

In persona Christi and the Legacy of the Second Vatican Council

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I. Introduction

In a memorable phrase, St. Augustine said that charity is the glue of the Church.¹ Writing against Faustus the Manichee in the early 5th century, he has occasion to comment on Genesis 6:14, where Noah is commanded to seal the Ark inside and out with pitch. Now, the Ark is the Church, and Augustine explains: "For pitch (bitumen) is a very fervid and violent glue, signifying the ardor of love by the great force of its strength in holding together a spiritual society that can endure everything." The interior reality of the Church is the unity of charity, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given us (Romans 5:5), binding us to God and so to one another.² If we think of the Church as a communion of life and love, what other glue could there be? For the communion is a supernatural, divine communion. And just as the Holy Spirit is the *amicitia*, the friendship and unity between Father and Son within the Trinity, so also is the Holy Spirit and the charity he brings the only thing that can make the Church what she is.

This indeed is a commonplace of Catholic ecclesiology—the role of the Holy Spirit and charity, I mean, not the metaphor. According to Cardinal Journet, before the Council, the Holy Spirit is the uncreated soul and charity the created soul of the Church.³

¹ Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, "'The Glue Itself Is Charity': Ps 62:9 in Augustine's Thought," *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, Earl C. Muller, SJ, and Roland J. Teske, SJ (New York: Peter Lang, 1993):375-384, at 378.

² *Ibid.*, 378, 380.

³ Charles Cardinal Journet, *Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek, O. Praem. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004 [French 1958]), 168ff.

The Council notes that the Holy Spirit "vivifies" the Church.⁴ Contemporarily, Benoît-Dominique de la Soujeole notes the "profoundly traditional" character of this teaching, and writes: "In a word, it is charity—uncreated and created—that is the origin, the abiding animating principle, and the finality of ecclesial life in all its aspects."⁵

The Church is a communion of faith and love. It is also a society, an institution. And the two, doubtless, are one, such that we can say the communion of faith and love is an institution. And we can add the old adjectives from the Reformation and Counter-Reform: the invisible communion of faith and love is a visible institution. Thinking of the communion of persons, the glue of the Church is most certainly charity. But thinking of the Church as an institution, how shall we apply Augustine's metaphor? What is the institutional glue of the Church, the binding agent that makes the Church cohere and that keeps it together precisely as the publicly available, visible thing it is? I submit to you, it is the priesthood. Priests are the glue of the institutional Church—that is, they are the glue of the communion of divine life and charity considered as an institution. And we can specify the relation between the interior and exterior gluing agents in the way the Council gives us leave, where it says that "the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit who vivifies it," and reminds us that the Church is a "sign and instrument" of the union of men with God and one another.⁶ So, in just that way, the exterior glue is the sacrament of the interior glue. It makes it visible, though it is not the only thing that makes it visible. Second, it effects the interior glue instrumentally. That is, the interior realities of faith and love are produced by the ministry of the priests, as their preaching and teaching evoke faith, and as their sanctifying makes it holy. In the first way, they mediate the word of God, the mind of God, in the second they mediate the touch of God, the touch of Christ, who thereby conforms the Christian to himself.

Should we not rather say the bishops instead of the priests are the glue? Let's say that apostolic office is the institutional glue. But the bishops are too few. Their ministry needs to be extended into the Church so as to be bodily and personally present to us, and

⁴ *Lumen gentium*, no. 8.

⁵ Benoît-Dominique de la Soujeole, OP, *Introduction au Mystère de l'Église* (Toulouse: Parole et Silence, 2006), 466, 467.

⁶ Reading *Lumen gentium* no. 8 with no. 1.

it is, through priests. The priest is the presence of the bishop in the parish.⁷ And the priest can speak for his people to the bishop. The Church as it has been given to us cannot function and cannot be imagined without priests. Just so, whenever there is a crisis of the priesthood, there is a crisis of the Church. You cannot have a presbyteral crisis without having an ecclesial crisis and vice versa. For precisely this reason, as the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council began to see the end of their work, there was a moment of very justified panic. Documents and decrees and constitutions either had or were soon to address everything inside of the Church and all her relations to what is outside her. The nature of the Church herself as mystery, as communion, as pilgrim people, as sacrament—all had been addressed in the Constitution on the Church (1964). The Church's relations with non-Catholics and non-Christians were already or soon to be specified (1964, 1965). The complicated relation of the Church to the modern world was being worked out at length in the long development that issued in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World (1965). Within the Church, the appreciation of the role of bishops, whom priests obey, had already found lengthy expression and would soon be addressed again (1964, 1965). The mission of the laity, the laity whom priests serve and whose mission they enable, was soon to be detailed (1965). The word of God that priests preach was the topic of the Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965). The liturgy over which priests preside was in process of reformation and renewal under the aegis of the Constitution on the Liturgy (1963). But priests themselves, the glue without which the institutional form of the Church comes apart as do the dry sticks in a piece of old furniture—priests were as yet unconsidered, un-thanked, unappreciated by any conciliar document. So, among more thoughtful minds, there was some anxiety. If the Council closed without a word about priests, there would be a disaster, a real crisis of priestly morale and confidence.

That this disaster, this crisis happened anyway invites an analysis that we have not time to do justice to tonight. The immediate point I wish to make is the Council's desire to give due consideration to this essential element of her reality, the priesthood. I wish to deal directly with the question: did the Council give the consideration that was in fact *due*? That is, did it produce a just, right, appropriate word about the nature of the

⁷ *Lumen gentium* no. 28.

priesthood and the ministry of priests in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests—*Presbyterorum ordinis*—promulgated December 7, 1965?

