, Scripture and homiletics.

Looking further into the term, “ministry”, I firmly agree with Rademacher’s statement that “...no church could survive as long as an institution or organization if everyone, without any

distinction or qualification, were considered a public minister” (p. 89). Rademacher writes that since Vatican II there has been a tendency to call all acts of charity, “ministry”. In effect if everything is ministry than nothing is ministry. There is certainly no logical reason to assume most lay members of the “Christifideles” feel called or have a vocation to “public ministry”. Certainly, there are many good people who do good things who have little or no religious affiliation. This does not negate their good deeds but they certainly do not qualify as “ministry”. Perhaps a helpful reminder of the definition of ministry is found in Chapter One in Thomas O’Meara’s THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY is called for again. He writes that “Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and the individual’s personality on behalf of the Christian community to witness to, serve, and realize the Kingdom of God”. This definition fits those “Christifideles” who minister both, as ordained or in lay capacities.

Moving more immediately into the role and place of the lay person in the Church we can turn to Russell Shaw. In his book, “UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS, Shaw has written a rather interesting work clarifying the canonical rights and obligations of lay “Christifideles”. In reflecting on canon after canon, Shaw hammers away on his basic theme of the fact that lay “Christifideles” have a true “vocation” as much as any cleric, religious or member of a secular institute.” He reminds his readers that canon 208 assures the full equality of all members of the Church in human dignity and obligation to build up the Church. Canon 210 tells us that all are called to holiness of life. Canon 211 that all have the obligation to promote the message of the Gospel. Canon 215 to find and govern organizations for religious and charitable purpose (e.g. the work of Dorothy Day, charismatic prayer groups, etc.). Canon 216 states that all have the right and obligation to promote apostolic action with the provision that they will not use the term

“Catholic” without permission (since this could make the entire community responsible for actions that might not represent Catholic teaching or practice). Canon 230 provides a broad provision that states that lay “Christifideles” can not only act as lectors and ministers of the Eucharist, but can exercise the ministry of the word and confer Baptism. Indeed, this often happens in mission lands. This canon brings us back to the beginning of this chapter and the charge given to lay ministers in these Canadian parishes. It does seem, indeed, that if lay people can perform so many functions that are normally the task of the ordained, then why should we ordain deacons? Some have raised the question in a somewhat cynical fashion as to whether the baptism celebrated by a lay woman is in any less effective that of an ordained cleric? The answer is, of course, no! This, however, is not the full answer to the question. We have already indicated that one response to this question lies in the conferral of a sacramental character with all the implications of this that the deacon receives in ordination.

It is in further response to this question this question, this chapter has tried to stress that the lay vocation is truly a “vocation”. It has tried to make clear that while the lay “Christifideles” have a true call to fulfill the “tria munera” that is equally given to all Christians and that some of the lay “Christifideles” are called in addition to the above to public ministry in the Church. With all of this being so, what further could be said regarding what ordination would bring in addition to the reception of the sacramental character and the being “conformed” to Christ the Servant.

To begin with, this writer wants to clarify that he does not wish to leave the impression that diaconal ministry is primarily ordered to “sanctuary” ministry. While it is these functions that are being looked at, this is not the heart of diaconal ministry. The diaconate is rooted in

service and charity. We must never tire of stressing this. However, even in the service aspects of diaconal ministry ordination contributes something distinctive.

The first aspect of this “distinctive” dimension lies in the notion of “apostolic succession”. This concept has come under considerable criticism in recent times in much of the research and writing of Catholic theologians. The challenge essentially comes down to seeing the idea of “Apostolic Succession” in terms of a continual line of Episcopal ordinations going back to the Apostles as rather naïve. In addition, its focus is too limited to “ordination” rather than seeing the entire community of faith as sharing in this succession.

There are many theologians who express this position, but for the sake of brevity, we will look at a critique of Hans Kung by Francis Sullivan, S.J. in Sullivan’s book, *MAGISTERIUM*, which Sullivan wrote while he was serving as professor of ecclesiology at the Gregorian University in Rome. In summary, Kung argues that the notion that the bishops are successors to the Apostles “in a direct and exclusive sense” is an “unhistorical theory”. (Summary and response appears in pp. 40-51 of *MAGISTERIUM*). Kung argues that the episcopate is the result of complex historical development. Sullivan responds that the teaching of Vatican II the bishops have succeeded the place of the Apostles does not depend on the description that Kung rejects. Sullivan acknowledges that the majority of Catholic scholars agree the certainly there is “historical development” of the episcopate. Also, Sullivan agrees that the whole Church is in “Apostolic Succession.” The stress on a continual line of Episcopal ordinations going back to the Apostles can be rather naïve. In addition, there is too limited a focus of “succession” as limited to ordination. Rather, Sullivan writes that the whole Church is in “Apostolic Succession” in that all Christians are called to share the “Good News”. Yet, Father Sullivan does accept the teaching found in the decree on the “Life of Priests”, where the Church teaches that the

presbyters along with the bishops share in the office of the Apostles. However office was conferred, there is a continual succession. While not stated by Sullivan, I believe that something similar can be said of deacons in their own way since they are informed during their ordination that they too will receive the “laying on of hands that comes to us (the bishop) from the Apostles.” Sullivan defends the idea that the bishops receive the “Apostolic succession” even if there is historical development.

Essentially, Sullivan argues that Christ commissioned the Apostles. We see in the New Testament (e.g. Timothy and Titus) a witness to provision for those who would succeed the Apostles. There was a gradual tendency toward a single leader in each Church and that this development happened rather quickly. Local bishops were seen as the successors to the Apostles and this teaching was only rejected by schismatic communities. Sullivan argues that this as the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the bishops received a fullness of pastoral ministry that others do not have. The bishops and presbyters of today do inherit the ministry of the Apostles and presbyters of the New Testament church (although Sullivan and many others point out that there is a unique foundational role that the Apostles held and that they were not the residential pastors that bishops are). Although Sullivan doesn't mention deacons here, they also share in the “Apostolic succession” in their own way and manner that is distinct from those who are not ordained. They too receive the “laying on of hands.” How beautiful in the ordination ritual of deacons in the Latin Church when the bishop reminds the congregation that these “ordinandi” are about to receive the “layning on of hands that comes to us from the Apostles.” ( THE RITES, vol. II) This does not make them “better” than lay ministers who also represent the Church. But in recognition of the various charisms in the Church, it is simply saying that when the ordained deacon performs his ministry of service (or other ministries), he represents the “apostolic

ministry.” This is a key element in the whole ministry of service (or other ministries), he represents the “apostolic ministry” which is a key element in the whole notion of the “apostolicity” of the Church. No sane person would want to deny that the pastoral effectiveness of many lay leaders might in many cases be more real than that of the ordained person. What is being argued here is that the ordained person brings a special charism that is linked to sharing in a distinct way in “Apostolic succession”.

In addition to the issue of “apostolicity”, there is another dimension of the diaconate which needs to be explored, and that is the issue of sacramentality. In a classic article on the the diaconate, written by Cardinal Leo Suenens (“The Corresponsibility of Deacon: The Doctrinal Basis of the Diaconate”), Suenens presents an important aspect of the diaconate (as well as other ordained ministries) which seemed to be neglected or played down in much of contemporary sacramental theology. In a realistic effort to support the importance of the “priesthood of the people of God” and the common matrix that all “christifideles” share, it seems that there is a subtle desire to minimize the sacrament of orders mentioned earlier. This was already referred to in the excessive clericalization that has existed in the Church. Certainly, both the ordained and the non-ordained ought to see and appreciate the gifts that each possesses and not find their own special role at the expense of the others.

Suenens’ article presents a rational and balanced approach. He indicates that the diaconate is part of the very structure of the Church and not simply a matter of practical realism. The Church is a supernatural reality. The diaconate has been part of this reality from apostolic times. (Those who look at the decline of the diaconate in the West forget that the apostolic Churches of the East, Catholic and Orthodox, have always preserved the “permanent diaconate.”)

Suenens goes on to say that the Church is founded on the sacraments and the charisms that flow from those sacraments. This obviously included the sacrament of orders. Perhaps it is best to allow him to speak for himself. He teaches that the gifts and graces given to the laity in baptism and confirmation do not suffice for the building up of the Body of Christ, even when these laymen are deeply animated by authentic supernatural spirit. Since God has provided other gifts to be used at the service of the community as such, we do not have the right to ignore them, or refuse to actualize those elements that form part of the Church's patrimony. (p. 48) Perhaps this theology does not sit well with some who wish to stress lay ministry. This is not "clericalization." To ignore the sacramental reality of the Church is to change the very nature of how the church has understood itself. The church of both the East and the West has not seen itself in the manner of a New England congregational institution. Certainly there is value in allowing congregations to function without a priest rather than simply disappear, (one is certainly reminded of the vast number of "base communities in Latin America). Yet, the deliberate attempt to bypass the sacramental structure of the Church is dangerous, for it attacks the very nature of the Church. The presence of a deacon in an isolated community (something that has a long tradition in the Church) would at least insure that this community has a link to the apostolic church, which is not as clearly identifiable in the absence of such a minister by a lay leader alone. While a "collaborative" style of ministry is indeed something to foster, a community made up entirely of a "peer ministry" lacks something of the "spiritual basis" that is rooted in the sacraments. Hopefully, all this will provide a basis for further discussion on the relationship between the diaconate and lay ministry.

An additional element that needs to be explored is the aspect of "permanent." While it is time to drop the expression "permanent" deacons (we don't speak of "permanent presbyters"),

there is a “permanent” element in the diaconate that is not simply that these deacons are not bound to the priesthood. Like the orders of presbyter and bishop, the character they receive is permanent. The commitment is for a lifetime. Lay people engaged in the ministry of the Church are free to leave any time they wish.

There is a beautiful significance to this permanent aspect of ordination. It signifies the permanent commitment of Christ as Shepherd to his Church. Christ has espoused the Church and those chosen to be pastors or pastoral assistants (deacons) are the living signs of this relationship of Christ the Shepherd. (Of course this is complimented sacramentally in Marriage where, in the language of the Christian East, Christ is seen as the “lover of humankind.”)

Certainly, what is said in the DIRECTORY concerning the relationship between deacons and lay people can be mentioned here. The DIRECTORY reminds that while deacons are members of the clergy, because they resemble the life style of the lay person, they can be of great witness. As married, single and widowed persons, most of whom hold secular occupations “...they might {witness} how to integrate their baptismal call and state in life in living their Christian faith in society.” (p. 30)

Finally, the last element this chapter wishes to briefly mention (it will be the subject of another chapter) to explore on the distinction between diaconal and lay ministry is the question of ordaining women to the diaconate. It could be argued that this is one of the primary reasons for a less than enthusiastic response to the diaconate. It is restricted to men. For many this is interpreted as another slap in the face to women who have, in practice, engaged in the bulk of the “diaconal” ministry of the Church. One only has to look at the number of religious congregations of women who provide so much service. Further, in the contemporary church many lay women are working in a variety of ministries, even on a very professional level.

This has prompted no end of research on the theological possibilities of ordaining women to the diaconate. All of what follows will be examined more carefully when this study looks at the question of the ordination of women to the diaconate. But for the sake of completion of this chapter we will briefly look at some of the arguments. One of these was a study commissioned by the Canon Law Society of American, “The Canonical Implications of Ordaining Women to the Permanent Diaconate” in 1995. This examined the history and theological questions on this topic.

One of the major issues addressed was the role of deaconesses in the early Church. The Report goes on to say that probably the use of this term “deaconess” in various translations of the New Testament are anachronistic. (p. 8) Despite similarities to deacons, there are too many questions about the New Testament meaning of this term.

Yet, particularly in the Eastern churches, both canonical and non-canon-cal sources make reference to this office of deaconess. The “Didascalia Apostolorum” written in the third century and the “Apostolic Constitutions” probably from Antioch, portray a definite order. Like other clerics, women deacons were ordained by the laying on of hands and the prayer of the bishop. While the ordination rite was similar, certain functions were prohibited to the deaconesses. Their primary role was in the baptism of women.

While the Council of Nicea did not recognize deaconess as part of the clergy, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 certainly did. The Barberini Pontifical used by the Byzantine Church from the fourth to the twelfth centuries paralleled the ordination of male and female deacons. For many scholars, this was not merely granting of a “blessing” of a lesser “ordination” that the Eastern church uses by way of distinction. This was an ordination in the full sense. As late as

the eighteenth century, the Maronite church (in communion with Rome) ordained women who were abbesses to the office of deaconess. (p. 11)

The question of the sacramental ordination of women as deaconesses would take us too far in this particular essay. The writers of the CLSA document acknowledge that there is disagreement with scholars on the “sacramentality” of these ordinations. Nevertheless, there was most definitely an order of deaconess that certainly received what looked like the same ordination as the men. Further, the authors state that if women deacons were restored (which is their intention) they would receive the same sacrament with all of the implications we have already explored.

Again, if women were to be ordained to the diaconate, like their male counterparts, they would not be lay people. They would be an expression of the ordained ministry and all that entails.

### Conclusion

We have explored four areas regarding the distinction between ordained and lay ministries. While acknowledging that both the ordained person and the lay person truly have a vocation from God, yet there are distinctions.

One key area we explored was the reception of the sacramental character and the “ontological” implication of this. Baptism, Confirmation and Orders confer a character which inserts one in different ways into the priesthood of Christ. The ontological significance is that the very being of the person is touched, enabling her or him to do that which is beyond purely natural actions. They enable a person to exercise the priesthood of Christ in various ways.

Because the ordained deacon receives the sacramental character of Orders as a deacon, he acts truly and properly as a minister of the church to the people of God. The example we gave was p. While there are many who are gifted teachers in the community, the deacon, who indeed might not be a gifted teacher, nevertheless is in an essentially different relation with the bishop than is the lay person.

We also explored is the term “minister”. We saw the confusion that exists in this term and that this title only receives its proper meaning when used of the ordained. Only by ordination does one share in Christ’s role as shepherd and head. While deacons are not pastors of communities, they share by ordination in the bishop’s role of shepherd.

We examined the sacramental implications of the meaning of ordination to the diaconate and reflected on the truth that the Church is built on sacramental grace. The grace of baptism does not suffice for the building of the Body of Christ. Further, the diaconate is part of the very structure of the Church and that without an active diaconate something critical is missing.

Finally, we looked at the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate and mentioned the place of deaconesses in the early Church. Even if the Church decides to ordain women to the diaconate, these deaconesses would be distinct from lay persons for all the reasons above.

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**THE DIACONATE IN LIGHT OF  
THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY**

The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are certainly the central doctrines of Christian faith. If humans are created in the image of God, it is the relational God in whose image we are created. Yet, as will be seen a bit later in this chapter, the comment by theologian Karl Rahner is quite correct in suggesting that if this doctrine were removed from Catholic teaching, most Catholics would barely pay attention.

In more recent years there has been a renewed interest in the theology of the Trinity from a wide variety of sources. Also there has been a resurgence in the appreciation of the various classical representations of this doctrine. In the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, Part II centers on the sacramental life of the Church and places the teaching on the sacraments squarely within the Trinity. The sacraments are the work of the Trinity. All happens from the Father, through the Son by the working of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments are rooted in this Mystery. Individual sacraments cannot be appreciated apart from “the self-communicating presence of God.” (Dobbin, p. 1048) It is in light of this renewed interest in the centrality of the Trinity that this chapter will speculatively explore an understanding of the diaconate as a reflection of this Mystery. It will look at various models of the Trinity, and explore various theological and pastoral implications. It will make use of the best that theology offers and attempt to offer spiritual insights of the office of deacon in the context of this Mystery.

We might begin by looking at Leonardo Boff’s “social model” of the Trinity. While not one of the “classical” models of the Trinity, it certainly provides a particular vantage by which we may explore our topic. In Boff’s little work, HOLY TRINITY: PERFECT COMMUNITY, we are offered a concise study of the Trinity in light of the insights of liberation theology. Boff seeks to use his analysis of the Trinity as a theological base for a model of liberation theology. Liberation theology is a theological method by which Church doctrine dialogues with the lived

experience of millions who from suffer severe injustice and are considered as “non-persons.” They are the uncouned and undocumented.

For Boff, the Trinity serves as “the model” of how society (including the Church) ought to be constructed. The “social” model focuses on the “Three” in the Trinity. The emphasis is on equality and mutuality of the three Persons. Of course, the danger in this model is to terminate in a form of “tri-theism” (or three gods). Boff is sensitive to this. Yet, he relies on solid Church tradition for what he teaches. Boff rejects the notion of a “solitary” God, the “Supreme Being” who resides in splendid isolation. Of course, Christianity teaches that there is one God, but this one God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, Boff never tires of saying that “God is communion.” This communion is the basis of all relationships which is to say that we are made in the image of a “communal God.”

It is “dangerous” to say: “One God, pure and simple.” Boff lists several of the reason why we ought not to say One God, without the acknowledgement of the Trinitarian relationships. The “monarch” image gave theological support to totalitarian politics. Dictators use this model to support a regime of submission. It leads to authoritarianism in the Church. Everything is organized a single power. It leads to paternalism in society. Great “lords” believe it is their right to dominate others. Finally, Boff argues that it supports “machismo” in families. It is the base of much of the destructive sexism in families and society. (Boff, pp. 7-8)

One of Boff’s favorite images of the Trinity is found in chapter 8 of this work. It is a very rich model, developed, among others, by St. John Damascene. It is the patristic notion of “perichoresis.” The three Persons mutually interpenetrate each other. There is complete equality and oneness in unity. While the persons remain distinct, they “overflow” one into the other. The inclusion is such that one cannot be understood without the other.

Referring to the second century theologian, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Boff reminds of Irenaeus' teaching that the Son and Spirit are the "two hands of God" reaching out to creation. The "two hands" indicate that wherever humans have striven to be just, compassionate, loving, it is the presence of the Holy Trinity, even when people have little or no conscious realization of this Mystery in their lives.

Catherine Mowery laCugna, in her, *GOD FOR US: THE TRINITY AND CHRISTIAN LIFE*, echoes something of Boff's theology. In chapter ten of her work, LaCugna develops the implications of what her book has sought to develop, namely, the pastoral significance of the Trinity. LaCugna writes that the genius of the Cappadocian Fathers of the Fourth Century (perhaps the most brilliant of the Greek fathers of the Church) was that they were able to express the "Arche" of the Father (the Father as the Source of Trinitarian life) without the "Arche" leading to "monarchy." The Father shares all that he is with the Son and the Spirit. Like Boff, LaCugna writes that a non-Trinitarian God leads to an anthropology that is "...derogatory and detrimental because one human being is put forward as normative for another." (p. 396) Deeply harmful attitudes have resulted from not appreciating the Trinitarian reality of God. These have included all forms of sexism, racism and abuses even with the church community. Further, subordination of some people to others is not "natural." It is "unnatural" because it violates the dignity of persons made in the image of God. God is a non self-sufficient "bachelor." Rather God is fecund, but we will save this for another model of diaconate.

Perhaps this provides sufficient basis to look at one model of the Trinity and the diaconate. In a later chapter, we will reflect on the teaching of Vatican II and repeated in the *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*, and more recently in the declarations from the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy, that the diaconate

stands “at a lower level of the hierarchy.” While not denying a certain truth of this statement, this needs to be understood with greater precision. The deacon is not the president of the assembly. He is not the shepherd of the community. He does not preside over the Eucharistic assembly. His role is that of an ordained assistant. This having been said, we still need to maintain the image of the deacon as used by Anglican theologian, James Barnett. The diaconate is a “full and equal order.” While certainly the order of deacon is “distinct” from the bishop and the presbyter and from the lay person in the church, there is, in using the “social” model of Trinity, no lessening of equality of dignity. Certainly there are distinct roles of leadership, but a model of “perichoresis” would want to emphasize mutuality rather than domination and subordination. Clearly, a Christian framework of ministry would want to protect the truth that the one who “serves in Christ” is the supreme model of one who ministers. There can be no second place to the work of service and charity.

Equally as important, the diaconate has a special mission to support, develop and encourage the work of justice in the Church. While all ordained ministers (and indeed all Christians) are called to have a commitment to justice, the deacon has a special responsibility. As the sacramental sign of Christ the Servant, he has a particular call to proclaim and live out this “constitutive” element of the Church (“De Justitia in Mundo,” Synod of Bishops, 1971, par. 6). Indeed as the **DIRECTORY FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS** maintains, the deacon should actively transmit the word in places of work, in civic organizations and other places of influence (par. 26). This requires, of course, that deacons are familiar with the social teaching of the Church. They need to be active in efforts against racism, sexism, poverty and violence. (This theme is addressed elsewhere.)

The next model of Trinitarian theology we will examine is that of the great Franciscan theologian, St. Bonaventure. Bonaventure, writing at the height of the Scholastic period is one of its great geniuses. Bonaventure, reflects more a theology of the Greek Fathers (including Gregory of Nyssa) than of that which was developed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas although he was clearly influenced by both. Although Bonaventure died in 1274, he follows the Greek patristic tradition, which sees the Father as the “fons divinitatis.” This is distinct from the emphasis of Augustine who sees the Father as one of the Three Persons who share the Divine Nature equally. Augustine and Thomas begin with the One Divine Nature. The Greek Fathers and Bonaventure begin with the Divine Person of the Father. Bonaventure, using the axiom of Dionysius, “bonum est diffusium sui” (goodness diffuses itself), provides the insight that by its very nature, goodness voluntarily gives itself away. Because God is goodness itself, God wills to produce many things and to share the divine goodness. For Bonaventure, the most perfect good is the most diffusive. As quoted in Trinitarian theologian, Edmund Fortman, Bonaventure writes; “...Good is said to be self-diffusive and therefore the highest good is that which diffuses itself the most” (“Itinerarium Mentis in Deum,” Fortman, p. 216).

Australian theologian, Anne Hunt, indicates that the divine fecundity of the Trinity in creation is, for Bonaventure, is an expression of the greater fecundity within the Trinity itself (Hunt, p. 410). The procession of the Word in the Trinity is the profound example of the fecund and ecstatic nature of the Father. The Son proceeds from the ecstatic and fecund nature of the Father. (Bonaventure rejects the Augustinian and Thomistic theology which understands that the Son proceeds by way of the intellect.) Bonaventure teaches that the Spirit proceeds by way of liberality and love. Again, the emphasis is on the ecstatic nature of God. For Bonaventure, creation flows from the divine nature that is the rich fountain of “all life and holiness.”

All of this is very much in accord with the theology of the Christian East. God the Father is, according to the Cappadocians, is the cause of all that exists. God's being originates in love, ecstasy and fecundity (LaCugna, p. 243). God exists in freedom and ecstasy. Greek Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, explains that this is central in the understanding of freedom in patristic thought. As Zizioulas describes it, freedom is not found in our autonomy but rather in "ecstasis," The more we grow in our ability to "give ourselves away," the more we grow in freedom. It is to conform to the image of the ecstatic God within us (Zizioulas, chap. 1).

Turning again to the diaconate, all of what we have said can apply to all Christians, not simply deacons. Yet, the diaconate has a special witness to this mystery. Within the ordained ministry, thus obviously within the Church, the deacon is called to be the sign of the fecund God who sends His Son to be Servant of all. If Jesus is the Servant of God who has come to serve and not to be served, the deacon is ordained to be the public sign and witness of the Servant Christ. It is the mission of the deacon to reach from the community and in the name of the community to minister to the poor, sick and needy. The deacon is a special witness to the fecund God. Of course he is not the ONLY witness. He is the sacramental sign that ALL are called to be.

Further, the deacon is the sign of the fecund nature of the church. The deacon stands as the ordained minister who publicly represents the Church in its out reach to the world. He is the one who leads the bidding prayers. He is the one who, in the liturgy of the East moves between sanctuary and people He is the one who is sent to serve the needs of the people in the name of the bishop. He is the representative of the ecstatic nature of the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the ecstatic Christ and Christ is the sacrament of the ecstatic God. The deacon is the sacramental sign of the Church as servant to the world. This in no way negates the

outstanding service by other Christians (lay, religious and ordained.) The deacon represents the ecstatic reality of all Christian life.

The third model of the Trinity that we will explore is that of twentieth century Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar. Unhappy with the traditional approach of Augustine and Aquinas, von Balthasar strives to develop a theology of the Trinity that engages the Trinity with the world of suffering and that reflects the splendor of God's love. Of course von Balthasar is not the only theologian that seeks to relate the doctrine of the Trinity to the mystery of human suffering. One only need to think of Moltmann's, *THE CRUCIFIED GOD*. Moltmann's brilliant work has had a major impact on liberation theology among other movements. In chapter six of this text, Moltmann brings the mystery of suffering right into the center of the Trinity. Reflecting a classical Lutheran understanding of "communicatio idiomata" (in Christ, because of the "hypostatic union," one can say, for example the God suffers), suffering penetrates right into the heart of divinity. While appealing in many ways, it raises many other questions regarding the impassability of God (the tradition says that God as God cannot suffer because God is perfect). Von Balthasar is concerned with showing the depths of God's concern for those who suffer, but he preserves a greater respect for orthodoxy. He connects the mystery of the Trinity with the paschal mystery and sees salvation as reaching the heart of human suffering and helplessness. Further, von Balthasar wants to present the Trinity in terms of sheer dynamism. The "Actus Purus" of St. Thomas, the view that God is "Being Itself", has too often been perceived in static rather than dynamic images. For von Balthasar, it is the dynamism and magnificent glory of the Trinity that has not been sufficiently appreciated.

What von Balthasar will want to demonstrate is that the processions in the Trinity are not understood best as processions of "intellect" and "will." Both are processions of love (Hunt, p.

50). It is the procession of love that issues the Son who in turn enters into our world, dies for us and for our sake descends into hell. It is also a procession of love that issues the Holy Spirit.

We now need to flesh out this summary.

John O'Donnell, S.J., in his study of von Balthasar, writes that von Balthasar is attracted to the theology of Bonaventure and Richard of St. Victor in the emphasis on the ecstatic love of God (O'Donnell, p. 143). We have already looked at Bonaventure. Richard of St. Victor argues that if God is love, there must be a lover and beloved. For God to be love, there must be an adequate partner who is equal to the Father. Yet, if there were not a third, their love would turn into mutual egoism. This must be a third (a "condilectus"), the mutually beloved of Father and Son. von Balthasar is quite positive toward the approach of Richard of St. Victor. The procession of the Spirit indicates God's opening to the world of creation. The divine love is not self-enclosed but open to the world.

What is fascinating in the theology of von Balthasar is that the center of the Trinitarian mystery is the Paschal mystery as celebrated in the "Sacrum Triduum." It is in this celebration that the depths of God's love is revealed. Von Balthasar's "leitmotif" is: "love alone is credible." (LOVE ALONE: THE WAY OF REVELATION, p. 7) Only love can make sense of things. Above all, the glory of God is manifest in the descent into hell. Von Balthasar does not stop at the cross. It is Christ's descent into hell that ultimately reveals the profundity of God's love for us.

Von Balthasar describes this in the following way. In the Trinity, the Father does not cling to the Divine nature. Rather, in a movement of "super-kenosis" or self-emptying, the Father empties Himself of all that He is so as to bring forth the consubstantial Son. In turn, the Son surrenders himself in return to the Father in an act of self-emptying love. Thus the "kenotic"

or self-emptying love of the Son on the cross is not new. It reveals the kenotic reality of the Trinity from all eternity.

Ultimately, the Father sends the Son into hell. The descent into hell is only possible because of the reality of the Trinity. While remaining the divine Son of God, the Son enters into God-forsakenness to assume solidarity with human sinfulness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Son and remains the bond of unity with the Father while, at the same time, the Son experiences being abandoned by the Father. The abandonment is only possible because the Father and Son remain united in the Spirit. (Hunt, p. 56-57)

Von Balthasar's theology of the descent, which is rooted in the mysticism of his close associate, Adrienne von Speyr, means that there is no place cut off from God. In the mystery of the descent into hell, God enters into solidarity with the sinner. God becomes passively present as one of the "dead" among the dead. Von Balthasar writes: "But on Holy Saturday there is the descent of the dead Jesus to hell, that is (out very simply) his solidarity in the period of noontime with those who have lost their way from God (VON BALTHASAR READER, p. 153). Von Balthasar continues "...the dead Son, no longer acting in any way...stripped by the cross of every power and initiative...incapable of any active act of solidarity..." p. 153). The world of the drug addict, the world of the alcoholic, the world of the sexually addicted, the world of the seriously depressed or the severely mentally ill are examples of hells where God is present.

The diaconate again holds a special place in this model of the Trinity. Again, it needs to be made clear that all who minister, ordained or lay, indeed all Christians and all people of good will, can, and do fit the description that follows. What is being expressed is the sacramental or sign value of the diaconate. The deacon is called to have as his focus ministry to people on the margins. No doubt many people do this very well. The deacon does not claim to do this better.

He is called to be the sacrament of the presence of Christ to those who are in “hells.” Perhaps it is of significance that unlike the other ordained ministers, the deacon cannot so much “do” as to “be” with others. He cannot anoint the sick. He cannot absolve sin. What he does is to be the “sacrament” of solidarity with those in hell. He, as the Church’s minister who represents Christ the Servant, needs to be with those who feel trapped. Often there is not much he can “do”. He can be “with” until the individual is able to get out of his or her “hell”. He is the public minister of the Church community proclaiming the presence of the Christ who was sent by the Father to “go to hell” with the most abandoned of people. Of all the ordained, it is the deacon’s special gift to be the “sacrament of solidarity.” In prisons, hospitals, facilities for the addicted and mentally ill, homes for the aged, ghettos, streets, bars or even places of employment, the deacon is the sacrament of solidarity. He reflects the call and service of so many good people, clergy, religious and lay, Christian and non-Christian, who spend even years in solidarity, often simply being with people who are in a “hell.”

We next take a look at the very rich theology of Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner. Rahner’s Trinitarian theology seeks to begin with an opposite focus than that of Boff. Instead of a “social” model of the Trinity, Rahner wants to emphasize the Oneness of God. Partially in response to the classic challenge of Islam who accuses Christianity of “tri-theism,” Rahner insists that Christians believe as deeply as Judaism or Islam, there is only One God.

Rahner can be credited with significantly reminding twentieth century Christians of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity. As mentioned earlier, he writes in his little work, *THE TRINITY*, “should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature would remain virtually unchanged” (pp. 10-11). Rahner bemoans the loss of the significance of the Trinity for most, especially Western, Christians. He believes that

traditional scholastic theology (e.g. Aquinas) has resulted in such abstract speculation as to make the Trinity irrelevant to most people.

In response to this, Rahner has attempted to develop a Trinitarian theology that begins with a Christian anthropology, in other words it starts with us as humans. We always exist at one and the same time in the historically concrete circumstances of our lives. Simultaneously, we are “spirit in the world.” As spirit we are open to the possibility of the Transcendent. We are given, says Rahner, the gift of a “supernatural existential” aspect of ourselves. This is to say we have a desire for God. At the same time we are granted an “obediential potency”, a capacity to respond to God’s offer or what Rahner calls God’s “self-communication” (grace). Thus, whether or not people are conscious of God, or perhaps might not even consider themselves religious, they are reaching out to God who is reaching out to them.

