Lay Ecclesial Ministry as Vocation: A Particular Call To Mission for Laity in the Roman Catholic Church

Shannon Loughlin

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY AS VOCATION:
A PARTICULAR CALL TO MISSION FOR LAITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
Shannon Loughlin

December 2010
LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY AS VOCATION:
A PARTICULAR CALL TO MISSION FOR LAITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

By
Shannon Loughlin

Approved September 30, 2010

Maureen R. O’Brien, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)

William M. Wright IV, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

Anna Floerke Scheid, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

George S. Worgul Jr., Ph.D., S.T.D.
Chair, Department of Theology
Professor of Theology

Christopher M. Duncan, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts
ABSTRACT

LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY AS VOCATION:
A PARTICULAR CALL TO MISSION FOR LAITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

By
Shannon Loughlin

December 2010

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Maureen O’Brien

Lay ecclesial ministry has become an increasingly important part of the experience of ministry in the Catholic Church today. The numbers of those engaged in lay ecclesial ministry, particularly in the United States, continues to rise. Yet questions as to how, or if, to describe lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation continue to cause tensions in the church. Key to those tensions are the underlying issues of the definition of the laity, the understanding of the secular character of the laity, the relationship between the ordained and laity in ministry, the basis of “call” to ministry, and the relationship between lay ecclesial ministers and the laity in general. It is critical that those issues continue to be developed if lay ecclesial ministry is to flourish. The purpose of this dissertation is to offer an articulation of a theology of ecclesial vocation for non-clerical faithful who are called by God as *laity* to ministry. It will use the concept of principal
mutually transformative relationships to describe the secular character of the laity and apply that relationship to the ecclesial repositioning found in ministry.

Chapter one presents the current state of lay ecclesial ministry and will provide background on a Roman Catholic understanding of lay ecclesial ministry, including definition of terms, types of ministry, and statistical information. Chapter two will analyze two important understandings of communion ecclesiology, represented in the works of Yves Congar and Pope John Paul II, that have implications for an understanding of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation. Chapter three will explore the understanding of the term “laity” and propose the concept of principal mutually transformative relationships. Chapter four will provide an understanding of ministry that can include lay ecclesial ministry while appreciating the need for a distinct ordained ministry using Edward Hahnenberg’s concept of relational ministry with the addition of principal mutually transformative relationship. Chapter five will present the vocation of lay ecclesial ministry as a particular understanding of the vocation and mission of the laity founded on discipleship.
DEDICATION

For my daughters, Liliana and Avila

You are my special angels
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“What a great favor God does to those He places in the company of good people.”

St. Teresa of Avila

I am deeply grateful to have received such favor from God, because I have certainly been placed in the company of good people repeatedly through my life. It has been through the support, love and kindness of these good people that I have been able to complete this dissertation. Always in this category are my family, through whom I first came to know how to love God, and how very much God loves me. I am particularly blessed by the patience and love of my parents, Thomas and Maryann King, and the wit and grace of my sisters, Erin and Kathy, and my brother Tom, all of whom have walked with me through these years.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the faculty of the Theology department at Duquesne University, most especially my director Dr. Maureen O’Brien and my committee members Dr. William Wright IV and Dr. Anna Floerke Scheid. I will never forget the generosity and graciousness of my encounters with you all throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Anne Clifford, C.S.J., who began this dissertation process with me and helped set the foundation for its completion.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends and co-workers in the Diocese of Rochester and in the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis. Under the care of Bishop Matthew Clark the experience of lay ecclesial ministry in this diocese has
flourished, and working with such dedicated women and men has been a source of inspiration both for me and for this dissertation.

I am humbled by the favor God has shown me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: The Current State of Lay Ecclesial Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Current State of Lay Ecclesial Ministry</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of the Second Vatican Council</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beginning of the Response in the United States</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Synod of 1987 and <em>Christifideles Laici</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Continued Development in the United States</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord</em></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Statistics for Lay Ecclesial Ministry</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Continuing the Conversation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: Perspectives on Communion Ecclesiology</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecclesiology and Vatican II</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congar and the Mystical Body of Christ</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congar, Trinity and the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congar and the Image of the Church as the People of God</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congar and the Church World Relationship</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congar and the Role of the Hierarchy</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Paul II and the Mystical Body of Christ</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Paul II, Trinity and the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Paul II and the Image of the Church as the People of God</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Paul II and the Church World Relationship</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Paul II and the Role of the Hierarchy</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of Communion Ecclesiology</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: The Vocation and the Mission of the Laity in Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Laity in the Time Leading up to the Second Vatican Council</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Vatican Council and the Laity</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Revised Code of Canon Law</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 Synod of Bishops</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Christifideles Laici</em></td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Redemptoris Missio</em></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Instruction on Sacred Ministry</em> and <em>Co-Workers in the Vineyard</em></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vocation and Mission of the Laity</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHAPTER FOUR: Ministry and Ministries: A Relational Approach to Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood

1. Sources for the Divergent Interpretations of “Ministry”  
2. Hierarchy and Ministry  
3. Comparison with the Episcopalian Church  
4. Baptism, the Priesthood of all Believers and Charism  
5. Comparison with Southern Baptist Churches  
6. Ordering the Baptismal Ministries  
7. Relational Ministry as the Language of Lay Ecclesial Ministry  
8. Relational Ministry and the Laity

### CHAPTER FIVE: Lay Ecclesial Ministry as a Particular Understanding of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity

1. Biblical Foundations  
2. Jesus as Model of Vocation  
3. Vocation and the Call to Holiness  
4. Lay Ecclesial Ministry as Vocation  
5. Further Considerations  
6. Conclusion

Bibliography
CHAPTER ONE: THE CURRENT STATE OF LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

The rise of lay ecclesial ministry in the Roman Catholic Church has ignited enthusiasm, criticism and concern. As lay ecclesial ministry arose from a complex set of experiences, as opposed to an intentional, organized vision, it often defies definition or common expression. In fact, as will be seen in this chapter, the process of defining or even describing lay ecclesial ministry has been the cause of much debate. Generally speaking, lay ecclesial ministry can be understood as “lay” in that the ministers are not ordained, “ecclesial” in that the ministers are formally assigned by a representative of the church to their ministry, and “ministry” in that the ministers participate in the mission that Christ gave the church.

Although much has been written on the topic as bishops, priests, parishioners and theologians try to articulate this new ministry in positive terms, there has yet to be a clear statement on whether lay ecclesial ministry is a vocation in its own right. Is it a call to mission in and for the building-up of the church or is it a temporary service offered by the laity during a time of need? The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a theological response to this question by proposing an understanding of lay ecclesial ministry as a particular expression by laity of the vocation to mission in the Roman Catholic Church today. The dissertation argues that recent growth in lay ministry requires an articulation

---


of a theology of ecclesial vocation for non-clerical faithful who are called by God as laity to church related ministry; a theology of lay vocation that recognizes that laity can fulfill a call to discipleship through lay ecclesial ministry. In doing so this dissertation will propose that they do this as laypersons, understood as those who express their Christian commitment in what will be described as a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world. This principal mutually transformative relationship with the world offers a new way to understand the secular character of the laity. Integral to this theological proposal is the position that some laity, because of their charisms and gifts and the recognition of them by the Catholic community, have a call from God to be the church in the heart of the world and to live the mission of Christ by bringing the heart of the world into the church primarily through their ecclesial ministry in the church.

The significance of this thesis can be grasped only when divergent points of view on the question of lay ministry as a “lay ecclesial vocation” are taken into account. Addressing these points of view theologically requires attention to ecclesiology. Yves Congar, author of ground-breaking works on laity in the Catholic Church, argued that any sound development of a theology of the laity must involve a reorientation of the whole ecclesiological vision that includes the ecclesial reality of the laity. This type of ecclesiological vision was not articulated in the Second Vatican Council, which focused instead on the call to holiness, the mission of the church in the world, and an understanding of the church as an ordered communion. As the documents did not seek to articulate one particular ecclesiology, multiple versions of “communion ecclesiology”

---

have developed, each able to point to the Council as its source.⁴ These versions of ecclesiology have, in turn, provided the foundations for divergent conversations on ministry that generally follow two distinct paths: 1) those who begin with the ordained ministries of presbyter and bishop, and emphasize the relationship of these ministries to Christ, and 2) those who begin with the broader ministry of all the baptized and emphasize that every ministry is based on charisms granted to individuals by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church.⁵ Divergent starting points create a challenge for understanding lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation since the first path points to a narrower understanding of vocation than the second. Indeed, the same struggles seen in defining lay ecclesial ministry are mirrored in articulating a definition of vocation. Should one use a broad definition of vocation that encompasses the call of all the baptized to holiness or should one use a more narrow definition that focuses on a particular state of life recognized by the community?

Further, the vocation and mission of the laity in general, as understood in documents such as The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity and John Paul II’s Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici, focus on the vocation and mission of the laity in the world. There is a strong emphasis, particularly in Christifideles Laici, on the secular character of the laity and the particular way that the laity are called to live their Christian vocation. The understanding of secular character is not just a sociological reality, but a theological one as well.⁶ Indeed, Aurelie Hagstrom describes John Paul II’s

---


⁶ Aurelie Hagstrom, The Concepts of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity (San Francisco
description of the vocation of the laity as having two elements: baptism and secular character.\(^7\)

That lay persons have a vocation in their own right is acknowledged frequently in church documents and articles. That lay ecclesial ministers are, “first, foremost, and always members of the laity” is clearly articulated in the 1999 study by the USCCB Subcommittee on Lay Ministry.\(^8\) The subcommittee even said that lay ecclesial ministry is a legitimate expression of the general vocation of all lay persons.\(^9\) Yet, later when describing the “feeling” that many lay ecclesial ministers have about responding to a particular call or vocation, the subcommittee reiterated that the church itself has not spoken of lay ministry as a vocation, though it merits further attention.\(^10\) The study is hesitant to commit to a particular definition of lay ecclesial ministry or even of vocation.

Such hesitancy comes in response to church documents such as the *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*. While not a document on lay ecclesial ministry per se, it raises serious concerns about any perception of lay people in the role of pastor or any confusion between the ordained ministry and the collaboration of lay people through the delegation of tasks.\(^11\) The driving force behind the document was to safeguard the uniqueness of the

---

\(^7\) Ibid.


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., 27.

ordained ministry and not to provide a comprehensive study of lay ecclesial ministry. However, the document has had a significant impact on the development of understanding lay ecclesial ministry.

Such challenges arising from concerns about the identity of the priests in the midst of lay involvement in ministry are not unique to the Catholic Church. The Episcopal Church is facing remarkably similar struggles in its current experience of ordained and lay ministries within the church. Even congregationally based communities such as the Southern Baptists are not immune to tensions in ministerial roles.

The latest Catholic document on lay ecclesial ministry, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, continues to struggle with the tension between lay and ordained ministry. While acknowledging that lay ecclesial ministers often express a sense of being called, the document takes pains to address the differences between lay and ordained ministry. It emphasizes:

> what is distinctive to the laity is engagement in the world with the intent of bringing the secular order into conformity with God’s plan. However, by their baptismal incorporation into the body of Christ, laypersons are also equipped with gifts and graces to build up the church from within, in cooperation with the hierarchy and under its direction.\(^\text{12}\)

It further clarifies that “lay collaboration with ordained ministers cannot mean substitution for ordained ministry.”\(^\text{13}\) The intense concern about distinguishing between lay and ordained ministries impedes the document from discussing if, or how, lay ecclesial ministry might be understood as a vocation.

---


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
In order to discuss lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation, therefore, certain factors must be addressed. Divergent understandings of ecclesiology, including especially recent developments in communion ecclesiology, must be explored with attention to recent post-Vatican II developments. Distinctions in the use of the term “ministry” must be examined. An understanding of how lay ecclesial ministry connects with the vocation and mission of the laity in a way that neither “clericalizes” the lay minister nor creates a separation between the lay minister and the laity as a whole must be discerned. Finally, an understanding of the use of the terms “vocation” and “mission” in Roman Catholicism, with both their biblical foundations and their post-conciliar application to the laity, must be explored. The exploration of these factors will allow for a process of evaluation in the final chapter as to how the thesis of this dissertation may address important issues in the ongoing conversations on lay ecclesial ministry.

**The Current State of Lay Ecclesial Ministry**

Lay ecclesial ministry exploded into the experience of the church in a manner that surprised and confused many of those struggling to articulate the new phenomenon and its implications. The reality of lay ecclesial ministry in many ways predated the theological conversation about its various components. This form of development, which began with a sundry collection of experiences that then provoked responses and dialogue within the church, allowed lay ecclesial ministry to unfold over time. While such development was beneficial to the articulation of a new experience in the church, it also created some frustration in that the process has had to incorporate various visions and understandings over time. Hopefully, the result of such ongoing conversations will
provide the best parameters to the issue and the necessary foundations from which the experience of lay ecclesial ministry can continue to grow.

In order to explore the current state of lay ecclesial ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, this chapter will highlight important historical developments as seen through a selection of church documents, including Vatican, papal, and conciliar documents along with documents from the U.S. bishops. This will not be an exhaustive survey of all documents that pertain to the issue, nor will the documents be discussed in a manner that addresses all aspects of their implications for lay ecclesial ministry.\(^\text{14}\) However, taken together, the documents presented will offer insights to the foundations that made the current experience of lay ecclesial ministry possible and key developments in the understanding of lay ecclesial ministry over time. In particular this chapter will highlight the issues of the laity as fundamentally equal members of the church who, by their baptism and confirmation engage in the mission of the church. They do so in relation to the world and in the church itself, while maintaining their own secular character, which will necessitate further development in chapter three of this dissertation. This first chapter will also present the findings of the 2005 study *Lay Parish Ministers: A Study of Emerging Leadership* to provide both statistical information and a sense of how the experience of lay ecclesial ministry has changed over time in the United States. Finally, the definition of terminology that will be used in the remainder of the dissertation will be presented.

---

\(^{14}\) Two excellent resources for those interested in a thorough treatment of this issue can be found in: Zeni Fox, *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church* and Aurelie Hagstrom, *The Concepts of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity.*
The Impact of the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council provided a major catalyst in the development of lay ecclesial ministry, though the phenomenon of what would become lay ecclesial ministry was entirely unknown at the time of the council. The council did not set out to inspire a new aspect of ecclesial ministry, but through its efforts, combined with a changing world, provided the impetus for such an addition. Three documents in particular served to offer important contributions to lay ecclesial ministry: *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. In the course of this dissertation these documents will be more fully treated, particularly in chapters three and four on laity and ministry, but some brief comments are needed to set the stage for the current state of lay ecclesial ministry today.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, set the agenda about the laity within the larger context of the church, with a renewed understanding of the church as People of God, Body of Christ, and pilgrim in nature. To this end, the laity are described as part of the whole, an integral part of a people who find the foundation of their unity in Christ. The often discussed and critical placement of chapter two, The People of God, towards the beginning of the document, prior to the discussion on the church as hierarchy, affirmed a fundamental unity of all the baptized that only later distinguished particular aspects, charisms, and roles.\(^\text{15}\)*Lumen Gentium* also introduced

\(^{15}\)Hagstrom, 38 – 44. The first draft of *Lumen Gentium* originated from a draft written for the First Vatican Council. The schema that was developed from that draft was rejected during the preparatory stage, and a new draft was written that contained only four chapters: 1) The Mystery of the Church, 2) The hierarchical constitution of the Church and the episcopate in particular, 3) The people of God and the laity in particular, and 4) the call to holiness in the Church. At this point Cardinal Suenens suggested the alteration in the chapter structure to include a new chapter on the People of God, which would follow the chapter on the Mystery of the Church. The debate and decisions that followed created the chapter structure as it stands today.
the concept that all Christians, by their baptism, share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal offices.\textsuperscript{16} Even with the immediate qualification that the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood differ “essentially and not only in degree,” the focus on the participation of all of Christians, in various ways, with the whole of the work of Christ and the mission of His church provided a shift in the perception of the role of the laity.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Lumen Gentium} set out to offer a positive definition of the laity, in the sense that the definition goes beyond being “not members of the clergy.” While it maintained the unity of all Christians it also described the laity’s particular and specific role in the temporal world in chapter four. In doing so \textit{Lumen Gentium} offered both the commonality of all Christians and the need to describe distinctions as well, offering a definitive point of departure for such distinctions without offering a definitive answer.\textsuperscript{18} The universal call to holiness found in chapter five also broadened the dialogue on laity as disciples. There could be no doubt that all of the people of God, not only the ordained and members of religious orders, are called to holiness in all spheres:

\begin{quote}
All Christians, in the conditions, duties, and circumstances of their life and through all these, will sanctify themselves more and more if they receive all things with faith from the hand of the heavenly Father and cooperate with the divine will, thus showing forth in that temporal service the love with which God has loved the world.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Such a view of the realm of the temporal and the circumstances of life is important in appreciating the particular secular character of the laity.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] LG no. 10 – 12.
\item[17] Ibid., no. 10.
\item[18] Hahnenberg, 13.
\item[19] LG no. 40.
\end{footnotes}
The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, offered a further foundation for future conversations, particularly in regard to the secular character of the laity. This document focused on the relationship between the church and the world, and articulated both connections and proper distinctions and autonomy between the two. The laity’s specific responsibilities in the temporal world were again emphasized, including the importance of married and family life, particular engagement in the political, economic and social structures of the world, and having an impact on culture as a witness to Christ. Importantly, this document also referred to that which the church received from the world, and how it has benefited from “new avenues of truth” that have opened up through understanding new insights in structures and attitudes of the world.\(^{20}\)

Finally, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, represented the first time that the church stated its teaching on the lay apostolate in a conciliar decree.\(^{21}\) The changing realities and complexities in the temporal world, ever increasing developments in technology and science, and the autonomy that had rightfully been reached by the laity in numerous sectors of life, with some relinquishing of Christian values on the part of some of the laity in the process, are all presented as reasons for the urgency placed on a greater understanding and commitment to the lay apostolate.\(^{22}\)

\(^{20}\) GS no. 44.

\(^{21}\) Hagstrom, 61.

\(^{22}\) AA no. 1.
It is in chapter four of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, on the different forms of the apostolate that specific mention is made of Catholic Action. Broadly understood, Catholic Action is any activity on the part of lay Catholic associations that has a primarily apostolic purpose.\(^{23}\) Through Catholic Action the laity were invited to cooperate with the church’s mission in the world. In contrast to the autonomy regarding the laity’s role in the temporal world found in the Second Vatican Council documents, Catholic Action was more often understood as something of an appendage of the hierarchical role in the mission of the church. Apostolic activities done by lay associations in Catholic Action were carried out for the assistance of the hierarchy, at the special mandate of the hierarchy, and as dependent upon the hierarchy.\(^{24}\) Pope Pius XI gave Catholic Action its institutional structure by defining it as a participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate.\(^{25}\) “Participation” in this definition did not mean that the laity became a part of the hierarchy, which in the pre-conciliar understanding had the sole responsibility for the mission of the church.\(^{26}\) Participation in this sense means that the laity can only *share* in the mission that belongs to the hierarchy, with no real apostolate that is rightfully theirs.

The Decree on the Laity presented two parts of the ongoing debate about the relationship between Catholic Action and the hierarchy. Article 20 tied the notion of Catholic Action to associations that are founded and directed by the hierarchy. However,

\(^{23}\) Hagstrom, 13.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., footnote 8.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 16.
article 19 gave more freedom on the part of the laity to form their own associations. The basis of the lay apostolate became understood as being rooted in baptism and confirmation, where the specific organization of Catholic Action became understood as connected to a mandate from the hierarchy.

Taken together, and in connection with the other documents from the council, the pieces of these three documents contributed to a new level and type of activity by laity as members of the church. In terms of vision, the recognition that all disciples are called to holiness and participation in the mission of Christ and His church empowered the laity and clergy to change their perception of their roles in the community. On a practical level, the types of renewals inspired by the council required new categories of service and the full and active participation of all the faithful. Laity began to assume new roles in leading adult faith formation and faith sharing, as well as taking on responsibilities for the catechetical formation of children and youth in the parishes, in addition to their roles in parochial schools. Such leadership required new levels of formation and education, found for many in the seminaries that previously excluded lay students.

These changes were especially striking in the church in the United States, where at the same time as the council major social, political and economic changes were underway. Activism and the call for equality of all citizens regardless of race or gender, propelled many Catholics onto the world stage, buoyed by the teachings of the council. That same egalitarian ideal found its way into the vision of the church as well, with a

---

27 Fox, 245.
28 Hahnenberg, 3.
29 Ibid., 7.
renewed appreciation for the collaboration possible between clergy and laity. While many embraced the changes occurring within the parishes, concerns regarding the changes and ambiguities in the use of terminology such as “ministry” began to arise. Coupled with numbers of clergy who left the priesthood following the council and the beginnings of awareness that a priest shortage could be a reality, those concerns found their way into subsequent church documents.\(^{30}\) However, in the United States, there was a general commitment to explore this new development as the work of the Holy Spirit. This attitude allowed for significant, sustained work and study on the issue of what the U.S. bishops would eventually call “lay ecclesial ministry.” It began with the short document *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity.* 

**The Beginning of the Response in the United States**

Fifteen years after the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Laity, the U.S. Bishops issued a set of pastoral reflections on the laity in the church. *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity,* though brief, set the stage for reflection on lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. The document balanced an emphasis on the development of a mature faith that lives out the universal call to holiness with some particular points on the “new development” of lay people who are living the ministry of the laity in the ecclesial setting.\(^{31}\) The newness of the phenomenon can be seen in the descriptions of the roles that laity had undertaken, which ranged from empowerment of the poor through job

\(^{30}\) The culmination of these concerns are best seen in the Congregation for the Clergy et al, *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest.*

development and education to catechesis and pastoral care, all in the same section. The bishops recognized that there was much ambiguity in the new experience of laity in ecclesial ministry, particularly in how roles are defined and responsibilities for leadership are determined.

Some important features in the document should be noted. While there are numerous references to the role of the laity participating in the mission of the church in the world, the document never uses the term “secular,” an emphasis that will be seen in later documents. The beginning of the document focuses on laity in the church in general, with an opening “Call to Adulthood.” The only reference to “character” comes in this section, where the bishops refer to the “adult character of the people of God” flowing from “baptism and confirmation, which are the foundation of the Christian life and ministry.”