There has been a relatively constant opinion since the very days of the close of the Council up to the present that it did not. Friedrich Wolff regrets that the "sacerdotal-cultic idea" of the priest, the priest as defined by the power of orders, although "absorbed into the wider apostolic ministry," sometimes "predominates," and he considers that the characterization of the priest as facing the Church as the representative of Christ is "one-sided."⁸

Christian Duquoc says that the old theology of the priest, such as we find at Trent, is combined with a new view in which ministerial activity is broadened to include preaching and pastoral service; however, there is "latent opposition" between the two views, and the new democratic re-formulation of the office of priest has not, alas, been perfectly achieved.⁹

Peter Hünemann, for his part, thinks that the Decree does not stay true to the Council's previous work, wherein priestly ministry is no longer defined solely in view of offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, but broadened so that "preaching and pastoral ministry are now the primary tasks." Rather, it seems once again in some places to privilege the cultic activity of the priest, and it gives insufficient attention to the possibility that the laymen and women the priest serves may themselves be mature, educated, and active in prosecuting the mission of the Church, and says nothing about the ability of a congregation "to nominate men for priestly ministry and suggest them for ordination." It makes the priest a representative of Christ, but leaves the priest as representative of the Church undeveloped. He finds patristic, medieval, counter-reformation, and modern views all "tangled up" in it.¹⁰ A tangle is no synthesis!

For these commentators, the Decree offers no single, synthetic, coherent view of the priesthood, and so, far from being able to stop the confusion that reigned after the Council, could arguably be seen to have contributed to it.

⁸ Friedrich Wolf, "Commentary on the Decree," in Herbert Vogrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 4 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 224, 222. Wolf worked on the Decree as a *peritus*.

⁹ Christian Duquoc, "Clerical Reform," G. Alberigo, J.-P. Jossua, and J. Komonchak, *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 298, 300, 303-305.

¹⁰ Peter Hünemann, "A Half-hearted Reform: The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests," in G. Alberigo and J. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, vol. V (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 459-461.

And indeed, the question as to the Decree's success in saying a timely theological and pastoral word might be thought to be answered by what in fact happened after the Council, at least in the more developed countries, which was the great exodus of priests, and the great confusion over priestly identity, which led, ultimately to the Synod on Priesthood of 1990, whence came the Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of 1992. Had the Decree done its job, it might be urged, the exodus and the confusion would not have happened, and the Synod would not have been necessary. On the other hand, it might rather be argued to the contrary that the crisis was well underway by 1965, that one lone Decree was not going to stop the flood of confusion, and that John Paul II's *Pastores dabo vobis* is the vindication and continuation of the Decree. "Confusion"? I mean proposals for a temporary priesthood, proposals for a married priesthood, proposals for an emasculated priesthood; I mean proposals for a priesthood of "leadership" and "ministry" freed from sacerdotal trappings, proposals for a priesthood whose identifying *munera* would be social service and political activism; proposals, in short, for priests who would not be priests. And accompanying almost all these devices, we should include the sometimes clear, sometimes vague call for a more or less Congregationalist church order, which is to say, a call for the abolition of apostolic office. Much of this was enabled by the "hermeneutics of rupture." The understanding was, not that the Council had completed the picture of Trent and of Pius XII's *Mediator Dei*, or had re-framed the Tridentine understanding, but that it had abandoned it.

In what follows, I want to defend the Decree as coherent internally, as synthetic relative to things both new and old, and, in what it says that *is* new, as proof of the providence of God. This, I undertake by way first of all of recalling some of the history of the text, especially, the second paragraph, the key paragraph, on the nature of the priesthood.

II. Some History of the Text

The long series of half-starts, re-starts, projects begun and abandoned, delay and irresolution with which the Council faced composing a statement on priests is perhaps to be explained by the attention-absorbing issues of such things as the nature of episcopal collegiality, the structure of divine revelation, and the ground of religious liberty that

long occupied the mind of the fathers. They could not even make up their minds on what *kind* of statement was needed. Whatever the explanation, the draft of what became *Presbyterorum ordinis* was distributed only November 20, 1964, which is to say, late in the third session, with only one more session to come.¹¹ At this late date, it was natural for the commission charged with its composition to take guidance from previous conciliar work. The drafting committee could look back to the Dogmatic Constitution on Church, *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, for an already agreed upon doctrinal word about priesthood. Even so, it was over the content of this all-important doctrinal word, what would become *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 2, that the Council fathers divided. An emended text was distributed May 28, 1965, but the two main views of the fathers had yet to be reconciled. Archbishop François Marty summarized the divergence of views in a *relatio* of October 16, 1965.

As to the specific nature of the ministry and life of presbyters. On this matter, there have been expressed two conceptions which seem to differ at first glance. For one of them [the so-called theological view] insists more on the consecration of the presbyter worked by the sacrament of Orders, and on the personal union of the presbyter with Christ, who is the font of holiness and spiritual efficaciousness. The other conception [the so-called anthropological view], however, insists on the mission of the presbyter, which mission he receives from Christ through the sacrament: that is, the presbyter, since he becomes a member of the Order of presbyters, by that fact becomes a helper of the Order of bishops, so that he acts in the person of Christ unto the building up of the Church.

In fact, each of these two conceptions puts in light an aspect of great importance in the ministry and life of presbyters. Therefore, our commission will take care to show how these two conceptions combine

¹¹ For a brief history of the discarded projects and text history, see Joseph Lécuyer's account in the Herder *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 4.

with one another harmoniously and indeed complete each other, so that they go together in the unity of presbyteral ministry.¹²

Yves Congar later remarked that the first view expressed not so much a theology as a spirituality of the priesthood. In any event, the reconciliation of the two views was a task easily within the reach of Congar, whose very active presence on the drafting committee should, I think, give us pause in imputing incoherence and confusion to the text. For Congar, ordination does indeed consecrate the priest to Christ and unites him to Christ by a special bond. This real consecration of the priest that the sacrament of orders effects, however, is absolutely and completely *for the sake of* his mission to the people of God, actual or potential, the fulfillment of which mission itself serves unto the praise of God. This reconciliation of the "two views" is, to my mind, perfectly coherent.