Because we are made by the Trinity to be capable of a relationship with God, the way we are corresponds to the way God is reaching out to us. As humans we always exist in concrete, historical circumstances. As humans we are also “spirit in the world.” We can transcend our historical limitation and reach out to the very heights of God. God is “Logos” or “Word” who meets us in the historically concrete circumstances of our lives. As Spirit, the Father reaches out to us as “spirits in the world” as God’s transforming presence.

Rather than using the term “person” to describe the relations in the Trinity, Rahner (like Protestant theologian Karl Barth) prefers the term “mode.” To be more precise “a distinct mode of subsistence.” Rahner (and Barth) do not mean the ancient heresy of “modalism” which taught that there was only the Father, that there are no real distinct relations in God. Modalism held that there were only three “modes” by which the Father expressed himself. Clearly, Rahner believes there are real relations in God. Yet, he wants to protect against the charge of tri-theism. The

One God that Christians believe in reaches out to us as Logos and Spirit. This is because the way God reaches out to us is the way God really is. (Here Rahner's famous quote appears: "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity" – meaning the God touches our lives is the same God who is eternally Trinity.) The Father who is the source of the Trinitarian life (here we hear again Bonaventure and the Cappadocian Fathers) reaches out as Logos and Spirit (THE TRINITY, part III).

Exploring the specific relation of Rahner's Trinitarian theology to the diaconate is a bit complex. For Rahner, all that he writes on the Trinity applies to everyone. God reaches out to all (there is a universal offer of grace). All people are given a "capacity for God." What is perhaps the special gift of the diaconal ministry of the Church is that this ministry has a special obligation to witness to the truth of Rahner's theology of the Trinity.

Rahner's emphasis that in the Logos, the Father reaches out to us in the specific and historically concrete circumstances of our lives, means there is no boxing in of God's active presence in the officially religious moments or circumstances of our lives. Nor is God to be found only in Christian lives. It is the deacon who, of the three expressions of the ordained ministry, who is called to be primarily found outside of "official" Church establishments. He is not meant to have his primary ministry in the sanctuary. He is called to be working in the world of business and industry. He is called to be present in the marketplace (understood as by what the philosopher Nietzsche meant, the secular world where "God is dead"). He is called to the public sign that God is actively present in the real lives and circumstances of people's lives.

At the same time, he is a public reminder that no matter what the concrete circumstances of people's secular lives, we are always all called to a transcendent vocation. As "spirits in the world" touched by the Holy Spirit, there is never a concrete situation where people are not

simultaneously called to be transformed and to transform our circumstances. As the public minister in the market place, the deacon's gift is to be a reminder that God is actively present as Word and Spirit in the most mundane realities of our lives.

The world is in need of "mytagogues," taught Rahner. Using a concept from the Fifth Century Father, Cyril of Jerusalem, Rahner believed that the world needed people who initiate others into the presence of the Mystery that encapsulated the world. Mystagogues are those who help others realize that they are already experiencing God in the midst of their secular lives. How special a vocation this is for the deacon.

We will now explore the last of our Trinitarian models. Here we turn to Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. These two priests and theologians as well as blood brothers teach at Boston College and the Washington Theological Union respectively. In their co-authored book, *FULNESS OF FAITH; THE PUBLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THEOLOGY*, they devote a brilliant chapter on, "The Trinity and Human Rights". While much of what they say seems close to our reflection on Boff, there is a distinct focus that we wish to explore.

By "public theology" these theologians mean "...the effort to communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and traditions." (Himes & Himes, p. 4) Using the definition of Martin Marty, (*THE PUBLIC CHURCH*), they attempt to express the social significance of the Church's creed to its adherents. It is presumed that the rich symbols of the Church have public significance.

The Himes brothers make use of the theology of Chicago theologian, David Tracy. Particularly, they turn to Tracy's and Tracy's understanding of the term, "classic." Tracy defines a classic as something that has an "excess of meaning." (Tracy, *ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION*, pp. 163). All classics have the power to be transformative and disclosive.

There is a “shock” of recognition when we discover a truth being revealed about ourselves or our world. Some transformative truth is made present. Some life changing insight is offered to us. If religious truths of whatever religious tradition are genuine classics, they will have the power to be disclosive to the public community. The public theologian has the task of taking theological truths and exploring ways these truths can be seen to have public significance even by people who do not come from the same religious tradition. The example used by the authors that of Martin Luther King. King was able to take his biblically based teachings about social justice and make them applicable to a much wider audience than adherents to his own Southern Baptist tradition.

Moving to the Trinity, Michael and Kenneth Himes briefly explore the Trinitarian theology of the New Testament. They then express the classic doctrine of the Trinity that God is “agape” (unconditional love). If God is love, there must be a recipient of God self-gift. It cannot be creation. This would lead to pantheism and would make God dependent on creation. There must be One who is equal to God who is capable of responding in kind. The Father gives himself fully to the Son and the Son gives himself totally to the Father. The Spirit is the mutual Gift and is the bond of love between Father and Son. This essentially Augustinian model of Trinity has been dominant in the West for many centuries. The central insight of this doctrine is the “to be” and “to love” is “synonymous.” (p. 57). To exist is to be in a network of relationships. This theme is central to the Himes’ text. What characterizes humans is the capacity for relationships. The authors stress the importance of Augustine’s teaching that to be “person” is to be directed to others. This is the nature of the Trinity. This is how we are made.

Regarding the “public” significance of the Trinity, this doctrine offers the most significant base for the rejection of individualism (p. 59). To be is to be related. They quote

Aristotle that to be human is to be political (we are called to share life.) Further, if we are called to be relational, we are called to be “self-gift”, a concept which is particularly strong in the personalistic philosophy of Pope John Paul II. The most fundamental human right is to give oneself away to another and ultimately to the Other.

In language similar to Boff, the Himes brothers reject the “sovereign individual” God who models the notion of the ideal of the “sovereign individual” taught, for example, in the philosophy of Hobbes. Hobbes understood all human relationships as the undermining of freedom and independence. (One is reminded of Sartre’s concept that “hell is the other”). Hobbes believed that the best possible condition of the human is to totally independent. A Christian Trinitarian perspective states the opposite. Both individual and community need each other. The individual is only free when he or she is capable of self-gift. Hobbes (and Locke) have contributed heavily to the American focus on individualism. In contrast, the Trinitarian vision sees a constant mutuality of individual and community. It is this theological foundation which has made the protection of both the individual and the “common good” vital. There can be no true human rights when either aspect is ignored.

Looking again at the diaconate in light of this perspective of the Trinity, we can begin with the whole concept of “public theology.” It is interesting the CODE OF CANON LAW of 1983 makes all kinds of exceptions for permanent deacons. Essentially, they come down to permitting permanent deacons active involvement in political and civic life. It is summarized in the new DIRECTORY FOR THE MINISTRY AND LIFE OF PERMANENT DEACONS. It states: “Active involvement in political parties or trade unions, in accordance with the dispositions of the Episcopal Conference, may be permitted in particular circumstances ‘for the defense of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good’” (par. 13). Such is not the

case for priests and bishops. Deacons are the one ministry of Holy Orders who are specifically called to be present and active in life in the public square. While priests and bishops may certainly prepare people for life in the public arena, deacons are to do the direct way. In her deacons, the Church's ordained presence is to be found in the heart of civic life and among secular realities.

What the deacon is to bring (as also lay Christians are to bring), is a living faith with its transformative power. The deacons, as a public minister of the Church, can be in a position to be quite supportive to lay initiatives since he is working with and along side of his lay brothers and sisters. He is not on the outside. He is the ordained servant who is present in the midst of people.

In light of the public significance of the Trinity as reflected on above, the deacon is in a position to be the servant leader who protects the dignity of persons and the rights of individuals and the common good. Whether it be the world of politics, civic associations, in trade unions or the worlds of business and education, deacons need to witness to the Trinitarian base which supports healthy relationships. Of course lay people are called by their vocation to this task. The deacon does not replace lay people. His task is to be a supportive presence and fellow worker.

In addition, Michael and Kenneth Himes have seen the Trinity as the Mystery which expresses that true human fulfillment is found in the "gift of self." In John Paul's, *THE ACTING PERSON*, the masterful philosophical work that he wrote prior to his election as Pope, we see a Christian anthropology at its best. In trying to summarize this text, John Paul wants to say that true human fulfillment is found only in the total gift of self. One must first possess self in order to give self. The gift must be seeking to protect all the human "goods." But it is the

very essence of the person (as reflected in the nuptial meaning of the body), to give self away. Ambiorix Rodrigues, in his article on John Paul's philosophy of personalism (DUNWOODIE REVIEW , pp. 181-249) describes the Pope's anthropology which sees human fulfillment only in living out the "spousal nature" of the human. Our very bodies express the "nuptial" condition in which we live. In a world which seeks fulfillment in self-centeredness, the Pope repeats again and again that without self-gift we are doomed to frustration.

As the sacrament of Christ the Servant, the deacon is called by his very demanding vocation to ever seek to "sacramentalize" the call to be "gift." All people, Christian and non-Christian, by their very human structure are called to be self-gift. Many people, Christian and non-Christian, have been outstanding models for us. How much than is the deacon who represents Christ's very disposition to be the Servant of all. The deacon called to this task which flows from the very "character" of his sacramental ordination which "permanently configures the deacon the Christ the Servant" (CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, par. 1570). Service and charity are to be the hallmark of his life.

May the Gift of Self which lies at the center of the Trinity find eexpression in the "diaconal" call of all people.

## Conclusion

We began this reflection by indicating the loss of the centrality of the Trinity for so many Christians and have tried to recapitulate five models of this Holy Mystery. Each one of these

models reflects some of the truth that God we Christians workshop is, in the words of Karl Rahner, the “God of us.” Our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed the mystery of the Trinity because this Mystery reveals how God relates to us. It is not merely an abstraction for the sake of an abstraction. It is a saving Mystery.

Having presented these models, we attempted to speculate of how the diaconate might be particularly understood in light of this mystery. With liberation theologian, we saw the “social” model of the Trinity where the emphasis is on the Three Persons. The mutual indwelling of the Three persons sharing fully and equally all They are, reflects first of all to a model of Holy Orders where each of the Orders mutually share an equality of dignity. While there are distinct roles, each has a special gift to share. This needs to be reflected in the fundamental equality of dignity shared by all of the Body of Christ. Further, the “social model” reminds the deacon that as the “outreach” minister of the Church, particularly the bishop, he has a special obligation to be a minister of justice.

St. Bonaventure’s rather mystical theology based on the Greek Fathers and Dionysius, stressed the “Arche” of the Father (the Father being the Source of all Life including the Persons of the Trinity). Here, the Father’s “ecstatic” and “fecund” love overflows as an unending fountain. First, the Father shares the divine dignity fully with the Son and Spirit, hold nothing back. The Trinity in turn brings forth creation, for it the nature goodness to “give itself away.” The deacon is called to sacramentalize the “fecund” nature of the Church as it reaches out beyond the sanctuary into the streets. The Church, which is the work of the Holy Trinity, is called to “overflow” into the world. The deacon has as his special role within the sacrament of Orders to be the “overflowing presence of the Church.”

Von Balthasar loves to speak of the “beauty” of God. Indeed, beauty is the context in which he does his theology. God is the “beautiful” Because God reveals the ultimate depth of love. No more is this seen than in the paschal event where the Father sends the Son into “hell.” By the Son’s descent into hell, Christ becomes passively present with those who are the most abandoned. The sinner who has lost and cannot find a way out, the addicted, the mentally ill, the oppressed, indeed, all who find themselves trapped in a hell of some sort will find the dead Christ already waiting for them. The deacon is seen as the “sacrament of solidarity” with those in a hell. He is often called to be the Church’s public presence with those who can only wait for some type of release.

Rahner wants to be clear that Christians believe in One God (not Three) who reaches out to us according to the modalities by which we exist. We are historically concrete creatures who, at the same time are “spirit in the world.” The Father reaches out in His Word to us in the historically specific reality of our lives. At the same time He reaches out in His Spirit, always calling us to be transformed right into the very life of God by grace. The deacon is the ordained minister placed by the Church to be present in the mundane and often painful concrete circumstances of life. At the same time he is the reminder that we have a dignity and destiny beyond even our biggest expectations.

Finally, Michael and Kenneth Himes have taught us the “public significance” of the theology of the Trinity. The Trinity, as a religious “classic,” invites all people to recognize that we are made for relationship. We are made in the image of a relational God. The Hobbesian ideal of an extreme individualism runs counter to our fundamental nature. It is only, in the words of Pope John Paul II, by “gift of self” that we can achieve authentic fulfillment.

Here we saw the deacon who is meant to be in the “public square.” His is not primarily a liturgical (although that is one dimension) ministry. He is called to be most at home in the “public square.” His is not primarily a liturgical (although that is one dimension) ministry. He is called to be most at home in the public arena. His is to bring the “public theology” of the professional theologian and make it concrete in the civic world. Specifically speaking of the Trinity, the deacon is in an excellent situation to witness to the “relational God.” By his own “gift of self” in his sacred ministry, whether at work, involved in politics, in family life as a fellow citizen, the deacon is called to build a network of communal relationships. In all that the deacon does, may the Holy Trinity be glorified.

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**THREE PERIODS  
OF CHURCH MINISTRY:  
ITS IMPACT ON THE DIACONATE**

## PART ONE

This chapter will attempt to provide an overview of three very general periods of Church history in order to set handle on a contemporary appreciation of the relationship of the diaconate to the presbyterate and the episcopate. By taking a broad look at three periods, it is hoped that there can emerge a better sense of the meaning of diaconal ordination and its significance. For those who are true historians, apologies are offered for reducing what in reality is a complex history to rather simple summaries. All that can be presented is a general framework so as to provide assistance to the individual trying to appreciate the relation between those who possess the “sacerdotal office” (presbyter and bishop) and those ordained to the diaconate. In this chapter we will take a quick look at the Early Church, the Middle Ages and contemporary expressions of these ministries. Individuals seeking a more thorough historical analysis are urged to examine the texts in the bibliography.

Certainly there is no end of interpretations of the nature of ministry in the early Church. One prime reason is that there were multiple expressions and forms of ministry and roles were not so clearly defined. What is clear, however, is that certain trends seemed to have been consistent. One of the most important, for our purposes, is that leadership over the Eucharist was not detached from leadership over the community. While not agreeing with all the conclusions of Edward Schillebeeckx (*THE CHURCH WITH A HUMAN FACE*), it does seem, for example, that in the Church at Corinth the host of the household community presided and this was the norm in other household churches. (p. 119) Schillebeeckx also will writes that the there was no sacral foundation as to who presided, but this is not universally agreed upon as we shall see briefly. Schillebeeckx’s position is that the power of the “sponsors” of these household churches was gradually transferred to the “episcopus” (presbyter) and deacon. Schillebeeckx

believes that it is possible that there was a rotating leadership, but again this does not go unchallenged. Scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, in his simple and readable *RESPONSES TO 101 QUESTIONS ON THE BIBLE* writes that "...there must have been some type of Church recognition {as to who presided at the Eucharist}. The people who came to the Eucharistic meal must have accepted in some way that an individual speak the words of the Lord. This seems to argue that church recognition is essential for the role of the Eucharistic celebrant ... (p. 123)

A similar position is held by Kennan Osborne (*PRIESTHOOD: A HISTORY OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH*). Osborne also rejects the position that at the time of the New Testament any Christian could celebrate the Eucharist. What is key for Osborne is that leadership over the community was the basis for leadership over the Eucharist. (p. 80) In addition, Osborne indicates that "The earliest Christian community is not an amorphous, acephalous congregation." A clear leadership is evident from the beginning.

Moving into early patristic times, by the time of Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 110) it is quite obvious that bishops are the presiders over the Eucharist. Yet, again it is because of his presidency over the community that makes the bishop the appropriate person to lead the Eucharist celebration.

Later in this same century we find Irenaeus of Lyons, Ordained a presbyter around 177 A.D., he was later made Bishop of Lyon. Irenaeus teaches that the bishop is the leader of the community because bishops have been appointed by the Apostles themselves or their successors (Osborne, p. 108) Irenaeus wants to emphasize that the role of the bishop is to protect the "apostolic tradition". In reacting to the Gnostic heresies of his day, Irenaeus wants to make clear that the bishop is the authentic witness to the teaching of the Apostles. Thus, the first role of the

bishop is to be the pastor and guide of the local Church. Again, it is in this capacity that the bishop is the logical person to preside over the Eucharist.

What is being emphasized is that no matter what variety and lack of clarity existed in the early Church, there was an integral relationship between general ministry to the community and presiding over cultic functions. We even see this later in the figure of Hippolytus of Rome. Hippolytus brings a development from the second to the third century in making a distinction between the office of deacon and the office of presbyter. The deacon belongs to another category than the presbyter (or bishop) since he is not a priest (“sacerdos”). Deacons are “non-priestly”. This will find its way in “Lumen Gentium” (par. 29) which describes the deacon as “...not being ordained to priesthood but to ministry of service”. Yet, even in Hippolytus, we find the relationship between leadership over the community and service at the Lord’s table. Subsequent developments will bring changes to this approach which had important effects for the deacon.

Harve-Marie Lagrand’s, “The Presidency of the Eucharist According to Ancient Tradition” found in *LIVING BREAD: SAVING CUP*) indicates that for Tertullian, the bishop as president of the community, presides over the community. If ordained ministers are lacking, the faithful can exercise cultic functions. (p. 207) Lagrand indicates that Tertullian’s position is an isolated one and rejected by, among others, Augustine. Nevertheless, it is interesting that for Tertullian, the one who presides should be one who is ministering in the local community.

Looking to the role of deacons in the early Church, we see that variety of expression is present here also. There seems to be general agreement that the “Seven” mentioned in Act:6 are not “deacons” in our sense. They had a unique function (a possible were really presbyters). Yet, from Irenaeus on, they were considered to be the prototype of the deacon and were significant

for the development of that office. They were to assist in the “distribution of bread” and to “serve tables”. They were also involved in catechetical instruction. While they served in a subordinate role, there was no sense of “subordination” in the sense of rank or dignity.

Subordination is simply one of authoritative leadership. (James Barnett, *THE DIACONATE: A FULL AND EQUAL ORDER*. p. 30) In the Pauline church, Barnett asserts that pastoral and administrative leadership co-existed with more “charismatic” leadership (although pastoral leadership was also seen as “charismatic”). Yet, in the Church at Philippi, deacons were clearly associated with bishops although we cannot know the exact nature of their functions other than that the deacons “served”. Further, deacons were not assistants to the bishops but rather assisted them in their service to the poor and the sick (hence the community). (Barnett, p. 37)

Looking at the patristic era, even a casual survey shows a great deal of evidence of how deacons were perceived. In the highly authoritative I Clement of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth 96 A.D.), we see that apostolic authority is transmitted in an orderly fashion to the presbyter-bishops and deacons with apostolic succession seen as given to both bishops and deacons.

In the “Shepherd of Hermas (c. 96) deacons are portrayed especially with the care of the sick, widows and orphans. In the “Didache” it seems that the deacons did catechetical work and instruction of the faithful. In Ignatius of Antioch, writing early in the second century, deacons represent Jesus Christ (for Jesus saw himself as one who serves). Office in the Church for Ignatius was not a matter of status but one of function. The office of deacon, though mentioned third, is not inferior but is in fact that of Christ himself. (p. 51)

Continuing this casual survey, in the “Pseudo-Clementines” deacons are presented as the eyes of the bishop, and to learn of the sick and bring word of this to the community. Again,

deacons are seen primarily as servants of the community. Tertullian (c 220) will state that deacons can baptize with the consent of the bishop, while in Hippolytus of Rome, the prayer of the ordination of the deacon seems to imply that his office was one of both charity and liturgy.

Given the high esteem that the office of deacon seemed to possess for the early Church, why was there such a decline in this office? What shifts in the understanding of ministry and the sacrament of Orders lead to a diminishing of the diaconate, both in use and in popular perception?

The reasons are certainly more complicated than mentioned here. However, as we turn to Part II of this chapter we can get some sense of what happened to the deacon in relationship to the priesthood.

## **PART TWO**

The medieval period brought about significant changes in the image of the priest (and also the other orders). As Schillebeeckx argues in *MINISTRY* (p. 52), this is when “privatization” begins. As Schillebeeckx sees it, there are two Councils particularly responsible for the shift in view from the early Church, Third and Fourth Lateran, 1179 and 1215. Although the Middle Ages prohibited “absolute ordinations” (ordinations without reference to a particular Church or community), the Third Lateran Council broke from this tradition which goes back to Chalcedon (451 A.D.). Under Pope Alexander III, the relationship to a particular Church was reduced to being assured of an income (“benefice”). What gradually emerged was that a man simply had to feel called to be a priest and then the bishop could ordain him without any reference to the community.

This approach of the Third Lateran Council was reinforced by the Fourth. Here, the Council stated that for a valid Eucharist all that one needed was duly ordained priest. The ecclesial nature of the Eucharist is reduced to the celebrating priest.

While Schillebeeckx asks what was it that led to this major change of approach, he turns not so much to theology but to law. At the beginning of the twelfth century there was a renaissance of Roman Law. This was decisive in ecclesiology according to Schillebeeckx. There developed a notion that detached leadership (any type) from territoriality. This would lead to a sense of authority apart from community. This made the priesthood much more of a status than a service to the community. As Schillebeeckx says, this made the priesthood more “privatized” and “personalized”. This brought about a division between the “power of ordination” and the “power of jurisdiction”. According to Schillebeeckx this marks one of the great distinctions between ministry of the first millennium and the second. ( p. 56) The implication is that even if a man had no power of jurisdiction, he had the power or ordination in his own person. Hence, we have “absolute ordination.” The result was to lead to practices unthinkable in the early church such as “private masses”. Leadership over the “Body of Christ” meant now, as distinct from the past, the “Eucharistic” Body of Christ.

In summary then, what happened in the Middle Ages, as Schillebeeckx interprets it, is that ordination was “reduced” to power to consecrate, while in the early church, someone was appointed to build up the community which included presidency over the Eucharist. The Middle Ages had a much narrower and more legalistic view than what the early church possessed.

Turning to Michael Lawler (SYMBOL AND SACRAMENT) he says much the same as Schillebeeckx. Lateran IV changed what the early church saw as “power over the Body” to mean the Eucharist. An individual could preside over the Eucharist without any relationship to a

community. This, as Schillebeeckx stated, this led to private Eucharists. Lawler writes that while he doesn't want to denigrate private Masses, even Vatican II teaches that Liturgical celebrations are public by nature and the presence of the faithful ought to be preferred. (p. 232)

Lawler continues that the high scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas passed directly from Christ to the sacraments without any real reference to the Church. Thus, for Thomas, ordination is primarily a "power" that is handed over. Thus, the ancient theology of the Church was thoroughly forgotten.

Lawler raises the question of whether the ancient theology was really "forgotten" or more correctly, deliberately ignored. He quotes Vogel to the effect that these scholars were quite familiar with Latin and Greek, and might well have chosen not to pay attention to the older teaching. (p. 233)

Richard Mc Brien further underscores the distinction between the "power of orders" and the "power of jurisdiction" that characterized the Middle Ages. He sees this as a separation from a call to minister to a community and possessing sacramental functions. (CATHOLICISM 1994, p. 870) The priesthood increasingly became a "state of life" rather than a ministry. In this view a man could be ordained without receiving a call from a community. He still had the "power to say Mass." In this view the clerical hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons were seen to reflect the divinely established angelic hierarchy with laity as the passive recipients of grace. (p. 870)

Theologian, Joseph Komonchak sees this envelopment of separation of "orders" and "jurisdiction" as very significant for the diaconate ("The Permanent Diaconate and the Variety of Ministries in the Church", DIACONAL READER: 1985). The powers of orders was primarily focused on the Eucharist. Its relationship to the concrete guidance of a community was

diminished. This reduced ordination to the communication of sacramental power and the removal of teaching and guidance from an original sacramental basis. (p. 18-19) The obvious implication is that in this view deacons receive no new sacramental “powers” (there is “nothing a deacon can do that a lay person can’t), then there is no need to ordain deacons. Hence, the theology of the Middle Ages saw a little need for the diaconate. We will look at this in the next section.

Perhaps the following from the SUMMA of St. Thomas gives something of the flavor of the high scholastics that will give something of the change from the early church to the Middle Ages. In speaking of the “states of life”, Thomas responds as to whether all clergy are in a “state of perfection”. His response:

*I answer that in priests and deacons having the care of souls, two things may be considered, their office and their charge. ... by receiving a certain order a man receives his power of exercising certain acts. Therefore it is clear ... that an inward perfection is needed to perform certain acts worthily.*

*(part II of Second part Q. 184, Art. 6)*

While it would be unfair to state that Thomas sees no connection between Orders and the community, clearly the focus of ordination is reduced to “power” and “acts”. Such an approach in which most clergy have been trained would leave little real need for the diaconate. In comparison to the early Church, there is also an obvious sense of those in orders as being quite distinct from the laity, something not evident in the early Church.

### **PART THREE**

Vatican II and its theology did not emerge out of nowhere. During the 1930's and 1940's there was considerable work by scholars such as Congar and Danielou, particularly in the areas of Patristics, exploring forms of ecclesiology that were less "Scholastic" and more rooted in earlier expressions of Church life. Much of what emerges out of the Council reflects this more "patristic" thrust. Yet, as in all Councils, there remain traces of compromise. Still, we get something closer to the early Church.

Returning briefly to the article of Fr. Komonchak, let us look at some of his insights regarding the Council and the Sacrament of Orders. As Komonchak sees it, one of the great achievements of the Council was the restoration of the unity between the "power order" and the "power of jurisdiction". The Council taught the full exercise of the pastoral ministry (teaching, leading, and sanctifying) comes from essential link between teaching, leading the community and presiding at the Eucharist. All the dimensions of the pastoral ministry need reference to the Spirit's empowerment that is the meaning of ordination. Ordination makes an important statement that a person is set apart for ministry to word, service and sacraments and is not only publicly recognized by the community but also is seen as receiving the strength of the Spirit.

Taking these insights a bit further we can look to an article also found in the same issue of the *DIACONAL READER* by Leo Cardinal Suenens entitled, "The Coresponsibility of Deacons". On page 50, he quotes Denis Shaller who states that the Council teaches that the meaning of bishops, priests and deacons is not defined by sacramental cult but in terms of their

various responsibilities regarding the evangelization of the world. This not to say that sacramental ministry is secondary. Rather it is saying that the full extension of the ministry is rooted in the preaching of the Gospel. Regarding the diaconate, he writes:

*...we can understand that the diaconal ministry cannot be reduced to this or that sacramental function, but must include all of ecclesial activity from announcing the Good News to the celebration of Eucharist. (Schaller, as quoted by Suenens, p. 50)*

McBrien (CATHOLICISM: 1994) in his reflection on Vatican II stresses that the Council sought to situate the notion of ministry as service rather than ecclesial status. (p. 770) Mc Brien stresses that even though there are some occasional references to the “sacred powers” of the ordained priest, the medieval distinction between the “power of orders” and the “power of jurisdiction” has been dropped. Now, whatever “power” a minister might have, it is also in terms of service to the community. Indeed, while the Council teaches that there is a difference only in “degree” but “essence” in the priesthood of the ordained and the priesthood of the laity, (LUMEN GENTIUM, n. 10) all share in the one priesthood of Christ.

Maybe one of the most interesting approaches to a new understanding of Orders and particularly the diaconate is another article in DIACONAL READER by Mark Searle (“Liturgy and Ministry”). Searle argues that roughly in the fourth century gradually the deacon exercised a purely liturgical role as liturgy and life became more separate. This dualism has become part of Christian life that is still with us. In this context it makes sense to ask the “why” of having deacons since they possess no special “sacramental powers”. Searle states that there can be a real (though understandable) response on the part of deacons to list the “things they can do”. Searle sees this as an unfortunate direction. This only repeats the focus of the Middle Ages.

Using Rahner's concept that grace is "everywhere", the special gift of deacons could be to help overcome this dualism. Liturgy and life, sacred and secular, do not have to be separated. Deacons having a mutual service in the world and of the liturgy can help to show mutual relatedness. (p. 105)

Perhaps this mutuality is well expressed in the "Motu Proprio" of Pope Paul VI, "Laying Down Certain Norms Regarding the Diaconate":

*The deacon is at the disposal of the bishop in order that he may serve the whole people of God and take care of the sick and poor . . . Furthermore, he is entrusted with the mission of taking the Holy Eucharist to the sick in their homes, of conferring baptism, and of attending to the preaching of the word of God in accordance with the express will of the bishop. (THE RITES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, p. 733)*

Herbert Vorgrimler (SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY), indicates what he believes to be special about the contemporary view of Orders as reflected in Vatican II: what is new in the vision of Vatican II is primarily its dynamic: beginning with the mission of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and the idea that human beings are given a share in that mission, the council views Church office as a share in the threefold office of Jesus Christ in service to the people. (p. 263-264)

All three ordained ministries share in the task of teaching, governing and sanctifying. Vorgrimler also emphasizes that the deacon makes clear that the celebration of the liturgy has consequences in the world. Works of charity ought to have a spiritual dimension. (p. 270) Again, we see the desire to overcome the dualism present in sacramental life.

## CONCLUSION

Having briefly explained these three periods, what are some things that can be said? To begin with, I do believe that there is room for legitimate development and insight in theology (as does the Catholic Church). I do accept that we do not have to limit ourselves to the way the New Testament looks at something. Certainly, we would not have the various Creeds if dogma could not develop. Yet, the traditional statement regarding Scripture “norma normans non normata!” has much truth. It expresses values that are not negotiable. Regarding ministry, certainly the sense that all ministry is a form of “diakonia” to the community enshrines the attitude of Jesus. It has been stressed that we cannot know precisely what the ministers listed in the New Testament did, but certainly they were not simply identified with “cultic acts”. While certain expressions of ministry became normative for the whole community, they were never seen as apart from the community they served. The early church was not one of “clergy” who had all the ministry and “laity” who were simply passive recipients.

The Middle Ages brought (although through gradual development which we did not explore) a significant shift. We saw that ministry was more clericalized and a state apart from the community characterized by the terms “status” and “power” particularly over cultic acts. This is not to reject that the ordained are responsible for the celebration of the Eucharist and the rest of the Church’s liturgy, but there is a sense of isolation and the reduction of the non-ordained to merely recipients. The separation of power and jurisdiction removed the spirit empowering grace of the Sacrament of Orders from the full range of pastoral ministry, reducing it to power of certain “act”. Clearly the office of deacon suffered (to this day) with such a perspective.