The beginning of some concern about the relationship between ordained and lay ministry can be seen in how the bishops regularly emphasize the role of the ordained, with a clear separation stated in the liturgical roles of ordained and laity set immediately before the section on ministry. Contrasts are highlighted through statements such as, “just as by divine institution bishops, priests and deacons have been given through ordination authority to exercise leadership…so through baptism and confirmation lay men and women have been given rights and responsibilities to participate in the mission of the church.” They also emphasized that the new developments in ministry should not

---

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 373.
34 Ibid., 371.
35 Ibid., 372.
36 Ibid.
create divisiveness between the laity and clergy, but “ministry” should express the “full range of influence of the people of God.”⁴⁷ However, language around the term “ministry” itself also showed concern to make nuanced distinctions between clergy and laity; the insertion of phrases such as “some form” and “broadly understood” as applied to the “ministry” of the laity can be noted through the document.⁴⁸ The overall sense of the document, however, is very positive in its characterization of the contribution of the laity, both in their ecclesial and secular involvements in ministry. The reflections in Called and Gifted are important in their role in recognizing the reality that quickly unfolded in unexpected ways. The document attempted to articulate that reality in a manner that diverse perspectives could appreciate. The diversity of perspectives would be seen in the process of the Synod of Bishops in 1987, and in the subsequent apostolic exhortation.

The Synod of 1987 and Christifideles Laici

In 1987 bishops from around the world gathered for a synod that dealt with vocation and mission of the laity in the church and the world. The synod would culminate in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici, in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the decree on the laity. Through the consultation process for the Lineamenta the particular concern in the United States regarding the issue of the new experience of lay ministry could be seen.⁴⁹ However, the experience of lay ministry was

⁴⁷ Ibid.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Fox, 257.
not restricted to the church in the United States. Numerous comments by bishops from around the world point to the fact that the phenomenon was widespread.40 While much of the conversation offered praise for the new development, not all those involved were pleased. Though lay ecclesial ministry was not to be the focus of the synod, references to “certain problems” which arose from the experience of laity’s requests for “access to various ‘ecclesial ministries’” were mentioned.41 Some bishops raised the concern, later expressed by Pope John Paul II, that there was a danger in a tendency toward “the clericalization of the laity” and the “laicization of the clergy.”42 The continued concern by some over use of the term “ministry” in regard to lay activity is evident in the lack of the use of the term “lay ministry” in the Lineamenta.43 The concerns raised by the bishops would be reflected in Pope John Paul II’s letter Christifideles Laici.

Christifideles Laici articulated the teaching of Pope John Paul II regarding the vocation of the laity. The focus of Christifideles Laici was most definitely on the secular character and nature of the vocation and mission of the laity, and thus it is unfortunate that early in the document the use of the term “secularism” to refer to developments in the world such as religious indifference and atheism, sets a negative connotation to the character.44 However, in light of the work done in the synod and the continuing growth of lay ministry in the church, the document also showed some of the pope’s thoughts on

40 Ibid., 259-261.


42 Ibid., 10.


44 Christifideles Laici no. 4.
this new development. John Paul II did not personally agree with the use of the term “ministry” in regard to the laity, and approached the use of the term with great caution, preferring to use “ministries of laypeople” as opposed to “lay ministry” on the occasions when he referred to the experience.\(^{45}\) He raised caution over the too-indiscriminate use of the term ministry as well as a tendency toward confusing or equating the common priesthood and the ministerial one.\(^{46}\) More often John Paul II used the language of “mission,” as when describing the manner in which the laity share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly work of Christ.\(^{47}\) When he did speak of lay ministries in particular, the focus was placed on how these are to be delegated by ordained ministries, with care taken to state that such activities do not make “Pastors of the faithful.”\(^{48}\) The brief comments on those legitimate ministries, roles and offices that the lay faithful can fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of faith and in the pastoral structures of the church were followed by the pope’s stress that they ought to be done in conformity to the specific vocation of the laity, and he immediately refers to their role in the temporal world.\(^{49}\) The impact of the pope’s caution and his focus on the world as the proper focus of the vocation of the laity would influence the ongoing work of the United States bishops.

\(^{45}\) Lakeland, 127.

\(^{46}\) *Christifideles Laici* no. 23.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., no. 14

\(^{48}\) Ibid., no. 23

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
The Continued Development in the United States

In 1995, fifteen years after Called and Gifted was published, the U.S. bishops published Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium. By the time of this document’s publication there had been considerable development in the experience of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. The first of what would become three surveys by the National Pastoral Life Center had been published, which added much needed statistical data to the conversation. Christifideles Laici had been promulgated and the areas that needed to be addressed were beginning to take form.

Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium again addressed the issue of laity in general, with a particular section on the still evolving reality of lay ecclesial ministry. As with Called and Gifted, Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium was structured around four sections related to “call”: Call to Holiness, Call to Community, Call to Mission and Ministry, and Call to Christian Maturity (adulthood). Interestingly, Third Millennium changed the order of the sections from Called and Gifted, which had placed “Call to Adulthood” first, followed by “Call to Holiness,” “Call to Ministry,” and finally “Call to Community.” The structure in Third Millennium placed the primary focus on the universal call to holiness and the role of community before addressing how laity can take on particular ecclesial roles. Perhaps this shift reflected the shift in concerns about how lay ecclesial ministers “fit” in the church. Third Millennium begins with the broadest category and works its way to a particular expression, following the example of Lumen Gentium. In this way Third Millennium gives the context of the universal call to holiness

50 DeLambo, 2005.
and connection with the community of the church as the backdrop of discussions about the laity.

The section on the “Call to Mission and Ministry” is heavily influenced by Christifideles Laici, with three cross references made in the first five sentences of the section. Again, “secular character” is not used to specify a particular aspect of the nature of the laity, and lay ecclesial ministers in particular. However, early in the section the bishops referred to John Paul II’s teaching that “any ministries, offices and roles undertaken by lay persons are to be exercised ‘in conformity to their specific lay vocation.’”\textsuperscript{51} The concerns of the pope that lay people are not “clericalized” and clergy are not “laicized” can be felt in this new emphasis. Third Millennium specifically notes that the lay vocation in particular is to “make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth,” offering family life as an especially striking example.\textsuperscript{52}

Later the section deals specifically with lay ecclesial ministry. The developments in the experience of the ministry are obvious, with a distinction made between those who engage in liturgical ministries such as lector, cantor, and altar services with lay ministers who are engaged in ministries that are “formative” such as those who teach young people, lead marriage preparation, or are on pastoral staffs.\textsuperscript{53} The document specifies that those actions that are done in the name of Jesus, under the aegis of the church, are forms of ministry.\textsuperscript{54}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 16.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.}
seem to be set aside in this section in favor of naming specific factors which distinguish this type of ministry from a more broadly understood use of the term. Perhaps this was an attempt to qualify terminology while still affirming the growth of the ministries.

Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium also included some new developments, such as the entrustment of the leadership of parishes to some lay people in the absence of a resident priest.\textsuperscript{55} The reality of parishes in need of this type of leadership had become clear by this point. In the end of this section, the bishops also referred to the fact that “ecclesial lay ministers” speak of their work as a calling, and that the ministers believe that God has called them to their ministry.\textsuperscript{56} The notion that somehow lay ecclesial ministry was perceived as a vocation by those in the ministry, not only a response to changes in the parishes, had sparked enough interest to include the reference. The bishops are quick to note that often “the parish priest is the means of discerning the call,” continuing the repeated effort to balance between reference to lay ministry and ordained ministry seen in Called and Gifted. The bishops also wanted to keep the need for recognition of a call by the authoritative leader of a community.

At the end of the section on lay ministry in Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium the bishops committed themselves to expanding their “study and dialogue concerning lay ministry in order to understand better the critical issues and find effective ways to address them.”\textsuperscript{57} To that end, the NCCB Committee on the Laity formed the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry in March of 1994, and set as its purpose the development

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 18.
of “a better understanding of the range of issues concerning lay ministry in the church in
the United States; given a deepened understanding of them, to bring certain issues to the
attention of the episcopal conference, and to offer options for addressing them.” The
subcommittee in turn created the Leadership for Lay Ecclesial Ministry Project, which
after four years of dialogue and research, resulted in the document *Lay Ecclesial
Ministry: The State of the Questions*. Through an initial consultation process, the
subcommittee identified six areas of concern, many of which had been reflected to one
degree or another in previous documents and research:

- The term “lay minister”
- A theology of lay ministry
- The formation of lay ministers
- The relationship between lay ministers and ordained ministers
- The financial and human resources issues connected with lay ministry
- The multicultural issues connected with lay ministry

What followed was an extensive process of consultation that included bishops,
representatives of twenty-one professional associations and graduate programs in
ministry, various multi-cultural organizations, and numerous theologians. Input from
the initial and second studies on parishes and parish ministers was incorporated, and the
continuation of the work that would culminate in the third study in 2005 was approved.
In May 1997, a colloquium of approximately fifty bishops, theologians, and other experts
gathered to present papers and discuss the pressing issues around lay ecclesial ministry.
The papers from the colloquium were eventually published as *Together in God’s Service:*

---

59 Ibid., 6.
60 Ibid., 70.
61 DeLambo, 16.
Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry. The extended process, along with the ongoing developments in the experience of lay ecclesial ministry, contributed to a series of conclusions and recommendations that captured much of the appreciation and tension around the still new phenomenon.

The State of the Questions offered a number of important clarifications. It solidified the use of the term “lay ecclesial minister” as the preferred terminology, and addressed the need for clarification and distinction around lay ecclesial ministers and the service of all the laity in the church by adopting a descriptive approach over a more formal, and potentially limiting, definition. As a result, the document was able to offer eight characterizations of a lay ecclesial minister:

- A fully initiated lay member of the Christian faithful (including vowed non-ordained religious) who is responding to the empowerment and gifts of the Holy Spirit received in baptism and confirmation, which enable one to share in some form of ministry;
- One who responds to a call or invitation to participate in ministry and who has prepared through a process of prayerful discernment;
- One who has received the necessary formation, education, and training to function competently within the given area of ministry;
- One who intentionally brings personal competencies and gifts to serve the church's mission through a specific ministry of ecclesial leadership and who does so with community recognition and support;
- One to whom a formal and public role in ministry has been entrusted or upon whom an office has been conferred by competent ecclesiastical authority;
- One who has been installed in a ministry through the authority of the bishop or his representative, perhaps using a public ritual;
- One who commits to performing the duties of a ministry in a stable manner;
• A paid staff person (full-or part-time) or a volunteer who has responsibility and the necessary authority for institutional leadership in a particular area of ministry.  

The document also made great strides in examining the foundational issues involved in a theology of lay ecclesial ministry. It rooted the ministry in the mission of the church, which is accomplished in communion, and firmly connected it with the sacraments of initiation. In its discussion on the lay ecclesial minister as a member of the laity, the document specified that the ministry of the laity is appropriate in its own right and not a way of participating in the ministry of the ordained. These lay ecclesial ministers are described as responding to a call from God to work alongside ordained ministers at the service of and within the ecclesial community.

The document offered a number of conclusions about the role of the local bishop in fostering and guiding the use of the “gifts that lay ecclesial ministers” bring and to maintain the dynamic communio of all vocations by acting as a center of unity. Bishops are encouraged to recognize the “distinctive character” of lay ecclesial ministry and to attend to appropriate language when publicly recognizing them to ensure that there is no confusion that the majority of ministry done by lay ecclesial ministers is proper to the laity and not simply assisting the ordained. At the same time, bishops are also called to

---

62 Ibid., 8.
63 Ibid., 14-15.
64 Ibid., 15.
65 Ibid., 17.
66 Ibid., 18.
67 Ibid., 19.
foster genuine collaboration between those in ministry. Yet, in describing the preparation of laity for ministry, the subcommittee reiterated that “the Church has not spoken of lay ministry as a vocation beyond the words in Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium: ‘Ecclesial lay ministers speak of their work, their service, as a calling, not merely a job.’” In its own conclusions, the document states that this “call or vocation” is worthy of respect and sustained attention, but does not definitively state that lay ecclesial ministry should be understood as a vocation.

Such hesitancy comes in response to church documents such as the Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest. While not a document on lay ecclesial ministry per se, it followed the lead of Pope John Paul II in Christifideles Laici and raised serious concerns about any perception of laypeople in the role of pastor or any confusion between the ordained ministry and the collaboration of lay people through the delegation of tasks. The driving force behind the document was to safeguard the uniqueness of the ordained ministry and not to provide a comprehensive study of lay ecclesial ministry. To this end, the focus seemed geared more to those occasions when lay ecclesial ministers were designated to perform roles ordinarily done by the ordained, with no real development of the concept that some ministries may flow from the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. It did not seem to take issue with lay ecclesial ministers per se, but rather

---

68 Ibid., 18.
69 Ibid, 27.
70 Ibid.
71 Congregation for the Clergy et al, Instruction, 399.
72 Ibid.
with any perceived confusion regarding their role. The document raised the specter that somehow lay ecclesial ministry had not only grown in part as a response to the shortage of priests, but that it may actually encourage a reduction of vocations to the priesthood.\footnote{Ibid., 401.}

There were no claims to any documentation that would verify such a position, but The Congregation for the Clergy’s recognition that the shortage of priests was a persistent and problematic development would certainly have been understood.

Bishop Hoffman of Toledo, Ohio, represented the U.S. bishops at the Vatican meeting on the \textit{Instruction}. In his comments to the U.S. bishops during their annual November meeting in 1997, Hoffman noted that the scope of the \textit{Instruction} was

\begin{quote}
…simply to provide a clear, authoritative response to the many pressing requests that have come to our dicasteries, from bishops, priests and laity seeking clarification in the light of specific cases of new forms of ‘pastoral activity’ of the non-ordained on both parochial and diocesan levels.\footnote{Ibid., 399, sidebar.}
\end{quote}

Hoffman did not see the \textit{Instruction} as devaluing the positive ministry done by laypeople, but he did comment that the \textit{Instruction} would be useful to the subcommittee on lay ministry as it worked to further define aspects of lay ecclesial ministry.\footnote{Ibid., 401, sidebar.} The next step in those efforts would be seen in the document \textit{Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry}. While particular to the experience of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States, the document pointed to the continuing tensions experienced in the whole church regarding lay ecclesial ministry’s place in the church, its connection with and distinction from ordained ministry, its

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 401.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 399, sidebar.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 401, sidebar.}
\end{itemize}}
connection with the vocation of the laity, and its need for specific formation and spirituality.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

At the end of 2005 the U.S. bishops approved what they referred to as a resource document meant to guide the development of lay ecclesial ministry and a synthesis of the best thinking and practice of a ministry that was still maturing. The bishops made clear that the document was not meant to propose norms or to establish particular law (a nod to the diverse experiences and opinions that still existed on the “maturing” ministry). The beginning section emphasized repeatedly the proper and primary vocation of the laity in the secular realm, with specific mention made of the secular character that is particular to the laity. It is in the section on the general call of all of the laity that the bishops included the reference to “ministries, offices and roles” that do not require sacramental ordination, but find instead their root in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. This type of ministry can occur in the ecclesial community in the form of service and limited or voluntary ministry.

However, once a leadership role is needed in the community, one of the characteristics of lay ecclesial ministry noted in The State of the Questions, the document shifted to a more specific connection with and distinction from ordained ministry. Three other characteristics of lay ecclesial ministry stated by the bishops were 1) authorization of lay ecclesial ministers by the hierarchy to serve publicly in the church, 2) close mutual

---


77 Ibid., 407.
collaboration with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, and 3) preparation and formation appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them. The role of delegation in this sense is connected to the public role of the lay ecclesial ministers as leaders in the church. The ministers are certainly equipped with graces and gifts to build up the church, but it is done in cooperation with the hierarchy and under its direction.

The bishops also attempted to clarify the identity of vowed brothers and sisters of religious orders who are also considered lay ecclesial ministers. As vowed religious are only truly “lay” in the sense that they are not ordained, their identity in being grouped with all lay ecclesial ministers can be problematic. However, vowed religious had been a major part of the experience of lay ecclesial ministry, especially early in its development. As will be seen in the statistical information in the upcoming section, the numbers of religious women and men have declined significantly over the past fifteen years, but their presence and work continue to have a strong impact on the experience of lay ecclesial ministry. The bishops recognize that contribution, and clarified that the “consecrated persons participate in ecclesial ministry by their own title, according to the nature of their institute.” In doing so, the bishops distinguished vowed religious from other lay ecclesial ministers explicitly for the first time.

It is in the second section of *Co-workers, “Understanding the Realities in Light of Theology and Church Teaching,*” that the bishops ground the theological and

---

78 Ibid.  
79 Ibid.  
80 Ibid.
ecclesiological foundations of lay ecclesial ministry in the Trinitarian communion. It is a relational model of church that sets ministry within the context of a people who have been called together to enter into the mystery of the God who is Communion, and who engage in mission through that foundational relationship.\textsuperscript{81} The gift of life in Christ is transformed into a mission of “dynamic openness and movement towards others.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{Co-workers} made a major contribution to the conversation on lay ecclesial ministry. It did not, however, further develop the concept of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation. Once again, the recognition that lay ecclesial ministers describe their ministry as a call is reiterated, but the tension between the vocation of the laity in the world and the particular expression of their call in the church is not clarified. \textit{Co-Workers} was not meant as the last word in the conversation, though, and discussions continue on many of the aspects of lay ecclesial ministry in the church. Such ongoing dialogue is critical considering the current reality of lay ecclesial ministry in the church.

\textbf{Current Statistics for Lay Ecclesial Ministry}

Lay ecclesial ministry is certainly a worldwide phenomenon, but specific worldwide statistics are difficult to acquire. However, the dedication in the United States to this particular issue has resulted in statistics that not only address the current reality of lay ecclesial ministry in this country, but also provide the opportunity for longitudinal comparison. In 2005 the National Pastoral Life Center published the third report in a series of studies of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States, spanning over fifteen years. The first study, published in 1992, came in response to a request in 1988 by Bishop

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 409 - 410.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
Timothy Harrington of Worcester to the USCCB (then NCCB) at the annual November meeting. Bishop Harrington asked for a study of laypeople in the church from a variety of perspectives. The original request was narrowed down to a focus on the rapidly expanding practice of hiring lay people and vowed religious for pastoral positions in the parish.\textsuperscript{83} The study was undertaken by the National Pastoral Life Center. The first study offered insight into the expansion of lay ministry in the United States, and offered important areas in need of attention for the future including greater diocesan involvement, enhanced educational experiences, better preparation of pastors to respond to the changes, better employment practices, and clarification of the roles and relationships among all of those in ministry.\textsuperscript{84}

Following the first study, a subcommittee was formed in the USCCB specifically to address what was then called “lay ministry.” The second study was initiated to address key issues in the development of “lay parish ministry” and also to offer follow up information from the first study.\textsuperscript{85} The study identified lay ecclesial ministers as those who were “lay” in that they were not ordained, “ecclesial” in that they were formally assigned by a representative of the church to their ministry, and “ministers” in that they were doing ministry that comes from an understanding of the mission that Christ gave the church.\textsuperscript{86} The second study, following the parameters of the first study, also limited lay ecclesial ministers to those laity or vowed religious who were paid staff of parishes and

\textsuperscript{83} DeLambo, 13.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{85} While the 2005 study acknowledges that the title “lay ecclesial minister” was in regular use by the time the 1997 study was complete, the term “lay parish minister” was kept in the latest publication for consistency. However, this paper will continue to use to term “lay ecclesial minister.”

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 15.
who worked a minimum of 20 hours per week.\textsuperscript{87} Within those definitions, the 1997 study found a 35\% increase in lay ministers.\textsuperscript{88} The study noted that the increase in lay ministers did not replace participation by volunteers, but in fact the individual attention and personal engagement that was possible with more lay leaders actually increased participation in the parishes.\textsuperscript{89} The overall response from the participants about their experience in lay ecclesial ministry was positive, with satisfaction reported in the changes that had occurred in the parish to address the addition of the lay ecclesial ministers. There was recognition, however, that theological foundations and church policies had not kept pace with the experience and practice of lay ecclesial ministry.\textsuperscript{90}

The 2005 study followed much of the methodology of the first two studies, with two exceptions. The number of dioceses surveyed was doubled, from 43 in the first two studies to 86 in the third\textsuperscript{91} and additional information was gathered on lay volunteers who worked over 20 hours per week.\textsuperscript{92} An interesting shift occurred in the return rate between studies. For each study, return rates were calculated by percentage for both lay ecclesial minister and pastor respondents. In 1990, the rates were 71.8\% and 77.9\% respectively. In 1997 the rate dropped to 48.8\% and 68.8\% respectively. In 2005, even with the increase in dioceses surveyed, the return rate was 47\% and 56\% respectively.\textsuperscript{93} While the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.,14.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 30.
\end{flushleft}
rate itself is not problematic for the quality of the information gathered, it is noteworthy that there was such a decrease in reporting, particularly considering the increase in the experience and practice of lay ecclesial ministry during that same time period.  

By 2005 there had been further increases in the number of lay ecclesial ministers in the United States, up another 5% to an approximate number of 30,632. That number of lay ecclesial ministers exceeded the number of parish priests in the same year. Additionally, in 2004 and 2005 more than 2,000 laypersons ministered in the name of the church in hospitals, on college campuses, and in prisons, seaports and airports. The difference in the rate of growth between the three studies pointed to a slowing in the growth overall, but the impact on the life of the parish was still remarkable. Over two thirds of all parishes in the United States in 2005 reported having lay ecclesial ministers who work over twenty hours per week. Of those ministers, laywomen made up the largest portion, increasing from 44% of all lay ecclesial ministers in 1990 to 64% in 2005. Laymen had also increased as a percentage of the total number, though they still only comprised 20% of all lay ecclesial ministers in 2005. The greatest change, however, occurred in the decrease in the percentage of religious women among the total number of lay ecclesial ministers, from 41% in 1990 to 16% in 2005.

---

94 DeLambo does not speculate as to reasons for the decrease. It would be interesting to see if the decrease were due to a level of complacency with the experience of lay ecclesial ministry. It would also be interesting to see if response rates for other surveys done over the same time frame had a drop in responses, or if only this subject matter saw such a decrease.