It is important to see that this reconciliation occurs within the context of the great themes of the Council's ecclesiology, for it is made possible by the Council's faithfulness to these themes. This faithfulness is declared from the outset, in the first, introductory paragraph of the Decree, where the treatment of the priesthood is related to these themes in a single sentence that forms as it were an ecclesiological preface to the decree.

For, by the sacred ordination and mission they receive from bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the teacher, priest and king whose ministry they share, so that the Church may be unceasingly built up here on earth into the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the holy Spirit.¹³

First, the mission of priests evokes that of Christ and the Church, more expressly developed immediately after in number 2. Second, this mission is ordered to building up the Church as the communion of the people of God, whose Christological and

¹² Concluding *relatio* of F. Marty, archbishop of Rheims, October 16, 1965, presenting the "textus recognitus," in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970-), vol. 4, pt. 5, 70–71.

¹³ This sentence is substantially that of the draft of November 20, 1964.

pneumatological dimensions are immediately brought forward: communion in the Church is communion with the persons of the Trinity. The exterior glue serves to put the interior glue in place. Third, this mission of Christ and the Church that priests share in is given the same threefold articulation as in *Lumen gentium*. Fourth, the ministry of priests, already situated between Christ who sends them and the people to whom they are sent is tied to that of the bishops, to which it has been a principal goal of the Council to give adequate treatment.¹⁴

The reconciliation and synthesis of the two views of Marty's *relatio* occurs throughout the paragraph. I call your attention first to the second sub-paragraph, which repeats the doctrine of Trent that within the body of Christ there are ministers who in virtue of their sacred power offer sacrifice and forgive sins. Trent is framed, however, by the theology of mission so prominent in *Lumen gentium*. The ministers in question are to be understood in the line of the great sending: Christ to the apostles, the apostles to the bishops. As the bishops are appointed “to share his [Christ’s] own consecration and mission,” the mission of the Church first mentioned at the beginning of the first sub-paragraph, so by implication do priests, who are delegated to collaborate with the bishops “in carrying out the apostolic mission.” Consecration and mission are united in that consecration is unto mission.¹⁵

Then there is the remarkable and beautiful integration of the sacrifices of the faithful, the sacrifice of Christ, and the sacrifice of the mass in the fourth sub-paragraph. This integration has been promised as it were already in the first sub-paragraph, which affirms that all the faithful are a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God.¹⁶

¹⁴ For more on this ecclesiological context of the decree, see Archbishop Julian Herranz Casado, “The Image of the Priest in the Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: Continuity and Projection toward the Third Millennium.” This paper was delivered in 1995 at the symposium on the priesthood for the thirtieth anniversary of the decree, and can be found on the Vatican website, under the Congregation for the Clergy (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_28101995_ints_y_en.html). With Alvaro del Portillo, Herranz formed the secretariat of Commission *De Disciplina Cleri et Populi Christiani* responsible for the decree.

¹⁵ See Congar’s remark on Marty’s “two conceptions of the priesthood,” *Mon Journal du Concile*, présenté et annoté par Éric Mahieu, avant-propos de Dominique Congar, Préface de Bernard Dupuy, o.p. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2002), vol. 2, 443 (October 20, 1965): “Deux conceptions du sacerdoce: comme consécration (union personnelle au Christ), comme envoyé! Précisément, le concile a redécouvert l’unité de consécration et mission!”

¹⁶ It is to be noted that neither *Lumen gentium* nor *Presbyterorum ordinis* characterizes the priesthood of the faithful as metaphorical, as did Pope Pius XII, *Magnificate Dominum*, AAS 46 (1954): 669. When the commission responsible for *Presbyterorum ordinis* was reproved for treating the “metaphorical” priesthood

We are being set up for the fourth sub-paragraph, where the mediating term uniting the two views is "sacrifice." Tridentine attention to cultic sacrifice is complemented by stating its relation to the existential sacrifice of Christians to whom the priest is sent. The ministerial priest is sent for the ultimate goal of enabling the perfect exercise of the baptismal priesthood of the faithful.¹⁷ The Christian's sacrifice, which is the whole-offering of all one's life and of every human action to the Father, is first of all rendered possible through the apostolic ministry of priests, which by preaching calls the faithful to this sacrifice, and then is consummated by being sacramentally united to the sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist. Paragraph 2 as a whole shows, as it were, how the spiritual sacrifice of the whole body is to be enabled and sacramentally accomplished in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Head through the ministry of priests. "This is the goal of the whole ministry of priests," furthermore, "and in this it is brought to full expression [*consummatur*]." Moreover, their ministry "which begins from the proclamation of the gospel, draws its force and strength from the sacrifice of Christ."¹⁸

I have said commenting on the second sub-paragraph that we can think of Trent as framed by the theology of mission, and so we can: the cultic work of the priest is located within a ministry whose discharge includes three tasks and not just one. On the other hand, the *munera* are ordered, as we also see in the text, since "the whole ministry of priests" finds its goal and perfection in the Eucharistic celebration. And in another way, this makes Trent architectonic. "*In another way*"—there isn't opposition, overt or latent of two views, but rather the articulation of different, complementary respects. That is, there is synthesis.