In more recent times, due to much scholarly research that found its way into the documents of Vatican II, much of what was lost was regained. Again, those who minister in the

Church are challenged to an attitude of service. In addition, ordination is seen as the spiritual basis for all expressions of pastoral ministry (including teaching and directing the community). The deacon, in this scheme, does not have to defend his role in terms of what “acts” he can perform, but as that individual who by all he does reminds the community that the sacred and secular are not opposed but are united.

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**THE “SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER” AND HOLY ORDERS:  
MEANING AND RELEVANCY FOR THE DIACONATE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The notion of “sacramental character” has been under question and even more so for the sacrament of Holy Orders. Much has been written about the issue of whether Orders should be seen in a “functional” or “ontological” sense, whether Holy Orders touches the very “being” of the person who receives it or whether it is a “function” or role which ends when a person leaves the ordained ministry.

In addition, there are those who accept the existence of a “sacramental character”, but see no real meaning in this notion. It is merely a medieval approach to sacraments that does not really speak to contemporary theology. It is merely saying the sacraments of Orders or Baptism and Confirmation are not repeated in our Catholic tradition.

Finally, there is a special challenge to the diaconate as to whether those ordained deacons receive the “sacramental character.” This would restrict the reception of the “sacramental character” to the episcopacy and presbyterate.

All of this has an effect of weakening the ordained ministry (in the opinion of this writer), and particularly weakening the diaconate. Perhaps, there are those who would like to see the diaconate reduced in sacramental dignity. However, whatever motives might be involved, the newly restored ministry of deacon in the West needs to have continued theological underpinnings.

In what follows, this chapter will briefly trace the notion of “sacramental character”, especially as it applies to Orders, look at some representative challenges and attempt some responses.

We begin our discussion of the notion of “character” by looking briefly at the history of this concept. By tradition, the church does not repeat three sacraments: baptism, confirmation and orders. They are received only once. The “res et sacramentum” (the lasting effect of the sacrament) is also called the “character”. (Mc Brien: CATHOLICISM, 1994, p. 795) Mc Brien states that this term was taken over from the ancient pagan world where it referred to the seal that indicated the owner of a slave or soldier. Mc Brien writes that when used by Christian writers such as Tertullian and Augustine, the term applied to the sacramental rite alone. It meant that a person was sealed for life, even he fell into heresy after he became a Christian. Only later in the medieval period did the word “character” become identified with its lasting effect (res et sacramentum”) as distinguished from the rite itself. Mc Brien is emphatic in saying that, the term “character” does not refer to an indelible mark on the soul, as some catechisms had it. It is simply used to describe the permanent effects of three sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders (p. 795)

Kenan Osborne, (SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: GENERAL INTRODUCTION) writes that the teaching of Trent that the three sacraments confer a character has a long history that antedates the period of the Reformation. (p. 111) Going back to the year 200 A.D., it had to do with the question of rebaptism and reordination of those who lapsed. It was this which led to the Tridentine teaching:

*If anyone says that in three sacraments, namely, Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, a character is not imprinted on the soul, that is, a kind of indelible spiritual sign by which these sacraments cannot be repeated, ‘anathema sit’. (Canon 1321 of Trent found in THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, p. 372)*

Using the research of J. Galot, Osborne (op.cit., p. 112) teaches that Trent defined that there is a character, not what the character is. We will reflect more on this later.

Tracing the earlier history of the notion of “character” or “seal,” Patrick Dunn (PRIESTHOOD: A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE PRESBYTERATE) sees the notion of “seal” going back to the New Testament, ie. St. Paul when Paul speaks of God marking us with a seal in 2 Cor: 1:22 (Dunn, p. 143). The early Church Fathers saw the use of the Greek term, “sphragis” (seal) which might identify the ownership of sheep of soldiers, as a good image by which God might identify his own. Dunn tells us that from the fourth century on, there was a strong tendency to see this “ineffaceable sphragis” as indestructible. Dunn states that Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) talks of Baptism as producing an “ineffaceable ‘sphragis’” of the Holy Spirit. John Chrysostom (d. 407) observes that just as a soldier receives a “sphragis” that remains even if he deserts, so with a spiritual “sphragis”. In this way, he distinguishes between the “sphragis” and the grace. (Dunn, p. 143) when Dunn discusses Augustine (d. 430), Dunn asserts (quoting sacramental scholar Jean Galot) that Augustine is relying on even an earlier source when he teaches that a priestly character is given in ordination. Augustine has an interesting approach to the notion of “character.” Augustine believes that certain sacraments should not be repeated because they have already imprinted a character and to repeat them, he believes, would do “injury” to the sacraments involved. (Dunn, p. 144)

There are other early Fathers who have written on the “notion of character”. One of the most poetic examples is found in the writings of the deacon, Ephraim (d. 373). He writes:

*That oil is a friend of the Holy Spirit, and His servant. Like a  
disciple, it accompanies Him, that which the priest and the anointed*

*are sealed. By means of the oil, the Holy Spirit impresses his seal upon the sheep; Like a signet pressed in wax, He impresses His seal, so also the invisible seal of the Spirit is impressed on our Bodies with the oil with which they were anointed in Baptism, Whereby we bear His seal.*

(Jurgens, THE FAITH OF THE EARLY FATHERS, number 712, p. 313)

It was during the Middle Ages that theologians began to analyze the exact meaning and nature of the “character.” Dunn outlines four basic teachings of Bonaventure on theology of character (Dunn, p. 144). A. They prepare for grace. B. They are a seal which distinguishes the Lord’s flock. C. They are something that remain indelible. D. They dispose us for grace.

However, it is Thomas Aquinas who moves more deeply into Augustine’s distinction between “grace” and “character.” He accepted that it marked one out as a member of the Lord’s flock, but he rejected any idea that it opened the soul to grace of “illumination.” Aquinas accepted that the character, for example of Orders, gave a “potential” to perform particular actions, but that it had no intrinsic predisposition toward moral goodness which was the product of grace. Let us briefly look directly at Thomas. In the Third Part of the SUMMA Thomas writes:

*Grace and character are in the soul in different ways. For grace is in the soul as a form having complete being therein, whereas a character is in the soul as an instrumental power ... (Thomas continues) ... grace is in the soul in a changeable manner. But an instrument of power follows rather the condition of the principle agent, and consequently a character*

*exits in the soul in an indelible manner, not from any perfection of Christ's priesthood, from which the character flows like an instrumental power. (Q.63 Art.6, Hutchins, ed. GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD, p. 869)*

Thus, Thomas gives character a real dynamic meaning in its proper field of meritorious work. A clear implication of this is that ordination, for Thomas, is no guarantee of being holier or more saintly. During the Reformation, Martin Luther challenged the distinction between the ordained and the non-ordained. To do this, he had to attack the notion that the priesthood was permanent. Of the Romanists, Luther wrote,

“They have a “character indelibles” (indelible character’), and pretext that a priest after deprivation still differs from a mere layman...All this is nothing but mere talk and a figment of human invention.” (Quoted by Dunn, p. 141) Of course, the Council of Trent will respond by its insistence that an indelible character is imprinted.

We will now explore some more recent challenges to the question of “character” (particularly applied to the sacrament of Orders). We might begin with some reflections from Tad Guzie (THE BOOK OF SACRAMENTAL BASICS) who provides not so much of a challenge as a clarification which is helpful in appreciating Thomas. Guzie is actually rather positive of the medieval approach to sacraments which is thorough and cohesive. Regarding the concept of “character”, Guzie states that it was originally meant to explain why Baptism, Confirmation and Orders were not repeated because their effect was permanent (p. 58). The notion of character was a philosophical explanation of the church's practice. Guzie stresses that the later scholastics did not heed the advice of Thomas that the “...the sacramental character is

not some kind of mark impressed on the soul.” (Guzie, p. 58) The sacramental character, as Thomas sees it, was a sharing in Christ’s own priesthood.

When we look at a contemporary Dominican theologian we see quite a contrary position to Thomas. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. (MINISTRY) says that the first official document of the Church that mentions the sacramental character (regarding Baptism) dates from 1201 in a letter written by Pope Innocent III. (Schillebeeckx, p. 71) Schillebeeckx goes on to say that “priestly character” appears for the first time in a letter from Pope Gregory IX. In high scholasticism, beginning in the thirteenth century, the doctrine of “character” stressed the link between the sacrament of ordination and the church. However, Schillebeeckx writes that the “sacerdotalist-ontological “view of ministry also developed at this time which gave full support to the ontological view of ministry.

Schillebeeckx insists that from a dogmatic point of view, all that was affirmed was the existence of the character without giving any precise explanations. Some theologians even assert that all it can even be explained in terms of a “logical relationship.” (MINISTRY, p. 72) Keenan Osborne (SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION) seems to say as much. He writes:

*The council (Trent) left open all such theories open and legitimate, and that openness remains valid today when the theologians begin to define the “what” of this sacramental character and insinuate that it is “church teaching” they are clearly going beyond the limits of both good theology and adherence to the teachings of the Church. (p. 112) It appears, however, the Schillebeeckx is saying more than the existence or non-existence of the sacramental*

*character. He implies that regarding ordination this character is not permanent. Schillebeeckx argues that there was a fundamental relationship between the minister and the community. He states that the Council of Chalcedon made it impossible to be moved from one community to another. Another basic consequence of this decree was that a minister who for any personal reason ceases to be the president of a community 'ipso facto' returned to being a layman in the full sense of the word. ...So at that time the departure of a minister had quite a different significance from the present day laicization of a priest. (p. 41 of MINISTRY)*

Hence, for Schillebeeckx, there is certainly no permanent or ontological dimension to the sacramental character conferred in ordination on any level.

Moving specifically into the question of the deacon and the reception of a sacramental character, Rev. Joseph Komonchak ("The Permanent Diaconate and the Variety of Ministries in the Church", *DIACONAL READER*, 1985) wonders if the notion of "character" is all that helpful. He questions if there is all that much difference between the effect of the sacramental rite of ordination the effect prayed for in other rites of institution. (p. 35) Komonchak writes that regarding the sacramental character, there is no real consensus among theologians. Opinions vary from a deep "ontological change" to merely stating that the Church does not, in fact, re-ordain. In addition, Komonchak believes that it is not a terribly useful notion since "...no one seems to appeal to the character of the diaconate when discussions arise about its value." (p. 36)

The only possible value is that it states the impossibility of repeating the ordination.

Herbert Vorgrimler (SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY) in discussing the notion of “character” as it is described in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, writes that the Code tries to be faithful too. The teaching of Vatican II when the Code says that the sacrament of Orders is of divine institution and that it makes human beings consecrated servants by the ineradicable character it imprints. (p. 264) In addition, Canon 1008 says that according to the ordination they have received, they act in the person of Christ as they fulfill their duties in teaching, sanctifying and pasturing the people of God. Vorgrimler then goes on to make the interesting statement that the sacramental character and acting in the person of Christ are not necessarily seen as applying to deacons. (p. 264)

Hence, we have some interesting challenges to the notion of character as applied to Orders, particularly the diaconate. Schillebeeckx questions whether the character is permanent. Komonchak wonders whether there is any real difference between the ordained and those instituted into ministries. Vorgrimler questions whether deacons receive a sacramental character as do priests and bishops. These theologians are merely representative of what others have said. For example, Vogel has raised the question of whether ordination is permanent. However, we will let the three we mentioned serve as representatives of this opinion.

As a general response, it is understandable that the discussion about “character” leaves people cold. It sounds so “objective” and seems to leave out any truly personal dimension. A deacon, for example, who knows everything about character and has little sense of real, concrete service, really misses the mark. One can appreciate the theological concerns of a Karl Rahner, reflected on by Michael Skelly, *THE LITURGY OF THE WORLD: KARL RAHNER’S THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP.*) Rahner’s concern is that we have paid too much attention to the objective side of things in the Catholic emphasis on “ex opere operato.” This sacramental

principle means that the grace is conferred on the recipient through the sacramental sign itself and was not dependent on the holiness of the minister or the recipient. This notion led to a magical approach to the sacraments. (pp. 155-156) Rahner wants to emphasize that Trent teaches that if adults are to receive the sacraments fruitfully, they must have the right disposition. Hence, there is the subjective dimension. Nevertheless, the question of character, in the mind of this writer of this chapter, is still significant.

Monika Hellwig (UNDERSTANDING CATHOLICISM) writes that since the fifth century, it has been maintained that along with Baptism and Confirmation, orders seals of “marks” the person with a permanent character. (p. 150) Hellwig reminds that this character remains even if the individual should be relieved of priestly functions. What this means, says Hellwig, is that “...to be aggregated to the ministry of Christ in this specialized way...is seen as radically affecting the very identity of the individual thus called, chosen and ordained.” (p. 150)

A more thorough response to the question of the permanent effect of the sacrament of Orders is found in Patrick Dunn’s (PRIESTHOOD: A REEXAMINATION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE PRESBYTERATE.) Dunn acknowledges that the definition of Trent that Orders confers a permanent character has been challenged. These have included theologians such as Piet Fransen and Harve Legrand. (p. 146) However, the Theological Commission which met prior to the 1971 Synod of Bishops approved a declaration that they saw no valid reason to question the normative teaching of tradition of the permanency of the sacrament of Orders through the conferral of the sacramental character. While it is generally agreed that “Trent” definition is nuanced, Trent simply reaffirmed what had been declared in the Decree for the Armenians which was published in the Council of Florence 1439.

Dunn argues that the critics of the notion of “character” are trying to reduce the priesthood to simply a “function”. Dunn points out that this is the position of Schillebeeckx, Piet Scoonenberg and Thomas O’Meara and at times even Vatican II confuse the “functional” and the “ontological”. (p. 150) Dunn believes, however, that the doctrine of the sacramental character gives “structural stability” (p. 148) to the Church preventing it from becoming an “indeterminate community.” The end result of this, says Jean Galot, would be a new type of priest (deacon) on unknown in the Catholic Church. (Galot, THEOLOGY OF THE PRIESTHOOD. p.196))

Keenan Osborne (PRIESTHOOD: A HISTORY OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH) discusses the question of the “sacramental character” and the question of returning to lay status states that the Council of Trent stood firmly on the hard won principle that three sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Orders) produced a permanent effect. (p. 258) This “...means that if a duly ordained decided to leave the ordained ministry and later return, he would not need to be reordained. Trent would have nothing to do with any contrary opinion. Moreover, Osborne insists, the Councils of Saragosa in 381, Chalcedon in 451, Angers in 453, and Tours in 461 all declared Orders to be irrevocable. (p. 259)

Perhaps one of the most powerful expressions of not only the “why” of the permanency of Orders but why the notion of “character” is important, is in Nathan Mitchell (MISSION AND MINISTRY: HISTORY AND THEOLOGY IN THE SACRAMENT OF ORDER). Mitchell states that the most fruitful way of understanding the permanency of the ordained ministry is to see this in light of the permanence of Christian baptism, the permanence of the community’s apostolic right to ministry and the permanence of the priesthood of Jesus. (p. 306)

What Mitchell means by this is that God establishes a permanent covenant with Christians at Baptism. Because of this, the community has an “apostolic right” to a pastoral leadership that is given to it by God. Preaching, sacraments and service are God’s work. The permanence of the ordained ministry signals God’s enduring presence in complexities of human history. (p. 309) Mitchell writes:

*The permanence of ordination is thus a testament of the permanence of God’s dangerous intimacy with us and with our world...This dangerously intimate God was revealed in the priestly ministry of Jesus...*  
(pp. 309-310)

We turn now to Aidan Nichols (HOLY ORDER: APOSTOLIC PRIESTHOOD FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL.) Nichols favors the theology of character found in German theologian, Walter Kasper. According to Nichols, Kasper sees the notion of character as stressing that the call to service is so deeply stamped into the nature of the person that it is not an addition to the person’s essential relationships, but is rather in them. (p. 79) This is the way Kasper resolves the “function - ontological” debate over the sacrament of Orders. Finally, the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH has a brief but important statement regarding the “sacramental character” and the diaconate. Paragraph 1570 (p. 392) says:

*Deacons share in Christ’s mission and grace in a special way.*  
*The sacrament of Holy Orders marks them with an “imprint”*

*(“character”) which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself “deacon” or servant of all.*

While accepting that this does not represent an “infallible” pronouncement of the Magisterium, it certainly is a teaching of the “ordinary magisterium.” In response to those who have questioned the “sacramentality” of the diaconate (eg. Though not explored in this chapter, Edward Echlin, S.J. in *THE DEACON IN THE CHURCH*, states at the time of Vatican 11, a few theologians questioned this), there is a clear teaching that the diaconate shares in Holy Orders. In response to Vorgrimler’s comment that the Magisterium is unclear on the reception of the Sacramental character in the diaconate, the CATECHISM could not possibly be clearer. Whatever else might be said, there is no question of what the ordinary magisterium teaches regarding the sacrament character and the diaconate.

Narcisco Jubany, in the article on the diaconate in *SACRAMENTUM MUNDI* vol. 2 (p. 57) that the order of the diaconate was instituted by the Apostles to be their fully accredited representatives received the sacramental character and this has been always maintained. It demanded exclusive dedication (which lead to celibacy even for the diaconate.) Further, since the diaconate is truly sacramental, it bestows the grace it signifies which qualifies the person to minister.

### CONCLUSION

Having made this brief excursion into the issues of the “sacramental character” and the sacrament of Orders, we can make some tentative conclusions. In response to those who question the existence of the sacramental character, it certainly flies in the face of many centuries of constant teaching. From the Council of Saragosa in 381 A.D. to the publication of the

CATECHISM in 1993, there has been a constant teaching which says that the sacrament of Orders leaves a permanent effect. This was reinforced by the International Theological Commission prior to the 1971 Synod of Bishops. And contemporary theologians such as Monika Hellwig and Nathan Mitchell support this teaching.

In addition, not only is there a sacramental character, it is not merely an abstract doctrine with little application, but filled with special meaning. We have seen that for Nathan Mitchell and for Patrick Dunn, it strikes right at the nature of the Church and God's relationship to the Church. In the words of Dunn, the Church is not merely an "indeterminate group." Further, it reminds the Church of the permanency of God's fidelity to the Church and its "apostolic right" to leaders. One might also add that those who are responsible for "shepherding" the community in various roles are not free to abandon the flock. The "good shepherd" is willing to risk one's life. Further, Walter Kasper stresses that the notion of "character" is a reminder that the call to is deeply ingrained into the very being of the person that all relationships are affected by it.

Finally, for those who would question as what the Church teaches about the question of "character" as applied to the diaconate, it is now sure that the ordinary magisterium has made it clear that the diaconate shares in Holy Orders. It has a permanent character (with all of the above implications) are received.

Thus, the diaconate, while not sharing in the priesthood, differs from both the priestly orders (bishop and presbyter) and the laity. Deacons truly receive a "sacramental character" that is its own special gift ("res et sacramentum") giving this office unique status within the Church.

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**A REFLECTION ON  
“AT A LOWER LEVEL OF THE HIERARCHY”**

In its description of the diaconate, “Lumen Gentium (p. 29) describes the office of deacon in the following terms, “At a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons who receive the imposition of hands ‘not unto priesthood, but unto ministry’”. It is interesting that Vatican II would take this particular phrase (from “St. Hippolytus”) to describe the diaconate. The Council does not, for example, describe the order of bishop as “above” the order of presbyter. Rather, the Council teaches that “...the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred with episcopal consecration...” (LG 21, 2) Nor does the Council teach that the order of presbyter is “below” the order of bishop. Rather, they are “...shares in his [the bishop’s] consecration and mission...(LG, 28). What this chapter seeks to do is to ask in what sense the deacon “lower” in his share of sacred ministry and how this might be understood. In addition, it will briefly explore other ways to express the concerns of this terminology.

To turn our attention directly to an analysis of this expression, we might benefit from the insights of Karl Rahner on this (found in “The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the Diaconate”, FOUNDATIONS FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE DIACONATE). Regarding this expression, Rahner indicates that there are several unanswered theological questions. Rahner agrees that it is certainly true that the deacon does not have certain functions that according to the teaching of the Church, particularly the Council of Trent, that belong to the priest, particularly celebrating the sacraments of reconciliation and presiding at the Eucharist. From this perspective one can understand the difference between the diaconate and the priesthood. In this sense, perhaps we can describe the office of the deacon as “lower” than that of the priest. But, says Rahner, this does not necessarily imply that the office of deacon is “ipso facto” of a status that is lower than a priest.

In a similar approach, Bishop (now Cardinal) Karl Lehmann in an article published in DEACON DIGEST (“Looking Back, Looking Ahead” May/June, ’94) writing on this same description of deacons as members of a “lower level of the hierarchy” states that this description needs to be carefully handled. Lehmann states it is true that the deacon, as does the priest (presbyter) has a limited participation in the one and complete Office in the Church, the fullness of which is in the office of the bishop. Yet, Bishop Lehmann makes a strong statement that the expression of “Lumen Gentium”, p. 41, that the diaconate is “inferioris ordinis” remains erroneous. (p. 25) The image of a hierarchical step ladder says something about the community of bishops, priests and deacons, but the Bishop insists that much is unsaid regarding the relationship between them. Obviously regarding the celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation there is differentiation, although the Bishop says here “only” in one dimension. However, the office of the deacon is not found in “subtraction” from the office of the priest (as is seen in the description of the deacon that says that he is ordained not to the priesthood but to ministry). It is “ministry” that is the particular characteristic of the deacon. Like Rahner, Lehmann indicates that in his ministry to the poor and his other responsibilities, the deacon cannot be described as being on a lower level of priesthood.

Rather, the deacon has his own special mode of participation in the single integral Sacrament of Order in the Church. In view of making the various ministries responsible for particular obligations, when it comes to ministry to the poor and needy, the diaconate is constituted an order in its own right.

Certainly one of the most articulate defenses of the full equality of the office of the deacon is found in James Barnett’s, THE DIACONATE: A FULL AND EQUAL ORDER. Barnett sees that one of the primary influences of the decline of the diaconate is the development

of the notion of “cursus honorum”. (p. 145) This required a person to hold various offices of differing and increasing responsibility as a demonstration of qualifications. The problem is that while there could be some merit in this, it sees ministry in terms of power and honor rather than service. (p. 145) Barnett (an Anglican who is sympathetic to Catholic teaching), argues for the elimination of passing through ministries. He believes that success in one ministry does not mean success in another. While people need to be tested in ministry, they do not, he believes, have to be formerly instituted in various ministries. In addition, it leaves the impression that these other ministries cannot stand on their own as proper ministries. In defending the role of the deacon, Barnett quotes Pope Paul VI in Paul’s 1967 “General Norms for the Restoring of the Permanent Diaconate in the Latin Church.” These clearly state that the diaconate is not merely a step toward the priesthood but a permanent vocation with its own indelible character. (p. 147) In addition, Edward Echlin (THE DEACON IN THE CHURCH PAST AND FUTURE), writes that while the deacon is described as on “...a lower level of the hierarchy”, he is not inferior to the priest but has a different charisma from the priest or any other person in the Church. (p. 131)

Having briefly sketched something of a theological statement on the meaning of “at a lower level”, we can now look at some further implications of this regarding the uniqueness of the ministry of the deacon. Richard Mc Brien’s little book, *MINISTRY*, points out the emphasis of Vatican II that all ministry in the Church is primarily that of service rather than status. (p. 42) The Church is identified with the whole People of God rather than the hierarchy, and all share by baptism in the threefold ministry of Jesus as priest, prophet and king. (This we have already seen in an earlier chapter.) While this is certainly true of all ministry and ministers, it pertains to the office of deacon to be a particular sign of service. It is the service ministry that is the heart of

the diaconate and the call the deacon has to be the sacramental sign of Jesus the servant to the entire community. What does it mean to minister as Jesus did?

Thomas O'Meara in his *THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY*, stresses that the self-description of Jesus is that of a "minister", "diakonos" in Greek, saying that he is the one who came to serve others and not himself. In addition, "...loving service transmitted the values of the kingdom of God". (p. 31) The problem is that often in Church history, the reverse has been the reality. "Ministry, then, points back to the Church, demands only obedience and offers only worship." (O'Meara, p. 31) It is so easy for all ministers (deacons very much included), to fall into the trap of self-service. On the other hand, when "...servanthood is the style of ministry, the pulse of ministry is the power of the Holy Spirit." (p. 34) This form of ministry reveals that God is present in people's lives.

As we keep in mind the notion of "a lower level of the hierarchy", it is important to remind ourselves the insights of Scripture scholar John Meier. In Vol. 1 of his *A MARGINAL JEW*, he writes that Jesus was not a "cleric" in his society but rather ways a layman. (Chap. 10) He was not part of the priestly caste and had no position of authority in his society. Jesus was not part of the Temple structure and held no position of power. Meier also stresses that contrary to those who would see Jesus as a "peasant" (Crossan's *A MEDITERRANEAN PEASANT*), Jesus did have a certain degree of economic security (not wealth by any means) by working as a "worker of wood". Jesus freely leaves this minimal security and inaugurates a mission to the marginalized and powerless of his society.

Albert Nolan in his *JESUS BEFORE CHRISTIANITY*, points out that even though Jesus belonged to the comfortable middle class (a designation that could be challenged), by choice Jesus identified with the marginalized and poorest of his world. He became an outcast. The

motive for this was compassion. (p. 34) Nolan points out that this word does not adequately translate the depth of what Jesus felt. The original Greek indicates something of “being touched in one’s bowels by the suffering of another”. The response of Jesus to suffering was to seek to liberate people.

Donald Senior, *JESUS: A GOSPEL PORTRAIT*, emphasizes that because of Jesus’ compassion to the outcasts of his society, he draws considerable fire from his opponents. Yet, Jesus refuses to be hemmed in by the taboos of his world. (p. 120) Jesus’ message was to the unclean and the righteous. He reached out and healed those who were on the margins and offered them hospitality. He insisted that the poor were the special friends of God. As Crossan (op.cit) states, in a world where “brokers were essential and where the poor had no “brokers”, people who could speak up for them, even with God, Jesus taught that these “brokerless ones” already had a special relationship with God. (Chap. 3)

Crossan writes that for the Mediterranean world, “honor and shame” were key realities in the lives and the values of these people (as they are for many today). Yet, all too often the outcasts who were many had nothing but “shame” and no possible way out. Edward Schillebeeckx (*CHURCH: THE HUMAN STORY OF GOD*), writes that “...Jesus rescues the poor from their sense of being an outcast, ; he restores their worth as human beings, children of God ...As a result, the poor can ultimately distance themselves from the scale of values in the society which had so humiliated them.” (p. 113) For this reason, Schillebeeckx sees the mission of the Church as “...evangelization and collaboration in development and work of liberation; caritative and political diakonia.” (p. 184) Obviously, Schillebeeckx sees this as the task of the entire Church, not just deacons. Nonetheless, should not deacons feel a particular urgency in this challenge?

In commenting on the ministerial implications of this, Schillebeeckx writes: "...ministry in the Church is not a status or state but a service, a function within the 'community of God' and therefore a "gift of the Holy Spirit." Suffering solidarity with the poor and insignificant is an essential mark of apostolicity of the ministry, since it is an apostolic mark of the whole community of Jesus. (THE SCHILLEBEECKX READER, p. 230)

Much of what has been said about the ministry of Jesus and ministering in the manner of Jesus can be looked at in terms of "power". This is important for our consideration of "at a lower level of the hierarchy." If, deacons are perceived in some sense of being the "least powerful" of the ordained ministers, perhaps there is something in that that deacons should find consolation. If Jesus, as a layman (which the deacon isn't in Catholic teaching), and chose to minister to those without power, than being at a "lower level" could find oneself in a position to reflect a significant aspect of the ministry of Jesus.

Before taking a closer look at the issue of "power", we might conclude this section by some notions from Kneenan Osborne (MINISTRY). In commenting on the style of ministry that he predicts for the Twenty First Century, Osborne sees the theme of the "kingdom of God" as being central to any spirituality of ministry. Osborne predicts a ministry that will be less ecclesiastical and more universal. Specifically he writes: "Jesus' message which centers so much on the good news preached to the anawim, the dispossessed, the poor, the marginalized, those without power or clout, whether in tidy areas of proper society or the tidy areas of proper churchness, will also be the nourishing element in this spirituality." (p. 603) He continues that spirituality will be less narrowly ecclesiastical and more Christological. While personally, this writer believes that these two components are certainly not in opposition since the Church is the

“sacrament” of Christ’s presence to the world, a status oriented ministry is in opposition to the values of the kingdom.

“Power” has different meanings for different people. The world famous psychologist, Alfred Adler, talked about the need to have a sense of power otherwise individuals would have an “inferiority complex”. Protestant theologians such as black theologian James Cone and Reinhold Niebuhr have talked about the importance of power in the sense that when one feels like a victim or is a victim, this sense of “powerlessness” leads to violence. The same has been said by some feminist theologians as well as liberation theologians. (Elizabeth Johnson in CONSIDER JESUS has developed these themes) Power is not necessarily a bad word. Helpful has been the insight of psychiatrist, Scott Peck (THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED). While certainly not agreeing with all of Peck, his distinction between “political” power and “spiritual” power (pp. 284-289) has proven helpful. Peck sees political power as the power to dominate and control others. Spiritual power is a power that comes from within. It is the power that emerges from a greatly developed sense of “awareness” such as Jesus had. It is an inner sense for freedom that does not require the need to dominate others that so often characterized weaker and less developed personalities. It is this sense of power that should be found in all ministers and ministries, but particularly those who are “at a lower level of the hierarchy”. They ought to be sacramental signs of those free persons who do not seek to control but to serve because they know and live the truth of the Gospel.

McCaslin and Lawler say much the same thing about power when speaking of the diaconate (SACRAMENT OF SERVICE). In describing the diaconate in terms of service rather than power they say, “...it is better to be understood as power to empower, not as power to dominate.” (p. 42) They continue, “...the outstanding deacons [we have known] have...empties

themselves of power, position, status, control over their own lives, and given evidence of their talent for poverty long before their ordination”. (p. 45) Indeed, these authors see “poverty” as one of the outstanding virtues of the deacon. “Poverty” here does not necessarily mean to be economically poor, although some deacons do indeed fit this category. Rather, it means that “...they are men who have chosen to be socially poor, socially powerless, men who have chosen to live no longer on their own time and under their own control but on other people’s time and other people’s control”. (p. 44) In effect, they have heard the description of Jesus in the hymn in Philippians (2:7) where Jesus “empties himself and took the form of a servant”.

All of this reflects again the deacon’s unique ministry in the Church. He is a member of the “hierarchy” (not understood as a “power trip”), yet he is at a “lower level” not sharing in the priestly office. Yet, his joy should be that because he is on a “lower level” he can be witness to both the other ordained ministers and to lay persons of the “glory” of being a “servant” in the image of Jesus Christ.