95 Ibid., 44.

96 Ibid, 145.

97 USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 408.

98 DeLambo, 44.

99 Ibid., 45.
As a group, the study found lay ecclesial ministers were getting older. More than 75% of all lay ecclesial ministers were born before 1960. The median age of vowed religious in parish ministry was 64, and the median age of the remaining laypeople was 52.\textsuperscript{100} The generation gap loomed heavily on the church in the United States in general, but there seemed to be a widening divide between even the lay leadership in parishes with the general community. An increased level of experience in ministry, however, matched the increased age of the lay ecclesial ministers. The median number of years in ministry was 14, with over half of all lay ecclesial ministers surveyed in 2005 having previous ministry employment.\textsuperscript{101}

In regards to their racial/ethnic profile, lay ecclesial ministers were overwhelmingly white at 88.5\%.\textsuperscript{102} There had been some gains made over the past fifteen years in the number of minority ministers in the United States, with the greatest increases occurring with Hispanic/Latino ministers. However, these increases were hugely disproportionate to the Hispanic population in the church.\textsuperscript{103} The addition of the non-paid respondents in the 2005 study showed the role of volunteer ministers in representing minority ministers. While the majority of non-paid ministers were still

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 65.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. The Catholic Hispanic population at the same time of the 2005 study was approximately 20 – 25\%, and the responses from paid lay ecclesial ministers working over twenty hours per week was 8.1\%. While almost double the 1997 figure of 4.4\% it is not reflective of the population as a whole.
reported to be white (74.3%) there was an increase to 11.4% for Black ministers as well as an additional 11.4% for unpaid Hispanic ministers.\textsuperscript{104}

Lay ecclesial ministers continued to be overwhelmingly Catholic, with 91.5% being cradle Catholics and another 7.2% identifying themselves as converts.\textsuperscript{105} Most described their families of origin as being “somewhat religious” and almost one third described their families as “very religious.”\textsuperscript{106} Over the past fifteen years there had been important shifts in attitudes reported regarding closeness to God, the Catholic Church, and the local parish. While in the 2005 study, the vast majority of lay ecclesial ministers reported feeling close to God (91.3%) only 66.2% reported feeling close to the Catholic Church. This continued a downward trend from a high of 71.5% in 1990 to 69.8% in 1997.\textsuperscript{107} Also, the 2005 study found that for the first time more ministers reported feeling closer to the church five years ago than today.\textsuperscript{108} When responses between laypersons and vowed religious were compared, laypersons reported a higher percentage of feeling close to the Catholic Church than vowed religious.\textsuperscript{109} Positive feeling toward their local parish,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 48. The increase was more dramatic for Black ministers, who represented only 1.4% of paid ministers.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 50. 1.2% of respondents were not Catholic. Among the non-Catholic ministers DeLambo lists four music ministers, two youth ministers, one DRE and one social concerns minister. DeLambo does not explain how non-Catholic ministers are understood to be engaging in Catholic ministry.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 51.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 71.1% reported feeling close to the Catholic Church in 1997 compared to 66.2% in 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 67% of laypersons reported feeling close to the Catholic Church compared to 60% of vowed religious.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
however, had uniformly increased for both vowed religious and laypersons over the past fifteen years.\textsuperscript{110}

The majority (95\%) of lay ecclesial ministers reported an active prayer life in 2005, and a high portion of respondents (88.9\%) reported going on retreat annually or occasionally.\textsuperscript{111} However, there was a dramatic decrease in those who reported a regular routine of prayer, declining from 70.8\% in 1990 to 51.2\% in 1997 and finally to 48.5\% in 2005, raising interesting questions about how lay ecclesial ministers distinguish between “active” and “regular routine.”\textsuperscript{112} There was a corresponding increase in those who reported that their prayer lives changed each day. No specific forms of prayer or descriptions of various types of possibilities of prayer were given, though it would be interesting to know how lay ecclesial ministers defined their prayer life and what constituted it.\textsuperscript{113}

The 2005 study found important shifts in the size of parishes where lay ecclesial ministers served. In the two earlier studies, larger parishes (over 2500 registered parishioners) were found to be three times as likely as smaller parishes (less than 1000 parishioners) to employ a lay ecclesial minister.\textsuperscript{114} By 2005 the percentage of parishes employing lay ecclesial ministers had increased in all three categories. While larger

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 51-52.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{113} By way of comparison, see James Davidson, Thomas Walters, Bede Cisco, Katherine Meyer, and Charles Zech, \textit{Lay Ministers and Their Spiritual Practices} (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 65 –76. Davidson et al reported that in their study lay ministers stressed the importance of Mass (99\% attend at least weekly), receiving communion (97\% receive at least weekly), “talking to God” (90\% daily), and starting or ending the day with prayer (88\%) as the most common practices.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 55.
parishes are still more likely to employ lay ecclesial ministers, the majority of them (59%) are employed by small or medium sized parishes. The number of lay ecclesial ministers employed in a parish was also related to its size. Small parishes averaged 1.37 paid ministers, medium parishes 2.15 and large parishes 3.34. The additional information in the 2005 study regarding volunteer ministers showed that smaller parishes were almost three times as likely as larger parishes to have volunteer ministers on staff. Fewer resources required more reliance on volunteer ministers in the smaller parishes.

The larger parishes tended to be in the suburban locations, and the ratio of lay ecclesial ministers per parish by locale showed that the greatest ratio was indeed in the suburban areas. Rural locations were the least likely to employ lay ecclesial ministers, with a ratio of 1.49 paid ministers per parish. Including volunteers did not greatly increase that ratio in the rural areas, adding only .09 ministers to the total. The distance between parishes in rural areas and the smaller number of available people overall seemed to make it difficult to have larger numbers of lay ecclesial ministers. Inner city parishes, while the next smallest to rural parishes in terms of registered parishioners, had a ratio of 2.42 paid lay ecclesial ministers, and volunteers raised that ratio to 2.72. This placed inner city parishes highest in regard to the ratio of volunteer ministers in the parish.

\[\text{footnote 115} \text{ Ibid., 57.}\]

\[\text{footnote 116} \text{ Ibid.}\]

\[\text{footnote 117} \text{ Ibid., 59. The total ratio for the suburban parishes was 3.60. While large parishes constitute those with more than 2,500 registered parishioners, suburban parishes in the study averaged 4,273 registered parishioners.}\]

\[\text{footnote 118} \text{ Ibid. Rural parishes in this study averaged 893 registered parishioners, with over half having fewer than 454 parishioners.}\]

\[\text{footnote 119} \text{ Ibid. Inner city parishes averaged 1,972 registered parishioners.}\]
In terms of education, ministry preparation and formation, there was actually a decrease in lay ecclesial ministers who have a Master’s degree or higher over the past fifteen years.\textsuperscript{120} The change was attributed to the decrease in vowed religious in lay ecclesial ministry while the remaining number of laypersons with Master’s degrees or higher did not significantly increase. There was an increase of 12\% in the percentages of lay ecclesial ministers whose highest degree was in a ministry related field.\textsuperscript{121}

The 2005 study asked about ministry preparation programs for the first time. More than half of respondents reported that they had completed a ministry formation program with nearly two-thirds of them going through a diocesan sponsored program.\textsuperscript{122} To determine content and preparedness, the researchers provided a list of areas of study that included spirituality, catechesis and evangelization, Scripture, liturgy and worship, Catholic Social Teaching, theology, church history, pastoral care and canon law. Respondents were asked if each of those categories was important to their work, and their level of preparedness. Not surprisingly, canon law had the lowest percentage of respondents who felt it was important to their work (60\%), with a correspondingly lower percentage who felt “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” in that content area.\textsuperscript{123} The highest percentages of content areas with importance to their work went to spirituality (90.8\%) and catechesis and evangelization (90.1\%) with equally high percentages of

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{120}]{Ibid., 48. 52.8\% of all lay ecclesial ministers had a Master’s degree or higher in 1990, 53.3\% in 1997 and 48.1\% in 2005.}
  \item[\textsuperscript{121}]{Ibid., 49. Vowed religious make up the greatest part of this increase.}
  \item[\textsuperscript{122}]{Ibid., 78.}
  \item[\textsuperscript{123}]{Ibid., 79.}
\end{itemize}
feeling “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” (94.4% and 95.7% respectively).\textsuperscript{124} Generally, the content areas with the lower percentage responses were those in canon law, church history, Catholic Social Teaching, theology and Scripture.\textsuperscript{125}

The researchers also asked about leadership and preparation for ministerial roles to determine how prepared lay ecclesial ministers felt in the actual application of ministerial knowledge. The respondents were given a list of 31 specialized roles, ranging from “sacramental preparation” to “home visitation” to “small Christian communities” and were asked if they lead this type of ministry and, if so, how prepared they felt to lead it. The overall reported percentages were very high, with at least 70% of all ministers feeling adequately prepared for those roles for which they were responsible, and in half of the roles listed better than 90% felt adequately prepared.\textsuperscript{126} Equally impressive were the responses to preparedness for particular ministerial skills. In those areas identified as most important to the lay ecclesial ministers, such as planning, recruiting volunteers, leading prayer and teaching, better than 80% felt at least “somewhat prepared.”\textsuperscript{127}

The 2005 study also studied the types of lay ecclesial ministry positions in parishes, which can be difficult given the lack of standardized job descriptions and responsibilities. Even with those difficulties, there was remarkable stability in both the general categories of positions and the percentages of ministers in those categories. The

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 82.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 82 - 84. Ten skill areas did have at least a twenty point divide between importance for ministry and level of preparedness: motivating involvement, managing conflict, recruiting volunteers, collaborating, working with people with diverse spiritualities, ministry training, organizing projects, planning, communicating to public groups, and preparing/administering a budget. These indicate a gap that needs to be addressed in ongoing formation.
categories include general pastoral ministers, religious educators, liturgists, music ministers, youth ministers, and a “catch all” group. The largest percentage of positions over the fifteen years from the original study was found in the religious educator group, with the smallest being the liturgist group. However, none of the percentages of any of the categories varied by more than a few percentage points over fifteen years. The wide variety of types of responsibilities within each category of ministry could be seen in the responses on areas of actual responsibility for leadership in ministry. Here the diversity in responsibilities from location to location could be seen.\footnote{128}{Ibid., 88. The breakdown in percentages in 2005 were as follows: general pastoral ministers 25\%, religious educators 41.5\%, liturgists 5.9\%, music ministers 9\%, youth ministers 10.2\%, and other 8.4\%.}

Even with the wide diversity of responsibilities and the demands of the ministry, the study reported a high rate of satisfaction among lay ecclesial ministers. To assess satisfaction levels, the ministers were given a list of 20 descriptors; some were negative and some positive. The negative ones included “boring,” “overlooked,” and “frustrating” while the positive ones included “meaningful,” “good,” and “gives a sense of accomplishment.” The researchers reported that more than 85\% of the ministers described their work as meaningful, good, providing a sense of accomplishment, satisfying, challenging, spiritually rewarding, creative, respected, life giving, and appreciated.\footnote{130}{Ibid., 134.} The negative descriptors were among the least chosen, with less than 5\% of respondents choosing “demeaning,” or “boring.”\footnote{131}{Ibid.} This was not to say that there were no negative descriptors used. A quarter to a third of all ministers also found their work

\footnote{128}{Ibid., 88. The breakdown in percentages in 2005 were as follows: general pastoral ministers 25\%, religious educators 41.5\%, liturgists 5.9\%, music ministers 9\%, youth ministers 10.2\%, and other 8.4\%.}
\footnote{129}{Ibid., 90.}
\footnote{130}{Ibid., 134.}
\footnote{131}{Ibid.}
“overlooked,” “tiresome,” and “routine.” The main theme, however, was high satisfaction overall.

Another indicator of satisfaction that was used was asking the respondents how often in the past 12 months they had considered leaving church ministry. The responses were similar to those found in the general population of American workers: about one third said they “often” or “sometimes” considered leaving. However, when asked how long they intended on serving the church, 49.5% said “indefinitely” and 44.9% said “for the next few years,” with only 5.5% reporting plans to leave within the coming year.

In fact, the study found that the majority of lay ecclesial ministers (73.1%) believe that they are pursuing a lifetime of service in the church. While it did not surprise the researchers that vowed religious understood their ministry as lifelong (98.3%), there was also a 5.3% increase in laypersons stating the same (up from 63.6% in 1997 to 68.9% in 2005). The increase in non-vowed religious laypersons who understood their ministry as lifelong was true both for full-time (79.4%) and part-time ministers (62%). Closely related to those findings was the question of what was the most influential factor in a lay ecclesial minister choosing to pursue church ministry: 54.2% responded that the most influential factor was that it was a response to God’s call, and when the top three factors

132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., 141.
134 Ibid., 142.
135 Ibid., 71.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
were included, 69.3% of respondents considered response to God’s call as one of their top reasons.\textsuperscript{138}

Overall the study points most dramatically to the need for more theological foundations in the understanding of lay ecclesial ministry. The reality of lay ecclesial ministry is that it is becoming more complex with each passing year and the need for ministers is increasing. A clearer articulation of key theological concepts, such as vocation, is imperative to the success of lay ecclesial ministry.

**Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Continuing the Conversation**

The extent of the conversation regarding lay ecclesial ministry in the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council has been substantial, and the responses to the series of surveys point to the need to continue to explore important aspects of the issue. In particular, further articulating how lay ecclesial ministers understand their call and how the church recognizes that call will be an important piece of the dialogue. This dissertation hopes to move that aspect of the dialogue forward. To do so, and in light of the brief history offered in this chapter, an understanding of terminology must be offered.

Following the documents of the U.S. bishops in particular, lay ecclesial ministry will be used as a general term that encompasses several possible roles.\textsuperscript{139} The term *lay* refers to the fact that lay ecclesial ministry is a specific and legitimate expression of the general vocation of all laypersons. It includes, and must not ignore, a specific secular

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{139} USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 408.
character. The term *ecclesial* refers to the fact that lay ecclesial ministry takes place in the communion of the church and is in relationship with and under the supervision of the hierarchy. It is not simply an activity that is taken on through a personal, individual initiative.\(^{140}\) Finally, it is *ministry* in that it is a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, and is part of the mission and ministry of Christ within the church and the world.\(^{141}\)

The descriptive model offered in *The State of the Questions* seems to be the most concise way to outline the parameters of lay ecclesial ministry, and its components will be used in further conversation. Each part of the descriptive definition offered corresponds to an aspect of Christian ministry as presented by Thomas O’Meara in *Theology of Ministry*:

> Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to proclaim, serve, and realize the kingdom of God.\(^{142}\)

The descriptive model of *The State of the Questions* incorporates the fact that lay ecclesial ministry flows from the sacraments of initiation and is a response to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It recognizes the unique personalities of each minister and the public, leadership role that the minister assumes, with all of its implications. The descriptive model connects the lay ecclesial minister to the hierarchical

---


\(^{141}\) USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 408.

\(^{142}\) Thomas O’Meara, O.P. *Theology of Ministry* (NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 150.
leadership of the church and also to the communion of all of the People of God, and does so in connection with the church’s mission in the world.

The use of this terminology allows for an appreciation of the diversity of types of lay ecclesial ministers, including those yet to emerge in the church, while narrowing the focus enough to provide common language. In light of the comments in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* regarding the particular expression of ministry in the church offered by vowed religious, the discussion of lay ecclesial ministry in this dissertation will not explore the implications for vowed religious in ecclesial ministry. However, the concluding chapter will offer some points to address in future conversations.

The “new” and “maturing” experience of lay ecclesial ministry continues to be an exciting development in the church, which offers the possibilities of renewed life and vision. The contributions to the church made by the dedication of lay ecclesial ministers have borne great fruit already. As the dialogue continues to further articulate their role, it is done in light of the great gift that lay ecclesial ministers are to the church. There is still a need to dialogue further, however, and tensions in reaction to this experience need to be resolved. To move towards resolution we must identify the points of disagreement and seek ways to bridge divergent views. The next chapter will explore a key issue that underlies much of the tension around lay ecclesial ministry: how communion ecclesiology is best understood.
A half a century ago, Yves Congar argued that any sound development of a theology of the laity must involve more than an adjustment of inherited ecclesiological views. What is required is a reorientation of the whole ecclesiological vision. He wrote that behind any sound and balanced theology of the laity there has to be a total ecclesiology, a whole ecclesiological synthesis wherein the mystery of the church has been given all its dimensions, including fully the ecclesial reality of the laity.\textsuperscript{143} Such a synthesis would also provide a foundation for discussing lay ecclesial ministry within an integrated framework. While the Second Vatican Council was one of the main catalysts for the evolution of lay ecclesial ministry, it did not articulate such a complete ecclesiology.\textsuperscript{144} Instead it offered a renewed priority to the baptismal call of all the faithful to holiness, emphasized the mission of the church in the world, and recovered the notion of the church as an ordered communion.

From the foundations of the Second Vatican Council, however, have grown multiple versions of “communion ecclesiology.” Generally, these versions have four common aspects: a retrieval of a vision of the church presupposed by Christians of the first millennium; an emphasis on spiritual fellowship or communion between human beings and God; an emphasis on visible unity as symbolically realized through shared participation in the Eucharist; and a dynamic interplay between unity and diversity in the

\textsuperscript{143} Congar, xv – xvi.

\textsuperscript{144} Gaillardetz, 26.
church at multiple levels.\textsuperscript{145} Even with those common elements, however, there have been numerous interpretations of what should actually constitute communion ecclesiology. These versions have, in turn, provided frameworks for conversations on the laity, their role in the church and in the world, and ministry. Those conversations generally follow two distinct paths: 1) those who begin with the ordained ministries of presbyter and bishop, and emphasize the relationship of those ministries to Christ, and 2) those who begin with the broader ministry of all the baptized and emphasize that every ministry is based on charisms granted to individuals by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church.\textsuperscript{146} According to Edward Hahnenberg, “one gets the impression that these two conversations are taking place in different classrooms with the doors closed.”\textsuperscript{147}

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze two important understandings of communion ecclesiology that have implications for an understanding of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation. The works of Yves Congar and John Paul II have been pivotal in both the area of communion ecclesiology and the role of the laity. Congar’s insights into the identity of the laity and their role in the church greatly informed the Second Vatican Council, and John Paul II shaped much of the dialogue on the laity and their role in ministry that followed the Council. No understanding of lay ecclesial ministry can be effective without addressing the issues raised by John Paul II, but the insights of Yves Congar can point to interesting possibilities within the parameters of the conversation set by the pope. This chapter will examine their perspectives on communion ecclesiology in

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{145} Doyle, 13.
\textsuperscript{146} Hahnenberg, 40.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
order to provide a foundation for chapter three of this dissertation, which will address the mission of the laity in particular, and chapter four, which will analyze the two paths of understanding ministry presented by Hahnenberg as well as his model of ministry.

This chapter will begin with some historical considerations regarding communion ecclesiology and the Second Vatican Council, and the possibility of multiple, valid understandings of the term. It will then describe the ecclesiological components of Congar and John Paul II using five major categories: the Mystical Body of Christ, the Trinity (with a particular focus on the Holy Spirit), the People of God, the Church and the World, and the Role of the Hierarchy. These five categories represent key concepts that taken on multiple meanings when applied to communion ecclesiology. By clarifying how these authors understood these concepts, one can nuance the usage of the concepts and see where there are points of convergence and difference. The chapter will conclude with a comparison of key aspects of both Congar and John Paul II’s work using Dennis Doyle’s five dimensions of communion ecclesiology. The purpose of this chapter is not to present a singular communion ecclesiology, nor to offer an exhaustive study of the historical and theological development of the concept of communion ecclesiology. Rather, it will analyze two different expressions of communion ecclesiology in a way that will show nuances that will impact an articulation of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation.

\[148\]

Doyle, 16. Doyle uses a variation of these categories to serve as “correctives” for distortions in some communion ecclesiology. Each category points to one of Doyle’s five dimensions of a complete communion ecclesiology.
Ecclesiology and Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council has had a significant and challenging impact on the theological discussions on ecclesiology for the past forty years. As an ecumenical council with a pastoral emphasis, it did not articulate a comprehensive ecclesiology. It instead offered a “mosaic of interpolated clauses” which sought to address the various theological perspectives of its participants. In doing so, the Council allowed for various interpretations in ecclesiology, all of which could point to the documents themselves for support. Within the broad conversation, however, there is consensus on the central concept of communio as the guiding principle of ecclesiology presented in and flowing from the council.

At the opening of the council, Pope John XXIII offered an important insight into the church’s understanding of itself at that time, and his hopes for a different approach in the formation of the documents of the council. In his often quoted speech he pointed to the “prophets of doom” who could only see “ruin and calamity in the present conditions of human society.” The pope suggested that the bishops look at the changes in society as the beginnings of “a new order of things,” and reminded them to be confident in the role of divine Providence in using all things, even “contrary human events” for the good of the church. Joseph Komonchak described this speech as being critical of the


151 Ibid., 70-71.
prevalent attitude of “Catholic catastrophism,” which viewed much of the developments of the Western world from the time of the Enlightenment with great suspicion, and saw this period as encompassing “one long apostasy.”

In light of such a view of the world, the ecclesiology of the church before the council focused on its role in relation to a world that seemed to have repudiated Christ. The focus was primarily institutional, with a strong emphasis on uniformity, authority, and the proper relationship of submission to the hierarchy. Pope John XIII’s call for a different attitude, however, did not mean that the ecclesiological perspectives of the council would come as an entirely new understanding. There were seeds of the more communion-based ecclesiology of Vatican II in the First Vatican Council, though it certainly was not its major emphasis. The years between the councils, with a return to scripture and Patristic sources that would infuse Vatican II, also provided the foundations for the conversations hoped for by Pope John.

The documents of the council did not set out to articulate a complete ecclesiology. Aspects of the understanding of church throughout the documents reflect the ongoing tensions between the council participants. The pastoral nature of the council, along with the use of the hermeneutical principle of not ending debate in ongoing questions, allowed for compromise in the development of the documents. Even with those tensions, the concept of church as communion would rise to the forefront in the understanding of the church in post-conciliar discussion. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, convened in

---

152 Ibid., 71.
153 Anton, 423.
celebration of the twentieth anniversary of Vatican II, described communion as a central and fundamental idea in the documents.\textsuperscript{154}

It is not only the use of the term “communion” that points to ecclesiological perspectives in the documents, but also changes that were made in the creation and ordering of the documents themselves. One such example is the insertion in \textit{Lumen Gentium} of chapter two on the People of God before chapter three on the Church as Hierarchy.\textsuperscript{155} The word “communion” does appear throughout the documents of the Second Vatican Council, however it is used in a number of different contexts. To understand the various uses of “communion” in the documents, Dennis Doyle’s categories of divine, mystical, sacramental, historical and social are useful. The categories will be used again in the final section of this chapter to synthesize the work of Congar and John Paul II.