The last sub-paragraph, the fifth, also reconciles the two views of Marty's *relatio*. It shows the unity of the theocentric, "consecratory" view with that of the "anthropocentric," apostolic view. Underneath the text there is the recollection of St.

of the faithful before the ministerial priesthood, it merely noted that *Lumen gentium* did not so characterize the priesthood of the faithful, and that the finality of the ministerial priesthood terminates in the universal priesthood (*Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 7, 118, "Response to Modus 15").

¹⁷ Spiritual sacrifice is the reason for exterior sacrifice; see Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 85, aa. 1 and 2; *In Hebr.* 2:3, no. 157. More originally, see St. Augustine, *The City of God*, bk. 10, ch. 5.

¹⁸ In this way, it can be said that the text moves from mission (no. 2.a and 2.b) to cult, in which cult the existential sacrifice of the faithful is joined to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ; see Jean Frisque, "Le Décret 'Presbyterorum Ordinis, Histoire et commentaire," in *Les Prêtres: Décrets "Presbyterorum Ordinis" et "Optatam totius,"* ed. J. Frisque and Y. Congar, *Unam Sanctam*, 38 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), pp. 123-189, at 140–141.

Irenaeus's dictum that the glory of God is the life of man, and that the life of man is the knowledge of God.¹⁹ So, as the text has it, priests are certainly devoted to the glory of God, but "that glory consists in human beings consciously, freely and thankfully accepting the work of God that was brought to perfection in Christ, and manifesting it in their whole lives." The entire life and activity of priests, including preaching, sanctifying, and ruling, and including also most notably the very prayer and adoration of the priest, therefore "contribute both to increasing the glory of God and to developing the life of God in the human race." The theocentric and latreutic intent of priesthood is consummated in the sanctification of man.

This leaves us with the third sub-paragraph, the central, middle section, where the originality of the Council comes to light as it presents its summary and controlling dogmatic view of the priest. The text articulates how the priest discharges his apostolic mission by recalling the threefold *munera*, and it explains the nature of the consecration for mission in terms of the sacrament of orders. Presbyteral office is conferred by a distinct sacrament whereby priests are "patterned to the priesthood of Christ [*Christo sacerdoti configurantur*], so that they may be able to act in the person of Christ as head of the body [*ita ut in persona Christi Capitis agere valeant*]."²⁰ Here let us quote Henri Denis apropos of that last phrase:

It seems to us that it is on this little phrase that the specificity of the hierarchical minister in general and that of the presbyteral minister in particular rests. Indeed, if one looks for what is *original* in the task of the priest in relation to that of the Christian, one is referred to this sign which is essential to the Church: the sign of Christ the Head for his Body. In other words, there is a ministry in the Church in order that the work of Christ in the work of the Church may be signified.²¹

¹⁹ *Adversus Haereses* 4.20.7.

²⁰ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II (London: Sheed and Ward, and Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990), *1044, translates the last clause as a purpose clause, but it is rather a result clause (signaled by the *ita ut*) and should read "such that [or "in such a way that"—Flannery edition] they can act in the person of Christ the head." It is a question of stating the certain effect—the result—of the sacrament of orders, not a hope which may be impeded.

²¹ Henri Denis, "La théologie du presbytérat de Trente à Vatican II," in *Les Prêtres: Décrets "Presbyterorum Ordinis" et "Optatam totius"*, ed. J. Frisque and Y. Congar, *Unam Sanctam*, 38 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 193-232, at 215-216 (our translation): "Il nous semble que cette petite phrase est en fait celle

III. How did *in persona Christi* get into the text?

The text of number 2 is novel relative to previous magisterial teaching by its combination of a theology of mission and consecration, of word and sacrament, by the very comprehensiveness of the ecclesiological framework in which it inserts priesthood. Still, none of this touches its most important novelty, a novelty that was not much remarked at the time and that, if we think it good and as I will explain, must be attributed solely to the accidents of the composition of the text, which is to say, solely to the providence of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who governed the proceedings of the Council. This novelty is the novelty with which the Council teaches that the priest acts in the person of Christ in the third sub-paragraph of no. 2.

I have remarked that the text of *Presbyterorum ordinis* could presuppose that of *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, and this has the consequence that it reverses that view of the bishop according to which a bishop is an augmented priest, a priest with more jurisdiction, and adopts the view rather that the priest is a sort of lesser bishop, a diminished bishop. This means that *Lumen gentium* no. 28 of its nature throws us back to *Lumen gentium*, no. 21. If you want to understand the priest, understand the bishop, wherein there is the fullness of priesthood, and the key text *for that* is *Lumen gentium*, no. 21. This has as a consequence that we are automatically given an ecclesiological framework for understanding the priest; it has as a consequence the understanding of priesthood within the framework of apostolic office and so a theology of mission; it has as a consequence that the mission is specified by the threefold *munera* that the apostles received from Christ and in turn enjoined on the bishops. References to *Lumen gentium*, no. 28 are many in the apparatus to the draft of June 12, 1965. The final text, for its part, refers to *Lumen gentium*, no. 10, where the priest is said to act in the person of Christ in the Eucharist. The point of the citation seems rather to be the distinction of the priesthood of the faithful and that of ordained ministers. The text immediately in the background of the third sub-paragraph is not referred to, however.²² And it is, as is most

sur laquelle repose *la spécificité* du ministère hiérarchique en général et du ministère presbytéral en particulier. Si l'on cherche, en effet, en quoi la tâche du prêtre est *originale* par rapport à celle du chrétien, on est renvoyé à ce signe essentiel à l'Église."

²² It is in the apparatus; see Francisco Gil Hellín, *Decretum de Presbyterorum Ministerio et Vita, Prsbyterorum Ordinis: Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis in ordinem redigens schemata cum relationibus necnon patrum orationes atque animadversiones* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), 16, 18,

natural given the understanding the relation of priest to bishop, *Lumen gentium*, no. 21. This can be seen by a simple inspection of the texts.