We have tried to take a brief look at the expression “...at a lower level of the hierarchy” and have found that there can only be a limited understanding of this expression theologically. In addition, we have tried to see the positive side of this expression in that it challenges the deacon to minister in the style of Jesus. Hopefully, this can provide some positive reinforcement to both deacons and those who are concerned about the ministry of the deacon.

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**SACRAMENTAL ISSUES**  
**REGARDING THE DEACON'S MINISTRY**  
**TO**  
**THE SICK AND THE DYING**

Can deacons anoint? The simple answer to this question seems to be “no”. Both the CODE OF CANON LAW (CIC 1003) and the RITE OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK (16) state that only a priest (“sacerdos” – either a presbyter or bishop) may anoint. This was the clear teaching of the Council of Trent and has been the teaching of the Church ever since. However, what appears to have been so simply settled perhaps still is an open question. Not that deacons at this point may anoint. But the future possibility is still a question that deserves further exploration.

This chapter does not pretend to offer radically new answers. Rather it seeks to build on previous research and perhaps to add some further reflections and insights. We will look at the primary objection of the Magisterium. We will then examine these arguments to explore new possibilities.

One of the best articles on this question is that of John Ziegler (“Who Can Anoint the Sick”, *WORSHIP*, Ja, 87). In presenting the historical basis of this topic we will make use of the research of Father Ziegler. Since 1551, the Council of Trent the Church rejected the teaching of the Reformers who claimed that others beside the priest could administer the sacrament of anointing (or “extreme unction” as it was called) it. It has been accepted as defined doctrine that only an ordained priest could validly anoint the sick. However, with the restoration of the permanent diaconate (henceforth we will drop the term “permanent”) and also the increase of non-ordained ministers to the sick, the question has been raised anew. Because of the large number of deacons who work as hospital chaplains and other ministries to the sick, Ziegler points out that in 1973, the American bishops petitioned the Congregation for Sacraments and

Divine Worship to empower deacons to anoint the sick. (p 26) Since that time other petitions were made including from bishops from other countries. In each case the answer from Rome has been negative. (p. 26)

The requests of these various conference of bishops have been pastorally rooted. The concern is for so many areas where there is a shortage of priests, including our own country (U.S.A). So many medical facilities are without the presence of a priest, chaplain. Priestless parishes are more and more common. While there has been a desire on the part of many to include non-ordained ministers the sick as part of the discussion, we will focus on the ordained deacon as a minister of anointing for the purposes of this chapter.

As Ziegler indicates, the primary argument against deacons anointing lies in canon 4 of the teaching of the Council of Trent. This states: “If anyone says that the presbyters of the Church whom blessed James exhorts to be brought in to anoint the sick are not the priests ordained by the bishop, but the elders by age in each community, and that for this reason the priest alone is not the proper minister of extreme unction,” (DS 1719) is condemned as “anathema”. This canon was seen as an infallible teaching which was immutable since it was divinely revealed doctrine.

Recent scholarship has raised new questions regarding the classical interpretation of many of the canons of Trent. Particularly, new questions have been asked regarding the question of infallibility of a number of the canons (i.e. Whether certain canons were intended to be understood as infallible.) One can look at the research of Paul Palmer (“Who can Anoint the

Sick?," WORSHIP, 1974) who argues that Trent did not mean that only the priest could anoint the sick but that the priest was "ex officio" the proper minister of anointing (81-82). In addition, Ziegler's work, LET THEM ANOINT THE SICK, (Liturgical Press, 1987) argues that what Trent was doing was defending a long standing practice and defending against challenges to that practice. (p. 25)

Perhaps just as significant is the issue of the competency of the Church regarding matters sacramental. There are no serious sacramental scholars that do not recognize that many of the sacraments have undergone significant development in the history of the Church. The vast amount of research in the decades before Vatican II was the primary impetus for much of the revision of the sacraments that were the fruit of the Council. Even the Sacrament of Anointing was the subject of much scrutiny and the developments in the celebration of this sacrament reflected a renewed appreciation of historical studies.

Questions arise as to how we understand that each sacrament was "instituted by Christ" and what dimensions of the sacrament can not be changed and what aspects are mutable. Classically, as Ziegler points out ("Who Can Anoint"?, p. 28), the Thomists and the Franciscans debated this issue in the Middle Ages. The Thomists held that the sacraments were immediately instituted by Christ who determined their essential aspects. The Franciscans used less precise terminology. Words such as "initiating" and "instituting" are found along with an appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit and the apostles and the Church. Today, the theology of Vatican II which sees the Church itself as a "kind of sacrament" (Lumen Gentium") has expanded the notion of sacrament and theologians such as Keenan Osborne, O.F.M.

As we have seen previously (INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS) he speaks of Christ as the "primordial sacrament" and the Church as the "foundational sacrament". This

approach allows for the possibility of historical development. Much of this same theology is found in Karl Rahner, S.J., who stresses that the Church is the “enduring presence of Christ in the world ...” (THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS, p. 18) Those actions which make the Church realize itself are sacraments and because of what they accomplish what signify they are of divine origin. Thus, theologians such as Rahner and Osborne argue that it is not necessary to find “historical moments” to indicate when the sacraments were instituted in an attempt to do some type of proof-texting.

In addition, because of the historical studies, it has become clear that functions and practices that were once thought to be in vogue always are not necessarily so. We know little, for example, about how reconciliation was celebrated in the time of the New Testament. Certainly, the practice of auricular confession to a priest would not be an accurate description of the situation in the early Church, yet it has been normative for many centuries.

When we look to the various roles and functions and roles of ministers in the Church we see that while we may have continued to use certain titles, we cannot be so sure as to the function that these ministers played. Indeed, in the New Testament there is no clear indication of exactly what was the role of “bishops” or “presbyters” or for that matter “deacons”. At time certain roles seem to be interchangeable. While this writer believes that certain people were designated leaders and there was church order from the beginning, exact functions were not so precise as the studies as people as diverse as Ray Brown, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx suggests. (See bibliographer for a list of these texts).

What is significant for us is that he use of the term “presbyter” in the Letter of James :5, which was used by Trent as a basis for stating that only a priest may anoint, is perhaps based on an understandable but inadequate biblical scholarship. Thus we see in Schillebeeckx,

MINISTRY, “Some scholars rightly suppose all kinds of shifts in the meaning of the term “presbyter”, which as time [of the Pastorals] went on increasingly took over the content of the earlier prophets and teachers.” (p. 51) Even a more conservative work as Patrick Dunn’s, PRIESTHOOD, states: “By the end of the first century ...the primitive Church had known several structures for her ministry. As it is still evolving, the “bishop” is still not clearly distinct from the “presbyter” and the threefold hierarchy which Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107?) took for granted is not found everywhere so clearly defined.” (p. 54) In addition, for the first three centuries, it is to the bishop that presiding over the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that carried the day. Only later were presbyters permitted to celebrate the Eucharist on their own. Hence, as Ziegler indicates: “In light of this scholarship, it cannot automatically be presumed that all sacramental responsibilities traditionally attributed to one or the other hierarchical office or ministry was determined by the direct institution of Christ or the apostles.” (p. 33) More probably it was the Church which assigned which assigned to the various grades of ministers the functions proper to each. Hence, it is an open question as to whether the term “presbyter” refers to the present office of “priest” in all respects. It is true that Trent did elaborate that the “presbyters” of James are the priests of the Church. It is for this reason that J. Mc Clain, in his article on anointing in the CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA (1968, Vol. 1, p. 573) states that it is impossible for deacons and other to anoint. However, we have seen that it is possible that Trent was more interested in condemning the Reformers than limiting the possible ministers.

In addition, there have been a number of important studies that have seriously examined the teaching style of Trent. Trent appears to employ a multiple of meanings to terms such as, “heresy”, “anathema” and “faith”. According to a number of authors, while it does seem that Trent used these terms in a manner similar to the teaching of Vatican I, there are occasions where

there is a less precise meaning. Canonist, Ladislav Orsy, S.J. (*THE EVOLVING CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE*), raises this very question. He writes, “Does it mean that every single clause of the canon [when “anathema sit” is used in the decrees of Trent] is of the same doctrinal value; or, does it allow for different doctrinal weights in so many clauses?” (p. 18) Orsy indicates that the latter is the case. Similarly, Piet Fransen, (“The Authority of Councils”, *PROBLEMS OF AUTHORITY*, p. 57) states that “heresy” may not always have had the same precise meaning it had today. Such comments raise the possibility that canon 4 of Trent might not be quite as settled as McLain and others would like us to believe.

While we are looking at the issue of extending the possibility of anointing to deacons, there is a most interesting situation in the history of sacraments. About the year 1400 Pope Boniface IX granted to the Abbot of St. Osith in Essex, England, and to his successors the privilege to ordain members of his community to the priesthood. The Abbot was not a bishop. In 1547, Pope Martin V granted a similar privilege to the Cistercian Abbot of Alzelle in Saxony. In 1489, Pope Innocent VIII granted the same privilege to the Abbots of Cîteaux. No one denies the authenticity of these decrees. The question that is raised is whether the Pope was “untying” a radical power that was already present or whether by virtue of the “supreme authority” of the papacy, the pope was granting an extraordinary privilege. (Neuner-DuPuis, *THE CHRISTIAN FAITH*, p. 542) Nevertheless, it certainly indicates that the Church exercises a tremendous authority over its sacraments. This certainly demonstrates a more significant departure from the entire tradition of the East or West. Indeed, it would seem far more extreme than the possibility of deacons anointing.

In addition, while there is far less argumentation of support for the practice, there are even instances where deacons are asked to preside over reconciliation in the case of impending

death. James Dallen writes: (THE RECONCILING COMMUNITY) “In the ancient Church, the bishop’s presence was ordinarily required so that the laying on of his hands would officially sign restoration and solidarity. In emergencies, where death threatened, other Church officials especially the presbyters, from whose number the bishop ordinary selected his delegate for official functions, but sometimes the deacon as well could be authorized to preside at this act of worship.” 9p. 278) This is not to argue for deacons reconciling penitents but as a further indication of historical flexibility in the celebration of sacraments.

While the question of lay anointing in the early centuries of the Church has received considerable attention, it is necessary to make reference to it here. The most quoted is the letter of Pope Innocent I to Decentius (416). In this letter, among other things, the Pope is responding to the Bishop of Gubbio regarding the minister of the sacrament. Innocent argues that it is the role of the bishop to consecrate the oil. Therefore, he ought to be the one who administers this anointing. However, if he is unable to do so himself then it belongs to the presbyters. However, this “...is permitted not only to priests but also to all Christians to use for anointing in their own need or that of those close to them” (DS 216)

This raises two questions as Ziegler indicates (p. 34): Is the Pope saying that all Christians can anoint with oil blessed by the bishop in case of necessity and does he mean this is the same anointing that is found in James. One response has been that what is meant is that when the anointing is done by a priest it is a sacrament and when done by a lay person it is a “sacramental”. Indeed, one finds this in the article quoted earlier by Mc Clain: “...although the same oil was used, two disparate anointing existed side by side: the first properly a Sacrament, was administered by a bishop or priest and was related to the forgiveness of sin as well as the restoration of health; the second, a sacramental, administered by a layman and looking only to

the restoration of health.” (p. 570) Yet, this same author points out that the oil had to be consecrated by the bishop and that the oil itself seems to have been regarded as a permanent sacrament (something like the Eucharist) and that it is complex problem that does not admit of any easy solution.

In responding to Mc Clain and others we might look at the comment of James Empeur (PROPHETIC ANOINTING) who comments on the letter of Pope Innocent to the bishop of Toulouse (406): “Innocent refers to two anointings: one by the sick person or some relative and another by a bishop or priest. But this should cause no difficulty since the sacramental nature of the anointing by priests and bishops is clear from the letter...Presumably, whatever sacramentality there was in lay anointing came from the fact that they used oil blessed by the bishop.” (p. 35)

There are a number of additional references indicating anoint by others than a priest. Caesarius of Aries (d. 543), Elegius of Noyon (a seventh century bishop) and Bede the Venerable of England (d. 735) all urge lay anointing provided the oil has been consecrated by the bishop. (Gusmer, AND YOU VISITED ME, p. 15-17) Gusmer continues “...Although Innocent and Bede distinguish two types of unction, lay and presbyter, no great difference is made between the two. Often times when oil was to be applied by another, the tendency was to seek out someone who had a reputation for holiness or who possessed a charisma of healing.” (p. 19) Again, Gusmer stresses that the important thing was who consecrated the oil more than who applied it. In summary, to quote Ziegler, “The documents of the preceding centuries give support to the position that the practice of lay anointing was widespread and that it was regarded like that done by the priests, to be the same sacramental anointing prescribed by James.” (p. 43) Ziegler goes on to say that with the new discipline of the eighth century which restricted the

anointing to priests was accompanied with, among other things, instances of tampering with the text of Innocent I which testified to the practice of lay anointing or forcing an interpretation which made an "...anachronistic application of the distinction between a sacrament and a sacramental". (p. 43)

The major shift was the Carolingian turning point about the year 800. The focus on the role of the presbyters was due to the combining of the sacrament of reconciliation with the sacrament of anointing. Of course only the bishop or priest could officiate at the sacrament of penance. Since the new rite of anointing that had emerged during the Carolingian period was celebrated with deathbed reconciliation, the practice of lay anointing disappeared. (It also led to confusion on the meaning of the sacraments and the consequent focus of anointing being the remission of the effects of sin. Anointing also became the sacrament of the dying). "When ... the rite of anointing became part of the last rites of the church for the dying it is also understandable why lay administration of the sacrament should yield to anointing by presbyters or priests." (Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 85)

Ziegler mentions that the scholastics of medieval theology all agreed that the minister of anointing is the priest. The primary reason cited was that since the sacrament remitted sins, it could only be celebrated by a priest. In addition, only a consecrated person could handle the consecrated matter (the oil) and only a priest could do that which was done in the person of the Church. (Ziegler, p. 36) The question is however, this. Since these changes were a development of the Carolingian reform when they were canonized by Trent, did this mean that this more recent practice was from the very beginning the divine intention? Or, did Trent canonize the current practice which was not so precisely determined by Christ and the Apostles. Was Trent giving expression to a particular manner of celebration that was not binding for all times? Of

course the Church has the right to determine what makes for the validity of her sacraments. Hence what Trent decreed was binding and still is until changed by the highest authority of the church.

In response to the often cited challenge of the medievalist that since “Extreme Unction” remitted sins hence only the priest could celebrate this sacrament (along with the claims that the oil could only be handled by a priest and that since it was a public celebration it called for the ministry of the priest), Ziegler makes a number of responses. He argues that these changes that came during the Medieval period were radical in nature and happened at a time of great clerical reform (LET THEM ANOINT THE SICK, p. 86) In the Medieval period there were great developments both in how anointing was understood and liturgically celebrated. Finally, Ziegler insists that the practice of the first eight centuries of the Church, in the consciousness of the church, lay anointing was seen as sacramental. (Ibid.) Nevertheless, Ziegler maintains that the medievalists were correct in their observation that the sacraments are public celebrations of the Church and should be celebrated by public persons. The permanent character that both the priest and deacon receive (as insisted upon in the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, no. 1570) identify the priest or deacon as a public person. While Ziegler will also defend on the basis of earlier history the practice of lay anointing (as we have seen over and over) there is a distinct issue of the deacon being permitted to anoint. The deacon is already a public person and hence Ziegler believes that all this is required is for the Church to extent the right to anoint to deacons. (LET THEM ANOINT THE SICK, p. 153)

Given the present discipline of the Church, however, there are some other issues that need to be addressed. First of all, while this present writer believes strongly in the importance of the sacrament of anointing, there is a sacramental celebration which the deacon (among others)

may celebrate, the rite of Viaticum. As the Church is again stressing Anointing as the sacrament of the sick, Viaticum (special communion rite for the dying) is again being seen as the proper sacrament for those who are close to death.

In Number 175 of the RITE OF THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK, we read: “The celebration of the Eucharist as viaticum, food for the passage through death to life, is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. It is the completion and the crown of the Christian life on earth, signifying that the Christian follows the Lord to eternal glory and the banquet of the heavenly kingdom.” Some of the special features of this celebration are the renewal of baptismal promises, the profession of faith, the sign of peace and the Eucharist administered with special words. This special celebration underscores the intention of the Church to restore this sacrament as the special sacrament for the dying.

Connected with this is the imparting of the plenary indulgence. Indulgences have come upon hard times in recent years and often are the subject of ridicule. However, theologians of the caliber of a Karl Rahner have defended their use and their history can be traced back to the time of Cyprian of Carthage when those imprisoned for their faith prayed for those who were undergoing canonical penance. In essence it celebrates the “communion of saints.” Properly understood, Indulgences reflect powerfully the notion of the church as “communio.” At the conclusion of the celebration of viaticum is the granting of the “Apostolic Pardon”, a practice that goes back to the fourteenth century.

In responding to the question of the meaning of the Apostolic Pardon, Gusmer (p. 118) responds that just as with share in human solidarity in original sin, we share in solidarity in the good works of the communion of saints. Gusmer underscores that the real preparation for the beatific vision is not the sacrament of anointing but the Apostolic Pardon. Unfortunately, many

priests ignore the practice. Nonetheless, this Pardon may only be given by a priest. (No. 106)

This Pardon is clearly not sacramental absolution. It is the remission of the “temporal punishment.” Since this is not the celebration of sacramental absolution, could not this be extended to the deacon as the Church’s official minister? Perhaps the “deprecatory” (second form without the formula “I...grant you pardon” which could be confusing) could be the one assigned to deacons. This would be an extension of the ancient practice where deacons did minister to the dying in the absence of a priest. Of course, if a priest is present (or could be present), then the Pardon should be celebrated by the priest. We are speaking of cases where there is no priest. Certainly this is an area where people could be comforted and would not challenge any present discipline on sacraments. The plenary indulgence comes from the power of the Apostolic See. The minister is simply extending this pardon.

In addition, maybe the most important thing the deacon needs to keep in mind is that he is a deacon. His first ministry is that of service. Sacraments take their meaning as celebrations of the community in the context of a wider celebration of faith. All too often we have images of priests running in and out of rooms of hospitals, etc., anointing people. This is not to impugn the motives of overworked priests. However, such celebrations are hardly ideal. There is a wider service and ministry to the sick (counseling, praying with people, doing chores where possible, bring people to doctors’ offices, etc.) in which the celebration of anointing is but the high point of a whole series of ministry. If deacons were simply to replace priests is what is clearly what is theirs (and only be extension in extraordinary capacity as a future possibility) the whole ministry of “diakonia” which is the hallmark of the deacon would be undermined.

Yet, there is a beautiful sacramental possibility that in fact is denied people in many cases due to the shortage of priests. As Tibor Horvath writes (“The Sacrament of the Anointing of the

Sick as revelation of God”), “...this sacrament reveals in its symbolism more powerfully the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ than the other sacraments”. Sacraments belong to the “esse” and not the “bene esse” (essence, not just the well being) of the Church. Whatever one might think of an Edward Schillebeekx, (MINISTRY) there is something to be said about his insistence that people have a right to the Eucharist which is at the very heart of the Church. In a similar way, while recognizing that anointing is not essential for salvation, as a sacrament it plays its significant role in the life of the Christian and therefore access to this sacrament at such a critical moment in the lives of people ought to be as available as possible. Regarding the celebration of this sacrament by a deacon, it would seem that at least deacons could be authorized to minister this sacrament. Thomas and the other medieval theologians were correct in saying that as a public celebration it belonged to the public minister. While certainly recognizing the presidency of the priest, deacons also share in the ordained ministry and thus represent the Church in a public way. Hence, it would seem that if it is possible to extend the ministry of Anointing, at least deacons would be the ones that could be empowered by the church to do this.

Certainly, there should be no question of taking “something away from the priest”. Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist do not absolve the obligation of priests to visit and communicate the sick. As the president of the community the pastor has the first obligation to do so. Indeed, the priest’s sacramental ministry is vitally connected to his general presidency over the community. At the same time one can have in mind the encouragement of Pope John Paul II who told priests that the two poles of their ministry is the celebration of the Eucharist and reconciliation. As the presiders over the community, these are the sacraments that absolutely belong to the priest.

But given pastoral emergency situations, is the time right to explore again the possibility of extending to the deacon in an extraordinary capacity the ministry of anointing? Is the time right to at least permit the deacon to confer the Apostolic Pardon? One can only await the judgment of the Magisterium which continuing to minister as deacon that are already in place.

Finally, keeping in mind our concern with the uniqueness of the diaconate, as the ordained minister of service the care of the sick he ministers as a public minister of the Church. He represents the Church in a manner different from the lay person. By ancient tradition he brings Holy Communion to the sick. He is able to celebrate the rite of Viaticum. Yet, he ought to do what he can to assist in the care of the sick. Often that will be limited but the concern should be there. The deacon is neither priest nor lay person. He is not primarily there to administer the sacraments, though he does have a role in this. But as deacon, he needs to show the solicitude of the Church community by whom he has been sent by the “laying on of hands.”

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**MODELS OF DIACONAL SPIRITUALITY:  
EPHREM, LAWRENCE, ATHANASIUS  
GREGORY AND FRANCIS**

If one were to examine the list of deacons in the sanctoral calendar of the West Church, One would only find three clearly identified as deacons. St. Vincent the Martyr, St. Ephrem and St. Lawrence. St. Stephen is called the proto-deacon in the Eastern liturgy but not identified as such in the Western calendar. St. Francis of Assisi is identified as such for the Franciscans, but there is some question about his diaconate (which we will see a bit later.) given the two thousand years of Christianity, that is certainly very minimal. Fortunately this list is by no means compete. There exists a significant number of saints and martyrs who are deacons in the Church of the Christian East that are included in the Byzantine Liturgy celebrated by Eastern Catholics as well as Orthodox and Oriental Churches. Included among these were a number of deaconesses venerated for their sanctity (including Melania the Elder in Jerusalem, Olympias of Constantinople and Susanna of Palestine. (Swan, chap. 5). Of the male deacons, the sanctoral calendar of the Eastern Church has a large number, most of whom would be unfamiliar to Western Christians. Yet, deacons might benefit from some awareness of these including the deacons of Alexandria who died ministering to people in a plague in 262 or Primus and Donatus who were martyred in North Africa in 297 by the Donatist heretics.

Indeed, deacons of today could find fewer better models than St Marinus of Dalmatia who live in the fifth century. Originally was a stonemason, he was a lay preacher to Christians who were sent to work in a quarry as punishment for professing the Christian faith. Eventually he was ordained a deacon by the Bishop of Rimini and lived as a celibate deacon (not a monk) serving the imprisoned and those who were suffering. Eventually the small country of San Marino was named for him. Nevertheless, the following five models have been chosen for more extensive reflection.

There are several issues that need to be addressed before commencing. To begin with, it is obvious that two of the people in our title died not as deacons, but one as a Pope and the other as a bishop. Indeed, probably they are most famous for what they did as pope and bishop. Nevertheless, Pope Gregory the Great and Archbishop Athanasius were both deacons when they were elected of office and both served as deacons for many years and in fact much of their contribution to a “diaconal” spirituality was formed during their years as deacons. In addition, there is the fact that Gregory and Athanasius come out of a monastic spirituality, Francis out of a celibate mendicant spirituality and Ephrem was a celibate. With the majority of contemporary deacons being married, one could ask what their contribution could be to a married deacon. This reflection will attempt to draw on what each of these individuals have to say to any deacon, married or celibate, living under any condition. Finally, there is a question of a “diaconal” spirituality. My own assumption is there are a variety of ways of living a “diaconal” spirituality which is why I have chosen five different expressions. It might be said, however, that what each of these held in common was a life of service without which there could be no truly “diaconal spirituality”. What would be more accurate is to say how one lives out a spirituality of service might be expressed in a variety of ways as these saintly deacons reflect. One might note that there is a deliberate attempt to be inclusive in that these deacons come out of both Eastern and Western Christian traditions and to be precise out of Syrian, Greek and Latin traditions.

We can begin with a deacon who in many respects embodies the vocation to the diaconate that most resembles that of a contemporary deacon, St. Ephrem. We begin with him not because of strict chronology, but because he is not known too well with Western deacons and yet comes so close to much of their experience. Ephrem the Syrian was born near the beginning

of the fourth century in Nisibis and spent his early life teaching, writing hymns, homilies and commentaries with the constant approval of bishops who remained faithful to the apostolic faith. This is mentioned because there were a substantial number of bishops who embraced the heresy of Arianism (which stated that Jesus was less the God) with whom Ephrem engaged in battle.

The loss of control by the Roman Empire to Persia in 363 CE forced him and many others to move from his native City to Edessa which was within the Roman Empire and in which he established a school of biblical and theological studies. It was in Edessa that Ephrem was ordained to the diaconate. Ephrem died in Edessa while he was ministering to victims of the plague in 373 CE.

It is common to portray Ephrem in the icons in his honor having him garbed in a monastic habit. While Ephrem was a deacon, he was never a monk. He did live a particularly Syrian form of asceticism called in Syria an “yhydy”, a “solitary” or “single one”, but he lived as a member of an ordinary Christian community right in the midst of ordinary life. (EPHREM THE SYRIAN, “Forward”, p. xi)

Christianity seems to have very ancient roots which has a famous legend of the King of Edessa requesting that Jesus come and visit him. Jesus instead sends his disciple, Addai. While clearly legendary, it reveals Syria’s connection with primitive Christianity. . Syrian spirituality seems to have a strong asceticism and individualism. By the time of Ephrem, the solitary ascetic is the model. In addition, the emphasis on individualism leads to an overemphasis on personal experience at the loss of the sacraments (called “Messalianism,” CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY, vol. I, p. 154). However, there was a positive side of this individualism in which the ideal was to be a “stranger” to the world, not by withdrawing from society but rather to assume a special

responsibility for it and to be a prayerful presence within it. (Ibid) It is obviously this type of approach that characterized the life of St. Ephrem.

Ephrem was a master writer of poetry and his works are considered gems of both theology and poetry. He was a great teacher of theology and spent much of his energy dealing with a variety of heresies. In his early life in Nisibis, he was engaged in polemics against Gnosticism in the days shortly after the Council of Nicea. Later in life, while in Edessa, his theological writing and teaching was, as reflected in his “Hymns against Heresies”, a continual battle against Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan as well as Arian bishops. Ephrem remained in the midst of secular living, rather than withdrawal to a monastic community. Perhaps the high point of his diaconate was his service to those desperately ill from the plague where he risked his life and eventually succumbed himself. His life combined that of a great intellect, theologian, thinker and poet along with that form of service to the sick. Ephrem used his gifts to serve with both his mind and his hands and was outstanding in both. Two special features of the spirituality of St. Ephrem are the importance of symbolism and the use of feminine imagery. Regarding the use of symbolism, Ephrem is the master in Syrian literature. It is an approach that sees simultaneously both the visible world and the hidden realities of God found within.

(CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY, vol. I, p. 157) This way of writing had a profound effect on later generations. Like the Cappadocians, Ephrem insisted that God’s nature cannot be understood and always remains mysterious. On the other hand, because of the Incarnation, we are able to know and to love God. It is by this “second vision” we can approach God in our own human sphere. Certainly this spirituality will be reflected in later generations by Francis, Gregory Palamas, and Ignatius of Loyola to mention only a few.

The second aspect, the place of the feminine, is also significant. Feminine imagery finds its place in Syrian spirituality before Ephrem such as in the “Odes of Solomon”. In Ephrem, however, particularly in his magnificent poetry and theology of Mary, one finds an incredible depth of feminine imagery in the description of the spiritual life.

Ephrem has something very real to offer to a “diagonal” spirituality. He models that style of deacon who remains in the middle of ordinary human affairs yet sees himself called to witness to something deeper. He does not seek to withdraw but by prayer and service to penetrate more deeply into the heart of the world. Ephrem is not afraid to be a witness to the truth, whether the challenge comes from a fellow citizen or an Aryan bishop. He is clearly “not ashamed of the Gospel” and in the midst of secular realities stands firm. He had an excellent mind made valiant efforts to master and teach Christian truth. Yet, he is that “hands on” deacon who, when needed, is not afraid to get close to the sick and abandoned, refusing to say in some isolated intellectual world. For many deacons, he provided much to think about and to imitate. Finally, his sensitivity to the feminine in spirituality has much to offer the deacon of today called to serve in a Church that is becoming more sensitive to the role and dignity of women.

Our second deacon is certainly more familiar to most contemporary deacons, St. Lawrence of Rome. Early in the Third century in Rome, a rise in persecutions of Christians began to occur, possibly because they were confused with a heretical sect, the Montanists, who were propagating a form of hostility to all aspects of the Roman government. (CHURCH HISTORY: TWENTY CENTURIES OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY, p. 89) By the year 250, the Emperor, Decius, decided that it was time to eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. He ordered an edict that all people were to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods, a move primarily directed against Christians. Decius believed that this would bring new order and life to his

Empire. The names of those who refused to offer sacrifice and those who conformed received a decree called a “libellus”. Those who rebelled were subject to all forms of persecution. Decius’ successor, Valerian, decided to direct this persecution specifically to the leaders of the Christian community assuming that without leaders that the community would soon fall apart. It was in the midst of all of this that St. Lawrence comes on the scene.

According to early tradition, Lawrence was born in Huesca, in Spain and went with his family to Rome where he became one of the seven deacons of the City under Pope Sixtus II. (DICTIONARY OF CATHOLIC BIOGRAPHY, p. 676) He was destined to become one of the most praised martyrs of the Church as seen in the Words of St. Maximus that the whole Church joins in universal joy and honor. (BUTTLER’S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, vol. III, p. 297) He was placed in charge of a great responsibility, which included the goods of the Church and with that the distribution of alms to the poor.

In 258 CE, Sixtus was arrested as part of the persecution of Valerian and executed. Four days later, Lawrence was to join his bishop in the same fate. Much of what we know about Lawrence comes from the writings of St. Ambrose. (“De Officiis”, I, 41) According to this tradition, Lawrence asked the Pope where he was going without his deacon. The Pope responded that in three days Lawrence would join him. Lawrence was filled with joy at this news and set out immediately to give all the poor, widows and orphans all the money that he had. He even sold sacred vessels too have more money to distribute. The Prefect of Rome heard of these activities and assumed that the Church was in possession of great funds. The prefect ordered Lawrence to bring to him all the treasures that he possessed so as to supply the Emperor with much needed funds. Lawrence agreed that the Church is indeed rich and has treasurers anything beyond what the Emperor could possess. He agreed that he would return with these

treasurers but that he needed three days to secure these treasures. The prefect granted him his request.

During this time Lawrence went through the City seeking out the poor who were supported by the Church. On the third day, Lawrence gathered a great number of the blind, lame, lepers, orphans and widows and then invited the Prefect to visit these treasures. The Prefect was astonished and clearly not amused at what this deacon had gathered. He demanded to know where the treasures were. Lawrence replied that these were the treasures of the Church. The enraged Prefect ordered that Lawrence be forced to suffer a slow and painful death on an iron bed over a fire. St. Augustine said that Lawrence's love for Christ was so intense that he did feel the torments of his persecutors and Ambrose records that famous line ascribed to Lawrence that he said to his tormentors to turn him over as he was cooked on one side. (BUTLER'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, p. 298) It is further recorded that some of the Roman senators were so impressed by Lawrence that they were converted to Christianity.