Doyle described the use of the term communion in the documents as “divine” when they focus on the love of God and the mystery of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Lumen Gentium} placed the concept of love and the mystery of the Trinity as the starting point for the understanding of the church, with the church being founded on a dynamic relationship of love which bonds the followers of Christ into the Trinitarian love of the Father and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{157} Communion is “mystical” when it embraces certain iconic symbols and images


\textsuperscript{155} Anton, 413.

\textsuperscript{156} Doyle, 74.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
drawn from scripture, the primary one being the Mystical Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{158}

Participation in the Mystical Body transcends the temporal to include the Communion of Saints, described in chapter seven of \textit{Lumen Gentium}, and Mary, described in chapter eight.\textsuperscript{159} The Second Vatican Council’s understanding of communion as “sacramental” is found in the first chapter of \textit{Lumen Gentium}, where the church is explicitly called “the sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all men.”\textsuperscript{160} Such communion finds expression in the relationships between local churches and dioceses and the universal church, and the renewed understanding of collegiality between bishops with each other and between bishops and the pope.

In its use of the concept of church as the “People of God” and the image of the church as a pilgrim people, Doyle described the Council documents as using a “historical” understanding of communion. In addition to chapter two in \textit{Lumen Gentium}, which speaks directly of these images, Doyle also points to \textit{Unitatis redintegratio} as a pivotal document in the council’s understanding of communion, which strives for the cultivation of ecumenical relationships.\textsuperscript{161} Finally, Doyle found a “social” dimension in the documents in the call to solidarity with all people in the world found in \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, and the fundamental dignity of all people and their right to religious expression found in \textit{Dignitatis Humanae}.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} LG no. 1.
\textsuperscript{161} Doyle, 75.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
The complexity of the use of the term “communion” in the documents themselves, alongside the diversity of uses in post-conciliar discussions, created continuing tensions in the use of the term in ecclesiology. The Extraordinary Synod acknowledged that the implementation of the Council was not without difficulties and even some failures.\(^1\) However, even with the tensions found in implementation, the dynamic unfolding of understanding offers insight and direction for the future church. In an effort to understand some of that potential, the next sections will explore the areas of communion as addressed by Congar and John Paul II. Each theologian will be addressed separately, then discussed in light of the five dimensions of “communion” presented in this section.

**Congar and The Mystical Body of Christ**

Fr. Yves Congar was a pivotal figure in the notion of resourcement, or the return to Scripture and the early Church Fathers as sources of renewal, which permeated the Second Vatican Council. Through his biblical studies, particularly his Pauline work, and his Thomistic focus, Congar championed the position that the Mystical Body of Christ was the best image of the church to guide a new understanding.\(^2\) For Congar, the Mystical Body is the church as a communion of grace, centered on the love of God.\(^3\) It is founded on the love of the Trinitarian God, and embraces all those who turn their lives over to live the life of Christ. Christians enter into a new life, “regenerated” by the grace

---

\(^1\) Rynne, 113.

\(^2\) Doyle, 39.

offered through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Congar described this relationship as being more than a moral expression of union with Christ or a certain sense of fidelity to his “inspiration.” It is instead participation in and acceptance of the actual life of Christ.

Through the acceptance of this new life, Christians come to lead their lives together on Christ’s account and see the world through the eyes of faith. This understanding connects the world to a way of being, a life that extends beyond the realm of human point of view to the reconciling grace made possible in Christ. Congar described the Mystical Body as a “re-creation of humanity in Christ, a re-creation of humanity to the image of God.” The love of God is transplanted and engrafted in the heart of humanity, conforming those open to transformation to God’s own “creative intentions.” Through a life of charity, lived out in ordinary expressions, Christians participate in bringing forth the kingdom of God. Congar recognized that the nature of charity itself is not only union with God, then, but also communion with others. Those who are united with Christ, who live their lives on Christ’s account, live together as His Body. Congar wrote, “Charity makes Christ live in us and unites us, one to the other, all together, in God.”

---


167 Ibid.

168 Ibid., 122.

169 Ibid., 123.

170 Ibid., 126.

171 Ibid., 128.
The mystery of union with Christ is consecrated in the sacraments. Through the sacraments Christians are nourished in their faith and brought into relationship with Christ. Congar wrote:

The Mystical Body itself is not a reality in all respects spiritual, invisible and inapprehensible to sense. It is brought into being in intimate and organic connection with a visible Church, something institutional and social in character. The ‘sacrament’ is the point where the two aspects meet and unite, the category wherein is expressed the necessary conjunction of the Mystical Body and the visible Church.  

In baptism, Christians are incorporated in Christ and become members of the church. The dual aspects of communion with God and with God’s people are evident in baptism. The life in Christ lived out in Christ’s community is deepened through the celebration and reception of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christians not only participate in the redemptive mystery of the cross, but also in the unity of the Mystical Body.  

In the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, the Christian realizes that it is impossible to communicate with God in total isolation from others. Christians can communicate in the body of Christ, the assembly, only by communicating at the same time in unity with His Mystical Body, celebrated in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist that unites Christians to all those who share in His redemption.

In discussing sacraments, particularly baptism, Congar refers to membership in the church and specifically identifies membership in the Catholic Church. However,

---

172 Ibid., 130.
173 Ibid., 132.
174 Ibid., 134.
Congar does not equate the Mystical Body of Christ exclusively with the Catholic Church. The theology of the church as the Mystical Body had been revitalized in the early twentieth century prior to Congar’s writings. Pope Pius XII embraced the image in his encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ, *Mystici Corporis Christi*. In the encyclical Pope Pius restored the understanding of body in light of St. Paul’s understanding of a differentiated social organism. However, the encyclical also set the foundation for a firm identification between the mystical body and the Roman Catholic Church, and participation in the body of Christ as membership in the Catholic Church. Congar resisted such a notion and celebrated the acceptance of the approach in *Lumen Gentium*. The document offered continuity with Pope Pius’ encyclical in that it stated the Catholic Church subsists in the Mystical Body of Christ, and that there is no opposition between the mystical body of Christ and the visible, hierarchical church. However, *Lumen Gentium* followed Congar’s understanding that described a mystical identification of each Christian with the body of Christ, accomplished by the action that Christ exercises on persons in baptism and the Eucharist.

**Congar, Trinity and the Holy Spirit**

Congar’s understanding of the church as the Mystical Body of Christ, as noted above, is founded on the love of the Trinitarian God. In his work, *Divided Christendom*, Congar described the church as an extension of the divine life, a unity in plurality. The

---

175 MacDonald, 231.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., 232.

life and love that is communicated within the Trinity is extended to humanity, so that humanity may in turn participate in the purpose of God.\textsuperscript{179} The Holy Spirit takes on a particular role as the one who unifies humanity, a role that evolved in Congar’s thought over the course of his life.

Early in his writing Congar introduced the distinction in the church between “structure” and “life,” with those aspects which relate to the changeless holiness of Christ and institution (the deposit of faith, the sacraments, the roles of priest, prophet and king) being connected to “structure” and the living out of that structure in the historical and communal sense, in a way dependent on the work of the Spirit, connected to “life.”\textsuperscript{180} The Spirit was with Jesus during His ministry on earth and was given at Pentecost to “quicken” the work of redemption until it comes to completion in the second coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{181} The Spirit acts in the whole of the community and in each individual, offering charisms, which are oriented toward the eschatological purpose of the church. For Congar, the Spirit is the “co-institutor” of the church, who, along with the Son offers a complementary unfolding of divine action. This understanding, while keeping the dialectic of structure and life, is a more fluid, less rigid distinction.\textsuperscript{182} The Spirit takes on a mission that, while never separate from or in contradiction to the work of Christ, is also particular to the Spirit. The work of the Spirit

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[179]{MacDonald, 210.}
\footnotetext[180]{MacDonald uses the dialectic between structure and life as the framework for his analysis on Congar’s ecclesiology, although in a letter from Fr. Congar published in the foreword of MacDonald’s work Congar cautions that he did not intend the dialectic as anything but an occasional tool for clarification. (see MacDonald, xxii-xxiii).}
\footnotetext[181]{Ibid., 214.}
\footnotetext[182]{Nichols, 155.}
\end{footnotes}
enters into the ongoing reform of the church itself so that it might more fully engage in
the work of Christ. 183

In his work I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Congar described the Spirit as eternally
“giveable” and as a “Gift” which unites us to God and to each other in a seal of unity,
becoming in that sense the principle of the church’s unity. 184 However, there is plurality
in that unity as well. Each person, as created in the image of God, reflects the Trinitarian
life of the divine and, as such, is open to others. By entering into communion with others,
as well as with God, each person opens themselves up to a deeper understanding of their
own true selves. The church is in this way a communion of persons who reflect, through
imperfectly, the love and life of the Trinitarian God. 185

The issue of unity and plurality are of particular importance to Congar in light of
the ecumenical emphasis that pervaded his whole life. In an interview in 1987 with
Bernard Lauret Congar described ecumenism as his vocation. 186 His vocation began early
in his life, with childhood friends who were both Jewish and Protestant. Congar’s later
studies in Belgium and the ecumenical interests of his master, Marie-Dominique Chenu,
strengthened Congar’s own perspectives, as did the work on his thesis on the unity of the
church as understood by Johann Adam Mohler. Congar continued to encounter men and
women of other faiths and their understanding of the Roman Catholic Church throughout
his early ministry, including a time during the Second World War when Congar was a

183 Congar, The Mystery of the Church, 180.
184 Nichols, 151.
185 MacDonald, 213.
186 Yves Conger, Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar, ed. Bernard
prisoner of war in Colditz. This regular and personal contact had a life long impact on him.

In *Divided Christendom*, Congar’s early work on ecumenism and Christian unity, Congar described three reasons for the ongoing separation of Christian communities: the sheer length of time that the communities have been apart; the development in their institutional forms, devotional lives, and theological thought during that time; and a certain hardening within the communities in their development. In light of such realities, the unity and diversity of the Holy Spirit is most likely an eschatological one. However, Christians are called to participate in the work of the Spirit in the in-between time, began by Christ and reaching fulfillment upon his return, “if only to prepare ourselves to be God’s instruments on the day when He is pleased to have mercy on us.” Congar later resonated with the work of *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which speak of the Roman Catholic Church as not being identical with the Church of Christ (though the Church of Christ subsists in it), and that there are numerous elements of “sanctification and truth” in the reality of the Church of Christ which can be found in other churches and communities which orient them towards Christian unity. The gift of the Holy Spirit in the context of ecclesial communion ties together the church through this in-between time in such a way that even the divisions between churches can move toward the greater hope in the final completion of the Kingdom.

---

187 Nichols, 3 - 5.

188 Nichols refers to Congar’s use of “Tridentinism” to describe this phenomenon in the Catholic Church, as term Congar used in the later interviews with Bernard Lauret in relation to the pre-conciliar Church.


190 See *Lumen Gentium* no. 15, and *Unitatis Redintegratio* no. 4.
Congar and the Image of the Church as the People of God

It is appropriate that a discussion of Congar’s use of the image of the People of God in his understanding of church occurs after the sections on the Mystical Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit, for as strongly as Congar embraced the image of the People of God, it is an image for him that only makes sense within the context of the other concepts. The image itself is a corrective to a purely juridical understanding of the church that overstressed the role of the law and structure. The image of the People of God emphasizes the connection of the church with the people of Israel, and in using it Congar understood the church to be a part of a wider salvation history which links creation, the covenant with Israel, and fulfillment of the messianic promise which will come to completion in the end times.

As part of the ongoing history of the salvific action of God with the chosen people of Israel, the church can be seen as participating in the same values that imbue the biblical notion. There is a fundamental equality in the People of God founded on the membership itself, a response to a call from God, which is in turn lived out through a communal life of service. As a people elected by God there is a special obligation to be a living testament to the glory of God to the other peoples of the world. There is a covenant relationship that exists between God and God’s people, which propels the chosen people forward through history as a collective part of God’s plan for all of creation. The church as the People of God embraces the role of servant and witness in the world, a collective of the converted who embody the equality made possible through baptism as well as the distinction of roles seen in the priestly, prophetic and kingly

---

aspects of the Israelite structure.\textsuperscript{192} As a people, the church continues the mission of the covenant, made new in Christ, and becomes a sign of that salvation.\textsuperscript{193} This sign is present at all levels of communion, from the universal church to a diocesan or parish church, or even to smaller communities of the faithful.\textsuperscript{194}

It is not enough, however, to simply pull the church back into the biblical notion of the People of God. While a key image of the church, it is not a complete image. To emphasize the biblical notion seemed to Congar to overshadow the “already” aspect of the church, i.e. that which is associated with the kingdom of God being currently present, with the “not yet” of it, i.e. that which is yet to be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{195} While the image connects with the covenant of the Old Testament, it does not acknowledge the new Christological reality that extends beyond a promise of the messiah to the actual incarnation of God. Membership in the People of God means participation in the Body of Christ, the fulfillment of the promise in a new and distinctive way. Christians who are the People of God are also made heirs to the kingdom through the redemptive act of Christ.

In the promise of the Old Testament, God would dwell with His people and make his home in their midst. However, with the new reality brought forth in the incarnation and the resurrection, there is an indwelling made possible in each disciple and indeed in the life of the church that is made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{196} The participation made possible in the old dispensation through the election by God and the

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{194} Congar, \textit{The Mystery of the Church}, 29.

\textsuperscript{195} Nichols, 57.

\textsuperscript{196} MacDonald, 238.
covenant with Israel are, in the new dispensation, an actual sharing in the life of the divine through the communication of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{197} Through the death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, the church as the People of God is given its “soul.”

For Congar the Holy Spirit can be understood as the “soul” of the church in two aspects, as the animating soul and the indwelling soul. As the animating soul, the Holy Spirit serves as “the source of all of the activities concerning or aiming at holiness and salvation, activities particular to the church and to the individual Christians.”\textsuperscript{198} In this sense the Holy Spirit is the font of all prayer, all love, and all virtues in the individual as well as the source for those who guide and sustain the Body of Christ. As the indwelling soul, the Holy Spirit not only acts in the church but also dwells in it, a dwelling made possible through Christ.\textsuperscript{199} Congar noted that there are limits to the understanding of the Holy Spirit as the “soul” of the church. Unlike humans, whose souls and bodies make up a physical and substantial whole, the Holy Spirit does not do the same in the Body of Christ. Congar described it instead as “a matter of a union between two realities, the Spirit and the Church, each having its own subsistence – a kind of marriage as if between two persons. In Scripture, the description of the Church as the Body of Christ is completed and, in a sense, corrected by its being also spoken of as the Bride of Christ.”\textsuperscript{200}

The church as the People of God as understood by Congar offers a rich image, which balances other prevalent images of the pre-conciliar church. As a church that is

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{198} Congar, \textit{The Mystery of the Church}, 34.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
comprised of humans, in the life – pole of Congar’s dialectic, it is holy yet susceptible to sin and failure. Yet, it is also a people who are engaged in the dynamic life of the Trinity and who are vivified continuously by the Holy Spirit.\footnote{MacDonald, 239.}

**Congar and the Church - World Relationship**

The relationship between the church and the world for Congar added the tangible expression of the church’s mission to the dimensions of ecclesiology. For Congar, the church’s involvement in the world is both theological and Christological.\footnote{Kenneth Untener, *The Church-World Relationship According to the Writings of Yves Congar, O.P.*, Dissertation excerpt (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1976), 16.} The church participates in God’s plan of creation and history of salvation, and does so under the absolute sovereignty of Christ. There is an underlying tension with which the church and its members must struggle in that all are called to be both in the world and not of it. It is impossible for the church to exist in a “pure state,” somehow outside the realm of history, for it is set in a “human matrix.”\footnote{Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 10.} Indeed, to fulfill its mission the church must be in the world as Christ was in the world. The church cannot fulfill its purpose if it is somehow external to the world, speaking the Good News from a distance. While appropriately distinct from the world, Congar described the church as ordered by its very essence toward the world.\footnote{Untener, 21.}

Congar referred to the church as being more than just the inn, found in the scriptural passage on the Good Samaritan, open to healing the injured when they...
are brought to it, but should instead be the Good Samaritan, on the road and actively picking up the injured on the journey.\footnote{Ibid.}

Yet while the church is in the world it also is not of it. Again to fulfill its mission the church must be with the world in view of Jesus Christ.\footnote{Ibid., 23.} The world has a destiny in which the church must take a particular role, which cannot be reduced only to participation in the world. There are also aspects of the world that are sinful, and those must actively and resoundingly be rejected. It is not rejection simply for the sake of rejection or derived from some sense of superiority. It is a refusal seen as a requirement of the “two fold loyalty, towards God, and towards the world,” which is owed “a duty of love and of service through love.”\footnote{Congar, \textit{Lay People in the Church}, 240.}

This sense of love and service is founded on a fundamental sense of respect for the world and its autonomy. The images both of the church as Good Samaritan and the reality that the church must in a certain sense reject the world can lead to a mistaken impression that somehow the church is only in relationship with the world as healer. However, Congar described the relationship as one of dialogue in which the distinct nature of the world, understood as creation and not simply as the State or the political sphere, takes on a role in growth of the church as well. The church is not a puppet, blindly yet infallibly acting in the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus encountered “external stimuli” that informed that his growth as a human, so too must the church fully encounter the conditions of its own historicity in order to grow and
live fully.\textsuperscript{208} This dialogue with the world, then, is not simply a one sided reality but must instead be understood as essential both for the world and for the church that both might fulfill their ultimate destiny.

The tendency on the part of some members of the church, clergy and monks in particular, to view the world simply as a means to a supernatural end, is balanced for Congar in the work of the layperson in the secular realm.\textsuperscript{209} Lay people do God’s work in so far as it must be done in and through the work of the world.\textsuperscript{210} Through their own particular work, laypeople participate in the “christofinalization” of the world; that is, the work of humanizing the temporal in light of the Christian understanding of true humanity revealed in Christ.\textsuperscript{211} The work of the layperson, done in charity and as part of the People of God, is transformative in its own way. Through ordinary actions done with great love, the layperson brings about the kingdom of God. The growth in holiness on the part of the individual is shared with the whole of the Mystical Body, so that “the whole body benefits from the advance of each.”\textsuperscript{212}

This is not to say that laypeople somehow have a separate mission from clergy. All are a part of the People of God, and all participate in the mission, though in different ways. Congar was influential in the Second Vatican Council in setting forth the understanding that laypeople share in the threefold priestly, royal and prophetic office of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{208} Untener, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Congar, \textit{Lay People in the Church}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Untener, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Congar, \textit{The Mystery of the Church}, 127.
\end{itemize}
In Jesus the messianic hope of Israel was fulfilled, with Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, the anointed Messiah, and the full revelation of God. Through their baptism and the Eucharist, all of the faithful have a real priestly quality in that they are incorporated in Christ, the one high priest. Laypeople share in the kingly office primarily through their consent to actions and decisions within the church-body, which Congar describes as necessary and not simply a matter of formality. Finally, laypeople share in the prophetic office in their profession of faith and transmission of the Good News.

Through his understanding of salvation history, eschatology and the unity of the past, present and future of the church and world, Congar presented an understanding of that relationship which both respected their respective autonomy and expressed their interrelationship. Within that interrelationship the role of the People of God in general, and of the layperson in particular, finds its unique gift in the process of building the kingdom of God.

**Congar and the Role of the Hierarchy**

Congar placed the role of the hierarchy within the larger context of the church as the People of God. Even early in his career Congar resisted the view of the church as a “hierarchology,” juridical and authoritarian in nature emphasizing the church as an

---

213 Nichols, 73.
214 Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 151.
215 Ibid., 269.
216 MacDonald, 188-189.
“unequal society” divided along lines of ordination and power.\textsuperscript{217} Though his understanding developed over the course of his career, Congar’s starting point of the church as Mystical Body of Christ and the People of God, as well as his understanding that all members of the church share in the threefold office of Christ, profoundly changed the understanding of the hierarchy in Catholic theology. This is not to say that Congar did not believe that Christ willed a structured community, but the structure began within the context of community.\textsuperscript{218}

As was noted in the section related to the laity, Christ is the one true priest. Through baptism and participation in the Eucharist, all members of the faithful share in the life of Christ. Some members of the People of God, however, for the benefit of the church, have a sacramental ministry to which they are consecrated and through which they receive a third participation in the priesthood of Christ.\textsuperscript{219} Again, this differentiation is not seen as then having a separate mission that is distinct from the laity, a point that Congar would later explicitly clarify. All the faithful share in the mission that began with the Twelve, who served as the seeds of the whole church, not only the hierarchy.\textsuperscript{220}

The hierarchy itself, according to Congar, is meant to ensure “in the visible order in which we live and where the Body of Christ is to be realized, that all comes from the one single event of the Incarnation and the Pasch of Christ.”\textsuperscript{221} Through a unity in the


\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 206.

\textsuperscript{219} Congar, \textit{The Lay People in the Church}, 151.

\textsuperscript{220} McBrien, 207.

\textsuperscript{221} Congar, \textit{The Mystery of the Church}, 159.
Holy Spirit, the hierarchy is a visible sign of God’s promise. Congar’s emphasis on the hierarchy in its connection to the unchangeable, divine “structure pole” could be misinterpreted as fully equating the institutional hierarchy with the infallible Christ and leaving no room for the reality of sin in the hierarchy. However, Congar’s own work on reform and the ongoing role of the world in the growth of the church offered a balance to his hierarchical perspective.

Within the context of the hierarchy and communion Congar pointed to the importance of collegiality, a notion that would also be incorporated in the Second Vatican Council, although without the actual use of the term. Congar understood collegiality in light of the primacy of the pope, in effect pointing to the continuity between the First and the Second Vatican Councils. The foundation for collegiality in the church is, as one would expect, the Holy Spirit, which, as part of the Trinitarian God, exemplifies unity and diversity. This same unity and diversity is made manifest in the charisms given to the church at all levels, which are then called to communicate with one another in unity. The episcopal collegiality is understood within that framework, with the pope and the college of bishops “harmonizing” the powers that they possess and exercise at the service of Christ.