The story of *Presbyterorum ordinis* 2 at this point depends on the story of *Lumen gentium* 21. In the formation of *Lumen gentium*, no. 21, which asserts the sacramentality of episcopal ordination, there is repeated the teaching of Trent that ordination imparts a character.²³ And in accord with the standard understanding of the effect of orders and the permanence of the character, the preliminary draft asserted that a bishop could not be reduced to the lay state nor become again a simple priest. The fathers, however, desired a positive expression of the effect of the sacrament. Responding to this wish, the doctrinal commission offered in the place of the negative characterization of the effect of ordination to say that, in virtue of ordination, grace was given, and a character imparted in such wise that bishops take the place of Christ himself, and represent him or act “in eius persona” as teacher, shepherd and priest.

The text means to connect ordination with all three *munera* or offices—teaching, ruling, sanctifying. Ordination equips a bishop, as the ancient ordinals witness, for all three *ministeria*, for the whole and every part of his properly episcopal ministry. In this way, the text implies the unity of the three powers: ordination gives the radical wherewithal for all, for each is essential to episcopal functioning and is a non-alienable part of episcopacy.

The authors of the text have therefore invoked a quite traditional phrase, “in persona Christi,” by which to express the effect of orders for all three functions. In doing so, however, they extend the range of this phrase and modify its prior usage. If they are not saying something new, they are saying the old in a new and quite succinct and powerful form. For St. Thomas, for example, the priest or bishop acts “in persona Christi” only when consecrating the Eucharistic elements.²⁴ *Mediator Dei*, less than twenty years before the Council, respected this usage.

note to the first draft. Hellín's synopsis comprises the last four drafts of the *Decree*. The same synopsis, but without Hellín's references to the interventions of the fathers and the explanatory reports of the responsible Commission, appears in René Wasselynck, *Les Prêtres. Élaboration du Décret Presbyterorum Ordinis de Vatican II, Synopse* (Paris: Desclée, 1968).

²³ For what follows see Guy Mansini, “Sacerdotal Character at Vatican II,” *Thomist* 67 (2003): 539–577.

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 78, a. 1, c.

I think it probably important that the phrase is used first for bishops, and not for priests. Of priests, as of anyone ordained, St. Thomas will say that they become images of (*typum*) of Christ.²⁵ But more particularly, St. Thomas will say of a bishop that he "takes the place of Christ" in ruling the Church.²⁶ So it is easier to expand the usage first with regard to bishops. But once the decision has been made to understand priests as lesser bishops, then it will extended to priests as well.

Lumen gentium, no. 28, itself can seem if read too swiftly to have fallen back to this older usage. Expressly, it speaks of the priest acting in persona Christi only in the sacrifice of the Mass, and its reference to Mediator Dei likewise takes us back to the old usage. Implicitly, however, *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, expands the sense of representing Christ to all three *munera*. This is clear from outside the text from the *relatio* of Henriquez Jimenez.²⁷ But also, the text itself implies it in several ways. First, by the power of the sacrament of orders, priests are consecrated "in the image of Christ (*ad imaginem Christi*), the high and eternal priest ... to preach the Gospel and nourish the faithful and celebrate divine worship." But doing something to or in or after the image of Christ is representing Him in doing it, and representing Christ is acting in his person. Second, sharing "in the *munus* of Christ the one mediator" for evangelizing and exercising "the *munus* of Christ the shepherd and head" in pastoral care are functionally equivalent in the text to "acting in the person of Christ" in the Eucharistic cult.²⁸ The text could as well have said for the last that the priest shares in the *munus* of Christ the Priest, and for the former that he acts in the person of Christ the Mediator and Shepherd.

Presbyterorum ordinis, therefore, follows *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, in giving in *persona Christi* a broader sense for priests, as *Lumen gentium*, no. 21, does for bishops, and it did so from the first draft, with very general approval of the fathers. It follows number 28 also in saying expressly, as number 21 did not, that the representation is of

²⁵ *ST* Suppl., q. 40, a. 4, ad 3.

²⁶ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6.

²⁷ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 213: "Munus quo sacerdos in persona Christi agit *speciatim* [emphasis added] in cultu Eucharistico exhibetur verbis Tridentini et Encyclicae *Mediator Dei* confirmatur; sed etiam participatio muneris sacerdotalis Christi in praedicatione verbi, in administratione sacramentorum, necnon in oratione et exemplo et, in genere, in pascendo grege apparet." The participation in the other two *munera*, it seems, could also be expressed by saying the priest acts in the person of Christ.

²⁸ *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 6, on the shepherding role of the priest, practically quotes this line of *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, verbatim.

Christ as *head* of the Church, an uncontested and unremarked precision the importance of which emerged only later.²⁹

That *Presbyterorum ordinis* means to assert that the priest acts in the person of Christ, and indeed in the person of Christ the head, in discharging all three functions is clear from the context, for 2.3 speaks of building up (that is, gathering by teaching), sanctifying, and ruling the body of Christ. It is also clear from the *Acta*. The second draft has it in number 2 that the priest acts *in persona Christi* expressly for all three *munera*. To a *modus* after the third draft, which drops the express listing of all three, requesting the restoration of the earlier text, the answer is that the text evidently enough supposes that all three are in question. The commission answers that “presbyters are always said to share in the *munera* of the Bishops, which indeed are the ones mentioned.”³⁰ So we are to understand that they share them as to exercise them all, as do the bishops, in the person of Christ.