St. Augustine writes:

Lawrence, as you know, was a deacon at Rome. There he distributed the sacred Blood of Christ; there he shed his own blood for the sake of Christ. The blessed Apostle John, clearly referring to the mystery of the Lord's Supper, told us, 'As Christ gave His life for us, so we ought to give our lives for our brothers.' Saint Lawrence learned that lesson well, he understood it and applied it. What he received at the table, he prepared to fulfill in himself. He loved Christ during his life

and imitated him in his death. (Sermon 304)

While no doubt there are elements that are most likely legendary, they certainly provide an incredible model of spirituality. Lawrence's love for the poor and marginalized rooted in his love for Christ which was strengthened by his participation in the Eucharist gives to any deacon a call and challenge to look at his ministry to the poor. No matter what ministry a deacon has, if there is not some real outreach to those who the neglected ones he might indeed ask what is his ministry about? While diaconal ministry has many dimensions, love for the poor ought to always find some expression.

St. Athanasius brings us again into the world of the Christian East. Born about 297 in Alexandria, he died in 373. Known as the "Champion of Orthodoxy", Athanasius gave his life to preserve the true teaching of the Church. It is certain that he received an excellent education which included philosophy, literature and theology. He had an excellent understanding of Scripture and also received a deep spiritual formation at the hands of the monks of the desert, especially the great St. Anthony of Egypt. It is not until the year 318 that he makes his appearance on the stage of history. When he was about 21, he was ordained a deacon and was appointed secretary to Bishop Alexander. It was during this period that he produced what is probably his most famous treatise on the Incarnation ("De Incarnatione").

In the year 323 that a major heresy was to arise (and still in some ways can be found in the Church today) called "Arianism", named after its founder, a priest of Alexandria named Arius. It was a struggle that was to dominate the life of Athanasius, as deacon and as bishop. However, it is the deacon Athanasius that we wish to focus on, though no doubt some of his most important work comes from his years as Bishop of Alexandria. Yet, his contributions that

he made while as deacon (and certainly it would have been assumed that had he not been elected bishop he would have lived his whole life as a deacon) that we will focus on and find another model of diaconal spirituality.

As deacon, Athanasius, as the bishop's secretary, composed an encyclical letter condemning Arius. He was also certainly present at the great Council of Nicea in 325 where the teaching of Arius was condemned and the full divinity of Christ was affirmed. Athanasius was to spend the rest of his life defending this doctrine.

It was as deacon that he produced his first great literary work, "De Incarnatione Verbi" (BUTLER'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, Vol. 11, p. 212) where there is the oft quoted statement, "God became man so that man might become God". This has to be the classic presentation of the doctrine of "deification" that is so central in Eastern (and also Western) spirituality. It is the notion that we are all called to be "divinized" or made to be partakers of the Divine Nature". (2 Peter 1:4) Donald Goergan writes: "The Fathers have often repeated the words of Athanasius in every century, wishing to sum up...the very essence of Christianity". (JESUS, SON OF, SON OF MARY, IMMANUEL, p. 32) It is this doctrine which Athanasius will devote his life because this is at the heart of soteriology (what it means to be saved). If Jesus is not truly divine than we have not truly been redeemed since redemption is being made a sharer in what Jesus is. As scholar J.N.D. Kelly writes, "...only if the Mediator is Himself divine could man hope to re-establish fellowship with God." (EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES, p. 233)

What Athanasius is defending is the reality that we are called to be "Christified", to be healed and transformed into by grace what Jesus is by nature, a sharer in God's very life. We become by grace "other Christs". By the operation of the Holy Spirit, Christ becomes present in

us and through us. Perfection for Athanasius is to become by grace more of what Christ is by nature. We become by grace the continuation of the presence of Christ.

Certainly this notion has to powerfully reflect on the nature of the diaconate which is to sacramentalize the presence of Christ the Servant. Athanasius used all of his great mental and spiritual powers to serve his bishop and provide the theological insight to help resist one on the major heresies of the Church. His service as secretary to his bishop provided the academic support in assistance to defend orthodox teaching. Certainly, deacons need to be adequately equipped to defend Church teaching since so often they are on the firing line in the midst of the secular world. In addition, however, to be “christified” ( a term dear to Pope John Paul II) is at the heart of what any Christian, and certainly a deacon, is about. How prepared are deacons to defend gently but clearly the faith of the Church? How do deacons reflect the continued presence of Christ in our world?

Perhaps one of the most interesting of all deacons that we will look at is the next, known to history as Gregory the Great. He is the source of a popular phrase in spirituality that describes Ignatian spirituality, “ a contemplative in action. ” This phrase that goes back to Jerome Nadal, an earlier follower of St. Ignatius of Loyola, actually has much earlier roots in Gregory. Bernard McGinn, the well respected professor of Early Christianity at the University of Chicago, writes that for Gregory “...the life of contemplation is open to all Christians” (THE GROWTH OF MYSTICISM, Vol. II, p. 74). While in itself the contemplative life is higher, yet, “...contemplation should yield to the demands of love whenever necessary.” (p. 75)

Gregory was born about 540 into a wealthy aristocratic family. He was given a classical education and, while open to secular learning, did not see great use for it. As a young man he

had observed the invasions of the Ostrogothic war. He abandoned secular life and became a monk.

In his early years as a monk, he devoted himself to a rigorous ascetical life. This, however, was not to last. In 579, Pope Pelagius II ordained him a deacon and sent him to Constantinople as a papal ambassador. He remained there until 586. It is his years there as a deacon that we will be concerned with. While in Constantinople, Gregory showed incredible diplomatic ability. He became friendly with the family of the Emperor and yet Deacon Gregory, in the midst of all this power and wealth, managed to live a life of deep prayer and simplicity. He gathered a number of monks around him so as to support him in this and managed to be both immersed in secular life and in a life of deep contemplation. As Gregory writes: “There is no Christian state from which the life of contemplation can be excluded. Whoever has an interior heart can be illuminated by the light of contemplation”. (GROWTH IN MYSTICISM, *Ibid.*, p. 74) On the other hand, while insisting on the interior life, Gregory, even after being elected Pope, “...did not hesitate to entrust to them {monks} pastoral duties, even missionary work, when he needed them”. (CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY, Vol. I, p. 118) Action and contemplation moved from being seen as alternate lifestyles to expressions that should always be held together in a kind of tension. All Christians were called to practice both but obviously in different ways. Gregory worked out in subtle accounts the relationship between the two.

When Gregory returned from Constantinople, as deacon of Rome, he returned to his monastery and was elected abbot. During this period the Venerable Bede describes an incident about deacon Gregory. While walking one day in the marketplace of Rome, Gregory noticed some fair haired boy with a light complexion. When he inquired who they were, he was told that they were Angles (English). Gregory’s response was “Angles, not Angles”. (BUTLER’S LIVES

OF THE SAINTS, Vol. I, p. 566) When Gregory realized that these people had no knowledge of Christ, he resolved to set out with some monks to do missionary work. While to be fair to scholarship some have stated that this story is apocryphal, it does seem reflect the deep evangelical thrust of Gregory. Two years after Gregory returned as deacon, he was elected Bishop of Rome and became one of the Church's most outstanding Popes.

Of course, Gregory is most remembered for what he did and wrote as Pope Gregory, but Deacon Gregory provides some powerful spiritual models. Most especially, his theme "contemplative in action" ought to be fundamental for every deacon (as for every Christian). Gregory modeled an individual who was able to be sophisticated in secular affairs and yet remain a man of deep prayer. Although a monk, as a deacon he had a profound sense of the evangelical nature of the Church. In an age where Pope John Paul II is asking for a "new evangelism" as we move into the next century, might not the spirit of Gregory be a challenge for all of deacons? Finally, Gregory was a man of service. When his bishop, Pope Pelagius, asked him to leave his "comfort zone" of a monastic life, accept ordination as a deacon and serve in a very secular world, Gregory accepted this call. By nature a contemplative, Gregory went beyond what was comfortable for him and gave his best efforts to serve the Church. Deacons today also need to leave their "comfort zones". Often ministry of service will place deacons in roles and situations where they need to go into a secular society whose values will often contradict the Gospel. Deacon Gregory reminds that if ordained servants become "contemplatives in action" they can keep their peace and stability in the midst of conflict.

No doubt, by far, the most well known to most Latin Rite deacons is the next deacon saint, Francis of Assisi. It is always important to distinguish between the "real" St. Francis and the version that often appeal to more popular piety. Certainly, Francis was the gentle, nature

loving man that so many have come to know, but he was also a man of great strength and his spiritual tradition requires a mature and very adult response. In the writings of the great theologian of the High Middle Ages, Saint Bonaventure, “The Life of Saint Francis” (found in BONAVENTURE, Ewert Cousins, ed.) describes Francis having prepared a Christmas crib (from which our custom comes) and invited friars and other people to celebrate Christmas. Bonaventure writes: “A solemn Mass is celebrated over the crib, with Francis as deacon chanting the Holy Gospel. Then he {Francis} preaches to the people concerning the birth of the poor King, whom when he wished to name him, he called in his tender love, the Child of Bethlehem.” (p. 278) These beautiful and charming stories of St. Francis have made him one of the most loved of all the saints. Yet, the profound impact of this deacon has to be understood on even a deeper level.

Francis was born about 1181 in central Italy. Having learned Latin and the other basics as a boy, in the parish church of St. George in Assisi. The conversion story of Francis leaving the moderate wealth and security of his father’s home, and publicly, in the presence of the Bishop, stripping himself of his clothes and returning them to his father so as to embrace the clothes (habit) of a beggar are rather well known. What we well look at are the less well known aspects of his spirituality and see their implications for deacons. Francis became aware of developments happening in the Church. Wayne Hellman in vol. II of CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY (p. 32) shows that Francis was aware of monastic reforms that were going on in Cluny (Benedictine) and Citeaux (Cistercian) communities. One can even see elements of these in Francis’ later Rules. The influence of Bernard and Romuald lead to an increased devotion to the humanity of Jesus is distinct from the approach of the Greek Fathers (such as Ephrem and Athanasius). This devotion to the humanity of Jesus was to be one of the major hallmarks of the

spirituality of the High Middle Ages. The “fuga mundi” (flight from the world) spirituality of monasticism went from the focus on stability of the monastic life to a spirituality of crusade and pilgrimage. In the “Later Rule” of Francis, the life of “instability” became the norm where the brothers were to be pilgrims and strangers in the world. There was to be none of the security of the monastic life, but rather a sharing in the insecurity of the lives of most people.

For Francis, an essential element of his spirituality was to operate from within the hierarchical Church. While such an emphasis might seem strange today, many of the penitential movements whose movements were a major influence on Francis, chose to operate outside of Church control. Francis would have none of this. In his rule he writes that “...all the brothers must be Catholics and live and speak in a Catholic manner”. (CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY, p. 32) This also indicated the importance of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that occurred during Francis’ life.

The foundational conversion experience for Francis was his encounter with the lepers which opened Francis’ heart to the most outcast of society. He was to realize that when he embraced them it was really he that was being embraced by the Lord. Francis encouraged his brothers to “...live among people who are considered to be of little worth and who are looked upon as the poor and powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.” (Ibid., p. 33) In being led by the lepers, Francis was led to Christ. Yet, Francis acknowledged that it was the Spirit and not himself that allowed him to overcome his disgust of the lepers. It was this experience that gave him the intense feeling that he was being led by God as Francis bent his will to that of the Father’s. This liberating experience allowed Francis to identify with the humble Christ and to free him from any desire to wish to dominate or control other people.

This was the key to Francis' whole enterprise. Francis will write, "Blessed is the servant who esteems himself no better when he is praised...or when he is considered worthless and simple..." (Ibid., p. 34) This same disposition was the one he maintained no matter who he encountered and the one his brothers were to reflect with anyone they would serve.

Francis had a profound love of the Eucharist. His love for the Eucharist demanded great respect for all the ministers of the Church. He insisted that his friars have a great love for priests because "...no one can be saved except through the holy words and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which the clergy pronounce, proclaim and minister." (Ibid., p. 35) Francis would write these words in spite of the fact that "...the clergy undoubtedly had difficulty understanding Francis and his itinerant brothers. The writings hit as possible misunderstanding, rejection, and persecution by the clergy". ("Introduction" FRANCIS AND CLARE, p. 24) Francis stressed the liturgical objects and norms and praised the importance of the Liturgy of the Hours. But it was the Eucharist that caught the heart of Francis. For Francis, the Eucharist reflected the humility of God and demand humility from all those who would embrace this mystery.

The Spirit which led Francis to embrace the lepers, poor and outcasts finally lead Francis in the last two years of his life to Mount La Verna and to a deep meditation on the passion of Christ which culminated in the reception of the stigmata. Bonaventure will see this event as the one which "...totally transformed him into the likeness of Christ crucified." (BONAVENTURE, op.cit., p. 306) Bonaventure saw this as a call by Christ not to become a martyr the flesh but in the depth of his love. Bonaventure writes: "In all things he wished to be conformed to Christ crucified, who hung on a cross, poor, naked and suffering." (op. cit., p. 318) Finally, Bonaventure will write of Deacon Francis that by the saint's intercession in heaven, "...the blind and deaf, the mute and the crippled, paralytics and those suffering from dropsy, lepers and those

possessed by devils, the shipwrecked and the captives – all these were given relief by his merits”.  
(op. cit., p. 327)

The lessons from the life of Deacon Francis are endless. Certainly, Francis reminds deacons that often they will need to minister to people on the edge of society, people others and perhaps themselves would seek to avoid. Francis needed the power of the Spirit to move him from his instinctive disgust for lepers and to embrace them as he would embrace Christ. Deacons can never see their ministry simple to the “nice” or the “saved”. In a spirituality which calls them like Francis to move out of the comfort of “stability” to the world of “instability”, deacons need to risk reaching to those who are outside of present structures of Church and to seek those who, for whatever reason, are marginalized. Yet, Francis reminds deacons that they are never “lone rangers” but minister in the name of the Church and must always realize that they are to work within and under the authority of its pastors. Francis’ love for priests calls for all deacons to do the same and is a gentle reminder to deacons to be patient with those who perhaps do not appreciate or understand the ministry of deacons. His love for the Eucharist should certainly inspire all deacons to frequent participation in the liturgy and perhaps a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, his love of Christ crucified is a call to deacons to minister and serve with a dedication and love that imitates the total giving of Christ. While respecting family obligations (for those who are married) and work responsibilities, deacons are called to be men of generosity because in the end they are the servants of Christ. He alone ought to be the explanation of their lives.

We can close our reflection on Francis with the words of Leonardo Boff (ST. FRANCIS: MODEL OF HUMAN LIBERATION):

What was the secret of St. Francis? Poverty was never for Francis an end in itself or a {purely ascetical path to be followed. It is a means to and incomparable good: union and fraternity with the forgotten and with the suffer servant, Jesus Christ. (p. 72)

Before closing, in fairness to scholarship, there are those who question whether Francis was a deacon. Certainly the diaconate was not a central feature of his life as it would have been for someone like Ephrem. Yet, there is adequate reason to accept that Francis was ordained as indicated by Bonaventure and a long tradition within the Franciscan Order.

Each of these deacon saints represented something of the uniqueness of the diaconate. The wide variety of ministries reflected in their lives, both deacons and deaconesses, indicate the possibilities open to the diaconate. Yet, each manifested the charism of service. This was the glue that held them together in the diaconate.

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**ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE DIACONATE:  
A DISPUTED QUESTION**

One of the more significant questions for the Church today, is the issue of the ordination of women, in this instance, the ordination of women to the diaconate. Implicit in this is the question of ordination of women to the priestly orders of the presbyterate and episcopacy. However, for our purposes, we will limit our concerns to the diaconate. While we will focus primarily to the churches in communion with Rome, clearly, many of the various Protestant denominations who have women deacons as well as the Anglican tradition have something to contribute. Further, the Eastern churches ordained women to the diaconate for many centuries, and, as we will see, continued to have ordination rites in their pontificals even after they ceased ordaining in practice. Certainly, the Eastern Churches will have much to contribute. Rome has no question about the validity of Eastern orders and these Churches possess a rich sacramental theology.

We will begin by returning to the 1995 document published by the Canon Law society of America entitled, *THE CANONICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ORDAINING WOMEN TO THE PERMANENT DIACONATE*. As seen previously, this report traces the development of the diaconate, the rise of deaconesses in the early Church, the Eastern Church and in the West, the decline of the diaconate, the debate about the meaning of “ordination” in the East and the theological and canonical implications.

In part, this document is a response to the apostolic letter issued by John Paul II teaching that the church has no authority to confer priestly ordination upon women and that this teaching is to be definitively held. (*ORIGINS*, June 9, 1994, p. 51) a “definitive” teaching in the Catholic Church is one that is to be “firmly held” by Catholics.

Some have argued that since this declaration did not specifically mention the diaconate, the door has remained open to the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate in the

Catholic Church. Further, there was an additional declaration by the Congregation for the Faith issued under the authority of Pope Paul VI. This document clearly stated that regarding deaconesses, that this was a question that needed to be taken up by a further study of the relevant texts and that no formal judgment was made at the time. (“Inter insigniores” Oct. 15, 1976)

Also, on June 2, 1994, Cardinal Carlo Martini, Archbishop of Milan is reported to have stated that John Paul’s prohibition on the ordination of women to the priesthood still left open the question on the possibility of the diaconate for women. (Peter Hebblethwaite, “A Search for the Absence of Infallible,” NATIONAL REPORTER, June 17, 1994, p. 10)

The CLSA study continues by presenting an historical study of the diaconate. It reminds that by the end of the first century the pattern of bishop, presbyter, and deacon emerged. It goes through the patristic era (which we have previously explored earlier in this study) and then the report specifically examines the role of deaconesses. The writers on the CLSA indicate that two theologians whom we will present a bit further in this chapter (Gryson and Martimort) argue that the deaconesses in the New Testament, e.g. Phoebe, were not deaconesses since this was not a proper term at this time.

In the Eastern Churches, the report goes on to say that by the third century there was clearly the office of deaconess. The “Didascalia Apostolorum” describes the role of the deaconess in baptism and a century later the “Apostolic Constitutions” (possibly from Antioch) describe the ordination rite that seem to parallel the rite of ordination for deacons. Further, while the Council of Nicea in 325 did not include deaconesses in the ranks of the clergy, the Council of Chalcedon (451) certainly did. Many of the Eastern Fathers addressed questions related to deaconesses and reminded deaconesses of their obligations. These included St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom and the Theodore of Mopsuestia.

The Greek pontificals, particularly the Barberini Pontifical, used from the fourth to the twelfth centuries, contained the rite for the ordination of deaconesses which had, among other things, the same prayer formula calling down the Spirit that was used for deacons along with the “laying on of hands.” Because of this, some have argued that the deaconesses received a true ordination and not simply a blessing. Hence they were truly members of the clergy.

As time went on, deaconesses were usually found only in monasteries and did not function in other situations. If deaconesses did minister the Eucharist, that practice disappeared. By the seventeenth century, for example, Maronite Abbesses, although they received the blessing of deaconesses, were not to distribute the Eucharist.

In Western Church legislation, while deaconesses were known in the West, from the Council of Nimes (304) until the sixth century, councils forbade their ordination. The First Council of Orange (441) decreed against diaconal blessing for women. According to the Latin legislation of the time, married men could be ordained deacons and priests but had to practice continence. Their wives were called “deaconess” or “priestess” and received a special blessing.

In the Middle Ages in the West, in Benedictine monasteries, the bishop prayed over the newly consecrated nun empowering her as a deaconess to lead the Office. Further, in the fifteenth century in Italy, St. Antonius wrote that when nuns received their veils, although the diaconal order was not conferred upon her, she received the blessing of a deaconess so that she might lead the Office. Finally, the seventeenth century Carthusian ritual directed the bishop to confer the diaconal stole on the newly consecrated nun so that she might read the epistle in public. What is interesting in the West is that the Report indicates that Latin pontificals up to the twentieth century faithfully kept the rituals for consecrating the blessing of deaconesses.

After the CLSA report describes the decline of the diaconate (which we have previously looked at), they examine the question of “ordination” of deaconesses. They refer to the study of Martimort who argues that the ancient church denied the “laying on of hands” to deaconesses. Martimort believes that the “Apostolic Constitutions” depart from the model of Hippolytus. Second, deaconesses were only given limited duties. Martimort argues that deaconesses existed only as long as adult baptisms continued to be popular and then became rapidly obsolete.

On the contrary, Gryson argues that women truly received ordination. The rituals for men and women were nearly identical. The Eastern Churches were certainly aware of the distinction between “ordination” and “instituting.” The Council of Chalcedon clearly expressed that women received “ordination” and were not simply blessed. Gryson’s study is supported by Vagginy (THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN), who makes use of the Barberini Pontifical to support his claims. They received “cheirotonia” – ordination rather than “cheirosia” or “institution” meaning a blessing.

It is clear that the CLSA supports the position that women were ordained to the diaconate in the early Church. They contend that by the third century clearly women were deacons. (p. 50) While admitting there is some debate over the question of “ordination,” the evidence points to an almost identical ceremony as the men received. Thus, the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate exists today. They would receive the same functions and sacramental grace that men receive.

Having summarized the CLSA report and a brief history of the role of deaconess found within this, we can look at other sources supporting the ordination of women to the diaconate. We already referred to the study of Roger Gryson (THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH). While Gryson agrees that there is no New Testament evidence that

substantiates a female diaconate, Gryson does indicate that Paul's description of Phoebe as the "diaconos" of Cenchreae may indicate the beginning of an "office" more than the original charisma (p. 5) Yet, Gryson does list a number of scholars who would argue that there was a parallel structure for women with male deacons.

By the fourth century, Gryson argues that there was so much evidence for women deacons that Church legislation could not ignore their presence. (pp. 61-69) Further, several deaconesses are listed as ruling monasteries both in Egypt and in Gaza. Gryson insists that there are a number of testimonies from the "Syrian-Byzantine" by which women received ordination the same ordination as men. (p. 120)

Gryson's thesis that women were truly ordained to the diaconate is supported by liturgical scholar Cipriano Vagaggini ("Orintalia Christiana Periodica" 40 (1974) 146-89 Vagaggini argues that the ordination rites for bishops, presbyters, deacons and deaconesses all took place with the imposition of hands and the prayer which accompanied it in the sanctuary. Hence, they were all true ordinations ("cheirotonia") while the institution of subdeacons, lectors, etc. took place outside the sanctuary are were a blessing (cheirotesia). Thus, they were not ordinations in the strict sense while deaconesses were truly ordained. Thus, they were not ordinations in the strict sense while deaconesses were truly ordained. Indeed, as canonist Fredrick McManus concludes from his evaluation from the situation, it seems that the Eastern bishops realized that in ordaining women deaconesses, they were conferring more than a simple blessing and that they acted properly when ordaining women to the deaconal order. (THE JURIST 47, (1987), 579.)

Similarly, Herbert Vogrimler (SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY) who has done extensive research on the diaconate along with Karl Rahner, agrees that women were ordained to the

diaconate in the early Church (p. 272) Vogrimler further writes that although the Western Church partially rejected deaconesses, from the fifth even to the eleventh centuries they existed in Rome. (p. 273). In the East, by Imperial law they were considered among the “clerus”. In the “Didascalia” they were imagined as a type of the Holy Spirit. Vogrimler, in response to the question of the “sacramentality” of their ordination responds that this is a question that could not be asked before the reflections on sacramental theology in the period of high scholasticism. (p. 273) However, in light of the Byzantine liturgy, the ordination of women deaconesses had all the qualities of an ordination. Thus, Vogrimler sees no reason why women cannot be ordained to the office of deacon as truly ordained sacramental ministers.

A publication from “women/priests” (<http://www.womenpriests.orgtraditiodeacord.htm>) gives some rather impressive arguments in favor of the ordination of women to the diaconate. These included the following: in the ordination rituals, both deacons and deaconesses received the imposition of hands, both are ordained by the bishop, both take place in the sanctuary, during the liturgy after the anaphora and the bishop invokes the Holy Spirit on both the male and the female by the same invocatory prayer. Further, the bishop speaks the two prayers of ordination, which is typical for higher ordinations and both receive the diaconal stole and both are handed the chalice for communion.

Further, the ordination rituals are preserved in a few precious manuscripts including the APOSTILIC CONSTITUTIONS ( 500 A.D.) a Greek Byzantine ritual found in the NICOLAI manuscript (9<sup>th</sup> cent.), the GEORGE VARUS manuscript (10<sup>th</sup> cent.) and a Greek Byzantine ritual found in the “Vatica Manuscript” no. 1873 (11<sup>th</sup> nth.) In addition, there is a Nestorian manuscript in the Syriac ritual. In all cases the “matter” and “form” of the ordination is the same for men and women and expresses the intention of the bishop to ordain a true minister.

Benedictine prioress, Laura Swan, in her *THE FORGOTTEN DESERT MOTHERS: SAYING, LIVES AND STORIES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WOMEN*, has a wonderful chapter dedicated to women deaconess and an appendix with a sample or ordination rituals for deaconesses. Particularly relevant is the “Appendix” compiled by Jacob Goar in 1647 and translated by John Wijngaards. Key in the ceremony is the imposition of hands by the bishop. After making the sign of the cross three times over the head of the woman the bishop prays: “Holy and Omnipotent Lord, through the birth of your Only Son our God from a Virgin according to the flesh, you have sanctified women. You grant not only to men, but also to women the grace of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Please also now, Lord, look on your maidservant and dedicate her to the take of your diaconate, and pour out into her the abundance giving of your Holy Spirit. (p. 173)

In her reflection on deaconesses, Swan writes that their role was increasingly institutionalized in the early Church and that they were clearly distinct from the widows and virgins. The widows and virgins were given positions behind the deacon or deaconess. Until the eighth or ninth century deaconesses were ordained in the Eastern Church but since 411, the Council of Orange forbade their ordination in the West. AS previously cited, The Synod of Nimes declared as “indecent” the idea that women were thought to be ordained as deacons and that the very concept would seem to invalidate the whole idea of ordination. (p. 108) In 494, Pope Gelasius wrote a letter to numerous bishops which restricted the role of women in the liturgy. (p. 108) Again, this does not deny that women were ordained as deaconesses in a ritual virtually identical to that of male deacons.

We need to also look at those who agree with the current position of Rome or at least on some level challenge the ordination of women to the diaconate. Certainly, one of the most

quoted is Aime Georges Martimort's DEACONESSSES: AN HISTORICAL STUDY. This study, published by Ignatius Press, was already referred to in the CLSA report. It is a scholarly work that deserves some time in review.

Martomort, in reaching his conclusion about the office of deaconess, writes that there is no fixed idea about what a deaconess is supposed to be. They were listed in various places, after the deacons, with the widow and sometimes in the midst of consecrated life. A common practice of Greek and other Eastern writers of antiquity was to refer to 1 Timothy chapter 3 and 5. (p. 241) But very soon, the ancient writes played them with the widows which blessed the deaconesses with those in consecrated life.

Further, Martimort argues, the canonical Greek and Writers of the Middle ages were even less able to know what the deaconesses were. This is because by this time deaconesses had long since ceased to exist and the documents available to them were often defective. With regard to the Latin deaconesses, Martimort says that the Latin canonists had an easier time of it since, in the Latin church, deaconesses were always seen to have only received a simple blessing. Martimort concludes that we cannot even speak of deaconesses as a single institution. He sees two reasons for this. One, the functions of deaconesses were varied according to the pastoral needs of the local church. More significant, too long a period of time had past since the allusion to "deaconesses" in the Pauline letters and the later institution of deaconesses in the Church. (p. 242) Martimort believes that only the DIDISCALIA, presents deaconesses as a true ministry in the church and this lasted only as long as adult baptisms were the norm. Martimort wants to insist that everywhere else deaconesses had a radically different meaning. Patriarch Severus of Antioch saw the ordination of deaconesses less with regard to the Holy Mysteries and more with regard to a solemn blessing. (p. 243)

The significant question is, of course, were they deacons? Those who respond yes, says Martimort, do so in light of the DIDASCALIA, the NOVELLAE of Emperor Justinian, and the Byzantine ordination of deaconesses. It is particularly these documents that convince authors, such as, Gryson and the writers of the CLSA document that women were truly ordained to the diaconate. Further, these writers argue that there was no difference between the male and female deacons. Certainly, Martimort agrees that the ordination of deaconesses took place during the Eucharist, in the sanctuary with the imposition of hands by the bishop. Nevertheless, Martimort wants to argue that there were a number of important differences. The deaconess did not genuflect, did not rest her head on the altar as did the male deacons, and did not receive the rhipidion ( a fan used to protect the Species from insects). Martmort writes that according to Pseuo-Dionysius, the fact that the deaconess did not genuflect was a sign that her role was not seen as equivalent to the deacons. Further, when the deaconess was presented with the chalice she did not communicate the chalice with the congregation as did the male deacons, but placed it immediately back on the altar. Further when they received the orarion (the stole), they wore in not around their shoulders as did the deacons but in the manner of sub-deacons with the two strips of the stole hanging down front. The reason that the deaconess did not rest her head on the altar was that she did not receive a ministry pertaining to the altar as did the deacons (p. 245). Most important, Martimort wants his reader to be aware the prayer for ordination ritual of a deaconess was not the same as the one used to ordain deacons. Further, the deaconess was never offered the hope of further ordination as the deacon was. In the Chaldean ordination of the deaconess, the pontificals indicate that the bishop places his hand not for ordination but blessing. (p. 246) The Syrian Jacobites ordained deaconess at the door rather than in the sanctuary. Finally, if they had a liturgical function in a monastery of nuns, it was only in the absence of

priests or deacons. Even the CLSA report agrees that in the Western church, there was no clear definition of the deaconess even though this was interpreted as a creative response on the part of the local church. Even more, the councils of the West repeatedly denied or prohibited the ordination of deaconesses. We can now look at some further challenges to the ordination of deaconesses as a true sacramental ordination.

Liturgical theologian, John Collins, offers a creative insight into the question of ordaining women to the diaconate. While attending a major conference on the diaconate in 1997 in Breassanone, a discussion arose about the ecclesial character of the deacon and is the deacon an integral part of the Church. While there was a strong insistence on the sacramental nature of the diaconate, there was less than a clear understanding of the nature of the diaconate. This emphasis appealing to the sacramental nature of the diaconate could have some value, believes Collins, but it also potentially covers over other questions.