Through his lifetime of writings, Yves Congar offered a depth of understanding of the various aspects of communion. Much of his thought was reflected in the Council documents. However, his thought did evolve over time, particularly in relation to his understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and to the shared apostolic mission of all of

\[222\] MacDonald, 251.

\[223\] Ibid.
the faithful. John Paul II also was an influential participant in the Second Vatican Council, and he too embraced communion as an important concept in the understanding of church. While the two men share some understandings of aspects of communion, John Paul II also had his own particular emphases that continue to impact the church today.

**John Paul II and the Mystical Body of Christ**

The image of the church as the Mystical Body of Christ takes on a particular significance for John Paul II throughout the course of his ministry and writing. It was he who co-authored an intervention at Vatican II insisting that the “Mystical Body of Christ is more than an image, for it is a determining aspect of the church’s very nature under its Christological aspect and likewise under the aspect of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.”

The church is not simply a society of members who gather together for a common cause, as with other human associations. Writing in *Sources of Renewal*, while still Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II described the church as the *communio* of Christians who share a common and reciprocal membership in the Mystical Body. Later, in his first encyclical, John Paul II would emphasize that each person is united in Christ; that is, each person is united with Christ by receiving the breath of life that comes from Christ, and each person comes together in union with others in Christ through the union of the church. In his understanding of the church as Mystical Body of Christ,

---


226 *Redemptor Hominis* no. 18.1 – 18.2.
John Paul II brings together his “dynamic personalism” and his Christocentric focus.227 The human person, the acting one who lives out relationships with the divine and with others, does so in communion made possible through the redemptive action of Christ opened to the whole world and continued in the action of the church.

The church is not only institution, but also mystical in its bonds, both vertical and horizontal. It was founded and is maintained by Christ and by the “reality of redemption, which abides and constantly renews itself in the church.”228 The reality of redemption continues permanently in the church and is lived out in the world. This consciousness of redemption is carried in the whole community, and serves as a necessary precedent to the understanding of the church as the People of God, though that image also is of special importance when properly held in connection to the Body of Christ.

There is a nuance in John Paul II’s Christocentric understanding of the church that is carried throughout his writings in his particular devotion to and understanding of the role of Mary in regard to the church. In his encyclical Redemptoris Mater John Paul II expounded on the special role of Mary in relation to Christ and His redemptive action through the church. Mary’s place in salvation history, as can be seen in the title of the encyclical, is as the Mother of the Redeemer. Through her divine motherhood and her willingness to say, “yes” to God, Mary became the first of “those to hear the word of God and do it.”229 Early in Jesus’ ministry Mary interceded on behalf of the couple at Cana, offering the first indications of her role of acting “on behalf” of those in need.230

---

227 Dulles, 44.
228 Ibid., 86.
229 Redemptoris Mater no. 20.7.
230 Ibid., no. 21.2.
Paul II then extends that mediation and motherhood to all of humanity through the experience of Christ’s Paschal Mystery. Through her divine motherhood Mary shares in a unique way in the redemption of Christ. It is always to be understood as subordinate to Christ, because it is dependent upon Christ.\textsuperscript{231} However, it is also unique and extraordinary, based on her fullness of grace and her willingness to be the handmaid of the Lord.

Mary’s divine motherhood finds a new continuation for John Paul II in her motherhood of the church, both in its infancy after the crucifixion and in its ongoing mission of participating in the redemption of the world through Christ. John Paul II referred to Paul VI’s address at the closing of the third session of Vatican II when he proclaimed Mary as “the Mother of the Church,” as well as a later address when Paul VI spoke of Mary as the one who “carries on in heaven her maternal role with regard to the members of Christ, cooperating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed.”\textsuperscript{232} John Paul II fully agreed with Paul VI in this understanding and expanded upon it, describing Mary as being present in the church both as the Mother of Christ and as the mother whom Christ gave at the cross to all of humanity. Mary received her new motherhood in the Spirit, and as such became united with each and every person in the church, and embraces each and every person through the church.\textsuperscript{233} Her work is not yet complete either. For just as the redemptive work of Christ continues,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} Ibid., no. 38.3.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Ibid., no. 47.1.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid., no. 47.2..
\end{itemize}
so too does Mary’s work in the eschatological fulfillment promised by Christ. John Paul II pointed to scripture and identified Mary as:

…that ‘woman’ who, from the first chapters of the Book of Genesis until the Book of Revelation, accompanies the revelation of God’s salvific plan for humanity. For Mary, present in the Church as the Mother of the Redeemer, takes part as a mother, in the ‘monumental struggle against the powers of darkness’ which continues throughout human history.  

Mary is more than the example par excellence of Christianity for John Paul II. In her role as the Mother of the Redeemer she takes on a position that ties Mariology with Christology and ecclesiology. She shares in the mediation offered through Christ, and through her ongoing mediation and unity with all of humanity she can be understood as the Mother of the Body of Christ.

**John Paul II, Trinity, and the Holy Spirit**

It is through communion with Jesus that Christians are able to share in the divine life of communion of the Trinity. In his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* John Paul II described the communion between the Father, Son and Spirit as the model and source of the unity between Christians and Christ, and that unity with Christ is the means to achieving the communion of the Triune God. He wrote that “united to the Son in the Spirit’s bond of love, Christians are united with the Father.” Using the passage from John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” John Paul II expressed the union

---

234 Ibid., no.47.3.
235 Dulles, 42.
236 *Christifideles Laici* no. 18.
between all Christians and Christ. All Christians are the branches of the single vine, Christ Himself, and as such reflect the intimate life of love in God.\textsuperscript{237} This unity is at the heart of the mystery of the church.

The Holy Spirit, the giver of life, serves as the source of the unity between humanity and God, made possible through Christ, and as the source of unity between all people, as well as the vital guide to the ongoing mission of the church. In \textit{Dominum et Vivificantem}, John Paul II identified the role of the Holy Spirit in continuing in the world, through the church, the work of Christ.\textsuperscript{238} As the promised Counselor, the Holy Spirit was sent not only as inspiration for those who are called to spread the Good News, but also as the One who ensures that the truth of the message offered in the church throughout history is the same truth that was heard by the apostles from their Master.\textsuperscript{239} The Holy Spirit acts as the one, the Person – Gift, who fulfills the mission of the Son, and who draws from the Son the fulfillment of its own mission. John Paul II referred to Ephesians 2:18 when he described how at the moment of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent definitively to sanctify the church, so that “believers might have access to the Father, through Christ in one Spirit.”\textsuperscript{240} The reality of the Triune communion can be understood by the believer through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which can then in turn offer a new insight for humanity. As those who are created in the image of the Triune God and redeemed through the Son, humans can discover the intimate truth that all are to live out that same communion with one another. As beings created by a God who is in full

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Dominum et Vivificantem} no. 3.2.

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., no. 4.

\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., no. 25.1.
communion in God’s own self, humans are called to see their own dignity and the dignity of all of those created by God, and to live in communion with each other.\(^{241}\) The communion between the Christian and the Triune God, made possible in the Spirit, and the Christian with others, is then lived out through the particular mission of the church, born on Pentecost and sustained by that same Spirit.

The Holy Spirit enables the church to be a sign and instrument of communion with God, and a sacrament, in an analogous sense, of the presence and action of the Spirit Itself.\(^{242}\) As a sacrament, the church lives in union with Jesus through the power of the Spirit and communicates that union with the world and all of humanity. The church strives to restore and strengthen the roots of humanity in its relationship with its Creator. The church does so in its analogous sense as sacrament, but also through the celebration of the individual sacraments. In the individual sacraments, John Paul II described the church as the visible dispenser of the “sacred signs” which signify and give life.\(^{243}\) The Holy Spirit acts in them as the invisible dispenser of the life the sacraments signify, and together with the Spirit, Christ is present and acting in the world.\(^{244}\)

John Paul II described the most complete sacrament as the Eucharist, which fully realizes the communion made possible through Christ. The Holy Spirit works through the Eucharist to accomplish this communion through the “strengthening of the inner man.”\(^{245}\) Through the inner strength of the Holy Spirit, the communion as a whole is

\(^{241}\) Ibid., no. 59.1.

\(^{242}\) Ibid., no. 64.2.

\(^{243}\) Ibid., no. 63.3.

\(^{244}\) Ibid.

\(^{245}\) Ibid., no. 62.1.
strengthened for mission. The union made possible with all believers then in turn strengthens the church as a sign and instrument to the world. John Paul II connected the union in the Eucharist with the unity of all Christians, for without a common Eucharistic celebration, full communion is not possible.\textsuperscript{246}

The ecumenical thrust of John Paul II was evident throughout his papacy. It was rooted in the Second Vatican Council’s call for Christian unity and in Christ’s desire seen in Jn 17:20, that “\textit{they may all be one.}” John Paul II dedicated his encyclical \textit{Ut Unum Sint} to the topic in 1995. John Paul II acknowledged the painful past of discord and disunity between Christians, as well as his own commitment to Christian unity, and his desire to encourage every “suitable initiative aimed at making the witness of the entire Catholic community understood in its full purity and consistency.”\textsuperscript{247} Through personal and communal conversion, dialogue and prayer, John Paul II encouraged the ongoing pilgrimage toward Christian unity. However, he always placed such unity within the context of the truth, which cannot be compromised or suppressed, even for the good of unity. John Paul II wrote that such a “being together,” done through a suppression of certain doctrines or truths, would in fact be opposed to the true unity found in God.\textsuperscript{248}

The importance of such an expression of unity served as the conclusion of John Paul II’s encyclical when he quotes from 2 Corinthians 13:13: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”


\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Ut Unum Sint} no. 3.3.

\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., no. 18.
John Paul II and the Image of the Church as the People of God

In keeping with his intervention at Vatican II, John Paul II placed great weight on the understanding of the church as the People of God, understood in relation to the church as the Mystical Body of Christ. Writing as Cardinal Wojtyla in *Sources of Renewal*, John Paul II recognized that *Lumen Gentium* gave a place of prominence to the image of the People of God. John Paul II went on to stress, however, that “in the Council’s teaching as a whole we find sufficient reason to affirm that the People of God is also the Mystical Body of Christ,” and that the consciousness of redemption made manifest in the Mystical Body of Christ is “logically prior to the consciousness of the People of God.”\(^{249}\) The salvific action of Christ is the foundation and reason for the consciousness of the People of God. While giving a primacy to the church as Mystical Body of Christ, John Paul II also said that the two images together provide a balance for each other. An understanding of the church solely as Body of Christ might neglect the very human subjects who comprise the church, and an understanding of the church solely as the People of God might reduce the church to a human association with little eschatological role.\(^{250}\) As members of the Body of Christ, the People of God share in the threefold offices of Christ, which in turn give the People of God a share in that redemptive mission.

The share in that redemptive mission connects the People of God with the history of salvation and the chosen people of Israel. The covenantal relationship between God and Israel established a “quasi-familial” relationship, which is intensified in the new

\(^{249}\) Wojtyla, 90-91.

\(^{250}\) Ibid., 91.
covenant through Christ.\textsuperscript{251} The image of the church as the household of the Lord complemented John Paul II’s emphasis on the importance of recognizing the individual members of the People of God and their distinctive, unique relationships.\textsuperscript{252} The love that binds the individual members of a family together is the same love, in the person of the Holy Spirit, which binds together the members of the church with each other and with the Triune God. The self-gift of the Spirit calls each person to his or her own particular vocation within the context of the People of God. It is that call, as a person in community, which for John Paul II constituted the foundation of the People of God.\textsuperscript{253} Each believer is called to holiness in his or her own unique way, and that call is placed at the service of the Lord in His mission in the world. It is in that role, in connection with the prophetic mission of Christ, that the whole People of God live in service. Through love and charity, all Christians serve divine truth in the church. The church as such bears a certain responsibility for serving the truth and faithfully seeking it out.\textsuperscript{254} The exact nature of the individual’s responsibility for the truth depends upon how that person fits within the structured community of the People of God. There is a true and complete equality within that structure which is based upon the inherent dignity of each person as made in the image of God. However, certain members of the People of God take on specific responsibilities. Those responsibilities will be discussed further in the section on John Paul II’s understanding of the hierarchy.

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{251} Avery Dulles, “The Ecclesiology of John Paul II,” \textit{Origins} 28 (April 22, 1999): 749.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{253} Wojtyla, 114.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Redemptor Hominis} no.19.2.}
\end{footnotesize}
Within the context of the discussion of the People of God and John Paul II’s understanding of the universal call to holiness lies another emphasis as reflected in his understanding of the communion of saints. The history of salvation is the history of all of the People of God who, throughout time, have lived out that reality in specific and ever new ways. John Paul II described holiness as the fundamental basis on which the community of the People of God rests. In the lives of the saints John Paul II finds the examples of the fullness of the union of the People of God with the mystery of the Body of Christ. The communion of saints ties together the historical lives of those who have come before and lived out their unrepeatable vocations in union with God’s desire for them with those in the present historical moment. As such they serve to show how all Christians are called to respond to God’s free gift of love with a reciprocal response of self-gift towards all of humanity. The actions of the saints connect the history of their lives with the eschatological destiny of all of humanity. Through their “yes” to God in using their particular gifts for the building of the kingdom, the saints draw all of humanity further toward their own fulfillment. John Paul II saw that most especially in the lives of those who followed self-giving to the point of martyrdom, completely following in the self-gift of Christ until the end. That universal call to holiness is also the primary inspiration of the sanctity of the church, as taught in Lumen Gentium. The consciousness that the saints bring to individuals both historically and eschatologically is

255 Wojtyla, 190.
256 Ibid., 192.
257 Ibid., 197.
one that fills the church as a whole as well, as the People of God in union with the Triune God.

Of course, as noted in the section on the Mystical Body of Christ, Mary takes on the role of the most extraordinary saint. If all saints point to the union between the response to each person’s own vocation and willingness to say “yes” to participating with that vocation for the building of the kingdom, Mary serves as the first and fullest expression of that “yes.” Her fullness of grace, which serves as the foundation for the church in her role as Mother, also serves as the archetype for holiness for all Christians throughout time and indeed until the very end of time and the completion of the redemptive work of Christ.

**John Paul II and the Church - World Relationship**

John Paul II described the world as the vineyard in which the faithful are called to fulfill their mission. In speaking of the Second Vatican Council’s appraisal of the world, John Paul II wrote that, “The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the church’s life and activity in light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the church’s ‘missionary nature,’ basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself.” Evangelization and the ongoing work of the church are led by the Holy Spirit who was invoked by Christ to “convince the world concerning sin” (Jn 16:8) that evil and iniquity might be understood in light of the cross and the

---

258 Ibid., 199.
259 *Christifideles Laici* no.3.
260 *Redemptoris Missio* no. 1.3.
The Spirit serves to lead the “company of believers” to form a community so that the fundamental purposes of mission might be accomplished in bringing people together, sharing the Gospel message, and living in “fraternal communion” in prayer and in the Eucharist. It is not only about going to the far corners of the earth to share the Good News, but also the re-evangelization of those who have lost their way or are Christian in name only.

The methods of evangelization or re-evangelization will change depending on the particular culture in which the message is shared. This process as well seems to be predominately one-sided in nature, with the church transmitting its own values to the culture while at the same time taking the “good elements” which already exist within a particular cultural context and renewing them from within. The process of inculturation impacts the church in that it becomes a more intelligible sign and therefore more effective in its missionary purpose. When speaking of culture, however, John Paul II tends to view the current strains of culture in negative terms. John Paul II, in Evangelium Vitae, outlined the various aspects of the “culture of death” which threaten authentic human development, with concerns over improper understandings of freedom and of the meaning of life itself. It seemed that many of the changes in the modern world are

261 Domine et Vivificantem no. 39.1.
262 Redemptoris Missio no. 26.2.
263 Ibid., no. 33.4.
264 Ibid., no. 52.3.
265 Ibid.
266 Evangelium Vitae no. 18.1 – 22.4.
cause for concern for John Paul II, and all Christians are called to combat those distortions by participating in and bearing witness to the Gospel of Life.

Lay people take on a particular role in the process of evangelization to the world. Through their baptism and participation in the threefold mission of Christ, lay people are called to “restore to creation all its original value.” The laity share in the kingly mission of Christ and are called to “spread that kingdom in history,” especially in spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the “kingdom of sin” and then to share themselves in service to the world. The secular character of the laity is, for John Paul II, an essential understanding as to what is properly and particularly lay about these members of the Body of Christ. The dignity of laypeople comes from baptism, but their secular character distinguishes them from other members of the Body and provides the context for their vocation. The world itself becomes for the lay person “the place and means” for them to fulfill their Christian vocation, because, as John Paul II pointed out, “the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ.” The work of laypeople in the world is not only sociological, but also theological and ecclesiological in that they become in a specific way the salt and light of the earth.

The specific role of work contributed to John Paul II’s thought in this understanding of the layperson in the world. As is seen in the first chapter of Genesis, work for John Paul II was an essential dimension of the human experience on earth. In

---

267 Christifideles Laici no. 14.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid., no. 15.
270 Ibid.
271 Laborem Exercens no. 4.1.
that humanity was given dominion over and responsibility for creation, work enables humanity to participate in the creative action of God. Each human being is called to engage in the creative process, and those who are laypeople in the church engage in that creative process in the spheres of politics, economics, and family life. The individual responsibility for engaging in the creative process joins with the evangelical responsibility of those called to holiness through their baptism and given specific charisms to participate in the ongoing redemptive mission of Christ. As such, in union with the whole church, laypeople sanctify the world from within, becoming a leaven in the world by fulfilling their own particular duties.\textsuperscript{272}

The interrelationship between mission and communion here is key for John Paul II. He described communion and mission as being intimately connected with one another, with each interpenetrating the other and mutually implying each other.\textsuperscript{273} The evangelization that is possible through the activity of laypeople is, for John Paul II, increasingly important in a world that is increasingly complex and global in nature. The role of laity in the world is also particularly important as the cultures of the world seem more separated from the understanding of the divine in creation, and more open to the experience of secularization. Laypeople have the opportunity to penetrate the various spheres of society in a way that is not possible for other members of the church, placing laypeople on the front lines of the new evangelization.

\textsuperscript{272} Christifidelis Laici no. 15.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., no. 32.
John Paul II and the Role of the Hierarchy

As was noted in the section on the image of the church as the People of God, John Paul II understood that there are diverse responsibilities of the various members of the church, as well as diverse relationships within the church. The People of God are presupposed in the hierarchy of the church, which justified for John Paul II the movement of that chapter in Lumen Gentium to precede the chapter on the hierarchy. John Paul II connected the call of the Twelve with the hierarchical structure of the church, not the whole of the People. The hierarchical structure of the church was therefore instituted by Jesus and continues on through the successors of the apostles. Jesus did not only institute the Eucharist at the Last Supper, but also the presbyterate.

The papacy takes on particular meaning within the communion of the church, then, as the successor of Peter, who takes on a special ministry of unity as the servant of the servants of God. In his role, the pope serves as the expression of the unity between all communities of faith and all levels of the hierarchy. He also serves as the servant of unity with those members of other Christian communities who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. John Paul II described the role of the pope as one which reflects the divine mercy, which was shown to Peter himself after his denial of the Lord. However, John Paul II was clear that the actions of mercy and unity could only

274 Dulles, Splendor of Faith, 49.
275 Ibid., 76.
276 Ibid.
277 Ut Unum Sint no. 88.
278 Ibid., no. 92.2.
occur when the pope serves as witness to the truth.\textsuperscript{279} Again, the imperative of the truth cannot allow any member of the People of God to compromise that which is essential to the identity of the church, including the role of apostolic succession. It is by being lovingly faithful to the truth entrusted to him that the pope may serve as a source of unity to all of God’s People.

The pope fulfills this role in communion with all of the bishops throughout the world in collegiality. John Paul II credited collegiality with assisting the church through challenging times, such as those that followed Vatican II and the differences of opinions on how the Council should be implemented. The work of the College of Bishops, “under the guidance of the Successor of Saint Peter,” remained united and a visible sign of continuity.\textsuperscript{280} The practical way in which collegiality is lived out can be a source of difficulty in itself. The balance between collegiality and the primacy of the papacy can be delicate and, for John Paul II, occasionally places the pope in a position where he must make unpopular decisions in light of the call of the pope to bear witness to the truth.

John Paul II also issued a \textit{motu proprio} in 1998 addressing two other concerns of his regarding collegiality, particularly as it related to conferences and regional gatherings of bishops.\textsuperscript{281} John Paul II was concerned that there should be no “national” church that might pose a challenge to the universal communion, or that a regional conference might somehow try to impose its decision upon individual bishops. John Paul II explained in the \textit{motu proprio} that episcopal conferences were primarily for consultation and the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{279} Ibid., no. 94.2.
\item \textsuperscript{280} \textit{Redemptor Hominis} no. 5.1.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Dulles, \textit{Splendor of Faith}, 62.
\end{itemize}
exchange of ideas between bishops, or for coordinating ministerial activities across a territory. Only if all bishops concur on a proposed decision could it potentially assume the force of law. Otherwise, there would need to be confirmation by an official *recognitio* by the Holy See.\(^{282}\) He spoke of this again in Brazil, in an address to the bishops of Brazil, when he stated that episcopal conferences, “rightfully conceived and duly realized,” are important to collegiality, but cannot “clip” or “diminish” or “do away with and replace the personal responsibility which each bishop assumes when…he receives a mission and the charisms necessary for accomplishing it.”\(^{283}\) At the end of his address, John Paul II also made it clear that he found it “superfluous to recall that this communion with the pope is expressed in acceptance of his word.”\(^{284}\) By setting limits on the conferences and connecting them explicitly to the role of the Bishop of Rome, John Paul II centralized the role of the pope as the source of unity in the wider call for collegiality.

A final note on the role of the hierarchy for John Paul II relates to the previous section on the laity and their particular role in the world. John Paul II also spoke of the particular role of the clergy, emphasizing their sacramental character. He cautioned against priests taking on a more secular style, or in becoming overly involved in secular activities. Such activities are the priority of the laity, and should only be done by clergy by way of exception.\(^{285}\) John Paul II also criticized priests who are too engaged in the

\(^{282}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{283}\) *Communion, Participation, Evangelization* no. 6.

\(^{284}\) Ibid., no. 6.10.

political affairs, or too enmeshed in economic policies that seek to advocate for the poor and marginalized. Again in his address to the Brazilian bishops, John Paul II stated that:

Religious should avoid abandoning what constitutes their charism in the church – total consecration to God, to prayer, testimony of a future life, quest for holiness – for political commitments. These are not good for them – since they lose their identity – nor do they serve the church, since it is impoverished through loss of an essential dimension; nor again do they serve the world and society, since they are likewise deprived of an original element that religious life alone could give to rightful pluralism.  