It should be noted that spokesmen for both of the “two views” of Marty’s *relatio* strongly approved speaking of the priest acting in the person of Christ for all three *munera*.³¹ For partisans of the theology of mission, this way of speaking seems to break the hold of the cult on the priesthood, to break open its hitherto exclusive connection to the Eucharist and sanctification. The others, too, liked this high view of priesthood: it extends the way of expressing the priest’s role in the cult to expressing his functioning in whatever he does, and with the same weighty accent; it ties whatever the priest does, and not just in “saying Mass,” to the presence, the action—the person—of Christ himself. Both sides came together on the high ground—that is, on a high view of the priesthood. Both sides came together, and this is a sign and reminder that in the Council, the mind of

²⁹ See *Mediator Dei*, nos. 40, 84.

³⁰ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 7, 121.

³¹ Julius Cardinal Döpfner, *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 4, 874; Bishop de Cambourg, in *ibid.*, appendix, 657; Cardinal Suenens, in *ibid.*, 787, 788; and from the other side, Bishop Ndongmo, *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 5, 67–68; Archbishop Perini, *Acta Synodalia*, appendix, 671; commenting on no. 14, the unity of priestly life, Perini writes: “all things become one if the Presbyter, illumined and led by a *supernatural vision of things, acts always in the Person of Christ*: namely, if thinking, if preaching, if administering Holy Things, if visiting the sick, if comforting the afflicted and poor, if praying, if celebrating Mass: he feels in himself, as in the living instrument of Christ, Christ thinking, preaching, exercising charity, praying, offering sacrifice to the Father.” See also the bishops of Argentina and France, *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 5, 528, who suggest saying the priest acts “in the name of Christ,” since acting “in the person of Christ” is more connected with the Eucharist; and Archbishop de Provençères, *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 4, pt. 5, 308, who says that priests are to preserve the “immediate and constant sacramental presence of Christ, Head and Shepherd, for all the faithful.”

the whole Church comes to expression.³² On the other hand, it is to be denied that it is a new view relative to the tradition as a whole. *Petrus baptizat, hic [Christus] est qui baptizat*, St. Augustine says; and again, *Nos Christum praedicamus ... Christus autem Christum praedicat, quia seipsum praedicat*.³³

IV. Some Text Commentary

Let us begin with some more or less obvious remarks on the text.

(1) What is new in the synthesis of number 2, to repeat once more, and beyond the theology of mission so heavily in play, is the enlargement of the reference of acting in the person of Christ the head as compared with prior, especially Thomist usage: now, not just in quoting the words of institution (as for St. Thomas, *Mediator Dei*, *Lumen gentium*, no. 10, and *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 5), but for all three *munera*, the priest represents Christ. This makes the entire ministry of the priest something that before was by the customary language said usually only of his activity in the sanctuary. It heightens the worth—or rather our contemporary appreciation of the worth—of the other functions. This occurs again in number 12 very strongly where priests, acting in the person of Christ, are said also to be “the living instruments of Christ the eternal priest” and to take the place of Christ.

(2) We may ask whether to characterize the priest as acting in the person of Christ across the board belongs to the mission view or cultic view of the priest. The answer is that it transcends both, and seems to be a happy accident of the production of the text. It synthesizes the two views: priests do not act in the person of Christ except in virtue of their consecration in orders. But precisely so, the immediate effect of this consecration is to turn the priest to those to whom he represents Christ. They do not act in the person of Christ except in virtue of their consecration; they do not act in the person of Christ except in view of their mission. This locates the priest in the just the way Mark 3:14 does, where the Lord calls the twelve “to be with him,” Jesus, and “to be sent out” to

³² See Benoît-Dominique de la Soujeole, “‘En toute chose voir l’unité,’” in *Ordo Sapientiae et Amoris. Hommage au Professeur Jean-Pierre Torrell*, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto De Oliveira (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1993), 438.

³³ *In Ioannem*, 6.7, 47.3. See the citations at note 22 of no. 21 of *Lumen gentium*, and see Walter Kasper, “Priestly Office,” in *Leadership in the Church*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Herder, 2003), 45–75, and the manifestation of the necessarily representative character of apostolic office in Scripture, 49–55.

those whom the Lord wishes to touch, to heal, to forgive, to unite to himself through their agency.

(3) The characterization of the priest as acting in the person of Christ provides a synthesis of the *munera*. With the other places in *Lumen gentium*, the text unites the three *munera* Christologically: the unity of the *munera* is the unity of a person, beyond whatever order, ontological or teleological or temporal or sacramental (Soujeole) we may discern.

(4) The characterization of the priest as acting in the person of Christ is also totalizing: there is never a moment when the priest is not "on" as a priest. Presumably, whatever a priest is doing is proximately or immediately, directly or indirectly, properly or preparatory to the three *munera*.

Because the priest represents Christ in his entire ministerial activity, the objective call to a complete holiness of life that priesthood makes becomes obvious, as in number 12, and the prosecution of this holiness within the discharge of the *munera* also becomes evident, as with number 13, and yet the unity of priestly life and holiness in Christ, since the discharge of his duties have all of them to do with the actions and representation of Christ, also follows naturally in the text at number 14.

V. A Word on the Reception of the Text

The origin of the text is practically an accident. Its implications are enormous. Its subsequent reception, too, is noteworthy, although time permits only a brief remark or two about its *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

The characterization of the priest as acting in the person of Christ has provided a vocabulary, a framework, in which to locate two competing views of the priesthood since the Council. The immediate occasion for some of the examination given the nature of priestly representation was the question of women and presbyteral orders. But more broadly, theologians were meditating the ecclesial dimension of priestly office emphasized by the Council. Could this dimension be fully realized, could it be rightly understood, without making priestly ministry a function of prior ecclesial action, and this, even in the Eucharist? So, according to a common view tried out in various ways in the

sacramental theology of the last forty years, the priest indeed acts *in persona Christi*, but only as first acting *in persona ecclesiae*.