As a response to this, Collins refers to his own research (p. 3 of 18). Collins' study emphasizes how deacons be might nurtured more as functionaries working within the ecclesial environment rather than as isolated social workers which is how that are often portrayed. Here, Collins moves into a summary of his own book, *DIAKONIA: REINTERPRETING THE ANCIENT SOURCES*. It is not so much about the diaconate as it is a semantic study of the term, "diakonia." Of course, as this study developed, the role of the deacon also came to fore. Collins mentions that scholars no less of the reputation of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor stated in an article in *REVUE BIBLIQUE* (1995) that the implications would require a whole review of one of the dogmas of New Testament scholarship (4 of 18).

Key to this discussion is Collins' insistence that the understanding of "diakonia" primarily in the context of charitable work is to misread the term. Collins believes that it is not

accurate to understand the diaconate as expressing humble service in imitation of Jesus who allowed himself to be enslaved (p 7 of 18). Collins states that the "...iconology of the slavery in the Philippians' hymn bears no correlation to the ideas expressed in Greek by "diakonia". (Ibid.) Of course, this would radically conflict with the traditional image of the deacon. As Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos, Prefect of the congregation for the Clergy, emphasizes, ordination to the diaconate conformed the man to Christ, the model of service and humility. In the United States much of what is written on the diaconate places it under the general tripartite of Word, liturgy and service with service as the focus of the diaconate. Collins takes issue with a rather scholarly article by Deacon William Ditewig, a theologian who one of those drafting the new DIRECTORY for U.S. deacons (now completed). Ditewig makes the core of his presentation that deacons reflect the "diakonia" of Christ who stands over against those who have "power" and makes illusions to Christ kenotic status who came to serve. According to Collins' research, this is a misplaced emphasis. The diaconate has a broader scope of responsibility. Collins believes that until this broader view of the diaconate beyond that of "servant," occurs, the place of women in the Church is not enhanced.

In an article by Regis Scanlon ( "Woman Deacons: At What Price?) (<http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Homiletic/07-96/1/1.html>) Scanlon offers a rather extensive survey of how the Church has understood the office of deaconess. (In the view of this writer,) Scanlon makes a poor effort to defend Thomas' position that a "women is a misbegotten man." He attempts to defend Thomas's teaching that women are naturally subject to men (because men are superior when it comes to reason while women do better when it comes to the will). However, Scanlon does offer the reader some points worth consideration when he responds to the CLSA report. Scanlon agrees that there were deaconesses in the early Church

and in the time of St. Paul there were women who were called deaconesses. But since Paul does not allow women to preach or exercise authority over men, one must assume this includes deaconesses. Hence, these deaconesses were quite distinct from the male deacons. Further, says Scanlon, while these deaconesses did receive some form of “ordination”, there is no evidence that they received any sacramental power. There was an order of deaconess in the Church, but it was not for the purpose of priestly function. It was not part of the sacramental hierarchy and only existed for the sake of modesty in the Church. Scanlon disagrees that this prohibition of women exercising authority in the church is a matter of a negative sociological perspective of the ancient world. He states that culturally there was in the ancient world an acceptance of women religious leaders who acted as priestesses. A few heretical sects within Christianity ordained women, but this practice was condemned by the Early Fathers such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, Tertullian and Origen.

Brian Schwertley, in an article entitled “An Historical and Biblical examination of Women Deacons”, coming from a reformed and admittedly conservative position, nevertheless provides further historical evidence regarding the role of deaconess. A quick survey of some of his findings are instructive. In “The Didache”, he argues that there is only reference to male deacons, there was no official order of deaconess at this time (100 A.D.). The reference to “deaconess” in “Pliny’s Letter to Trajan” (113) might be the first reference to “deaconess”, but there is no evidence that this corresponds to the office of deacons but rather corresponds to the widows in 1 Tim. 5:9. The Epistles of Ignatius (115) while they discuss the role and authority of deacons, makes no mention to the role of deaconess. Polycarp of Smyrna does instruct widows but this is clearly distinct from the office of deacons. In the Epistle of (Pope) Zephyrinus to the Bishops of Sicily (201 A.D.) while there are clear instructions regarding deacons, again there is

no mention of deaconess. Indeed, there was no mention of deaconess in all of the Western church. The “Apostolic Canons” (300-350) the deaconess was considered to be of an entirely separate class, they were not part of the clergy, or the sacerdotal class or performed divine service. The critical Council of Nicea (325) the Council taught that they have no imposition of hands and are to be numbered with the laity. The important work, “The Teaching of the Apostles (Didascalia Apostolorum)”, (250-300) makes clear reference to the deaconess in the Syrian Church ( as we have seen several times.) Deaconess were to visit women who were sick. They would visit the poor and assist at the baptism of women. The concern was with modesty and the avoidance of scandal. In another classic work, “The Constitution of the Holy Apostles” (381) while the ordination of deaconesses had become the norm throughout the Eastern Church, it was not, according to our author, the norm prior to 325. The term “ordination” was applied to many roles within the Church, and such ordination was never accepted in the West. Finally, the Council of Chalcedon (451) compares the office of deaconess with 1 Timothy 5:9 which, according to Schwertley, is proof positive that deaconesses were not the same as deacons. According to our author, it is comparing apples and oranges.

Finally, Canonist Duane Galles (along with Charles Wilson) argue that from a canonical perspective, rooted in theology, it seems to be present enormous difficulty to state that it is infallible teaching that women cannot be ordained as bishops and priests and yet they could be ordained as deacons. If one argues that there is one sacrament of Orders, has does one make such a split? (p. 4 of 4)

## CONCLUSION

Of course this chapter cannot settle the issue of women deacons. As we will see a bit later, both the Reformed tradition and some Eastern traditions have or are exploring the possibility of women deacons along with the Anglican Church.

What has been presented in this chapter is a summary of some of the more recent discussions on this issue. It would seem that the “a priori” starting point often provides the conclusion that one arrives at. Scholars looking at the same documents find it difficult to arrive at the same conclusions. Hence, the question remains open within the Catholic Church as to whether women can be ordained deacons.

The response of this writer, in light of the fundamental thesis it wishes to offer, that the diaconate is “unique” in the ministry of the Church is that given the flexibility of the diaconate it can be open to women. No one can deny that women did receive an office that, even if it was not identical to male deacons, was quite similar. Certainly some of these early Churches saw the conferral of this office as an “ordination.”

Finally, one of the principal arguments against ordaining women to the priesthood in that the priest acts “in persona Christi” particularly during the consecration of the Species, could not be sustained for the diaconate. Women, as well as or better, can act “in persona Christi” as servants. It is hard to find an ontological refutation to this.

Theologically, this writer cannot find any serious argument, in spite of the various, positions presented in this chapter, that would eliminate women deacons.

This whole chapter certainly highlights the uniqueness of the diaconate. Certainly one of the most profound areas of uniqueness is the fact of deaconesses. This is the one ordained ministry that can claim to have had women (even if disputed) and the future possibility of this.

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**DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE REFORMED TRADITION**

In this particular chapter we want to examine the contributions from the Reform Churches in help to explore the uniqueness of the ministry of the deacon. Of course one of the immediate difficulties we encounter is that there exist a wide variety of understanding of “ministry” within the various denominations and, of course, significance difference between the “Reform” churches and the Episcopal (Anglican) Church. We will be careful to distinguish between these. However, the Anglican tradition will be included in this chapter.

In Glenn Sunshines’ scholarly essay, “Geneva Meets Rome: The Development of the French Reformed Diaconate” which appeared in the Summer ’95 edition of THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY JOURNAL, we are offered an initial appreciation of the distinguishing characteristics of the diaconate within the Reform (Calvinist) experience.

Sunshine acknowledges that of all the offices in the Church, none has had more guises than the diaconate (p. 1). Some see it as a way to fill in the gaps. Others as a stepping stone to other ministries. The reformers of the sixteenth century sought to restore the diaconate to its original biblical insight. The focus was on social welfare ministries (care of widows, the sick, orphaned, etc.). Nevertheless, the reformed diaconate in the French Church took on additional duties.

Tracing the development of the duties, Sunshine looks at the diaconate of the Roman Church at the end of the Middle Ages. By this time the Roman diaconate had become largely liturgical and by the sixteenth century generally a temporary office in preparation for the priesthood. Looking back to the end of the Middle Ages, the deacon chanted the Gospel, assisted the priest at the Eucharist, on occasion baptized, taught catechism and in the absence of a priest could hear death-bed confessions (this latter is most interesting in light of contemporary Catholic sacramental theology). (p. 1)

It is this view of the diaconate that the Reformers wished to challenge. A principle agent for a reformed diaconate was Martin Bucer, in Strasbourg. He consistently argued that the Church ought to be involved with the relief of the poor via the diaconate. Unfortunately for Bucer, the civil government had by this time taken over this role. Bucer also believed that deacons could have a significant liturgical role as preachers and ministers of the Eucharist.

While Bucer did not have great success in Strasbourg, he did have considerable influence with John Calvin. We will take a closer look at Calvin a bit later in this chapter. However, turning briefly to the French Reformed diaconate, French Protestants were a persecuted minority with no definitive central authority. Several tasks were assigned to deacons. They were given responsibility for both disciplinary social welfare obligations. They had to watch over the morals of the flock while looking out for needs of the poor. They could lead the assembly in the absence of the minister, read from the Bible, be catechists and keep records. Clearly the French diaconate did not model itself solely on the biblical model. In fact, it was closer the Catholic model. (p. 3). They would even take the place of the minister in the latter's absence. Even though the 1559 DISCIPLINE attempted to make the diaconate more Biblical in its orientation, they continued to have liturgical functions. Yet, the DISCIPLINE tried to distinguish the pastor from the deacon. Only the pastor could consecrate the elements of the Eucharist although the deacon could, on occasion, distribute the consecrated species.

David Hall's essay, "Earlier Paradigms for Welfare Reform: the Reformation Period" provides more specific information on both Calvin's and Luther's theology of the diaconate. Hall makes use of the research of Jeannine Olson (CALVIN AND SOCIAL WELFARE: DEACONS AND THE BOURSE FRANCAISE: DEACONS AND THE BOURSE FRANCAISE.) The Bourse Francaise along with its deacons was an important institution in Geneva. Hall stresses

that the welfare program of Geneva was “contoured” to the theological position of the Reform. (Hall, p. 1). The theology of the Reformation provided the religious basis for the expressions of almsgiving. Essentially that meant that “Acts” provided the underpinnings for the diaconal ministry of welfare.

Founded under the leadership of John Calvin, its primary purpose was to ease the suffering of the French Protestants. In addition, Calvin wrote a charter for deacons indicating that they were responsible for the public hospital and to take care of anyone worthy of special charity. However, begging without honest work was offensive to the Protestant work ethic. In the end, the deacons cared for all types of the poor, although beggars would be removed.

Of course the deacons were to try to get the able-bodied, especially refugees, back on their feet. Even as to the care for orphans, the goal was to train them for some type of employment so that they may care for themselves. The Bourse Francaise were concerned with the worthy and did not indiscriminately give aid to anyone. Funds were not available for the derelict and lazy. Of course the definition of “worthy” was vague and varied from place to place. (Hall, p. 4).

Essentially it seems the “worthy” included both religious conviction and good behavior in addition to need. For these Reformers the practice of Roman Catholics which gave alms to healthy beggars was seen as irresponsible.

When Hall turns to Elsie Anne McKee’s text (JOHN CALVIN ON THE DIACONATE AND LITURGICAL ALMSGIVING), Hall writes that McKee believes that Calvin’s appreciation of the diaconate is much neglected in contemporary Protestant theology. The diaconate contributes to a better understanding that the ecclesiology of the Reformation. Calvin saw compassion for the poor as a measure of the church’s Christianity. If the public funds if the

Church are not sufficient, then people must contribute privately. (p. 7). Indeed Calvin emphasized that if there were truly a Reformation going on in the Church, then there must be compassion for the poor.

Turning to Luther, like Calvin Luther detested any type of begging as this conflict with Luther's "sola Fides." Begging could no longer be seen as a monastic ideal. It was not a sign of Christian perfection or some that was meritorious. Yet, Luther stipulated that the poor were to be helped.

Luther's theology of the diaconate was deeply rooted in his concept of "justification by faith." This emphasis gradually diminished the Catholic practice as works as a means of grace (not quite accurate from a Catholic perspective). McKee writes of Luther that the deacons were certainly quite willing to assist a genuine worker but only gave minimal assistance to the vagrants.

Hall's essay closes with a fascinating comparison of Protestant theology of welfare along with late medieval Catholic theology as reflected in the writing of Jaun Luis Vives (ca. 1526). Vives distinguished between the deserving and undeserving poor. Vives shared with Calvin and other Protestants that charity dispensers and recipients were both depraved. Vives, along with Calvin and Loyola (founder of the Jesuits) were essentially in agreement that there was a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. (Hall, p. 13). The major difference between the Protestant and Catholic approaches was that for Calvin, the secular world was to be converted into a godly kingdom while from the Catholic perspective Christianity was the Body of Christi in the secular world. With this we can move ahead having summarized the classical Protestant tradition on the diaconate.

Now look at more contemporary concerns. In P.Y. De Jong's article, "The ministry of Mercy for Today," (ORDAINED SERVANT, July, 1994) the author writes that the first task of the Church is to confront people with the gospel which can deliver people from the power of sin. Yet, the Church also has something to say about economic issues. The Church is very much concerned about the physical suffering of people. (p. 2/8). The Church is concerned about the salvation of the whole person. To assist in this task, there is a ministry of government which consists of the elders of the Church. Further, to heal the effects of sin as seen in poverty, sickness and distress, there is the ministry of the deacon. Without the deacon says De Jong, the New Testament pattern of the Church is missing. De Jong denounces all too ready acceptance of current popular thought rather than being a prophetic instrument of God. De Jong rejects the popular position that secularism is the child of the Reformation. On the contrary, especially the Calvinistic pattern was diametrically opposed to the materialism of its day. Indeed, the "new gospel" sought to react to the glorification of Greek classical influence found in the Renaissance. By now secularism has fully saturated our society so that the various aspects of society understand themselves to be ends in themselves. While society offers care and assistance to people in need (e.g. welfare programs), they are totally rooted in a secular system.

In response as to why the Church needs an active diaconate, De Jong writes that the totality of the person, not only physical but spiritual, has to be served. Many who are suffering physically also suffer from a lack of spiritual support. (p. 6/8). Only the regular involvement of the official representatives of the church will restore the proper concern of soul as well as body.

Having said something that the Reform's understanding of the role and function of deacon, what place do they hold among the ordained (or not ordained) ministers. The answer to this is rather complex since this varies from denomination to denomination. "Ordination" is not a

univocal expression. Certainly, for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches it represents reception of one of the sacraments of the Church. This would not be so in the Reform tradition. Within the Reform tradition, we can only provide a sample of positions.

In Baptist theology, using a strong evangelical approach to the Bible, one can find a rejection of any understanding of deacons as persons who hold an “office.” Cooper Abrams (“A Biblical look at Deacons”) emphasizes that “deacon” means “servant.” He argues that the term “office” appears nowhere in the New Testament in speaking of deacons (p. 9). None of the qualities for being a deacons require leadership potential. Their role was to relieve pastors of menial tasks. Acts 6 refers to “servants” and not deacons as later understood as officers in the Church. Even titles such as “Deacon Jones,” as a title of honor, is contrary to the role of deacon. Further, Abrams argues that deacons are not to be deacons for life (contrary to Catholic theology which sees diaconal ordination conferring a permanent character) but only for a term.

S. Robert’s article (“The Deacon in Protestantism”) similarly writes there among the various denominations there is considerable diversity in the understanding of ministry in general and deacons in particular. Yet, insists Roberts there is a fundamental common root which that we are “justified by faith” and the primary authority is the Bible. While some (as Congregationalist) have insisted that there is not God-given Church order, others have equally insisted that there is a clear order given in the scriptures. Further, this order is essential for salvation.

Moving specifically to the office of deacon, Robert states that it is generally true that Protestantism no order of deacons as a specific hierarchal rank. (p. 2/7). In many denominations, especially where there is no concern to preserve an established Church order, they may not be any deacons at all. Or, it might appear in a particular location. In Lutheranism, while in general the office of deacon is not known, in the Swedish context there has been a return to the three-fold

office of the Church. In the case of Methodism, because Wesley did not intend to break with the church of England, one finds deacons. Yet, in the American Methodist church the deacons do not represent a distinct order.

While there might not be much to talk about in terms of a distinct “order” of deacons in Lutherism and Methodism, says Robert, if one broadens the category to include service within the Church, there have been many, without the title of deacons who have performed the ministry of service. It is this type of diaconate that Luther referred to in his (Luther’s) description of the deacons involved with the “Inner Mission in Europe.” (p. 2/7).

In Churches which have attempted to restore the New Testament image of the Church, the picture can be clear and complex at the same time. In Calvin’s INSTITUTES, one finds rather clear directives about the pattern of Church authority, yet, seems to mix both ancient and more contemporary norms. In local congregations today, one would find a similarity between Presbyterians, Baptists and Disciples of Christ. There would be ordained elders and ministers and a lay diaconate elected by the congregation. In practice this means that the deacons are often simply a committee in charge of the material affairs of the parish.

In all of this discussion, one must keep in mind that the lynch-pin of understanding the theology of the diaconate from the reform tradition is Luther’s insistence on the priesthood of all believers. Of course the Church of Rome taught and teaches that all the baptized share in the common priesthood of all believers. However, for Rome, as we have seen elsewhere, the ordained receive a special sacrament and character. For Luther, no matter what ministry one receives, the calling remains the same. In the “Aaron C. Ministries Newsletter (#18, June 24, 2001), the author sees the root of the problem (from the Reform perspective) as stemming from the third century bishop, Cyprian of Carthage, who identified the Eucharist as a sacrifice and

thus needed priests to offer the sacrifice. This established a priesthood beyond that of the ordinary Christian. Luther provided the ammunition for the Reformation to challenge this theology of ministry. The Reformation saw its ministers simply as people set aside to organize the ministry that belonged to all Christians. Ordination does not impart, according to Reformation theology, any spiritual gifts or raise the individual to a higher status. Ordination simply acknowledges support from the Church and recognition of gifts. All Christians are called to “diaconal” service. The first deacons were simply assistants but their work can include evangelization, teaching and proclamation. (p.5)

A good summary of the various attitudes towards the diaconate in different protestant denominations it found in James Barnett’s, *THE DIACONATE: A FULL AND EQUAL ORDER*. Barnett states that although some Protestant denominations have retained the diaconate office, the majority have not. (p. 153). The office has not historically been part of either Lutheranism or Methodism. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Disciples have what is basically a “lay” diaconate. In European Lutheranism there is a non-ordained diaconate. The Reformed tradition has now a large number of deacons and deaconesses but they are not ordained nor do they hold an official office (p. 154). Some traditions have a board of deacons who administer charitable concerns. The Baptist tradition in the States usually has one elder and a board of deacons. Again, they are not ordained and serve for a limited period.

The United Methodist Church in the United States has a form of a “permanent diaconate” but they are not usually referred to as deacons. In 1968 the Disciples of Christ established an order of deacons who can be repeatedly ordained each time they are elected to office. On the other hand, the United Church of Christ has boards of deacons and deaconesses but they are a corporate reality and not seen as holding an office.

Turning to the Anglican tradition (including the Episcopal church) we find a reality more similar to the Catholic experience. In fact, one's initial response might be, as often in matters Anglican, that it is almost identical.

Since 1970, the Episcopal church has restored the order of "perpetual deacons." This was brought about with a number of changes including both the ancient order of deacons and deaconesses into one order. The new functions combine both liturgical and pastoral responsibilities. Modern Anglican deacons are ordained to assist the bishop in his diaconal ministry and are to be leaders in the ministry of service (Toward a Theology of Ministry, p. 1 of 2). There is a wide variety of possible ministries for deacons, from organizing the laity for social concerns to caring for the sick. They bring a wide range of talents to ordination. The trend has been away from a more individualistic ministry to a more collegial diaconate. Thus, in a sacramental way, deacons represent Christ the Servant. (p. 2/2). Except for the inclusion of women in the diaconate, the above could be seen to reflect much of contemporary Catholic theology of the diaconate. However, this needs further clarification.

While it is true that the Episcopal / Anglican Church deacons are ordained ministers, one needs to understand how the Church views ordination. In the "Thirty Nine Articles of Religion U.S.A." of the Episcopal Church (1979), we see in Article XXV that there are two sacraments ordained of Christ. The other sacraments are not sacraments of the Gospel and although they are to be respected and received worthily, they have no visible ceremony ordained by God. Regarding the Eucharist, Article XVIII rejects the notion of "transubstantiation." The species consecrated at the Eucharist are not to be reserved or worshipped. Hence, one can see that not only will priesthood be understood in a manner quite distinct from the Catholic tradition but there is no distinct sacrament of orders which is seen to come from Christ. Therefore, for the

Episcopal tradition, while deacons are ordained, that have not received a sacrament in the Catholic understanding of the term.

An interesting question has been raised in Anglican circles (as it has by some Catholic theologians) regarding the necessity of sequential ordination. In an article that appeared in the *ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW*, (Spring '93, Vol. 75, Issue 2, p. 246), author Robert Wright offers a defense for the Anglican (as well as the Catholic and Orthodox practice) of sequential ordination. This is the requirement of being ordained first a deacon, and diaconal ordination being required before ordination to the priesthood and presbyteral ordination being required for episcopacy. In Anglican canon law and in the 1979 *BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*, this practice is explicitly required.

Wright points out that this practice has never held the position that direct ordination to either the presbyter or episcopacy would be invalid. Sequential ordination is not evident in the Apostolic tradition of Hippolytus (210 A.D.) or in the earlier writings of Ignatius of Antioch (107 A.D.). The practice seems to have emerged in the mid-third century with Cyprian of Carthage. While a number of Anglican theologians seem to be arguing for direct ordination, Wright offers a number of challenges to this. The first is that the Anglican tradition normally follows the broad catholic tradition unless there is good reason to the contrary. The second is that simply because something was done during the first centuries of the Church does not mean it must do so now. However, with regard to the diaconate, to say, as some have, that there is no need to ordain to the diaconate prior to the other orders since all Christians are called to service by baptism is problematic. In that case it would make more sense to eliminate the diaconate all together. In fact though, the opposite ought to be true. While baptism is the base for all ministry in the Church, the three orders of ordination ought to be icons of what all are called to be.

Because servanthood is so basic to all ministry, priests and bishops need to remember that they don't lose their diaconal ordination with ordination to the priesthood or episcopacy, but rather that these other ministries are further expressions of the call to service to the community.

Further, would deacons want to be ordained by bishops who have never shared their office?

Would priests want to be ordained by Bishops who never shared this office?

Before leaving this reflection on the diaconate in the Reformed tradition, there is one other Church that deserves consideration, that of the Old Catholics. This most obvious objection is the classification of Old Catholics with the Reformed tradition. Indeed, the Old Catholic Church is not a Protestant Church. Nevertheless, the Old Catholic Church separated from the Church of Rome in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, the Utrecht Union of Old Catholics has recently entered into communion with the Anglican Church. This has included the ordination of women to both the diaconate and the priesthood. Because of the move by the Old Catholic Churches of Europe have resigned from the Union. (The first woman priest was ordained on September 18, 2002, by Archbishop Glazmaker of Utrecht.) Archbishop Arnold Matthew of the Old Catholic Church believed that these changes were a deviation from orthodox catholic theology. ("The Old Catholic Churches in the United States." p. 1). Thus, there are the Utrecht Old Catholics who are in communion with the Anglican tradition and those in the United States (including the Polish National Catholic Church) who would not be in communion with Utrecht but also are not in communion with Rome.

The Old Catholic Church would share Catholic teaching that priests (and deacons receive as true sacraments and sacramental "character." They believe that priests and deacons receive the "laying on of hands" which comes from the Apostles. In the case of the Old Catholics in the United States, apostolic succession derives from the Church of Utrecht (hence the Roman

Catholic Church), from Archbishop Henry Carfora of the Old Roman Catholic Church and from Archbishop Villate of the Syrian Orthodox Church. This concern for valid apostolic succession would reflect a “Catholic” understanding of Holy Orders. Hence, for Old Catholics, there would not be significant deviations between Roman and Old Catholic Churches on the office of deacon.

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## **THE DEACON IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

We can now turn the final study of this study by taking a look at the role of the deacon in the Orthodox Churches. Here, again, there is some need for greater precision. For Orthodox Churches, “orthodox” refers to those Churches which accept the first seven ecumenical councils of the Church. There are also the “oriental churches” (such as the Armenian, Syrian-Jacobite, Nestorians, etc.) who have maintained apostolic succession but are not in communion (unless they are Eastern Rite branches) with Rome. Neither are they in communion with the Orthodox churches although they often refer to themselves as “orthodox.” For the purposes of this chapter we will include both the Orthodox and Oriental churches.

In light of an earlier chapter on the Trinity and the diaconate, we might begin this reflection by looking at Greek theologian, Constantine Scouteris of the Theology Department of the University of Athens in his article, “Christian Priesthood and Ecclesial Unity: Some Theological and Canonical Considerations.” In his essay, Scouteris refers to a number of Fathers and their Trinitarian approach to priesthood. Pseudo-Dionysius teaches that the source of the heirarchical ministry is the Trinity, while St. Maximus the Confessor makes much the same point. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote his famous comment that the deacons were to be respected as Christ while the bishop is a type of the Father and the presbyters the council of Apostles. Athanasius wrote that the bishop, presbyter and deacon were like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and St. Simeon the New Theologian wrote that the three grades of priesthood are a type of the Trinity. (Scouteris. p. 2 and 3). The Trinitarian origin of the priesthood not only reveals the divine origin of a “private gift.” For the East, the ordained person is primarily understood in relation to the community and thus not as some private charism. Ordination is an ecclesial gift given to build up the community.

Moving more specifically into the question of the diaconate, we can turn to Russian Orthodox theologian, Georges Florovsky. In an article, “The Problem of the Diaconate in the Orthodox Church,” Florovsky refers to the “Apostolic Tradition of Hyppollytus”, a document we have had reasons to examine before. This patristic writing makes a clear distinction between “sacerdotium” which is common to the bishop and the presbyter and “ministerium,” and that deacons were ordained to “ministerium” but not to the “sacerdotium” or priesthood. In fact the Council of Nicea reminded the deacons that they were to minister within the proper limits of their office. Florovsky insists that the liturgical functions of the deacon that, since the fourth century, has been their primary function, is not a decline in the diaconate. It represents a reorganization of the Church wherein the “diaconal” ministry of charity is seen as belonging to all Christians while the liturgical role of the deacon belongs to the ordained deacon. (p. 6). Yet, Florovsky keeps insisting that the diaconate is an auxiliary ministry and even their liturgical function does not belong to the “esse” of the Liturgy but only to the “plene esse” of the Liturgy. (p. 6).

In the Russian Orthodox Church, the role of the deacon has been reduced to a largely artistic function and the chief requirement of the deacon is that he possesses a good voice for singing. Often the deacon does not even properly participate in the Liturgy since he has not prepared by prayer and fasting, and his role is simply to lead the litanies. Florovsky sees this abuse of the diaconal role as part of an overall problem with the Russian Liturgy which has become more of a coral recitation than an act of worship. (p. 4).

Florovsky writes that some conservative Orthodox bishops have even raised the question of whether or not the diaconate ought to be eliminated. Florovsky sees this as really asking

whether there is not need of a broader reform. Nonetheless, there is a proper role for the ordained diaconate that is a liturgical function while “diakonia” belongs to the entire Church.

While Florovsky is a highly recognized Russian Orthodox theologian and raises some very important questions, he also has a rather bleak image of the ordained diaconate in the Orthodox Church. For a more positive perspective we now look at Greek Orthodox theologian, Fr. Deacon Photios Touloumes, “The Diaconate in the Orthodox Church”. In this lecture which was originally delivered in the Toronto Orthodox conference, Fr. Deacon Photios, after providing some outstanding examples of deacons, roots the meaning of the diaconate in service. Jesus reverses the order of popular thinking by stating that He is among us as one who serves. Of course service is basic to all Christian spirituality. Yet, Christ has set some people apart so that service may be embodied as personal function for the Church. These are the bishops, priests and deacons.

In the early Church, the Apostles appointed others to take their place in the local communities. They in turn appointed deacons to assist them in the liturgy and the works of charity. In their ministry of charity the deacons moved among the poor to learn their needs and to visit the sick and imprisoned. In addition, the deacons prepared catechumens for reception into the Church and preached the Gospel. The deacons united their service in the sanctuary with their service of charity and brought to the liturgical worship the collections for the poor. In addition, in the Liturgy, the deacon, as servant to both the celebrant and the community serves as a bond between the two.

The diaconal function in the Eastern Liturgy of leading the litanies (ektenias) flows from the practice of the early Church where the deacon would compose the litanies. Because the deacon was supposed to know the needs of the community because he visited them and took care

of the sick and poor, he would be the appropriate person to lead the “ektenuas”. (This is of course the reason why the deacon in the Roman Church has this function.)

In addition, the ministry of the diaconate is an expression of the incarnate love and charity of the Church. He brings the social and economic realities of people’s lives and transforms them in the liturgy. He is a vital link between the clergy and the laity and he manifest the charismatic and institutions dimensions of the Church (p.7). (One might be surprised that Florovsky seemed to have little appreciation of this whole dimension of the diaconate. Perhaps his scope was too limited by the experience of the Russian Orthodox Church.)

Fr. Deacon Photios is somewhat critical of the diaconate in the Western Church (Roman Catholic). Photios points out that by the Fifth Century the diaconate began to decline the West and almost totally disappeared. It took Vatican II to restore the “permanent diaconate.” (The East never lost the presence of “permanent” deacons.) When the Roman Church restored the diaconate it was not the ancient office that was restored. It was more an office of “mini priest” (p. 7). This criticism is often made by the Eastern Churches of the Church of Rome regarding the diaconate. Latin deacons do many things reserved for priests in the East. (This includes Eastern Rite deacons of the Catholic Church who may not do weddings, baptisms, etc.) Latin deacons give blessings, celebrate marriages, baptisms and similar services. Eastern deacons are not permitted to conduct these services. They are seen as priestly and not diaconal.

For Orthodox Churches, Touloumes believes that the restoration of the diaconate in many Orthodox parishes would be most beneficial. They would have the responsibility to perform, on behalf of all the people, the various diaconal functions. In addition to their liturgical functions, the deacons would be able to represent the diaconal ministry of Christ in a variety of works of service and charity.

While certainly the diaconal function is not synonymous with the holy priesthood, the function of the deacon is complete and vital in itself (p. 9). It ought not simply to be seen as a step to the priesthood. Since many of these deacons work in ordinary occupations, it brings these realities to the table of the Lord and sanctifies them.