While John Paul II spoke of religious here, and not priests specifically, he was clear that the identity of one who is either religious or ordained should not be compromised through work in the world. Such work is rightfully the place of the laity, whom John Paul II repeatedly emphasized as the primary agents of change in the economic and political sphere.

John Paul II’s contribution to ecclesiology has played a significant role in the conversations on lay ecclesial ministry. His emphasis on truth, structured unity and holiness has focused the conversation in a manner that emphasizes continuity and Christology. Taken with the work of Yves Congar, some of the ongoing tensions between the two “paths” of approach to ministry can be seen, which also have implications for the understanding of the role of laity in ministry. The next section will use Doyle’s five dimensions of communion ecclesiology to point to area of commonality between the two theologians as well as areas that will need a bridge in further dialogue.

---

286 Communion, Participation, Evangelization no. 6.9.
Dimensions of Communion Ecclesiology

Divine

Both Congar and John Paul II spoke of the communion of the Triune God as the foundation for all understandings of communion. The life and love of God serves as the source and purpose of communion that is both vertical and horizontal in nature. It is in the gracious invitation on the part of God that humanity finds the possibility of union and of participation. The triune nature of God points as well to diversity that can live harmoniously in that unity. Additionally, both Congar and John Paul II look at the Holy Spirit as being key in understanding how that unity is made manifest. The Holy Spirit is the source of unity for both men, and the One who is guiding the mission of the church throughout the course of salvation history. Congar and John Paul II differ, however, in their emphasis on the distinct role of the Holy Spirit. Both certainly connect the mission of the Holy Spirit to the mission of Christ, but Congar had a stronger emphasis on the distinct role of the Spirit. Congar’s point on the Holy Spirit as the “soul” of the church, both as its source and indwelling, gave a creative emphasis to the role of the Holy Spirit in the overall history. This will have implications for an understanding of ministry that develops through history. It also connects with the role of reform and the church, as it is the Holy Spirit who continues to offer the guidance and courage necessary through times of change. John Paul II also had a recurring theme of the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to revealing to the church the Truth, fully present in Christ’s revelation, which then obliges the church to give witness to that same Truth. There is a tension between the ongoing creative power of the Spirit and the Truth to which the church is called to witness.
Again, both men placed the understanding of the mystical nature of the church as central to expressing its mystery. The Mystical Body of Christ served as a key image for both men, and each included in their arguments that the individual relationship between Christ and each member, each human person, serves as the first component of membership in the Body. However, both men saw that the image also necessitates that the individual relationships are then called into communion through baptism and Eucharist with the other members of the Body. Each author also pointed to the ecumenical aspect of communion in light of this reality, with the Mystical Body being more than a simple identification with the Catholic Church. John Paul II, however, saw a particular role in the Catholic Church in promoting unity that does not suppress the Truth. John Paul II also presented the role of Mary as Mother of the Church as an important aspect of the Mystical Body. This image can have ecumenical implications, as Mary has historically been a source of tension between churches. In focusing on the biblical understanding of Mary and her relation to Christ, John Paul II certainly did not believe that such tensions should be necessary, but not all communities agreed. The role of Mary and her divine motherhood is also of interest to the conversation on lay ecclesial ministry, for while John Paul II saw her as the Mother of the Church he did not associate her with the apostolic succession. Her role was distinct and particular, certainly incomparable, but not a part of the mission of the Twelve. Perhaps a similarly distinct and particular role articulated for lay ecclesial ministers could be compatible with John Paul II’s approach.
The mystical element of communion also incorporates the understanding of holiness and the communion of saints. All of the baptized are called to holiness, and that universal call was important for both men. The Holy Spirit again takes on a special role in the giving of particular gifts for building up the church. Congar certainly emphasized the co-creative power of the Holy Spirit in that ongoing process in the church, and the relationship of each person with the Spirit in identifying and offering their gifts. John Paul II also saw the role of the Spirit in calling forth vocations, but it was a Christocentric vision of vocation; a call to be in relationship with the Redeemer and live that relationship in a particular way.

Sacramental

The church as sacrament, in an analogous sense, is important for both Congar and John Paul II, and the visible nature of its symbolism of the communion of humanity with God and each other. The individual sacraments also took on a special place for both men, with baptism as a sign of incorporation into the Body of Christ and the Eucharist as a sign and source of unity. That unity extends through all levels of church, and throughout the world. It also binds those with leadership responsibilities together in collegiality. As has already been noted, Congar and John Paul II differed on the understanding of the Twelve as the seeds of the church. Congar saw them as the seed of the entire church, while John Paul II understood them as the foundation for the sacramental leadership. This difference is critical in how one understands Christ’s institution and structuring of the church, and in the call to participate in the apostolic mission of the church.
The work of the leadership in collegiality is shared between both men, as is the importance of the papacy in that collegiality. However, John Paul II placed the greater emphasis on the role of the pope as the minister of unity to the whole church. Again, service to the truth takes on a strong place in John Paul II’s work, and the autonomy of the individual bishop in his role as witness to the Truth seems to take precedence over any collegial activity that could diminish that role. All aspects of John Paul II’s thought place ecumenical communion within a context that is always a priority, but only through the lens of service to the Truth, which lives in light of the doctrines and Tradition of the Catholic Church.

**Historical**

Congar and John Paul II welcomed the Council’s return to the image of the church as the People of God, though not without qualification from each. Both men understood the image as a necessary balance to an overly juridical understanding of church, and both held that it was necessary to complement the image of the People of God with the Mystical Body of Christ. However, the church as the People of God was an important connection with the chosen people of Israel, and placed the church into history, and the world, itself. Congar and John Paul II differed in the extent that they gave a role to the world in shaping the church. Congar was much more open to the idea that the church must be open to the world, which has an autonomy all its own, and that the world can serve to help the church grow more fully into its own purpose. John Paul II saw the role of the world in shaping the church primarily in helping it better articulate the Truth so that the church could become more intelligible, but not necessarily change.
The historical aspect of the understanding of the church as a communion also speaks to the church as a fundamentally equal society, based on all of the baptized coming together in mission. Each theologian spoke of differentiated roles within the society, and that those roles come with different types of relationships and responsibilities. The role of service on the part of all of the baptized also permeates both men’s writings. John Paul II, however, often noted that the service of all the baptized, and especially the service of those in leadership, is always service to the Truth. Such service then has its limits, as it cannot compromise itself to accommodate actions that are not, in John Paul II’s assessment, in keeping with the Truth.

Social

Finally, both theologians, primarily through their understanding of the laity, presented the social dimension of communion. The role of the laity in the world serves as the primary means of the fulfillment of the church’s mission in the transformation, or “christofinalization” as Congar put it, of the world. The relationship with the world is inherent to the church, although both Congar and John Paul II made distinctions between being “in the world” versus being of it. The connection between mission and communion is important for both men, though John Paul II placed a special emphasis on that connection. His very structured distinctions also led to his rebuff to priests who seemed too involved in the political and economic affairs of the world. John Paul II’s more rigid understanding of responsibilities and roles caused a stronger response to any attempt on the part of clergy to overstep their bounds and take over responsibilities proper to the laity. Correspondingly, John Paul II was also very concerned about laity overstepping
their bounds as well and trying to take over responsibilities proper to the clergy. This level of distinction, particularly in regard to sacramental versus secular character, will be further explored in the next chapter.

The works of Yves Congar and John Paul II point to many of the commonalities found among various versions of communion ecclesiology. However, nuances of their thought also provide insight into where communion ecclesiology can differ, and how those differences can impact other aspects of the communion itself. This will be particularly important as we discuss the various understandings of ministry in chapter four and how one can describe the unique manner in which laypeople can engage in ministry. As the church continues to struggle to articulate an understanding of lay ecclesial ministry, it will be even more important to identify differences in order that bridges of thought might be erected. The next chapter will explore the different approaches to the laity and offer a new approach that may provide such a bridge.
CHAPTER THREE: THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN CONCILIAR AND POST-CONCILIAR THOUGHT

As the reality of lay ecclesial ministry grew in the later part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, a consistent theme was presented in the documents pertaining to the issue: that which makes lay ecclesial ministry unique is the lay status of the minister. Lay ecclesial ministers are, “first, foremost, and always members of the laity.” As members of the laity, lay ecclesial ministers should not be understood in any elitist manner, nor should their ministry be understood as forming a separate “rank” or “order” among the laity. The emphasis on the lay aspect of lay ecclesial ministry was meant to clarify some of the unique aspects of lay ecclesial ministry particularly in contrast to ordained ministry. However, the term “laity” itself has been a source of debate. What distinguishes a lay Christian from “other” Christians? Is the status of the layperson based on a sociological description of the secular place where a Christian carries out the mission of the church, or on a theological reality? Are all Christians first and foremost lay people, the group out of which other vocations arise, or does a more common framework exist? Does the term “laity” actually mean anything or should the term cease to be used? Many of these issues arose early in the discussions prior to and during the Second Vatican Council, and continued through the decades following. This chapter will offer an overview of the pertinent conciliar and post-

\[287\] NCCB, State of the Questions, 7. As noted in Chapter one, lay ministers can be understood as “lay” in that the ministers are not ordained, “ecclesial” in that the ministers are formally assigned by a representative of the church to their ministry, and “ministry” in that the ministers participate in the mission that Christ gave the church.

\[288\] USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 408, understood to be Christians with a specifically secular vocation and character.
conciliar documents and their implications, in an attempt to explore an understanding of
the vocation and mission of the laity that can serve as a foundation for both connecting
lay ecclesial ministry to the lay vocation and distinguishing lay ecclesial ministry as a
particular expression of that vocation. This will involve a more in depth treatment than
found in chapter one of this dissertation of such issues as the possibility of a theological
foundation for an understanding of the laity, the mutual relationship between the laity and
the world as intrinsic to their identity, and the connection between the church’s
relationship with the world as compared to the laity’s relationship. The treatment of the
term “laity” will be explored in the time leading up to the Second Vatican Council and in
the pertinent council documents. From there, further insight on the complex issues
surrounding the term will be gleaned from papal documents, the revised code of canon
law, synod propositions, a congregational Instruction, and finally the most recent
document on the issue of lay ecclesial ministry by the USCCB. All of these will
contribute to how the term “lay” can be understood in a manner that highlights the unique
nature of lay ecclesial ministry without being unnecessarily divisive.

The Laity in the Time Leading to the Second Vatican Council

The time leading up to the Second Vatican Council was seeded with thoughts on
the laity, both in terms of their participation in the mission of the church and in their
identity, particularly in terms of grappling with a positive understanding of the laity
instead of the definition of the laity as those who “are not” members of the ordained or
vowed religious. This negative understanding of the laity had been prevalent for an
extended period of time in the church, a time described by Paul Lakeland as the “second
stage” of development, stretching from the second or third century until the late nineteenth century.\(^{289}\) This period of time saw a progressive separation between the role of the clergy and the laity.\(^ {290}\) As structures of institution solidified through these times, there developed a tendency to view the laity as infantile and needing a strong hand for guidance.\(^ {291}\) Bishops were described as the “Father Hen,” charged with the care of the laity, their “chicks” who needed love and guidance and who should offer in return submission to their paternal guides.\(^ {292}\) Such perspectives found their roots early in the third century and blossomed as the divide strengthened.

The social changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, forced the church to consider alternative understandings of how it could best live out its mission in the world.\(^ {293}\) With the rise of a society founded on the principles of the Enlightenment, and the “secularization of society,” the structures of the world had changed.\(^ {294}\) Congar described that world as being deeply divided, and separated from Christ by hostility or indifference.\(^ {295}\) Coupled with a decrease in clergy, the church was faced with an opportunity to explore the role of the laity in the apostolic mission of the church. Certainly the call of all Christians to discipleship was evident in the understanding of the

\(^{289}\) Lakeland, 10.

\(^{290}\) Hagstrom, 12.


\(^{292}\) Ibid. The use of an image such as “Father Hen” is interesting in such a creature does not exist in nature. It seems to be an attempt at incorporating maternal characteristics to the role of bishop.


\(^{294}\) Ibid.

\(^{295}\) Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 359.
church by this time, even in its more “hierological” self-understanding. Congar pointed to how Pope Pius XI, in trying to show how lay involvement in the mission of the church is not new, frequently referenced the biblical examples of Evodia, Syntche and Epaphras who were commended by St. Paul for their work, along with Prisca and Aquila, Paul’s co-workers in Christ.\textsuperscript{296} However, as the societal norms and pressures changed and the reach of the church into various spheres of influence decreased, the call to the laity to embrace their duties as Christians in the world began to be heard anew.

Pope Leo XIII first used the term “Catholic action” in \textit{Permoti Nos}, and then later in his encyclical letter \textit{Spesse volte}, on Catholic Action in Italy, to describe the lay apostolate, specifically the ability of the laity to assist bishops in their apostolic mission.\textsuperscript{297} Leo XIII was particularly focused on the creation of organizations and societies of Catholics who would be able to influence the wider society. This emphasis on lay organizations and the social action of Catholics was embraced as well by Pope Pius X, and continued by Pope Benedict XV during the First World War, but it was not until Pope Pius XI that Catholic Action became a formal, fully defined movement.\textsuperscript{298}

Pius XI offered the famous definition of Catholic Action as a participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate.\textsuperscript{299} In the pre-conciliar understanding of the church, with those in the hierarchy being the ones entrusted with the mission of the church, it was important to connect the action of the laity in the world with the proper authority of the

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid., 356.(cf Philippians 4:2, Colossians 4:12, Romans 16:3)\
\textsuperscript{297} Hesburgh, 8.\
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., 12.\
\textsuperscript{299} Hagstrom, 15.
ones who held the power to send others on Christ’s mission. To be truly a part of Catholic Action was to co-operate with the hierarchical apostolate and exist under its direction. This was not to mean that laity somehow became a part of the hierarchy. The laity was to remain distinct from the hierarchy, and did not share in their powers of jurisdiction, but could accept a mission from the hierarchy so long as the hierarchy maintained oversight of the endeavor. Pope Pius XII attempted to make this cooperation explicit by using the term “collaborate” instead of “participate.”

While Catholic Action served as a vital and pivotal stage in the understanding of the role of the laity in and of itself, it also began the process of raising questions about discipleship and mission, which would set the stage for the Second Vatican Council. In particular, the issue of the relationship between the laity and the hierarchy in terms of mission and the ability to participate in the mission of the church heightened the questions around discipleship and baptismal power. Congar struggled with this relationship in his work on the laity. What is the status of a layperson that is not a part of Catholic Action? Does that person still participate in the mission of the church? Is Catholic Action the only manner in which the laity can engage in the mission, and in that sense only through sharing in the mission of the hierarchy?

Those questions in the early and middle parts of the nineteenth century helped inspire the return to scripture for a renewed understanding of the layperson. This return did not serve to answer all of the questions about the layperson, but did set the stage for the Second Vatican Council’s interest in the image of the church as the People of God.

---

300 Ibid., 17.
301 Ibid., 19.
The return to the “first stage” of the understanding of the laity can be understood as including the first two centuries of the church. In this time, according to Lakeland, the understanding of laity, particularly as a concept distinct from clergy, was nonexistent. It has been often noted that the word *laikos*, from which the word laity is derived, is not found anywhere in the Bible. Yves Congar began his study on the laity with this fact, pointing to the biblical use of *laos* instead as the closest term in scripture. For Congar, however, the connotations around *laos* have little to do with an understanding of laity as a separate “type” of Christian. Instead, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, the term *laos* is more properly understood to mean “people,” and in particular the people of God, as distinguished from the gentiles.

This use of the theological meaning of *laos* as “people of God,” and its relationship to the later term “laity” has caused a significant amount of debate. Congar noted this debate in an insertion in the second edition of his study. Kenan Osborne also noted the extent of the debate in his work on lay ministry. Osborne pointed to two major issues in regard to the use of the word *laikos*: first, that many authors disagree on the way that the later term of *laikos* relates to the scriptural term *laos* and second, on the significance carried by the later appearances of the term *laikos*. Giovanni Magnani, for example, found Congar’s transfusion of all of the semantic and theological content of the

---

302 Lakeland, 10.
303 Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 3.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid., 3 – 4.
term *laos* into the later term *laikos* to be unconvincing, as *laos*. Magnani quotes the work of Father I. De la Potterie who found that *laos* in Greek literature carries both the meaning of people in general but also those who are set in contrast to the leaders of the community. Osborne and others contest such an interpretation, citing Egyptian usage of the terms that, while carrying the dual meaning noted by Magnani and others, gives precedence to the “belonging to” characteristics of the term used by Congar. The continued question as to whether the laity could rightfully understand their identity in connection with the biblical term *laos* had implications for the ongoing debate on the laity following the Second Vatican Council. However, the discussion of the People of God, and membership within that people as having a sacramental character, would be critical in the understanding of the laity in the Council.

**The Second Vatican Council and the Laity**

*Lumen Gentium*

The documents of the Second Vatican Council that directly impact the understanding of the laity today created as many questions as were answered. While the descriptions of the laity, in particular, in the council were meant to be typological rather than theological, the descriptions propelled conversations on the laity that have had a

---

307 Giovanni Magnani, S.J., “Does the So-called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-Five Years After*, Vol. One, ed. Rene LaTourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 570 - 571. Magnani contended that Congar and others who wanted a theological basis for the term “layperson” had taken all of the theological and semantic content that the term “laos” had acquired in the Jewish and Christian contexts and applied it to the term layperson.

308 Osborne, 22.
profound effect on the church.\footnote{Ibid., 538.} \textit{Lumen Gentium} grounded the section on the laity within the wider scope of the church. The common matrix within which the laity were described was alternately the “People of God,” the “priesthood of all believers” or the “Christian faithful.” It began, therefore, with an affirmation of the fundamental equality of all the faithful. Those terms, according to Osborne, were also used rather indiscriminately to describe those who are not ordained, particularly in post-conciliar writing, which would form further confusion in the understanding of the laity.\footnote{Ibid., 532.} When used as a unifying, common matrix, though, those terms grounded the laity within the church as equal with the ordained through their baptism and common discipleship, called to mission as a part of the Body of Christ.

While the document began with a fundamental equality, it did not disregard the structures of the church and the multiple roles of the faithful involved.\footnote{Hagstrom, 38. Hagstrom described this distinction both as functional inequality and functional diversity. I prefer the term functional diversity in that it maintains the foundational equality established in the earlier sections of \textit{Lumen Gentium}, as well as in section 32 which uses the language of “distinction” and “diversity” over inequality.} The functional diversity of the People of God pointed to the need for descriptions of multiple roles in the common mission. Those roles complement each other and are held together in a unified mission. The chapters which addressed the multiple roles, the specific vocations of the ordained, the laity, and the religious, were brought together in a common call to holiness.
found in Chapter V, even though that chapter comes before the section on vowed religious.312

In Chapter IV the document addressed the laity in particular. There the council stated that, “everything that has been said of the People of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy;” however, “because of their mission…certain things pertain particularly to the laity.”313 That statement connected the section on the laity with earlier statements affirming the common baptismal foundation of all members of the People of God, as well as the common priesthood of all believers.314 Sections 31 and 33 of Lumen Gentium addressed specifically the identity of the laity and what they do. In its first two sentences, section 31 contained both a negative and a positive description of the laity,

The term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.315

The laity is described as not clergy or religious in the first sentence, yet in the second sentence they are described as members of the People of God who share in the threefold offices of Christ by virtue of their baptism. As was seen in chapter two of this dissertation, the issue of how the laity share in Christ’s threefold offices has caused


313 LG no. 30.

314 LG no. 10.

315 LG no. 31.
considerable conversation, but in the context of Lumen Gentium itself, the internal reference pointed back to section 10, which stated that

…though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.\footnote{LG no. 10.}

The mission of the church does not rest on the shoulders of the ordained alone, but on all Christians by merit of their baptism. As sharers in the common priesthood and as full members of the church and its mission, the laity are called to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them toward God’s will” (LG, 31). The specific reference to seeking the kingdom of God described the laity in their ecclesial sense, as members of the church in the temporal world.\footnote{Hagstrom, 52.} This is the characteristic manner in which the laity exercise their power, but the bishops explicitly included that the mission was also carried out in the church.\footnote{LG no. 31.} The laity are called to active participation in the life of the church, and to exercise their competence in the church through collaboration with pastors and bishops for the good of the community.\footnote{Jon Nilson, “The Laity,” in The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Gransfield, O.S.B., ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 398.}

Section 33 continued with that emphasis on the laity’s share in the salvific mission of the church through their work in spreading the gospel message. It also, however, highlighted the issue that would cause much conversation after the Council, namely the question of whether every Christian, lay and ordained alike, shares in the
mission of Christ and in spreading the good news throughout the world. Indeed the whole church has a secular dimension, and is called to engage in the world.\textsuperscript{320} The question remained as to whether there truly was anything specific about the lay Christian that distinguished him or her from the ordained and religious, a question that will serve as the focus of the final section of this chapter.

\textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem}

\textit{Apostolicam Actuositatem} reiterated the themes of the common call to mission of all the faithful and the sacramental foundation for that call found in \textit{Lumen Gentium}, and added important elements to the concept of “apostolate” and the secular realms of the lay apostolate. The question as to what rightly constitutes an apostolate received a qualified answer in section 2, where in its final form the decree stated:

\begin{quote}
The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish right relationship of the entire world to Christ. Every activity of the Mystical Body with this in view goes by the name “apostolate”; the Church exercises it through all its members, though in various ways.\textsuperscript{321}
\end{quote}

All Christians are called to this apostolate, and lay people are assured that, “from the fact of their union with Christ,” flows their right and duty to be apostles.\textsuperscript{322} The notion that lay people act in the world only under the oversight of the hierarchy was dismissed here. The layperson, by his or her share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Henn, 90.
\item AA no. 2. This understanding of apostolate expanded the role of the laity in the world understood in Catholic Action, which was treated in a separate section near the end of the decree.
\item AA no. 2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
has in the church and in the world their own “assignment.” The specific realm of the layperson is the life led in the midst of the world and secular affairs. The Council left open, however, any exact theological definition of the criteria by which the actions of the layperson in the world would be considered a part of their apostolate.