This view is thought to be compatible with *Presbyterorum ordinis* on the supposition that the decree is incomplete, and has taken various forms. For the late Edward Kilmartin (+1994), the priest represents Christ only in first representing the faith of the Church.³⁴ For David Power, the priest represents and acts for Christ only within representing the ecclesial action of the assembled Church.³⁵ The truth in these views is indeed a truth made plain by the Council, that the priest is an ecclesial figure, that he is in and of the Church, not outside it. And this truth, it is urged, implies a certain structure in the orders of sacramental representation and agency.

However, one supposes there is some confusion here. The faith of the Church does not need representation so much as expression. The faith of the Church, and the Church herself assembled, do not need representation in the way that things absent need representation. The Church, the assembly, is visibly present. But Christ is not, or not yet bodily present, and even so, when he becomes present, he is sacramentally present—another kind of presence than that of the assembly. Then again, it is hard to see why, if the action of Christ making the Eucharist is present first in the assembly, the assembly needs a priest.

These proposals cannot withstand the letter of the text of *Presbyterorum ordinis*, which asserts a priestly representation of Christ unmediated by first representing the Church. Just here there comes to the fore the fact that the text speaks of acting in the person of Christ the *Head, Christi Capitis*—understand, *Christus Caput ecclesiae*. The text is following the lead of *Mediator Dei*, which also spoke of the priest acting in the person of Christ the head in sanctifying, in offering the sacrifice of the Mass. The Council broadens the reference, of course, so that for all *munera*, the priest acts in the person of Christ the Head.³⁶ The representation in each function is therefore of Christ precisely in his distinction from the Church his body, “facing” the Church, as we might

³⁴ Edward Kilmartin, SJ, "Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ," *Theological Studies* 36(1975): 243-264, at 252, and *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 375-376.

³⁵ David N. Power, OMI, "Representing Christ in Community and Sacrament," in *Being a Priest Today*, ed. James Whitehead and Donald Goergan (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 97-123, at 116-117, especially.

³⁶ See also nos. 6 and 12 of the decree.

put it.³⁷ Where the *munera* are named, the representation of Christ in distinction from the Church goes without saying: the teacher is not one of the taught; the shepherd is not one of the sheep; and the high priest enters into the sanctuary alone. Number 2 does not at this point name the *munera*, however, and so the specification of Christ as head is suitable. While *Presbyterorum ordinis* does not reprove the denial of this nor insist that this representation is true exclusively of the priest, in keeping with the positive and irenic tone of the entire production of the Council, *Mediator Dei* does.³⁸

More fundamentally, these proposals cannot withstand the letter of the text of Eucharistic prayers of the liturgy. Doubtless, the liturgy signifies the priest as an "ecclesial person," even and especially when he undertakes to recite the institution narrative. And therefore, one can say that the priest there fulfills the desire of the Church, and does what she wants him to do. But just as clearly, precisely there, at the center of mass, the Church is not *signified* as speaking or acting. The Church assembled is *addressed* by the priest, in the person of Christ, just as the disciples were addressed by Christ *in propria persona* at the Last Supper.

It is true that this straightforward understanding of the phrase, "Christ the Head," has been challenged by Susan Wood. She maintains that the priest represents Christ the head only in representing the *totus Christus*, head and body.³⁹ Her reasoning is that, since one cannot *understand* "head" without understanding "body," since it is an inherently relational term, one cannot *represent* the head without representing the body. But this does not in fact follow. Truly, one cannot understand "head" without thinking "body," just as one cannot understand the priest without inserting him into the Church. Still, one can represent the head without representing the body, just as one can *say* the word "head" without *saying* "body." Moreover, it is precisely this distinct representation that is needed at mass. The faith of the Church, while it needs expression, does not need representation—it is present in the faith of the assembly and the priest. The Church as such does not need representation to herself—she is bodily present to herself in the

³⁷ Which is how *Pastores dabo vobis* puts it; see below.

³⁸ See no. 84: "we deem it necessary to recall that the priest acts for the people only because he represents Jesus Christ insofar as [*quatenus*] He is Head of all His members.... The people, on the other hand, since they in no sense [*nulla ratione*] represent the divine Redeemer and are not mediator between themselves and God can in no way possess the sacerdotal power."

³⁹ Susan K. Wood, SCL, "Priestly Identity: Sacrament of the Ecclesial Community," *Worship* 69(1995): 109-127, at 114-15.

assembled congregation. What needs representation is Christ, who is bodily absent, who is not visible. And this the priest provides.

But the dialectic of the last part of the century has had the merit of making very clear the choice we face between two very different views of priesthood. As summarized most recently by Robert Daly, in some sense the theological heir of Kilmartin, in the first, the line of sacramental operation is: first Christ, who operates second through the Church (assembly), within which assembly and only in function of it, and third, the priest operates, and does so so as to make the Eucharist. On the other view, the view of *Mediator Dei* presupposed by *Presbyterorum ordinis*, the order of operation is: first Christ, who operates second through the priest, who thus instrumentally makes the Eucharist, for the benefit, in the third place, of the Church assembled.⁴⁰

If one looks for the reception of *Presbyterorum ordinis* in subsequent magisterial teaching, it is the second view that is maintained. To my mind, it finds clearest expression in *Pastores dabo vobis*. This is so because the pope explicitly recognizes that the priest is in and of the Church. He is not prior to the Church. Nor however is a priest-less Church prior to priests. And the priest, even and especially when representing Christ, remains in and of the Church. But at crucial times, although he himself is not prior to Church, he represents and acts in the power of him who *is* prior to the Church, namely Christ.