Looking at the Orthodox understanding of the diaconate within the larger perspective of Orthodox sacramental theology, we turn to Greek Orthodox, Fr. Alciviadis Calivas, Th.D., “The Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church.” Fr. Calivas sees the life of the Orthodox Christian as a constant celebration of the Paschal mystery and the rehearsing of the acts of God (p. 1) the Holy Mysteries (sacraments of which seven are recognized) are a foretaste of the heavenly mysteries. The Mysteries derive from God and not from humans. Their power comes from the Holy Spirit. Thus the Orthodox would hold a very similar theology to the Church of Rome. Regarding the sacrament of priesthood (as Holy Orders is usually called in the East), the Orthodox teach (as do the Romans) that ordination is permanent and not to be repeated. If one of the ordained leaves the Church and wishes to return, he would not be re-ordained. There is no question that the diaconate is truly sacramental (instituted by Christ) as distinct from both the Reformed and Anglican tradition.

In terms of the situation of the ordained ministry, particularly the diaconate, we might turn to insights of the Orthodox Church regarding the Lima document. In an article found in the *JOURNAL OF ECUMENICAL STUDIES* (vol. 3330-43, S’96) Lucian Tercescu provides Orthodox reactions to one of the most important milestones in ecumenical relations, the “Lima Document.” Written in 1982, it was an attempt to clarify areas of agreement on Baptism, Eucharist and ministry (BEM). What was fascinating were the significant number of theological concerns that were acceptable to the various Christian communities that were represented,

including Roman Catholic and Orthodox. Tercescu makes reference to Thomas Hopko of St. Valdimir's Theological Seminary (Crestwood, N.Y.) who expressed several reservations. Principle is the teaching the ordination for the Orthodox is truly a sacrament that communicates grace. It is more than a "sacramental sign" as BEM describes it. While BEM speaks of ordination as the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the Lima document (BEM) seems to imply that this is merely a recognition of gifts that the minister already possesses (M 44). Such a position would not be acceptable to the Orthodox Church.

Further, the notion of "apostolic succession" seems to be confused with "apostolic faith." For the Orthodox, apostolic succession is actualized by the laying on of hands that come from the Apostles. (The author of this article accepts the position of Raymond Brown, PRIEST AND BISHOP, where Brown sees the episcopacy as coming from Christ by the guidance of the Holy Spirit over a period of time and not a strict chain of hands from the Apostles).

Regarding the ordination of women, while BEM does not urge the ordination of women as priests, the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches have rejected the notion that deaconesses received the same ordination as men. The Russians and Bulgarians insist that the deaconesses simply received a blessing (cheirothesia) (p. 5).

While the above concerns primarily dealt with priests and bishops, the Orthodox, in response to BEM, are most certainly insisting of the truly sacramental nature of the diaconate (as well as the episcopacy and priesthood.)

Next we would want to look at the Oriental Churches which are not in communion with either the Orthodox or Roman Churches (although the majority have Eastern Rites branches in communion with Rome.)

In a report from the Office of Communications of the U.S.C.B. (“Deacons Focus of Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation, June 9-10 in New Rochelle, N.Y.”) which took place at St. Nereses Armenian Seminary, we have an excellent overview of the diaconate in the Oriental Churches. These include the Armenian Church, the Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Syriac-Orthodox Church, the Malankara Syrian Church of India and finally the Maronite Church of Lebanon which is a Catholic Church fully in communion with Rome. While there was a common understanding that deacons share in the sacrament of Holy Orders, there also had been unique development in each particular Church.

In the Armenian Church, deacons play a central role and at least one deacon is required in the celebration of the Liturgy, the Divine Office and other major functions. The social role of deacons is being restored and often deacons visit the sick or take on administrative roles. There is both a transitional and permanent diaconate. The were ordinations of women deacons in part of the Armenian tradition but this has almost disappeared. There are plans to revive this ministry.

For the Coptic Orthodox Church, the deacon is seen as one of seven clerical orders (these once existed in the Roman Church) and the presence of the deacon is required for the celebration of the liturgy. Coptic deacons are not allowed to baptize. The Coptic Church is in the process of restoring the order of deaconess. The deaconess may not, however, participate in the service of the altar or in any sacerdotal ministry. They are to assist in the ministry to women and children.

For the Ethiopian Church, there is a significant number of deacons. While their role is primarily liturgical, they have an increasing role in other ministries. Although there is mention of women deacons in the ancient liturgical texts, there are no women deacons at the present.

In the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, deacons are ordained by the bishop (as in all the other Oriental Churches) and serve primarily in the Liturgy. Some teach or do other

charitable work. Deaconesses were known in the Church, but by the sixth century began to disappear. Some scholars assert that the ordination of deaconesses was different from the ordination deacons, including the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Deaconesses had no role in the sanctuary.

In the Malankara -Syrian Orthodox Church of India, the apostles were regarded as deacons. There is some evidence that women who were called deaconesses were wives of deacons in the early Church.

In the Maronite Catholic Church one sees the influence of Roman communion. In Lebanon, most deacons become priests because there is no problem with marriage for either deacons or priests. There are permanent deacons and even sub-deacons in the West where there is a very intensive formation program.

Our reflection on the diaconate in Eastern Churches would not be complete without looking at the practices of the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome. Traditionally called Eastern Rites, this term has become offensive since Vatican II where “rites” are now called “particular Churches” in communion with Rome. Most of the Orthodox and Oriental Churches have branches in communion with Rome. They possess their own hierarchy, canon law and practices. While there was often a tendency to “Latinize” these churches, since Vatican II these particular Churches have made strong efforts to recover their ancient liturgies, canons and traditions.

Unlike the Latin branch of the Catholic Church, the Eastern Catholic Churches, like their Orthodox counterparts, have never fully lost the permanent diaconate although in many cases has almost fallen into disuse.

Since Vatican II in many of the Eastern Catholic Churches there has been a renewed interest in the permanent diaconate. Nevertheless, these deacons function as Eastern deacons . In other words, they do not perform baptisms, marriages or give blessings. As in the Orthodox and Oriental Churches, these liturgical roles are seen as priestly ministries. Rather, Eastern deacons (Catholic and Orthodox) see their proper role as assisting in the liturgy and not taking the place of the priest. However, deacons who belong to Eastern Catholic Churches also engage in various pastoral and social ministries.

It is important to remember that the various Eastern Catholic Churches are truly members of the Catholic church and yet not part of the Patriarchate of the West. They have their own patriarchs and Major Archbishops. Their approach to sacraments, including the diaconate, reflects the sacramental theology of the East. Thus, the sacramental theology of the West is not the only valid approach to the diaconate or the other sacraments.

Looking at the Orthodox and Oriental Churches, they are significant for Catholics in that there is no question on the part of the Catholic Church that they have retained Apostolic succession and valid orders. For our purposes, their insights into the diaconate can be quite instructive.

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**THE DEACON'S MINISTRY OF  
PEACE AND JUSTICE:  
AN EXPRESSION OF COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY**

The deacon is, at times, put into positions where he is seen as the “next best thing” when there is no priest available. This image of the deacon, as a “mini priest” is a distortion of the diaconate. Rather, he be perceived as a “sign of service” rather than a “replacement” for a priest. In addition, while the deacon shares in the threefold ministry of word, liturgy and charity, his ministry should be so designed that the focus is on service and charity. This helps to define the specialty of his ministry. History has shown, as we have already seen in this study, that when this is lost, the diaconate disappears.

The above helps to define the function of the deacon within the sacrament of orders. However, the reality is that many deacons are serving within a parish where his assistance is very much needed or perhaps finds himself placed in a situation where many ministries are already in place. How is the deacon to find his proper place and identify?

Liturgically, what the deacon does is spelled out in the various liturgical texts, including The Roman Missal. Neither the priest nor the lay minister should feel threatened by the deacon’s presence since he does what he called to do, no more and no less. He has his own specified role in the liturgy. As has been already said, this ought not to be the major portion of his ministry, but he does have his role where liturgy is involved. Unfortunately, many times priests have little appreciation of the liturgical role of the deacon and indiscriminately take over his position. Sometimes lay ministers also can see the deacon as an intrusion. If, on the other hand, the deacon is known primarily as the minister of service and charity in the community, then he already has an identity. He is trying neither to be a priest nor a lay minister, neither of which he is.

Where ministers, especially lay ministers are properly carrying out their own forms of service to the community, the deacon, especially if he is new on the scene, should not assume

that because he is “ordained” he has the right to “barge in” areas that are being well serviced. To begin with, deacons ought to work at not being totally identified with purely “parochial” activities. He ought to be asking himself, who is not being serviced by the present arrangement of things. How can he bring the presence of the servant Christ to areas, both geographically and personally, that are currently “outside” official structures of ministry. He is indeed an ecclesial minister, but he need not always be involved with “ecclesiastical” work all the time. If the deacon is asking where he can extend present ministry, he is not displacing those already doing their own good work.

In addition, deacons might share in various service ministries that are already in process. He need not be in charge of a particular project. He is to be a “sign of service”. He certainly not the only servant. Indeed, any deacon would have to be quite humbled by the work of people like Dorothy Day or Mother Teresa of Calcutta and those who follow them. They are not ordained deacons, but certainly do works of service and charity that leave most deacons in awe. If he is known as a man of generosity and charity, even as a “team player” and not the leader, he is already doing fine diaconal service.

One of the best models for deacons to explore in their reflections on how to be part of a ministerial team is the model of “collaboration”. Among the many who have written in this area are Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Julian (*COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY: SKILLS AND GUIDELINES*). Some of what they have to offer can be instructive.

According to the authors, collaboration “...is the identification, release and union of the gifts of all baptized persons. The belief that every baptized person is gifted and called to ministry is the basis for collaboration.” (p. 11). The authors see the Church as moving in the direction of “collaboration”. At the same time there are definite obstacles to collaboration which

include competitiveness, parochialism, arrogance and burnout. (p. 26). A competitive approach to life and ministry works against collaboration. Parochialism is reflected in narrow attitudes which sees ministry and Church in a limited perspective, characterized by such expressions as my parish, my school or my diocese. (p. 29). The authors point out that such attitudes exist within religious congregations as well. The approach of parochialism leads to putting energies in maintaining a “system” rather than responding to needs. Arrogance can affect all persons in ministry. People find it difficult to see this trait in themselves. Clergy, religious, and laity can be guilty of attitudes of superiority. (p. 31). Finally, “burnout” is a common problem of people. Even in ministry who develop attitudes which sees the “good numbers” and who never takes a break. This actually leads to depression and the inability to adequately minister or to really develop collaboration.

On the other side, collaboration works where there is a sense of trust. It is to see others as intending good rather than harm and the ability to enter positive relationships. There is a sense of autonomy in which people can work independently and cooperatively. They are those who feel a sense of control in their live and are willing to make even difficult choices. There a dimension of initiative. They are able to discover new models of ministry and to try new things. They have a sense of their identity and are not threatened by others. They know their gifts and their limitations. They can develop healthy intimacy with others and are able to love and be loved in return. (above from chapter 3).

Deacons, as well as others, can easily become “long rangers”. If they are not sure of their identity, if they are arrogant and insecure, they will find it difficult to work in a truly collaborative setting. If they are always waiting to be “told what to do by Father”, they will feel a constant frustration in their ministry. As a former associate director of the Brooklyn Permanent

Diaconate Program, a common complaint that I often received from deacons was that “Father never lets me do anything”. I would reply that they don’t need Father’s “permission” to visit the sick, talk to a kid in trouble, go to a hospital, counsel someone in need, etc.

What is essential is that the deacon, as well as other ministers, not only know what is their proper focus, but their gifts and abilities. The “collaborative” deacon is not threatened when others have similar gifts or even more “dramatic” gifts. He is a person who is able to support and encourage others since he is secure in his identity and place.

This brings up the issue of “power”. While this theme has been addressed earlier, we could take a brief look at *THE EMERGING LAITY: RETURNING LEADERSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY FAITH*, by James and Evelyn Whitehead. In this work, the authors stress that leaders in ministry foster collaboration. They write: “mobilizing the groups resources includes both generating and fostering its strengths. The goal is to make “more” of the group’s power. Effective leaders take steps to help the group grow in both competence and confidence. (p. 79). The authors spend considerable time in this work analyzing “power” in both positive and negative expressions, including within the Church. At the same time the Whitehead’s discuss the “purifying processes” of ministry regarding “power” since Vatican II. This has leads to envisioning ministry in broader and more inclusive ways. Ministry is seen in less hierarchical ways and portrayed more as “mutual service”. (p. 159). Ministry is not “delivered” to passive people but arises from within the community itself, distinctions that protect status and privilege and less convincing.

Again, the deacon needs to look at the issues of power within his own ministry. If a “power trip” is not conducive to authentic ministry, than he needs to honestly and even painfully ask about his own use / abuse of power. We have already looked at the issue of power, and seen

that it is precisely in the refusal to abuse power and even reject that type of power, that the deacon most especially ministers as the servant of the Church community in the manner of his Master. A deacon whose sense of power is internal, does not need to abuse power. He is able to cooperate and contribute according to his own charisms.

Perhaps the area where deacons need to develop a sensitivity and bring it into their own ministries is the area of the social teaching of the Church. Because deacons are middle aged or older, often their personal formation is rich in terms of acts of charity and works of personal service. This, of course is by no means unimportant. However, even without having done any form of scientific survey, one can often see where deacons (like many Catholics of their age and background) are lacking in a serious knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church or perhaps still honestly need a “conversion” in their own lives. An one author writes, the social doctrine of the Church is “our best kept secret.” (Henriot) Yet, of all the ministers of the Church, deacons, by the nature of their ministry, ought to be among the most informed and sensitive to this area of Church teaching. How they implement this in their ministry will vary from deacon to deacon, but there needs to be a serious confrontation with the major encyclicals of the Holy Fathers, particularly of Paul VI and John Paul II, and the teaching of the American Bishops. The majority of deacons have read little of these documents and are in a poor position to explain or defend them. Most deacons have indeed a strong “privatized” spirituality, but little exposure to this vast treasure of the Church. Yet, deacons are in the marketplace and in ministries that call for this awareness.

When a deacon is involved in some form of service to the poor or people who are in some way marginalized, he ought to at least have in the back of his mind some questions about the causes for these injustices. Further the desire to in some way, however limited, to raise to

consciousness the larger questions of justice needs to be fostered. Certainly, a deacon is not always in a position to change these structures as an individual, but there are some ways he can respond.

Just to take a brief survey of some key elements of the Church's teaching should challenge deacons and those responsible for their formation to seek to find ways to bring these teachings into their ministerial practice. Beginning with the exhortation of Pope John Paul II to the "Plenarium" of the Congregation for the Clergy meeting in November of 1995 on the Permanent Diaconate, the Pope urged deacons to be committed to "just social causes" in their ministries. This was presented as an integral aspect of diaconal service even as the deacon was called by Pope John Paul (and now Pope Benedict) to share in the "new evangelization."

In the Apostolic Exhortation, "Evangelii Nuntiandi" in 1975, Pope Paul VI wrote, "Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take into account the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. That is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations, ...about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development. A message especially energetic today of liberation." (par. 29, found in THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, p. 715). This certainly is a powerful challenge to a "privatized" spirituality. Pope Paul continues, "Between evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation – there are profound links. ...They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact one can proclaim the new commandment without promoting justice and peace, the true, authentic advancement of man." (par. 31). If this is true of all Christians, how true is this of the deacon who is called to be the minister of service and evangelization?

Regarding women, the deacon, who is so often married, ought to have a particular sensitivity. Pope John Paul II has written often of the importance of the dignity of women. In “*Familiaris Consortio*” (1981), John Paul writes, “Above all it is important to underline the equal dignity and responsibility of women and men. ...What human reason intuitively perceives and acknowledges is fully realized by the word of God: the history of salvation, in fact, it a continuous and luminous testimony of the dignity of women.” (par 22, p. 721 of *THE CHRISTIAN FAITH*).

The same Pontiff, in his encyclical, “*Laborem Exercens*” (1981) writes regarding women: “But it is fitting that they (women) should be able to fulfill their tasks in accordance with their own nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also without lack of respect for their family aspirations and for the specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of society.” (par. 19). Again, the deacon ought to be outstanding in the defense of the dignity and equality of women. In the family, the work place, the neighborhood and the parish or agency where the deacon is assigned, he should be known as a leader in protecting and defending the rights of women.

Concerning those who are victims of poverty, Paul VI, in the Apostolic Letter, “*Octogesima Adveniens*” (1971) writes, “In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect for the poor and the situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.” (par 23, p. 706). Similarly, in the Instruction from the S. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Libertatis Conscientia*” (CONCERNING “Liberation Theology”), we read, “But the love that impels the Church to communicate to all people a sharing in the grace of divine life also causes her, through the effective action of her members, to pursue people’s true temporal good,

help them in their needs, provide for their education and promote an integral liberation from everything that hinders the development of liberation. The special option for the poor, far from being a sign of particularity, manifests the universality of the Church's being and mission." (par. 68, p. 723). In reality, there is no doubt that deacons are personally challenged by this difficult demand of the Gospel. No doubt, the deacon who seriously also seeks to remind others of this aspect of the Gospel will find his popularity diminished, but will be a better sacramental sign of service, especially if he incorporates this value in his own witness.

In the work place, the deacon ought to be identified as one who defends the dignity of all who are employed, no matter what their status or occupation. Especially if the deacon has a position of leadership in the work place, those under his charge ought to know they will find in him a person who is a protector from unjust treatment. Again, turning to "Laborem Exercens", Pope John Paul writes, "...The basis for determining the value of the work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not the objective one." (par. 6, p. 718).

Perhaps an area that might receive little attention from deacons would be the issues of sexual minorities. While deacons are called to support and defend the teaching of the Church regarding homosexual behavior, they might also keep in mind the Instruction from the C.D.F. regarding the "Pastoral Care of Homosexual" (1986). While defending Church teaching on homosexual acts, nevertheless this document states that: "It has been deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violence malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs." (par. 10, p. 756). Deacons need to look at their own comments and behavior. Again, do those who are among the

most vulnerable among those they serve, (and every congregation and community and place of employment have homosexual persons), see deacons as witnesses to the charity of Christ?

Perhaps deacons would benefit from reading James Alison, *THE JOY OF BEING WRONG*. In this creative study of original sin, Alison, a Dominican priest, describes some of the pain a young person experiences in trying to cope with a homosexual orientation. What a beautiful ministry that would be truly diaconal to be able to be a sensitive listener to a young person in this situation.

Regarding racism, turning again to the Apostolic Letter, “Octogesima Adveniens”, we read: “the people rightly consider unjustifiable and reject as inadmissible the tendency to maintain or introduce legislation or behavior systematically inspired by racial prejudice.” It continues to say that all people share the same basic rights and duties, as well as the same supernatural destiny.” (par. 16, p. 705). In a similar vein, the American Bishops, in their pastoral letter, “To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral reflection on the Moral Life”, insisted on the “...incomparable worth of racial and ethnic group,” but lamented “racial antagonisms and discrimination.” (p. 70). So also in a recent (1996) pastoral letter by Bishop Thomas Daily of Brooklyn (“The Image of God Revisited”) in speaking on racism says that: “It happens all too often that institutions created by people...contain mechanisms that eventually humiliate, devalue, damage and destroy people. ...We live in structures and are often blind to the injury they cause.” (chap. 11). Deacons are not protected from racism in their own hearts. They, like all, need to examine their consciences and explore dimensions of racism within themselves. In addition, in the parish, neighborhood, work place and especially in their families, they need to be seen as leaders in efforts against racism.

Deacons and deacon candidates need to be familiar with what is perhaps the most dramatic encyclical of Pope John Paul, “*Evangelium Vitae*”. This powerful and Spirit-filled Letter of the Holy Father challenges the “culture of death” in which we all find ourselves. What is so wonderful about this encyclical is the breath that it possesses. Certainly, abortion is a central concern. In addition the Pope rejects infanticide, euthanasia, drug trade, arms trade, capital punishment and the social conditions that so often make these alternatives attractive. The depth of this encyclical is profound and difficult to summarize except to say that deacons, as ministers of evangelization and service again have a particular task to promote and defend the “Gospel of Life” against a “culture of death”. One might note that in ministering to various people, often there is conversion in one area and lack of conversion in others (including deacons). One might fully agree that abortion is immoral and see no difficulty with capital punishment, or have no sense of the social conditions that lead to abortion or the need to help provide alternatives to abortion.

Certainly the above is far from an exhaustive summary of the social teaching of the Church. It is only a brief suggest of some directions formation or on-going formation might take in looking at some ways of reflecting on diaconal ministry in light of this teaching.

Before concluding, deacons might greatly benefit from the work of one of the most seminal Catholic writers on our time, Rene Girard. He is a thinker whose concepts deserve exploration by all Christians, but certainly deacons, who are called to stand with “victims” who are unjustly threatened by all forms of violence need to become familiar with the creative writer. Indeed, as American theologian and anthropologist, Gil Baile (*VIOLENCE UNVEILED*), Girard will prove to be one of the most important forces for enlightening our post-modern world on the issue of violence.

Rene Girard, in his THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD and his more recent, I SEE SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTENING, has developed one of the most creative and biblically based interpretations of the source of violence and how violence might be healed. Essentially, what Girard seeks to develop is a biblical anthropology.

Girard looks closely at human “desire.” He explores “desire” and looks at the implications of desire. This is called “mimetic desire” or “mimesis.” It is the desire that comes about from the imitation of others. We regularly make use of “models” for clothing or look to heroes or various role models. Girard’s anthropology insists that this imitation frequently leads to violence. The Bible, again and again, reveals examples of this conflict, i.e. Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, etc. In each of the stories there is a “victim.” In the Bible, God always sides with the victim. However, it is on the cross that this destructive process is ultimately unveiled. In Jesus, God himself becomes the victim. He is the innocent victim who is ultimately vindicated in the resurrection.

In the “Forward” of Girard’s , I SAW SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTENING, author James Williams summarizes this process which is the most we can do in this chapter. Girard sees the identifying characteristic of the human person as “mimetic desire.” Thus, the ninth and tenth commandments of the Decalogue are especially significant. Desire is not an instinct. Rather it is a potential that must be activated according to Girard (as Wilson summarizes.) This desire leads to conflict and violence since eventually we want what the “model” has. This rivalry leads to “scandal.” Scandal in its root meaning means a “block.” An individual or group feels “blocked” or obstructed in attaining what the model has. This leads to an unconscious “breaking point.”

What happens in this situation is that someone is blamed for this situation and the community accepts the accusation. This results in a “victim.” Ultimately, this is the work of

“Satan.” For Girard, is the “accuser” or the power of accusation that results in the punishment of the victim rather than dealing with the real cause of the problem. The Satan myth, according to Girard, reveals the mechanism of accusing and lynching the victim. However, it disguises the real violence. The myth takes the side of the community. It results in the belief that the victim is really the source of the community’s troubles. (Girard uses the example of the Greek myth of “The Horrible Miracle of Apollonius of Tyana.”) The Gospels, on the other hand, take the side of the victim, Jesus. The innocent victim lets himself be killed by Satan’s work so that others may have their eyes opened. .

A key term for Girard is “scapegoating.” This term, which comes from Leviticus 16 refers to an animal (also human in Greek ritual) that takes the blame and burden for the difficulties within the community and suffers the penalty of death (as happened so often in the lynchings of Blacks in the South.) The Bible is unique in that God stand with the victim. The Gospels are unique in the innocent victim, by his resurrection, reveals the evil involved in this whole process.

Of course this is only a cursory summary of the thought of Girard and by no means replaces a serious analysis of his writings. It is, however, enough to indicate why Girard has something to say to deacons. As ordained ministers on the front lines of civil life and of the work place, the more they can expose the process of “victimizing” the more effectively that can carry out their prophetic role. When they received the Book of the Gospels and are instructed to “live what they preach” at their ordination, this is an example where this takes on flesh.

One last area of sensitivity that needs to be mentioned is an openness to various religious communities of faith. There is no doubt that a great deal of tension in the present world is rooted in religious differences. While most deacons would not be expected to become experts in the

theological differences between different religions , theistic and non-theistic, Western and Eastern, a fundamental knowledge of various religions and how the Catholic Church today responds to these faiths is critical for the deacon's role, in the midst of the marketplace, to be an instrument of reconciliation.

One could not do better than to read Jacques Dupuis', TOWARD A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM. In this masterful text one would become familiar with not only basic concepts of the world's major traditions, as well as current Catholic teaching as the Church responds to the reality of religious pluralism. Knowing where interreligious is going and how to share in this dialogue, even for a non-professional who is on the front lines, as is the deacon, this would be most beneficial.

As we come to the end of this chapter, we need to be reminded that deacons are called to a "collaborative" form of ministry. No matter what the particulars of what they do, that they are called to be people who empower others. While respecting the unique role and ministry they have received, they respect and promote the ministry of others. Most especially, that they incorporate the social doctrine of the Church in all that they do. It is the strong belief of this writer that this latter suggestion is the most significant aspect of diaconal ministry, even if their focus is in the form of "individual service" (which is perfectly fine) to people in need.

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## **THE LITURGICAL ROLE OF DEACONS**

This last chapter of the liturgical role of deacons has been saved until the end so that we might focus on the other dimensions of the diaconate first. Of course the Liturgy and most especially the Eucharist is the “summit” of the life of any Christian. This most certainly includes the deacon. Most certainly the deacon, as an ordained minister, has his proper role in the Liturgy. What this study has tried reinforce is that the work of charity and service lies at the heart of the diaconate

This chapter will not so much explore “what” the deacon does in the liturgy as much as “why.” Continuing with the question of this study which is the “uniqueness” of the diaconate, this chapter will take a brief look at the deacon’s liturgical role from this perspective.

As a general statement, it may be said that the role of the deacon is to assist. In the Eastern Churches particularly, the deacon is always an auxiliary minister. ( NEW DICTIONARY OF SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY, p. 319) This is not to deny that, as seen in an earlier chapter, Roman Catholic deacons do preside at various liturgical functions which does raise some theological questions as to the distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood.

Turning to one of the great liturgical classics, Joseph Jungmann’s THE RITE OF THE ROMAN MASS, one can see and trace something of the diaconal role in the Liturgy of the West. While it is impossible to go into great detail, again and again the deacon is seen as an assistant to the celebrant. Jungmann quotes Justin Martyr, describing the deacon’s as distributing the consecrated Bread (p. 14), leading the litanies in Basil’s Liturgy (Prayers of the faithful), p. 26, reading the diptychs in the Byzantine Liturgy (p. 32) and the reading of the Gospel from the earliest development of the Roman Liturgy (p. 25) Further, Dom Gregory Dix, THE SHAPE OF THE LITURGY states that the deacon would be the one who would give directions as in the Liturgy of St. Sarapion (340 A.D.) such as “Bow your heads for a blessing” or “Let the

catechumens depart,” “Let us kneel” in the Old Roman Liturgy (p.42) In the early Roman liturgy we read that “...one or more deacons would bring ...spread a linen cloth which covered the whole altar.” (p. 104) The bishop then moves toward the altar, facing the people with a deacon on either side of him. After the Eucharistic prayer led by the bishop and the presbyters, the deacons would assist in the breaking of the bread (p. 105). The Milanese Rite (along with the Mozarabic rite in Spain) had the deacon proclaim “Pacem habete” ( “Have peace”) before the Offertory while in Rome, it was before communion (p. 110). Again the deacon is “giving directions.”

Dom Gregory Dix reminds in his study of the Liturgy with a reminder for St. Clement of Rome (96 A.D.) that the Liturgy is a corporate action and that each one was to “make eucharist” according to his or her place in the community. Regarding deacons, their “deaconing” was “imposed.” (Dix, p. 1) .

In a wonderful article published by the Anglican Diocese of Montreal, “The Diaconate and Liturgy,” we have a fine summary of the theology of the liturgical functions of deacons. The author (unnamed) the role of bishop, priest and deacon symbolize particular aspects of the community as a whole. This means for the diaconate that deacons should enable bishops, priest and laity to exercise their roles. Jesus himself is the model of the one who came to “serve and not be served.” In Acts 6, 1-6, the diaconate was instituted for the distribution of food for the needy, freeing the apostles for the ministry of the word. This would seem to have created a separation between works of charity and the work of evangelization. But Stephen was martyred precisely for his preaching. Philip, in Acts 8, who was chosen to wait on tables, clearly is involved in proclaiming the Gospel. Thus, the two ministries of service and word are joined in the ministry of the deacon.

In Philippians 1:1, our article continues to show how deacons are linked with the bishops and 1 Timothy holds similar requirements for those who are to be set apart by ordination for either of these two ministries. (p. 2) Thus, in the early Church, leadership was entrusted to these two roles. For the first 660 years, deacons were in charge of the social service needs of the Church, administered works of charity and assisted in the Liturgy. The liturgical roles included the reading of the Gospel, leading of litanies (prayer of the faithful), the preparation of gifts and assisted in the distribution of Communion. Further, they carried the paschal candle and proclaimed the “Exultet.” Obviously, there was a continual development in the expression of the work of service and word in the liturgical life of a deacon.

Our author writes that the “in-church” roles of the deacon are a liturgical parallel to the role of deacons in the world. The author writes that the deacon’s role is “... to bring light into places of physical or spiritual darkness, to serve all people and especially the most vulnerable, ...and to be sent into the world to live out the good news in word and deed.” (p.2)

One here is reminded of Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, S.J. who writes about the relationship between the “Liturgy of the Church” and the “Liturgy of the world.” Michael Skelley’s study of Rahner and the liturgy demonstrates Rahner’s understanding of the Eucharistic Liturgy as celebrating “thematically” or consciously what is happening in the world where the paschal mystery is being lived out “pre-thematically” every day in the lives of millions of people. How appropriate for the deacon, especially as he leads the litanies, West or East, to be seen as the ordained bridge between these two realms. Rahner bases his theology on the notion that all of us are called to be “everyday mystics.” At some level we are always experiencing the Absolute Mystery. (Skelley, p, 85) Even the most mundane experiences have the potential to reveal God. This is because every experience points to “more” than itself. It points to an “absolute

fulfillment” or a transcendent Source. Therefore the “...history of the world is liturgy.” (Skelley, p.86.) Revelation and salvation are happening in human history. We accept or reject salvation by our responses to this Mystery. Therefore, when we think of Liturgy, we should first think of the liturgy of the world.

For Rahner, Jesus is the high point of the Liturgy of the world. The crucified and risen Lord is God’s ultimate and final manifestation to us. It celebrates God’s ultimately victorious self-communication of God. (p. 106). In the celebration of the Eucharist, the death and resurrection of Jesus is celebrated and makes present the saving effects of this mystery.

Again we have a reason to appreciate the unique role of the deacon. While it is true that all Christians who celebrate the Eucharist bridge the “liturgy of the world” and the “liturgy of the Church,” it is the deacon’s special vocation as the ordained minister called to precisely be the sacramental sign of that bridge. He is called to bring the needs of the “world” to the liturgy of the church. He is called to connect sanctuary and street.