The renewal of the temporal order was placed within the objectives of the apostolate laid out by the authors and followed the goal of evangelization. In its description of the temporal order, the decree stated that all things that are contained in the temporal order, including personal and family values, culture, economics, professional life, political communities, and international affairs, have a value of their own placed in them by God and with their own autonomy. The layperson is called upon to take on the renewal of the temporal order as his or her distinctive task, in a way which both recognizes the principles which are good and inherent in creation and the autonomy of the world, while seeking to incorporate the justice and salvation of the kingdom into those places tarnished by corruption and sin. The laity is uniquely qualified to engage in this apostolate by merit of their secular lives and relationships. Their immersion in the world allows for opportunities that are not available to members of the hierarchy. The decree described various types of apostolic activity, both individual and collective, that require different types of relationships with the hierarchy. It also specifically included mention of the role of the layperson in the church, working with the pastor in the parish

323 AA no. 2.

324 Hagstrom, 75. The question of when the actions of the lay person in the world would rightly be considered an apostolate mirrors the later questions of when the actions of a lay person in the Church constitute a ministry, particularly as regards the title of someone as a lay ecclesial minister.

325 AA no. 7.

326 Ibid.
to build up the ecclesial community from within. As with other references in the Council, this does not reflect lay ecclesial ministries as is understood today, but instead the call of all the baptized to participate in strengthening the ecclesial community by offering their gifts and time to the church. However, the primary emphasis maintained the unity of mission in the church and the right and responsibility of all members of the faithful to participate in that mission as an expression of their baptism and confirmation.

*Gaudium et Spes*

The question of the autonomy of the world and the relationship of the world and the church which was raised in the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* and in *Lumen Gentium* was also raised in *Gaudium et Spes*. *Gaudium et Spes*, however, did not focus specifically on the laity. Instead its focus was on the relationship of all the church with the world. As such, it reflected the emerging developments of the issue of whether secularity can be a particular, defining aspect of the laity.

The emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes* was pastoral, and the role of the laity was not the primary issue that it addressed. Its purpose was to describe the relationship between the church as a whole and the world, and to put that relationship in more positive and mutual terms in the midst of multiple, complicated changes within the world and the church itself. The relationship between the church and the world is mutual, with the world having an autonomy which must be respected and which can enrich the life and mission of the church. *Gaudium et Spes* reiterated many of the themes of *Lumen Gentium*.

---

327 AA no. 10.

328 GS no. 44.
Gentium, but emphasized that it is to the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties and activities properly belong.\textsuperscript{329}

There is a tension which runs throughout Gaudium et Spes as it tries to articulate a relationship between the world and the church, and the role of the church in directing the transformative elements of that relationship. At times, the relationship, as seen above, is mutual in its nature, but at other times the emphasis on the role of the church in directing the world overshadowed the ability to read the signs of the times in a positive light.\textsuperscript{330} The role of the laity in this context becomes ambiguous. When described as a more mutual relationship, the layperson’s role would seem to be multi-directional, bringing the insights of the world into the heart of the church and allowing that which must change within the church itself to benefit from the signs of the times. However, when the emphasis is on the role of the church as the one who guides the world to a destiny beyond this time, the role of the layperson is less clear. In section 40, the document states:

Thus the Church, at once ‘a visible organization and a spiritual community,’ travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.\textsuperscript{331}

The whole church is described as the leaven and soul of the world. The whole church is in the world, and travels the same journey as all of humanity. The whole church is called to engage in Christ’s mission of the renewal of human society. The question remains that if all of the church is to engage the world, and to be in relationship

\textsuperscript{329} GS no. 43.

\textsuperscript{330} Lakeland, 99-100.

\textsuperscript{331} GS no. 40.
with the world, does the notion of the laity as having a uniquely secular character have merit?

The documents of the Second Vatican Council opened the door for discussion on the vocation and mission of the laity. While the council did raise many new questions, it also emphasized the common call of discipleship, the inclusion of all in the mission of the church, and the autonomy of the world that carries a latent, inherent goodness that, even in light of the effect of original sin, must be respected. Those components would have a lasting impact on the post-conciliar discussion of the laity, even as questions arose as to the theological status of the layperson in light of the council.

_Evangelii Nuntiandi_

In celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council Pope Paul VI wrote _Evangelii Nuntiandi_, an apostolic exhortation on evangelization and the missionary role of the church. The document continued to draw on the dual approach to the question of the church’s relationship with the world, but added important descriptions and clarifications that would influence the understanding of the vocation of the laity and the notion of “secular.”

Pope Paul emphasized the outward flow of the church’s mission by focusing on evangelization. Evangelization is the very heart of the identity of the church, with its obligation first to be evangelized within itself, fully embracing and sharing the gospel message of the kingdom of God and the salvation made possible through Christ.\(^{332}\) That

---

\(^{332}\) _Evangelii Nuntiandi_ no. 15.
internal evangelization then propels the People of God outward, into the world, sent by the church:

…the Church herself sends out evangelizers. She puts on their lips the saving Word, she explains to them the message of which she herself is the depository, she gives them the mandate which she herself has received and she sends them out to evangelize.

Evangelization is, therefore, never an individual act by a disciple but is instead deeply connected to the ecclesial reality from which it receives its mandate. Though the method of evangelization may differ between members of the People of God, all Christians are called to give witness to the gospel message. The church as a whole was again presented as the bearer of the good news to the world.

Pope Paul VI did include limits in the understanding, however, of how entwined the whole church should be in the affairs of the world in the evangelization process. In the midst of burgeoning discussions regarding liberation theology and the role of the church in political and social liberation, Pope Paul centered the role of the church on the spiritual dimension that cannot be reduced to political or social liberation. Liberation in Christ is, for Pope Paul, primarily a matter of eschatological salvation. Pope Paul wrote that the church should not ignore the tangible struggles of people or communities and that the church does indeed have a valid role in the political and social tensions of the world, but that such a role on the part of the whole church does not constitute the complete extent of its call for evangelization. Within that holistic understanding of

333 Ibid.

334 Ibid., no. 60.
evangelization, Pope Paul VI focused on the relationship within the communion and how those members related with each other and the tasks of evangelization.

Pastors were given particular emphasis, for example, in their role of determining the most appropriate means of communicating the gospel message to the men and women of the time. Of note, while lay people were explicitly mentioned in the end of the exhortation, the clergy were named as the ones who would discern the means of communicating the message to the world, with an emphasis on a unidirectional communication. Pastors were mentioned again later in the document as part of the ecclesial connection with which all Christians who evangelize are called to honor:

…if each individual evangelizes in the name of the Church, who herself does so by virtue of a mandate from the Lord, no evangelizer is the absolute master of his evangelizing action, with the discretionary power to carry it out in accordance with individualistic criteria and perspectives; he acts in communion with the Church and her pastors.

This differed from the formal connection between the hierarchy and Catholic Action. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* did not call for a return to the level of accountability and control by the hierarchy found in Catholic Action. However, the notion that individual Christians are authorized for evangelization by their baptism was tempered with the reminder that baptism brought one into the People of God and that such a connection must be acknowledged and honored when one goes forth to spread the gospel.

Lay people were given particular attention near the end of the exhortation, in the section which outlined the various tasks of evangelization that each member of the

---

335 Ibid., no. 27.
336 Ibid., no. 40.
337 Ibid., no. 60.
People of God assumes in different ways. Pope Paul returned to a hierarchical presentation of members of the church in the section, beginning with the role of the pope in evangelization, followed by the role of bishops, pastors and members of religious orders. Lay people were presented last and regarded as having a “special form of evangelization.” Their primary role is not to develop the ecclesial community (presented as the specific role of the pastor) but to “put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present in the affairs of the world.” Pope Paul included in these affairs the realms of politics, economics and culture, but also other realities such as “human love, the family, education of children and adolescents, professional work, and suffering.”

The task of evangelization for the layperson in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* incorporated the whole of the mission of church, and presented the layperson as acting in concert with that ecclesial reality. It also articulated the autonomy of the world in a sense, through its description of the latent goodness in the world that the Christian could call forth. Pope Paul VI did not use the term “secular character” in describing the laity, but instead presented the temporal sphere as their particular realm. Regarding the use of the terms “secularism” and “secularization” Pope Paul VI offered an important distinction. He described “secularization” as

\[\text{...the effort, in itself just and legitimate and in no way incompatible with faith or religion, to discover in creation, in each thing or each happening in the universe, the laws which regulate them with a certain autonomy, but with the}\]

---

338 Ibid., no. 66 - 69.
339 Ibid., no. 70.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid.
inner conviction that the creator has placed those laws there. The Council has in this sense affirmed the legitimate autonomy of culture and particularly of the sciences.\textsuperscript{342}

Secularism, on the other hand, was described as the

\ldots concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any need for recourse for God, who thus becomes superfluous and an encumbrance. This sort of secularism, in order to recognize the power of man, therefore ends up by doing without God and even denying him.\textsuperscript{343}

This distinction illustrated the difficulty in language around the positive use of the term “secular” in describing the laity and the extremely negative characterization of secularism, which ultimately seeks to deny the role of the creator in the world.

While tempering some of the understandings of the laity left open in the council, Pope Paul VI located the vocation and mission of the laity firmly within their ecclesial life and the mission of the church. The mission of the individual layperson, while always particular to their gifts and circumstances, was never based on the personal perspectives of the individual. The mission of the individual only made sense in the context of the ecclesial reality. The interplay between the role of the individual and the community would be found again in the following decade with the revised code of canon law, but with more of the conciliar tone.

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid., no. 55.

\textsuperscript{343} Ibid.
The Revised Code of Canon Law

Pope John Paul II promulgated the new Code of Canon Law on January 25, 1983, twenty-four years after Pope John XXIII announced his intention to establish a Pontifical Commission to revise the Code and on the same day that he announced the invocation of Vatican II.\(^{344}\) The code undertook the task of translating the pastoral language of the council into juridical terminology. The code did not seek to provide theological understanding of the vocation of the laity. Indeed, Osborne cautioned against using the Code of Canon Law as a point of departure for discussing the layperson in the church.\(^{345}\) However, it did address the laity in a manner that should be noted within the larger conversation leading from the council to the Synod of Bishops called to discuss the vocation and mission of the laity.

Of particular importance is that the code, following the council, placed the sections about the laity within the larger understanding of the *Christifideles*, the Christian faithful, all of whom have rights and responsibilities as a part of their baptism and confirmation. Canon 204 noted that baptism establishes the fundamental equality of all of the faithful, and gives all members of the faithful the right and duty to fulfill the three offices of Christ.\(^{346}\) Only later, in Canon 207, was a distinction drawn between the ordained, members of religious orders, and the laity. However, as the canon drew from both the council and the previous code, the passage continued to reflect the tension

\(^{344}\) Hagstrom, 96.

\(^{345}\) Osborne, 8-9. Osborne did note on page 9 that one can “reflect on the efforts of the revised code of canon law to incorporate the lay person into church life and structure…” and therefore use canon law within an overall reflection.

\(^{346}\) Code of canon law, canon 204, book II.
between positive understandings of the laity, and the negative description of contrast to the ordained.\textsuperscript{347}

The code did, however, reiterate in juridical language in Canon 225 that the missionary activity of the laity is founded in their baptism and confirmation.\textsuperscript{348} The layperson is bound by a special duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the spirit of the gospel, giving witness to Christ through the execution of their secular duties.\textsuperscript{349} The code still connected the work of the laity in the world with the ecclesial structure of the mission of the church, but avoided the language found in Pope Paul VI regarding the primacy of the pastor in the evangelization method and oversight. The code seemed to give preference for the conciliar autonomy of the layperson as a disciple in the world.

The tension seen between Pope Paul VI’s understanding of the relationship between the layperson and the pastor, and the approach of the revised code towards more autonomy of the layperson typifies some of the tensions that were evident in the years following the council. Pope John Paul II recognized those tensions, as well as the constantly changing realities of the modern, multi-cultural, pluralistic world. Those tensions contributed to his decision to call a Synod of Bishops in 1987.

\textsuperscript{347} Hagstrom, 101-102.

\textsuperscript{348} Code of Canon Law, Book II, Canon 225.

\textsuperscript{349} Ibid.
1987 Synod of Bishops

Pope John Paul II announced the theme for the 1987 Synod of Bishops on May 19, 1984. In light of the watershed of change in the understanding and role of the laity seen after the Second Vatican Council, and the struggle to articulate the secular role of the lay Christian in the world, Pope John Paul II expressed that the theme was most appropriate as the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the council drew near. The outline for the synod, released in February of the following year, presented the framework for discussion at the local level, including input from laity, to inform the working paper. It recalled the role of the council, particularly the documents *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and *Gaudium et Spes*, in raising up the issue of the laity within the ecclesial context, and the need for new understandings of the laity by the whole church in light of historic changes in society. In particular, the characterization of the theological foundation of the secular condition of the laity, not just a sociological understanding, was presented as in need of further development. Laity are a part of the ecclesial structure and the People of God through their sacramental identity in baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and as such fully participate in the mission of the church. They also are members of society, and as such live out their vocation in the temporal realm.

The outline raised two dangers for the laity. The first danger could occur when the properly secular condition turns to secularism, recalling Pope Paul VI’s distinction, at

---

[^351]: Ibid.
[^352]: Ibid., no. 4.
[^353]: Ibid., no. 9.
which time the layperson would compromise his or her faith for the sake of the values of the world.\textsuperscript{354} The second danger could occur if the laity were to flee from the world entirely and ignore their secular role in the mission of the church, choosing instead to focus exclusively on the intra-ecclesial aspect of their mission. Using a phrase that would resound in later documents, the \textit{lineamenta} referred to the dangers of “the clericalization of the laity,” which arise from a lack of appreciation for the secular nature of the laity.\textsuperscript{355}

Those issues were the areas presented that required a new look on the part of the bishops and were incorporated into the working paper presented to assist the Synod fathers in their discussion. The working paper acknowledged the participation of the laity in the ongoing mission of the church in the world, and highlighted the new questions that had arisen in light of the heightened awareness of that participation. The advancement of the lay state over the centuries had been “reawakened” in the Second Vatican Council, but with it came the need to address new questions regarding the responsibility of the lay Christian.\textsuperscript{356} The working paper paid particular attention to the question of vocation and mission, in keeping with the \textit{lineamenta}. All Christians are called into a personal relationship with God, which requires a personal and specific response.\textsuperscript{357} That call and response, however, is lived within the reciprocal relationships of Christians within the church communio, giving the love received and lived in the vocation two dimensions: “1) a love for God which acknowledges that he has called and 2) a generous love for all

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{356} \textit{Instrumentum Laboris} no. 12

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., no. 18.
people in the name of God who loves them.”

Vocation is broader than mission because it is composed of both a call to communio and a call to mission. Communio is the fundamental aspect destined to last forever. Mission, on the other hand, is a consequence of this call and is limited to an earthly existence.

The mission of the laity was later described as receiving its specific character in their immediate involvement in worldly affairs. The working paper also defined its use of certain phrases: the world, generally speaking, referred to the “immense reality of creation, which is fundamentally good since it is the work of God.” The world, in a particular sense, is also understood to be the human world, the whole human family, with its cultural and social developments. The world, in general and in particular terms, provides the defining aspect of the lay state, which cannot be confused or clericalized.

The foundational state for all Christians is the relationship with the mystery of Christ, and as such the lay state has a common foundation with all Christians. However the paper clearly distinguished the states of life of clergy and religious from that of the layperson.

The Synod itself met through October 1987, and offered a set of 54 propositions as a part of its concluding documents. In its first proposition the Synod fathers requested

---

358 Ibid., no. 16.
359 Ibid., no. 14.
360 Ibid., no. 19.
361 Ibid., no. 27.
that the pope consider a document on the vocation and mission of the laity.\textsuperscript{362} The following 53 propositions would serve as a foundation of thought for such an endeavor. After thanking those, especially laity, who assisted in the development of the propositions, the Synod fathers immediately addressed the pressing issues around a positive description of the vocation and mission of the laity and the need to articulate the secular character of the Christian laity. Following their earlier conversations and the council documents, the fathers reiterated that all Christians share a common dignity by merit of their baptism. Each Christian, made a disciple of Christ, called to holiness, sharing in the Eucharist and marked with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is called to make the life and mission of Christ present in this world.\textsuperscript{363} Each Christian does so in a unique manner, with lay Christians participating specifically in the secular dimension. The whole church, again, was noted as having a secular dimension, but that dimension “belongs in a special way” to the laity.\textsuperscript{364} They are involved in the world that the world might become a pleasing offering to God. The secular character of the laity is reiterated as being theological, not merely sociological, embracing the creative powers of God and the co-creative powers handed over to humanity. The fathers connect the co-creative powers both with all of creation and with those aspects of creation that arose from the professional and social realms of life.\textsuperscript{365} This was reflected also in the brief, “Message to


\textsuperscript{363} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{364} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., 501.
the People to God,” in which the Synod fathers added that lay people are called to announce the good news in all spheres of life and to participate in dialogue with all.\textsuperscript{366}

It should be noted that the agreement on the language in the Propositions by the Synod fathers came only after an extended debate on the issue of secularity. Robert Oliver outlined the debate as having two main positions: one more typological or sociological, the other theological.\textsuperscript{367} Concern was raised along many of the lines already seen in the tensions following the Second Vatican Council: should the laity be distinguished as separate or different from other Christians? What should be the relationship between the laity and the church if their primary role is in the world? Is there truly meaning in the term “laity?” In many ways the tensions simply were not resolved. Oliver noted that the \textit{Lineamenta} adopted the position that the Synod would take a more theological approach to secularity, defining it in terms of divine vocation, while the working paper took a more neutral position, stating that the laity are in the place where the church is most visible and concrete in its interaction with the world.\textsuperscript{368} In the Propositions, the fathers returned to a more theological approach as seen above, in light of God as creator and redeemer, and the co-creative responsibilities of the laity.\textsuperscript{369}

In addition to the questions regarding secularity, the Synod fathers also raised up issues around the intra-ecclesial role of the laity, noting the need for greater clarity on the

\textsuperscript{366} Synod 1987: Message to the People of God no. 3.


\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid.
use of such terms as “ministry,” “task,” and “office.” These propositions reflected the tensions in the hierarchy around the clericalization of the laity in their increased service within the ecclesial structure and in many ways mirrored the tensions found in the debate about the understanding of secularity for the laity. Those issues, and the tensions that would continue on long after the Synod, would be incorporated into the Instruction on Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests’ Sacred Ministry, and set the backdrop to the USCCB document on lay ecclesial ministry, Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord.

**Christifideles Laici**

Two years after the closing of the 1987 Synod, Pope John Paul II wrote the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. The document began by recalling the Synod, noting both the gratitude of the church for the laity in their participation and collaboration in the spirit of renewal encouraged in the Second Vatican Council, as well as the concern of avoiding the “two temptations” noted in the Lineamenta of either ignoring the world or becoming overly immersed in worldly affairs to the detriment of the gospel message. The pope chose to use an apostolic exhortation as the document to respond to the request of the Synod in Proposition 1. John Paul II described the intention of his exhortation to “stir and promote a deeper awareness among all of the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and

---


371 *Christifideles Laici* no. 2.
According to Hagstrom, in choosing to use an exhortation the pope offered a pastoral, rather than dogmatic, response to the request of the Synod fathers for a positive definition of the laity beyond the description offered in the council documents. He chose to advise and encourage all of the faithful rather than set down dogmatic definitions.

Pope John Paul II again emphasized the common dignity and equality of all Christians by merit of their baptism. Participation in the mystery of communion affirms the fundamental dignity of the laity and offers the context for their vocation and mission in the church and in the world. In response to Proposition 3 from the Synod, John Paul II reiterated the description from *Lumen Gentium* no. 31, which both emphasized the full belonging of the laity in the mystery of the church and insisted on the unique character of their vocation in the world. He then quoted Pope Pius XII, who had described the laity as being on the front lines of the church’s life, and as such needing to know that they do not only belong to the church, but are the church in the world, in communion with the bishops and the Pope. For four additional sections, numbers 10 – 14, John Paul II expanded on the common baptismal dignity and equality of the faithful. He related it to the newness of life, and to Christians’ common adoption by God, made possible through Jesus. The faithful are brought into membership in Christ’s body through the work of

---

372 Ibid.
373 Hagstrom, 160.
374 *Christifideles Laici* no. 9.
375 Ibid.
376 Ibid., no. 10 – 14.
the Holy Spirit, and are joined together in unity though that same Spirit.\textsuperscript{377} John Paul II strongly emphasized the imagery of St. Paul, in the common call to “put on Christ,” and the imagery from St. Peter that the baptized together become the “living stones” founded on Christ and raised up into a spiritual building (1 Pt 2:5 ff).\textsuperscript{378}

The spiritual connectedness of all the faithful joins them together, in the message of St. Peter, into the royal priesthood. John Paul II recalled in \textit{Christifideles Laici} his own homily at the beginning of his papacy when he forcefully emphasized the common share of all the baptized in the threefold mission of Christ, each in their own manner.\textsuperscript{379} Quoting \textit{Lumen Gentium} at length, John Paul II summarized the Council teaching that the lay faithful share in the priestly mission of Christ through their daily sacrifice of themselves and their work in the world, through which they consecrate the world itself to God.\textsuperscript{380} The laity share in the prophetic mission of Christ through their ability to accept the gospel in faith and proclaim it in word and deed through the framework of their secular life.\textsuperscript{381} Finally, the laity share in the kingly mission of Christ through their participation in bringing forth the kingdom of God and in the restoration of creation through their daily lives.\textsuperscript{382} The lay faithful participate in the threefold mission of Christ in and through their communion with the church, and for the increase of that communion.

\textsuperscript{377} Ibid., no. 11.

\textsuperscript{378} Ibid., no. 13.

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., no. 14.