... by his very nature and sacramental mission, the priest appears in the structure of the Church as a sign of the absolute priority and gratuitousness of the grace given to the Church by the risen Christ. Through the ministerial priesthood the Church becomes aware in faith that her being comes not from herself but from the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit. The apostles and their successors, inasmuch as they exercise an authority which comes to them from Christ, the head and shepherd, are placed - with their ministry – facing the Church [*coram ecclesia*]⁴¹

⁴⁰ One can also express the difference between the two views by saying that, in the first, an ecclesially grounding pneumatology mediates the Christological moment of hierarchical ministry, while in the second, pneumatological and Christological efficacy are equally immediate relative to hierarchical operation.

⁴¹ For *coram*, Lewis & Short give "in the presence, before the eyes, in the face, openly, face to face." The equivalent preposition used earlier in no. 16 is *erga*, for which Lewis & Short give "towards, in respect of, in relation to." What cannot be gotten out of these prepositions is what the English translation in fact gives, which is "in the forefront of," and which one supposes is designed to obscure the point the text is making,

as a visible continuation and sacramental sign of Christ in his own position facing the Church and the world [*coram ecclesia et mundo*], as the enduring and ever new source of salvation, he "who is head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior" (Eph. 5:23). (no. 16)

"Sacramental sign." The Holy Father understood *in persona Christi* to mean, not just "in the name of" or "in the place of," but "in specific sacramental identification with the eternal High Priest."⁴²

VI. Conclusion

It is time to conclude. "*In persona Christi*." It is wonderful that an expression of such power and such unexpected consequence for the future should be produced as it were almost by accident. As to unforeseen consequences, yes, this short twist of Latin has attracted an attention hardly foreseen at the time of the Council, where it found universal approval. We mistake it, however, if we do not see it in the context of the entire synthesis of the second paragraph of the Decree, a synthesis, newly expressed, of ancient tradition, medieval insight, Tridentine doctrinal precision, and Baroque piety. I think it is a durable synthesis, and one that helped us meet the largely unforeseen but quite fundamental post-conciliar challenges to the Church's understanding and practice.

This should not surprise us. As Jean Frisque remarks, "carried along as it was by the dynamism of the Council, a document like our decree in some measure escapes from its redactors; it no longer belongs to them."⁴³ Because the Council expresses the mind of the whole Church, and does so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can speak with B. D. de La Soujeole of a certain "openness" of the conciliar teaching, by which he means that the doctrinal richness "contained in the documents could not have been clearly—at least explicitly—present to the mind of the fathers and could not appear but much later."⁴⁴ But what is not present to the mind of the fathers could be present to the

to obliterate the sharp distinction between Head and Church, and between the representation of the Head and Church, the text makes.

⁴² John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), no. 29, quoting *Dominicae cenae* (1980), no. 8.

⁴³ Frisque, "Le Décret '*Presbyterorum Ordinis*,' Histoire et commentaire," in *Les Prêtres: Décrets "Presbyterorum Ordinis" et "Optatam totius,"* ed. J. Frisque and Y. Congar, *Unam Sanctam*, 38 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), pp. 123-189, at 133.

⁴⁴ de La Soujeole, "En toute chose voir l'unité," 443; he finds an example of this is the Conciliar teaching on the sacramentality of the Church.

mind of Christ, and what did not appear except much later was well within divine providence to foreordain as a gift, like the gift of priesthood, like the gift of the Eucharist itself, to his Church.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For the Eucharist and the priesthood as gifts beyond the power of the assembly to give itself, see John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), no. 29.

Appendix: *Lumen gentium* 21 and *Presbyterorum ordinis* 2

From *Lumen gentium* 21:

And the Sacred Council teaches that by Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that **fullness of power**, namely, which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.(19*) But Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college. For from the tradition, which is expressed especially in liturgical rites and in the practice of both the Church of the East and of the West, **[1] it is clear that, by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, [2] the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred,(20*) [3] and the sacred character so impressed,(21*) [4] that bishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, [5] and that they act in His person.(22*)** Therefore it pertains to the bishops to admit newly elected members into the Episcopal body by means of the sacrament of Orders.

(19) In Trad. Apost. 3, ed. Botte, Sources Chr., pp. 27-30, Episcopo tribuitur primatus sacerdotii. ... (20) Trad. Apost. 2, ed. Botte, p. 27. (21) Conc. Trid., Sess. 23, cap. 4, docet Ordinis sacramentum imprimere characterem indelebilem. ... (22) S. Cyprianus, Epist. 63, 14: PL 4, 386; Hartel, III B, p. 713: Sacerdos vice Christi vere fungitur .. S. Io. Chrysostomus, In 2 Tim. Hom. 2, 4: PG 62, 612: Sacerdos est symbolon . Christi. S. Ambrosius, In Ps. 38, 25-26: PL 14, 105 1-52: CSEL 64, 203- 204. ...

From *Presbyterorum ordinis* 2:

Therefore, having sent the apostles just as he himself been sent by the Father,(6) Christ, through the apostles themselves, made their successors, the bishops,(7) sharers in his consecration and mission. The office of their ministry has been handed down, **in a lesser degree** indeed, to the priests.(8) Established in the order of the priesthood they can be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the apostolic mission entrusted to priests by Christ.(9)

The office of priests, since it is connected with the episcopal order, also, in its own degree, shares the authority by which Christ builds up, sanctifies and rules his Body. Wherefore the priesthood, while indeed it presupposes the sacraments of Christian initiation, is conferred by **[1] that special sacrament; through it priests, [2] by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, [3] are signed with a special character [4] and are conformed to Christ the Priest [5] in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head.(10)**

6. Cf. Jn 20:21; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n 18. 2. 7. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n 28. 8. Cf. ibid. 9. Cf. Roman Pontifical Ordination of a Priest, preface. ... 10. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n 10.