. Here it might be worthwhile to look more deeply into something of the theology that supports these functions, particularly from the rich theology of the Eastern Church. Again this helps to further clarify the deacon’s unique place within the Church. Here we turn briefly to a rather recent and quite scholarly work by a British Catholic priest and theologian, Paul McPartlan. In McPartlan’s study, *THE EUCHARIST MAKES THE CHURCH*, the reader is offered a wonderful comparison of the Eucharistic theology of Cardinal Henri de Lubac and Greek Orthodox Bishop, John Zizioulas. Zizioulas we have already seen before in the reflection on the deacon and the Trinity. Here we get a glimpse into his (Zizioulas) and de Lubac’s rich theology of the Eucharist.

It is to John Zizioulas that we wish to particularly turn. Zizioulas's ecclesiology, reflecting that of the Eastern Church with its emphasis on the "local Church," ((influenced by Russian Orthodox, Nicolas Afanassieff's "Eucharistic ecclesiology"), has a greater appreciation of the diaconate. Although de Lubac was a brilliant patristic scholar, he is also influenced by Western theology. DeLubac, for example, emphasizes the role of the bishop or priest to gather the people together and transmit sacramental grace to them. DeLubac, agreeing with the theology of St. Peter Damien, that a monk in his cell in the desert. (or eremetical monastery) gathers the people, so to speak, even without anyone being present. McPartlan, p. 92-93) Such a concept is alien to Zizioulas. Zizioulas believes that all the orders of the Church need to be present for the celebration of the Eucharist. For Zizioulas, the ministries or orders point to Christ as a "corporate personality." (p. 97) They reflect the whole Church united to Christ.

These four orders (bishop, priest, deacon and lay person are "constitutive" of the Church's celebration of the Eucharist (p. 195). Each brings their specific gift. Referring specifically to the deacon, Zizioulas sees the deacon as revealing the mystery of the kingdom to creation as a whole. The deacon does this by what he calls a "double movement." (p. 198) He is the go-between the bishop and the people on one hand and `and then he offers communion to the people on the other.

Regarding the deacon's role of proclaiming the Gospel in the Liturgy, it seems to have been an accepted role from the early period of the Church. However, there was not a universal practice. In the Church of Alexandria, the Gospel was read only by the archdeacon, in others read by any deacon and in some, only by priests. ( CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, Pp. 4 of 10) With the reading of the Gospel, came the possibility of the deacon preaching on occasion although this seems to have been relatively rare. Yet, one of the greatest preachers of the Syrian

Church was the deacon, Ephrem (whom we heard of earlier). Again, the biblical basis for diaconal preaching is the evangelical ministry of the deacon, Philip. Certainly, for the contemporary Catholic Church, while the priest celebrant normally should give the homily, the deacon, if he has faculties, may give the homily.

Having briefly looked at the deacon's role in the Eucharist, we can turn to Baptism, a sacrament where the deacon's role has always been prominent. In contemporary Canon Law of the Roman Rite (but not Eastern), the deacon is an ordinary minister of Baptism (Canon 861) (Galles, p5 of 7) . Here, again, we want to look at the theological basis of the role for deacons.

For the early centuries of the Church, Tertullian reminds that the right to baptize belongs to the bishop. A priest could only baptize when commanded to do so. ("Baptism," CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, p. 23/33). Writing early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch says that it is "unlawful" to baptize without the bishop's permission. (P. 23) St. Jerome, (Fourth Century) writes that without chrism, neither the priest or deacon can baptize. Deacons were seen as extraordinary ministers of baptism since their role was to assist the priest.

Yet, it is also obvious that from very early days deacons, even if not the ordinary ministers, did solemnly baptize. In the Tridentine ritual for the ordination of deacons, it mentions that baptizing is one of the functions of the deacon. It recalls that Philip the deacon conferred baptism. Thus, like preaching, conferring baptism by a deacon can be traced to New Testaments roots. However, it is only in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church (in the West) that deacons are now the ordinary minister of this sacrament.

Canonist Duane Galles reminds that deacons in the Latin Rite (again, not in the East), may witness and bless marriages. (Galles, p.5/7) This presumes that he has the faculty from the local ordinary (c. 1108). Since the deacon is a cleric, he can also grant certain dispensations from

matrimonial impediments in the case of death or in an emergency when it appears at the last minute that an impediment exists. This is mentioned here, because, in certain circumstances, lay people are permitted by the Catholic Church to officiate at weddings (c.1112). Yet, because they are not clerics, they would not have the power to dispense. (Galles, p. 5/7)

Here we have a situation that does raise a number of questions. Does making a deacon an ordinary minister of baptism and marriage something of a mini priest. This, as we saw earlier in this study is a charge brought by Eastern Churches. However, the situation is a bit more complex. We have seen that baptisms were, even if rarely, conferred by deacons. Marriage, in eastern theology, is conferred by the priest (not a deacon). For the East, marriage is not conferred by the couple. In the theology of the West, the couple confers the sacrament of marriage. The priest is simply the official witness. Until 1017, it wasn't necessary for a Catholic to be married by a priest in the U.S.A. since America was considered a missionary country. Given a wide diversity of practice, it would seem that having deacons celebrate a wedding is not necessarily to make the deacon a "mini priest." However, the assumption is that if a priest is present, he should be the celebrant and the deacon should assist.

A similar question arises in the matter of giving blessings. Here we also have a situation where Roman Catholic Deacons are seen as exercising what seems, at least to many in the Eastern Church, functions that belong to the priest. What is instructive here is #18 of the General Introduction to the 1989 BOOK OF BLESSINGS of the ROMAN RITUAL. In discussing who has the right to bless, this question is answered in the context of the priesthood of Christ as it exists in the entire people of God. The Bishop, of course, is assigned by virtue of his office, to confer all of the blessings in the book and may even reserve some to himself. The presbyter, especially in the community where he serves, may also confer any of the blessings in this book.

(p. 27) The deacon, because of his ministry of the altar of the word and of charity, may preside at the blessings so indicated. Laypersons, men and women, by virtue of sharing in the universal priesthood of Christ, may also confer certain blessings, especially those related to family or to a particular responsibility they may have. Hence, it is not simply a matter of giving deacons priestly functions. It is seeing Blessing as something that belongs to the people of God.

Yet, there are some distinctions made. Deacons may not give, as has been mentioned all the blessings contained in this Ritual. For example, deacons may not bless an altar, a chalice, a confessional, in other words, he cannot bless objects that are specifically related to the ministry of the priest.

Lay people do not bless in the manner of a priest or deacon. They read the blessing but do not make the sign of the cross on the person in the manner of a priest since they are more acting in the role of a peer minister. Perhaps this puts this issue into something of a context.

Concerning the deacon's role as an "ordinary" minister of Holy Communion ( Canon 910), not only has the right to distribute Holy Communion but also to bring Communion to the sick, administer Viaticum and expose and bless with the Blessed Sacrament (Benediction). The deacon's role as minister of Holy Communion is not new. The ancient Council of Leodicea permitted the deacon (but now lower clergy) to touch the sacred vessels, and the Council of Toledo (Fifth Century) punished deacons by forbidding them from handling vessels. ("Deacons," CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, p. 4/10)

These ancient Councils permitted the deacon to reserve Consecrated Species, the administer the chalice and even the sacred host, on occasion. Prior to Vatican II, a deacon, in the celebration of Solemn Benediction, could expose the Blessed Sacrament but not bless with the

Sacrament. Obviously Vatican II expanded the deacon's role, but this is rooted in the long tradition of the deacon having a strong Eucharistic ministry.

Here again we see the deacon's uniqueness. Unlike lay persons, the deacon is an ordinary minister of Holy Communion. Further, while lay people may expose the Blessed Sacrament, they may not Bless with the Sacrament. At the same time, the deacon assists the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist but may not, of course be the celebrant.

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**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?**

**SOME CONCLUSIONS**

We began our study by asking the question of what is “unique” about the diaconate. Within the ordained ministry (for Catholics among others) what are the unique contributions and possibilities latent within this office and how does it differ from the other ordained ministries and lay ministry? What can we learn from other Christian communities. What of the role of women and the diaconate? What lead to the decline of the diaconate, to its rival in many Churches and what could lead to its decline?

The central insight that this study wishes to offer is that of all the ordained ministries, because of its rich history and the varied understandings of the diaconate, it is the most eclectic of all the ordained ministries. This provides the possibility of having a vast number of possibilities for the future. In this conclusion we now wish to explore.

We began by looking at the nature of ministry and what it means to belong to a “sacramental” Church. It is perhaps this context which makes the Catholic understanding of the diaconate distinct from churches which do not see the diaconate in the context of “sacrament.” This chapter tried to remind that “ministry” was not simply any good work or act of charity. It had to be some service to the Christian community that was exercised on a regular basis and done in the name of the community. Private acts of service and charity were not “ministry”. Certainly, this chapter wanted to emphasize the fundamental equality of all the baptized, a notion central in “Lumen Gentium”. While a later chapter would try to distinguish between the ministry of the ordained and those ministries exercised by the laity, the basic matrix was the “tria munera” shared by all the baptized. Of course, when it comes to an understanding of the diaconate as participating in the sacramental nature of the Church, here it departs from the Reformed tradition. However, for the broad Catholic tradition, namely the Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Orthodox, and Oriental and to some extent the Anglican tradition, the Church can only be

understood in light of the Incarnation. The Incarnation (as taught by the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council) reminds that matter can be the bearer of the Spirit. The physical Body of Christ was the primordial sacrament and the Church is the fundamental sacrament. The sacraments continue to embody the presence of Christ and of Orders, embodied the presence of Christ the Servant. The deacon is the sacrament of service for all Christians. As the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH states, the deacon is “configured to Christ the Servant” by the sacramental character he receives. It is the configuring of the deacon to “Christ the servant” which offers a unique sacramental role in the Church. While it is true that all the ordained are to be servants to the community, the deacon is ordained to directly, not only implicitly, manifest this dimension of the ministry.

Further, our study explored the relationship of the deacon with both the other ordained minister and with lay people. No doubt this is a sensitive area and it was difficult not to perhaps seem offensive, though not intentionally. Regarding lay people, we again wanted to emphasize that the lay vocation was not a “lesser” vocation or a second class vocation. There has been too much of an unfortunate history in this regard. On the other hand, there was an attempt to appreciate the meaning and significance of the sacrament of orders. The Catholic Church is not a “Congregationalist” Church (neither are any of the Churches in the broad Catholic tradition). We showed how “Christifideles Laici” (among many other documents) clearly taught that there are ministries that flow from Baptism. Many lay people are being highly trained (including on the doctoral level) for professional roles in the Church. It would be impossible to maintain most ministries in the Church without the collaboration of lay people. We also wanted to say that it would be unfair to indicate to lay people that they would not be living fully Christian lives unless they were actively engaged in some form of recognized parish ministry. Not all lay people are

called to active ministry. All Church documents regarding the role of lay people, certainly from Vatican II onwards, has insisted that the “proper” vocation (meaning inherent vocation) of the lay person was the sanctification and transformation of the world. In business, education, politics, family, etc. it was the great vocation of lay people exercising their priesthood, to sanctify realities, and this is not second rate vocation.

The “proper” (meaning again the inherent primary task) of the ordained was to be ordained as ministers to the laity. The ordained are constituted as ministers by their ordination. We continued to use the term “ontological” as has Pope John Paul II to stress that ordination, whether as a bishop, presbyter or deacon, touches someone at the very core of this being (just as baptism gives a share in the priesthood of Christ in the very core of the being of the baptized). Further, deacons receive the “laying on of hands that comes to us from the Apostles. This means, as we have indicated, that deacons share in their proper order, a share in the apostolic succession. Thus, they are not peer ministers to the laity even if their lifestyle often resembles that of lay people. Since, for the broad Catholic tradition, they have been ordained, they have received the strengthening that comes from the sacramental grace of the sacrament along with the authority to exercise their ministry by the laying on of hands. Yet, what is distinct to the deacons is that their specialization in service and charity. They are the sacramental reminders to the other ministers that apostolic authority is to be understood as service and with the attitude of servants. Apostolic authority radically differs from those who seek power to dominate. Thus, deacons are permanently configured to Christ the servant and share in the Apostolic succession in their grade thus constituting them as proper ministers. Thus, they are distinct from lay people who do ministry. Yet, as servants receiving their ministry from the apostles, they need to minister collaboratively with both priests and lay people (as well as Religious).

Moving more specifically to the deacons relationship with other clergy. We reflected on “Lumen Gentium’s” description of the deacon as being on a “lower level of the hierarchy.” (par. 29). We are reminded of the teaching of both Karl Rahner and Bishop (now Cardinal) Karl Lehmann who both felt this description of the diaconate was unfortunate. While the deacon certainly does not preside over the Eucharist or serve as the shepherd of the community, in his own rank and ministry he is certainly not less than the others. Indeed, as Rahner stated, if works of charity are the hallmark of the diaconate, from a Christian perspective they are most certainly in no way less than the others.

Further, looking from a number of perspectives on the ministry of Jesus, certainly he had made ministry to those on the margins of society the center of his preaching. The Gospel was proclaimed to the poor and the outcastes. If the Church can do no less than her Master, she needs to embody this focus. If the deacon is true to his vocation, than it is his privilege to serve the outcastes of his world. Of course, this is the obligation of all, most certainly to the bishops and priests. Nevertheless, the deacon needs to take a leadership role here if he truly wants to exercise the diaconate. He is not “less” but rather a leader in what is to be the identifying characteristic of the Christian, to excel in the virtue of charity and to bring the needs of the marginalized to the community, most especially at the Eucharist. The deacon has no need to be concerned with competition with the other ordained ministers. He needs to know in what area he is meant to be a specialist and then to carry out his vocation. Further, we looked at a number of examples of Scripture scholars who again and again reminded that while the ministry of Jesus was to all people, the marginalized were the particular focus of his concern. Sinners and outcastes, those who had none to defend them were the strong object for his love. If this be true

for the Master, the servant has no need to see himself as second class in engaging in the same call.

We next reflected on the deacon's ministry to the sick and dying. We explored not only the deacon's present ministry but future possibilities based on the past. In the PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK, the major ritual text in the Roman Church for caring for the sick, it certainly reminds the deacons of their duty to care for the ill. This not only included bringing the Eucharist to the sick (including Viaticum), but caring for the material needs of the ill. A deacon who lacked this dimension of his ministry would need to carefully reflect on his vocation.

But we went further. We explored the history of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and saw that one could make a serious case that in the early centuries of the Church, lay people celebrated this sacrament. While we make distinctions between "sacrament" and "sacramental" this distinction was not so precise in the early centuries. Further, the "presbyters" in James did not have the precise meaning it has today. Could not the deacon of the future include in his ministry the sacrament of anointing. Even if it were by way of exception (such as a priest in the Roman Rite conferring confirmation), the deacon could in special circumstances anoint. Further, while often dismissed in much of contemporary theology as a relic of the past, the Church still insists in the reality of indulgences. We made the case that since the Apostolic Pardon was not the forgiveness of sins, it would seem that the deacon should be able to confer this. In the absence of a priest, this could be a source of consolation.

We even raised the possibility of a deacon, in the absence of a priest of giving sacramental absolution. One cannot deny that there are instances of this happening in the past. Again, it would be by way of exception, but these areas need further exploration by sacramental theologians.

Another theological concern was the significance of the sacramental “character” and its significance for the deacon. Here we examined the history of the notion of the “character” or “seal”. We saw that Trent declared the three sacraments confer a “seal”, baptism, confirmation, and Holy Orders. We discussed the various interpretations of the meaning of the “character”. These included Church Fathers (especially Augustine), the medieval, especially Thomas, and contemporary theologians (Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Dunn). While there are certainly a variety of opinions, this study saw the position of Aquinas as still having merit. Thomas taught that the character inserted one into the priesthood of Christ in different ways; baptism allowed one to share in the offering of the Eucharist, confirmation empowered one to bring witness to Christ into the world and Holy Orders to support the priesthood of the people. Further, the character is ontological in that it touches the core and center of the person who receives it. One area of significance for the diaconate is that on the level of the ordinary Magisterium in the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, it clarified that there is no question that the deacon receives the sacramental character and that he is permanently configured to Christ the Servant. There were two major conclusions to this. One was that the effect of diaconal ordination was “permanent”. This stressed the stability of the apostolic structure of the Church and the fidelity of Christ to his Church. Second, it declared that the “diaconal” ministry of the Church was an integral and permanent characteristic of the Church. The deacon is the sacramental sign of the “diaconal” ministry that all Christians are called to share. Here the deacon is called to be the permanent sacramental sign of this dimension of the Church. We recall the teaching of Cardinal Seunens that without the diaconate this essential aspect of the very structure of the Church is truncated. The priesthood of Christ shared (though in a different way) by both the ordained priest and the baptized lay person would lose its base in the

“diakonia” of Christ the Servant. As said several times, the deacon is by no means the only servant but he is the ordained sacramental sign of that service, and the sacramental character says this sign is “forever”.

One area of special concern for the deacon is the ministry of the deacon is the area of justice and peace. Again, this by no means is limited to the deacon. However, this chapter began with a challenge to the deacon because for many deacons this is probably an area where many are lagging behind. Most deacons in the Roman tradition are older men. Therefore, they were raised in a Church where the emphasis was on “personal” morality. The social teaching of the Church was in the words of one author, “our best kept secret”. Yet, if the deacon is the sacramental sign of the Church’s ministry to the poor and the marginalized, the deacon, above all, has the special obligation to be leading the way. This means that he needs to be familiar with that teaching, be zealous in preaching it and above all seeking means to practice it. Indeed, Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany once told a group of deacons that if they were not involved in some element of social concern, they needed to question their diaconate. Perhaps, these are strong words, but it raises an important challenge.

No deacon ought to be ordained without training in the major social documents of the Popes, from Leo XIII to John Paul II. From the questions of “private property” and “just wage” to the “work bench” spirituality of John Paul, deacons need to know, love and live what these documents teach. As ordained ministers in the marketplace, they need to appreciate concerns for justice. They are the only ordained ministers of the Church who are normally engaged in working in the secular environment. This is an important dimension of their uniqueness. They bring the hierarchical structure of the Church into the midst of the civil arena. Thus they have a role that is distinct from both the lay person and the other ordained ministers or those in

consecrated life. Often they are known by their fellow workers, neighbors, etc., as ordained ministers. Therefore, they need to be persons who understand and defend the justice concerns of Christ and his Church. They are “public” persons of the Church in the secular arena and therefore are potentially in both a difficult yet challenging position to witness for Christ. Other clergy and lay persons are generally not so exposed. Even persons in secular institutes are often not known for being in consecrated life. The deacon has no protection. He is a publically ordained servant. Yet, he has a wonderful opportunity to be prophetic in the defense of life, in the defense of the poor and marginalized and in protecting the rights of women.

A major concern we raised was the question of the ordination of women to the diaconate, a complex and important question. Certainly in the Reformed tradition there are communities which ordain women as deacons. The Anglican communion ordains women to both the diaconate and priesthood. Until well in the Middle Ages the Pontificals for the Orthodox Church had ordination rites for women as deaconesses. In the Oriental Churches there are some (not in communion with Rome, who ordain women as deaconesses. Of course, the practices of the Orthodox and Oriental Churches are significant since Rome has always recognized the validity of the Orders of these groups. We also saw the Old Catholic Church in Utrecht has begun to ordain women to the diaconate and priesthood. While these orders have been traditionally recognized as valid, Rome has not accepted these ordinations as valid.

Even for the Orthodox and Oriental Churches there has been a major question, even within these Churches as to the meaning of these ordinations. Are they identical to the ordination of male deacons or are they simply a blessing. We indicted the conflicts within these traditions even today.

Of course no one disputes the ordination of women as deaconesses. Although primarily a reality in the East, it was a reality when East and West were in communion. We even mentioned the rather unusual situation of Carthusian nuns receiving a diaconal stole at their consecration as virgins so that they might read the Gospel during the celebration of the Divine Office.

The chief dispute though remains as to how to understand the “ordination” these deaconesses received. The difficulty is that strong arguments by competent theologians and canonists can be made on both sides of the issue. Certainly the ordination rites in the Byzantine tradition and often in the Oriental traditions were quite similar to that of the ordination as deacons. Yet, there were notable differences not only in the ordination but in the ministry that followed. Was this only a cultural phenomenon or did this reflect a difference of ordination?

There is not need to go through the specifics again. Perhaps we have to say that we cannot know for certain what was in the minds of these early centuries. What we can say is that for several centuries there existed a female branch of “diaconal” ministry that was conferred in a manner similar to males. Therefore of the three ordained ministries, what is unique to the diaconate is there existed a feminine counterpart, even if one wants to argue that it was not identical to the males. This is not true in the broad Catholic tradition (until recent times) for the office of the bishop and priest. Further, these deaconesses often ministered to communities (generally in monasteries) in the manner of one who is ordained. (This does not deny that in the West there were abbesses who held jurisdiction even over clergy. However, they were not ordained as deaconesses.)

Maybe another question might be, whether or not women received the identical ordination as men, if they could not be ordained as deacons today. The prohibition of ordaining women to the priesthood did not include the diaconate. Although the Catholic Church taught

that it was a matter of defined teaching that women could not be ordained to the priesthood, there was no mention of the diaconate. The argument used that the priest “in persona Christi” at the Eucharist and therefore must be male, is not an issue for the diaconate since the deacon is not ordained to the priesthood but to ministry. Further, deaconesses quite possibly were ordained to Holy Orders since there was a laying on of hands and an invocation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the feminine branch of the diaconate is not a novelty. In other areas the Church has seen fit to develop their sacraments (including cases in the Middle Ages of Cisterican abbots being given permission to ordain to the priesthood even though these abbots were not bishops). Could not there be an ordination to the diaconate for women. This would not only give a share in order but a true extension in Apostolic succession to the role of women in the Church. Thus this study argues that this ordained ministry (the diaconate) has a truly unique place regarding women.

We explored the diaconate in the Reformed and Eastern (Orthodox and Oriental traditions). From the Reformed traditions we saw a strong emphasis on service. Often there were groups of deacons who were organized to perform works of charity. However, we also saw that there was a wide variety of understanding how the diaconate was understood. Certainly, it was distinct from the Catholic and Eastern traditions who view the diaconate as truly sacramental. For the Reformed tradition, there is no sacrament of Holy Orders. Further, in many denominations deacons are lay people who are temporally elected to a role of supervision. Yet, the Catholic tradition can learn from the Reformed tradition the importance of the focus on service. As the Orthodox complain about Catholic deacons, they often function more like mini priests rather than deacons. When the Reform restored the diaconate they often looked to the New Testament and sought to imitate this model as much as possible.

The Anglican Church has Holy Orders and does see the diaconate as an ordination. Yet, upon closer examination, Holy Orders is not seen as it is in the Catholic Church. It is not sacramental as Catholic would understand and there is no conferral of a sacramental character.

What can we learn of the uniqueness of the diaconate from the reformed tradition? From an ecumenical perspective there can be much fruitful dialogue on this ministry since most traditions have some expression of diaconate. The “Lima Document” of 1987 already provided areas of commonality regarding ministry. Within ministry the diaconate has the common bond of service. Ministry of service would be the least controversial of the ministries of the Church.

Further, the variety of expressions in the diaconate in the Reform tradition remind us of the versatility of this ministry. From serving in leadership roles in small communities to handling the finances of a community, from teaching catechism to providing service to the needy, we see a wide expression of ministries.

Concerning the Orthodox and Oriental Churches, perhaps one of the important insights that they offer to the Roman Tradition is that there is less blurring of lines between the diaconate and the presbyterate. The deacon always serves in an assisting capacity. He does not replace the priest as celebrant of certain sacraments (e.g. marriage). This has helped to preserve the clear identity of the deacon. The danger in the Roman situation is that the deacon is really being (at least in practice) a substitute priest and this could lead to the dissolution of the diaconate.

When we studied the history of the diaconate, we saw that the diaconate disappeared when it lost a clear identity and distinction from the priesthood. Although the diaconate has been restored in many traditions (or enhanced where its presence was minimal), there is always the possibility of this occurring again. If the diaconate does not maintain its unique role, it will be deemed unnecessary. Of course there is, as has been argued, a flexibility in the diaconate more

that the other ordained ministries. This, therefore, does not negate the Roman practice of assigning deacons roles that are primarily presbyteral. But even in the Roman tradition, these should not be seen as replacing the presbyter for no really good reason, but rather more in terms of necessity. The presiding role belongs essentially to the presbyter and not the deacon. The deacon needs to cherish his ministry of service and charity where he needs to excel.

Of course we also learned from the East the possibility of ordaining deaconesses, something that still happens in some of the Churches. This reality needs greater study and examination of its implications.

Further, the East can learn from the West that deacons, while finding as all Christians do, their ultimate fulfillment in the Eucharist, they need to seek to be more than Liturgy deacons. All too often in the East, the service of charity has been not adequately expressed in the diaconate.

From a more speculative perspective we examined the diaconate in light of the Mystery of the Trinity. The impetus of this was the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. The section on the sacraments was one of the best composed divisions. The base for the sacramental reality of the Church and of each of the sacraments was the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity, the very doctrine of God in the Christian faith, a doctrine that in practice was often paid little attention in more recent years, has been restored to its rightful place. All comes from the Trinity and all returns to the Trinity. It was in light of this truth that we attempted to locate something of the uniqueness of the diaconate in light of this Mystery. Here we made use of a number of theologians and theological models.

Liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, who rejects the notion of a “solitary Supreme Being” wants to show that the Christian view of God is more “social”. The theology of

“perichoresis” (St. John Damascene) which stresses mutuality and equality is the Christian view of God. For the diaconate, although described on a lower level of the hierarchy, could certainly be a reminder of the equality of dignity of the three branches of Holy Orders and this in turn reminding of the fundamental equality of the “people of God”. Along with this model of the Trinity is the emphasis on the fundamental equality of all people and the right of all people to justice. Here the deacon can be seen as the instrument of the Trinity to make manifest this basic truth.

Bonaventure’s model of the “fecund” Trinity reflects the teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa on the ecstatic nature of the Triune God. The Church is called to be the sacramental sign of this truth. Of the ordained ministers, the deacon is the one sent out to be the servant to the world, to bring Christ to the marketplace, to sacramentalize the outreach of the Church, hence ultimate of the Triune God.

Von Balthasar’s model of the Trinity as the depths of God’s love reaching right into the depths of hell is profoundly moving. If love is the only convincing reality, than a love which reaches to people in some form of hell is a powerful truth. While we made clear that in no way claiming that deacons were the primary or even that best examples of this expression of Christian life, of all the ordained the deacon has the specific vocation to minister to those on the edge. His glorious vocation is to be that sacramental sign of the Christian’s vocation to be present where life is most painful and where despair seems to loom large.

Rahner’s rather complex theology of the Trinity as the Logos reaching out into the concrete realities of life was a basis for seeing the deacon as the minister who does not simply minister primarily to those in the Christian community but as the ordained minister who brings this witness into the ordinary circumstances of life. This, as the Himes brothers further

developed, means that the Gospel need to be made manifest in the civil realities of our lives. All this, of the ordained ministers of the Catholic Church, is the particular task of the deacon.

Finally, we looked at some models of deacon saints. There are in fact a multiple number of saints who are deacons, not simply the sample represented in this chapter. Most of the deacon saints are from the Eastern Church and most of these are martyrs. These were selected because of their popularity, at least to some degree, in the West. If it becomes a saint in the final goal of the Christian life, than offering examples of saintly deacons provides models of those who achieved this. In addition, we can see by the lives of these deacon saints, examples of the variety of lifestyles in which the diaconate can be expressed and lived out.

It was suggested that perhaps the best model for the contemporary deacon was St. Ephrem of Syria. Though often depicted as a monk. He lived a life in ways similar to most deacons today. He worked in a parish. He taught religion. He cared for the sick (which lead to his death). Of course he was a brilliant theologian and composed magnificent writings. He was a first rate scholar and spent much of his life seeking to relate the faith to those he served.

St. Lawrence certainly was a beloved deacon and one of the best known. He models the diaconal ministry of service to the poor. His fidelity to Christ and the poor lead to his martyrdom. He faithfully served the poor of Rome and in his well-known comment saw the poor as the treasure of the Church.

St. Athanasius who was elected bishop from being deacon reminds the deacon of today of the need to be a faithful witness to the truth of the Gospel. It was as deacon that Athanasius attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Nicea and defended that divinity of Christ against the Arians. He would suffer much during his life for his fidelity to the Gospel. As Church ministers on the front lines, Athanasius is a model of the cost of discipleship.

St. Gregory the Great was a deacon when elected Pope. Although a monk and contemplative by nature, he exercised the diaconal role as legate to the Byzantine Court from the Pope. Essentially he was engaged in the world of politics of his day. Though this life was difficult for him, he faithfully carried out his task. Often in the early Church the deacon served in this quasi-political work as representative of a bishop or pope. Perhaps the deacon of today, who is permitted by canon law to be engaged in the political area (with permission of his bishop), can see in Gregory a model of public service where the values of the Gospel can be brought.

In St. Francis, we have the most popular but perhaps the most problematic of the deacon saints. First, there is a still unresolved question of whether he was a deacon. Second, there is the reality that unlike Ephrem of Lawrence, being a deacon was somewhat secondary to his vocation to evangelical witness. Presuming he was a deacon, Francis no doubt saw as a means to be able to preach the gospel of repentance. Francis spent his mature life in calling to conversion to the poor as he traveled from town to town and even to the world of Islam. Certainly there is a preaching dimension to the call of the deacon. Francis models a style of preaching which really is a form, in his case, of seeking those who were often not touched by the clerics of his day. Perhaps this expression of preaching the Gospel might well challenge the deacon of today.

In liturgical ministry we saw that the deacon again is unique, neither priest nor lay person. The deacon ministers between the altar and the people. As the ordained minister who lives most of life in the secular sphere, the deacon is truly a bridge between street and sanctuary, between the liturgy of the world and the liturgy of the Church. As an ordained minister, he has liturgical functions that are proper to the ordained. But since he is not a priest, his most proper liturgical functions are that of an assistant.

So, what makes the diaconate unique?

1. It is the sacramental sign of Christ the Servant.
2. It has a wide spectrum of possible ministries associated with it.
3. It includes ministry of service. Word and sacrament that as a “mandated” service can be expanded as the Church deems necessary.
4. It resembles the laity although they are ordained.
5. They are clergy who can fully enter civil and secular society.
6. They share as a “full and equal order” in the sacrament of orders.
7. They remind that “service and charity” are as vital as presiding.
8. Of all the ordained ministries, it has been, at least in some degree, open to women.
9. They sacramentalize the ministry of Christ to the marginalized.
10. In some way or other, it exists in most Christian traditions.
11. It has many different expressions leading to sanctity.
12. It reflects the found nature of the Trinity.
13. Deacons bridge in a special way the liturgy of the Church and the Liturgy of the world