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
as well. They are called to build up the communion from within as members of the church, as they participate in the mission set before the People of God.\textsuperscript{383}

Through numbers 9 to 14 Pope John Paul II repeatedly affirmed the common equality, dignity and participation of all the faithful in the communion and mission of the church by reason of their baptism into the Body of Christ. In number 15, John Paul II focused on that which identifies the laity person in particular: secular character, which is “properly and particularly” theirs.\textsuperscript{384} Even here, John Paul II began with recalling Pope Paul VI’s affirmation that the whole church has a secular dimension, that the whole church lives in the world though not of the world, and that all members of the church share in its secular dimension.\textsuperscript{385} Lay faithful share in the secular dimension of the church in their own particular way, understood as an expression of their secular character.\textsuperscript{386}

John Paul II described the Council’s understanding of the laity’s situation in the secular world as “above all…the place in which they receive their call from God.”\textsuperscript{387} It is a dynamic place, where the laity live out secular professions, ordinary activities and memberships in civic and social associations. However, the world is not only some external framework for laity, but the reality which they understand through the lens of their relationship with Christ.\textsuperscript{388} John Paul II recalled both the documents of the Council as well as the Synod in situating the secular understanding of the laity in light of their

\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid., no. 15.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid.
participation in the creative and redemptive action of God.\textsuperscript{389} John Paul II called this both a theological reality as well as an ecclesiological one, founded on the common baptism and entrance into the mission of the church. They are at once called to build up the church as its members so that the communion can fully serve the mission, and also to live the mission out in their particular manner in the world as part of their particular participation in the threefold mission of Christ.

John Paul II avoided a purely theological or a purely sociological approach to the question of secularity and the laity. He allowed both for the need for a deeper theological understanding of secular character, as well as stating that the place of the laity in the world included the sociological and the anthropological.\textsuperscript{390} In addition, though, Oliver suggests that John Paul II’s emphasis was primarily on evangelization of the world, and that therefore the question of secularity is placed in the context of the divine vocation to mission in a particular sphere.\textsuperscript{391} The world becomes the place and means for the fulfillment of the lay vocation to mission, with secularity being the particular way in which the laity live out the new life of baptism in the same situations and conditions of life that are common to all people.\textsuperscript{392} They are not of the world, but are sent into the world on divine mission as part of the communion of believers, and in the affirmation of that mission the pope and bishops acknowledged the privileged place of the layperson.

While Oliver’s perspective connects the theological and the sociological, and connects

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{390} Oliver, 86.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid.
both to divine mission, it does not necessarily answer the question of how that understanding of secularity is different for the layperson than for the ordained. John Paul II and the bishops allowed multiple interpretations to be read in their texts, in reflection of the unresolved nature of the issue. John Paul II, however, would take up the issue of mission again in his next encyclical.

**Redemptoris Missio**

One year after *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II offered the encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent validity of the church’s missionary mandate, in celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. While his attention to the laity in particular is brief, it is worth noting their inclusion in a document primarily concerned with the mission of the church so soon after John Paul II’s treatment of the vocation and mission of the laity. Much of the encyclical focused on the validity of mission *ad gentes*, with an emphasis on those who are formal missionaries on behalf of the church and who direct their attention to those who do not yet know or believe in Christ.\(^{393}\) John Paul II included other types of missionary situations, however, including those situations in need of “re-evangelization” or “new evangelization.” In these situations entire groups of the baptized have “lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.”\(^{394}\)

---

\(^{393}\) *Redemptoris Missio* no. 33.  
\(^{394}\) Ibid.
John Paul II set the responsibility of the laity within both situations of missionary activity. He described the mission *ad gentes* as incumbent upon the entire People of God, and though the establishment of a new church requires the priestly ministry, missionary activity carried out in a variety of other ways is the responsibility of all the faithful through their baptism.  

John Paul II wrote in terms of responsibility and obligation, not as the inclination of the few but the requirement of the whole. The history of the lay contribution to the mission *ad gentes* is offered as considerable, but the encyclical also emphasized the multiple ways in which the laity participate in the church’s mission in the world. They work in lay missionary associations, volunteer organizations, ecclesial movements, groups and sodalities of all kinds.  

Quoting *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, John Paul II reiterated that there are situations where only the laity are able to share the gospel message, giving particular weight to their specific participation. Because of their secular character, their missionary activity is connected with their engagement in temporal affairs and ordering them to God’s will.

*Redemptoris Missio* placed the laity squarely within the formal mission *ad gentes* and the broader new evangelization, where historically Christian societies could be challenged in a particular way to be renewed in their understanding of the gospel message through the missionary activities of the laity in the world. Even within this broad call to evangelize, seen here and in *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II also made references that seem to separate the laity in their response to their baptismal call. In numbers 73 and 74,

---

395 Ibid., no. 71.
396 Ibid., no. 72.
397 Ibid., no. 71.
398 Ibid.
immediately following the section on the lay missionary activity in the world, John Paul II inserted language around laity that seems to limit their activity. In the introduction to the section on catechists, he wrote “among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor.”\(^{399}\) There seems to be a tension through the sections that focus on the intra-ecclesial missionary activities of the laity, where it implied that only some laity choose to be evangelizers. It is unclear if the reason why John Paul II used the language “among the laity who become evangelizers” here is because he is speaking of the role of the laity within the church. The next section, again focusing on the ways in which the laity serve with the church, begins “besides catechists, mention must also be made of other ways of serving the church and her mission…”\(^{400}\) The emphasis is no longer on how the laity live out the mission of all of the faithful seen in the earlier section on the activities of the laity in the temporal world. While John Paul II consistently embraced the understanding that the laity are called to evangelize, as a part of the communion of the church, and that baptism is the source of their mission, ambiguities remain as to how that is lived within the Body of Christ. Those tensions again arose six years later in the documents related to lay ecclesial ministry.

**The Instruction on Sacred Ministry and Co-Workers in the Vineyard**

Two final documents should be noted briefly, primarily because their understandings of the laity are directly connected to the issue of lay ecclesial ministry and because they reflect the continued tensions seen above in the previous documents. The

\(^{399}\) Ibid., no. 73.

\(^{400}\) Ibid.
first is the *Instruction: On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Nonordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests.*\(^{401}\) In 1997 the *Instruction* was made public and set down principles which were seen as necessary in light of the developments in lay ecclesial ministry and in anticipation of the work of committees, particularly in the United States, which were exploring the questions around lay ecclesial ministry. The *Instruction* clearly meant, in the words of Bishop Hoffman who represented the US bishops at the Vatican meeting regarding the *Instruction*, “to restate the indispensable role of the ordained priest in the life of the church.”\(^{402}\) To that end, the *Instruction* was designed to articulate the differences between the laity and the clergy, particularly in regard to their ministerial role within the church. Laity, in the life of the church, are called to assist the ordained, without losing site of the primary, secular nature of the mission of the laity.\(^{403}\) The *Instruction* clearly articulated that in its view, collaboration with does not mean substitution for, and that any collaboration with the priest should not be construed as offering a replacement for the ordained ministry.\(^{404}\) The *Instruction* draws from the Second Vatican Council, as well as from John Paul II’s *Christifideles Laici*, but emphasizes the theological and ontological difference between clergy and laity. As such, even though the *Instruction* affirmed the active role of all Christians in the life and mission of the church, it affirmed a sharper distinction between

---

\(^{401}\) The Instruction was authored by the Congregation for the Clergy, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Congregation for Bishops, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts.

\(^{402}\) Ibid., 400 sidebar.

\(^{403}\) Ibid., 399.

\(^{404}\) Ibid.
the clergy and the laity than had been a part of previous documents. Regarding the
difficult issues that persistently surround the differences between the common priesthood
of all believers and the ministerial priesthood, the Instruction emphasized that there is an
essential difference between the two.\textsuperscript{405} The Instruction also repeatedly reaffirmed the
necessity of the ordained ministry to the church, in order for a community to exist as
“church.”\textsuperscript{406} The teaching in the Instruction was not particularly new or different from
sections found in previous documents. However, the tone and emphasis of the Instruction
served as a clear reminder of the tension that continued to exist within the church
regarding the distinctions between the laity and the clergy. The focus almost exclusively
on the ontological and theological difference between the two was in contrast to the work
of John Paul II, which employed multiple levels for understanding the similarities and
differences between Christians.\textsuperscript{407} The document seemed to present “sacred ministry” and
“secular character” as being, in the words of Zeni Fox, antithetical to one another.\textsuperscript{408}

The tone that was presented in the Instruction influenced the last document to be
noted here, \textit{Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord}. Again, this document dealt with lay
ecclesial ministry, rather than a theology of the laity, but the presentation of the laity and
the emphasis on the distinction between the laity and the clergy found in the 1997
Instruction served as a background to sections of the document. \textit{Co-Workers}, however,

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 401. The Instruction quotes here from the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}.

\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., 402.

\textsuperscript{407} Aurelie Hagstrom, “The Secular Character of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity,” In
\textit{Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry} ed. Susan Wood

\textsuperscript{408} Zeni Fox, “Laity, Ministry and Secular Character,” In \textit{Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood:
Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry}, ed. Susan Wood (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003),
139.
returned to a foundation of commonality in its introduction of the theological foundations for lay ecclesial ministry. God calls all believers to holiness and the fullness of Christian life, and all are empowered by the Spirit with various gifts and ministries for the building up of the Body of Christ. The common mission of all in the church is rooted in the Trinitarian source that is fundamentally relational and that calls all members to engage in the mission. Participation in the mission is mandated through baptism and confirmation and celebrated in the Eucharist; it shapes the life of all Christians, though in different ways. Co-Workers made clear, however, that the primary answer to the call to holiness for laity is made in the secular realm, and that the common priesthood of all believers functions in relation to the ordained priesthood:

This recognition of the unique role of the ordained is not a distinction based on merit or rank; rather, it is a distinction based on the sacramental character given by the Holy Spirit that configures the recipient to Christ the Head and on the particular relationship of service that Holy Orders brings about between ecclesiastical ministry and the community. The ordained ministry is uniquely constitutive of the Church in a given place. All other ministries function in relation to it.

The document also makes extensive use of the language of the Instruction, citing it seven times in part one, on the foundations for lay ecclesial ministry. Both of these documents will be addressed again in the fourth chapter of this dissertation as they relate

---

410 Ibid., 409.
411 Ibid., 410.
412 Ibid., 411.
413 Ibid., 410 in footnote no. 40. Co-Workers uses the official title of the Instruction: Ecclesiae de Mysterio.
to ministry, but of importance to this chapter is the need for repeated emphasis on the need for a distinction between the ordained and the laity, and the concern over the proper, primary realm of lay activity.

The Vocation and Mission of the Laity

The church has tried to articulate the vocation and mission of the laity for well over half a century. This last section will attempt to contribute to that articulation by proposing a relational understanding of what it means to be laity. As seen in the previous sections, important parameters to the discussion have been outlined: the need to incorporate the secular character into conversations about the laity, the importance of the fundamental equality of the laity in the church, the need for clear language about how the laity and the ordained are equal but distinct, the connection between the Trinitarian foundations of the church and the understanding of relationships in the church and the world, and the role of all the baptized in the mission of the church. There have been enormous benefits to the process. Lay Christians have proven to be a wellspring of life and creativity for the church and its mission, particularly in light of the drastic changes in the church and society that have occurred in that same timeframe. The decrease in the number of priests available and the increase in the age of those who are in parish leadership have forced many changes on how the mission of the church is fulfilled. Those changes were coupled with new approaches to institutional life, fewer acceptances of the status quo particularly in regard to the role of women, and a willingness to question the reasons behind all institutions in society including the church.414

____________________
The renewal of the centrality of baptism as a unifying source of mission has propelled the laity in their mission in the world as well as their ministry within the church. There has been a sense of empowerment in the laity, to such an extent that Catholics of a new generation have the luxury of considering it the “way things have always been.” Within the same timeframe, however, there continues to be tension within the hierarchy around the laity and their identity. The overview of the conciliar and post-conciliar documents points to regular shifts in emphasis and disagreements in how, or whether, the church should define the laity. Through the documents it seems clear that, although there have been great strides in the articulation of the role and mission of the laity, there is still a tendency to reduce the laity to those who are not ordained. From this perspective, the laity becomes the common “matrix” from which those called to the ordained life are drawn. This perspective does not stand up to scrutiny, though. If the laity are the common matrix, then those who argue that the title holds no meaning are correct; there would be no difference between calling someone a “Christian” and calling someone a “layperson.” If that is the case, then the situation for lay ecclesial ministers is grim. That which is considered central to their identity as ministers, i.e. their “lay” status would be redundant and incapable of providing a meaningful identity.

Osborne, however, considered an alternate place to begin: “discipleship” as the common matrix of all Christians. Osborne pointed to the New Testament usage of the

---

414 Further information on the decline in the number of priests both worldwide and in the United States can be found regularly updated on the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) website: http://cara.georgetown.edu. The reader interested in further reading on societal trends is encouraged to read William D’Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge, and Mary Gautier, American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).
term as pertaining to all those who followed Jesus.\textsuperscript{415} In an extensive chapter on the subject, Osborne traced the usage of the term “disciple” and found that the overwhelming teaching in the scripture on how to be a follower of Christ related to all disciples, and when a passage related to leaders in particular it was clear from the context of the passage. Even in those situations, there is not a separate path of discipleship for leaders and for followers.\textsuperscript{416} All believers are called to a powerful understanding of true discipleship and to live that out to the best of their abilities in their lives. All followers of Christ are called to “go and make disciples” throughout the world, and to do so in the context of the believing community.

In his concluding chapter, Osborne recalled the quote from the Synod distinguishing vocation from mission, noted earlier in this chapter:

\begin{quote}
Vocation is broader than mission because it is composed of both a call to communio and a call to mission. Communio is the fundamental aspect destined to last forever. Mission, on the other hand, is a consequence of this call and is limited to an earthly existence.\textsuperscript{417}
\end{quote}

For Osborne, gospel discipleship is the vocation of all baptized-eucharistic Christians and the common matrix of all believers who share in the communion of the People of God and in the threefold mission of Christ.\textsuperscript{418} This would not necessarily mean that there could be no distinct definition of the laity. Instead, the call to the lay life would rise out of the common call of all to discipleship, to a distinct vocation in the church and a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{415} Osborne, 49.
\bibitem{416} Ibid., 109.
\bibitem{417} Instrumentum Laboris no. 14.
\bibitem{418} Osborne, 598 – 599.
\end{thebibliography}
repositioning in the ecclesial community. A Catholic would not be a layperson at baptism, but a disciple who may or may not discern whether he or she was called to the lay life. Osborne’s premise is thought provoking and profoundly helpful in rethinking the place of the layperson in the ecclesial community and in its mission. However, left unclear are the particulars of the mission as unique to the layperson. The secularity of the lay life seems to be an important component of the equation, but the question remains even in Osborne’s schema as to how that secularity would serve as particular to the lay life if all disciples are called to evangelize.

I propose one possibility that reflects the transformative relationship that is found in the foundational relationship of discipleship. The baptized-eucharistic Christian, as Osborne described those who accept the vocation to gospel discipleship in the context of a communion of believers, has entered into a transformative relationship with the divine which serves as the foundation for all other relationships. I would call this the “foundational transformative relationship” with the divine that draws the disciple into communion with other believers, forming the basis for the common matrix of discipleship. However, disciples enter into multiple relationships in the course of their lives. Certainly not all relationships will carry the same impact as the foundational transformative relationship, and some of the other relationships will be more central, or principal, in the lives of the disciples. I would describe these types of relationships as “principal mutually transformative relationships.” They are mutual in that in any principal relationship there is more than one party involved and that involvement is directed toward the “other” in the relationship. That is, it is not merely self-serving in nature. By being directed toward to other, both parties will be changed in the course of

---

419 Ibid., 600.
the relationship. In this sense, these principal relationships are transformative. A continued commitment to openness to engagement in the relationship itself will inevitably lead to some sort of change in both parties, and this would be a permanent change in the sense that neither party can ever be the same person they were prior to the relationship.

I would then propose that some Christians, by merit of their vocation and mission in the world, may be called to enter into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world in a way that would reposition them in the communion of believers. Most documents since the Second Vatican Council focus on the layperson as the one who engages in the world, or as immersed in the world, in a unidirectional manner. However, if the layperson is called into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world, not only would the world be transformed, but so would the disciple. In the overview of the conciliar and post-conciliar documents discussed earlier in this chapter, three aspects of the world are apparent. First, the world has an autonomy that must be respected. Second, the world has within it goodness stemming from its creation by God, and though wounded by sin it has its place within the salvific action of Christ. Third, the world encompasses creation as well as the political, economic, and social realms of human interaction.

Why would this be important? Disciples who choose to enter into a mutually transformative principal relationship with the world open themselves to being personally transformed by those aspects of the world that reflect the goodness of creation. That goodness is certainly found latent in the world as created by God. However, humanity in general and disciples in particular are also called to be co-creators with God and as such
have sought to form positive, life giving structures in the political, economic and social aspects of the world as well.

Disciples in this sense are very much on the “front lines of the church,” in Pope John Paul II’s terms. They are, through the sacramental expression of their foundational transformative relationship, a part of the communion of the People of God, and that relationship grounds all that they are and do in the context of their principal mutually transformative relationships. They are still not of the world, but in deep relationship with it. They open themselves to the prospect of conversion, which requires risk on the part of the disciple. Such openness requires the support, discernment and challenge of the whole communion of believers to be fruitful.

When the disciples called to lay life are transformed the church is transformed as well. In this sense, those disciples called to the lay life bring the heart of the church into the world and the heart of the world into the church through their very being. By accepting as their mission the entrance into a principal relationship with the world that is mutually transformative, the layperson becomes the primary way in which the church can read and understand the signs of the times, incorporate that which calls the communion to conversation, and have an authentic voice with which to share the good news in the changing contexts of the world.

This does not change the fact that all the church has a secular role, and that all members are called to engage the world. The particular vocation of the laity, however, calls them to do so in a particular way that risks entering into a mutually transformative relationship. It is a risk, however, and needs the whole of the church to be successful. Not all aspects of creation are “good” and most structures created in society do not fully
reflect the positive, life giving possibilities that would be the ideal. Discernment of those aspects of the relationship which call the individual to be transformed, and through them the church, versus those aspects of the world which should be transformed is not an easy process. It needs the regular assistance and support of the whole communion in relationship with one another, and the guidance of those for whom the relationship with the world is different. In particular, the ordained ministers, who would not have a mutually transformative relationship with the world as part of their principal relationships, could offer guidance and support to the disciples in light of the principal mutually transformative relationships manifested in the ordained life. This is not to say that the ordained Christians are not engaged in the world, but that their engagement is different from that of those disciples called to lay life, in a way that helps the ordained support the laity as they discern the implications of that relationship.

The implications for the lay ecclesial minister are critical. As laity, they would be primarily open to the principal mutually transformative relationship with the world that all laypeople are called to as a part of their vocation. However, the lay ecclesial minister would be living out that transformative relationship in the communion in a particular way. The next chapter will explore the ministerial aspects related to lay ecclesial ministry so that a clear articulation can be made as to how the lay ecclesial minister is called as a layperson to live out their transformative relationship with the world through their ministry in the church.
CHAPTER FOUR: MINISTRY AND MINISTRIES: A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO ORDERING THE BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD

The proliferation of the use of the terms “ministry” and “minister” in the years following the Second Vatican Council has sparked vigorous debate and concern in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The terminology reflected the explosion of the experience of ministry and who rightfully should be called a “minister.” Chapters two and three of this dissertation have already shown that competing understandings of ecclesiology and of the laity have remained in tension in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. Those foundations also found expression in the multiple understandings of ministry following the council. Assumptions that ministry could only refer to that which is done by the ordained in the church were challenged by the call of all the baptized to participate in the threefold ministry of Christ. The “how” of participation, of course, offered the crux of the issue, as well as the question on the very use of the term ministry to describe the action of the laity. The debate has continued on through the decades following Vatican II, most recently with the often-noted intervention by Cardinal Avery Dulles on the floor of the debate around Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord.420

This chapter will explore the divergent understandings of ministry that are in tension. It will use Edward Hahnenberg’s category of “high theologies” and “low

420 USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 406 sidebar. This describes a discussion on whether terms such as “minister” or “ministry” should be used in the document since Catholics may not understand the difference between lay and ordained ministry. Dulles assured the bishops that the text’s drafters had used the terminology in accord with the documents of the Holy See. The term “ministry” can be used in a broad sense that includes the laity, unless it’s qualified by “sacred or “Petrine.” In those cases ministry would refer only to the ordained.
theologies” of ministry to offer the background on the debate as well as the Trinitarian foundations that are common to all understandings of ministry. Comparisons using the experiences of the Episcopalian Church and the Southern Baptist churches, which reflect Hahnenberg’s “high” and “low” theologies respectively, will be used to show how widespread the issue of clarity in ministry is across denominational lines. Finally, an evaluation of Hahnenberg’s proposed approach to ministry will be offered with some suggestions for an understanding of ministry that is relational, yet still sees value in the distinction of “lay” ecclesial ministry by using the concept of principal mutually transformative relationships.

Sources for the Divergent Interpretations of “Ministry”

Jesus and his followers did not offer a definition of ministry, per se. However, the person and mission of Jesus provide for Christians the foundation and purpose for all ministry. Kenan Osborne describes the characteristics of ministry exemplified in Jesus, beginning with the intimate connection with God. All those who engage in ministry rooted in Jesus must affirm that it is not self-initiated, but instead is initiated by God. This does not discount the role of the community in discerning the validity of the call to public office. It notes, though, that the core of the call comes from God and is only then ratified by the community. With its foundation in God, the ministry of Jesus is naturally understood as a ministry of love and a ministry of healing. The love of God for the world and all of humanity is evident in the person of Jesus and his mission to reconcile all of

---

421 Hahnenberg, 40.

creation with God, and to offer healing from the fracture of sin. The ministry of Jesus is also a ministry of service. The Greek word *diakonos*, which provides the root for the English word minister, in addition to the other cognates of the word (such as *dikaiosynē*, “ministry” or *dikaioun*, “to serve”) is used 104 times in the New Testament.\(^{423}\) The New Testament authors point back to the servant leadership typified by Jesus and then lived out in the early church. Jesus’ ministry is a ministry of preaching and teaching, beginning with the proclamation that the Kingdom of God is at hand, that God is truly present and is calling all people to say yes to the power of God in their lives.\(^{424}\) Finally, for Osborne, the ministry of Jesus is political, in that it is not meant to be separated from the realms of people’s lives but to enter the fray and incorporate the Gospel message into the whole world.

The ministry and mission of Jesus were carried on by the early church, and in particular the understanding of service carries on as a central feature of ministry. The writings of Paul suggests other aspects of ministry include a variety of gifts (*charismata*) and works (*energēmata*) used to build up the Body of Christ, as in 1 Cor 12: 4-6. Thomas Rausch points out that there is a certain fluidity of terminology in the early church, but that there is already a certain sense of leadership, where some are called to a particular type of ministry.\(^{425}\) While Paul’s communities would not have had institutionalized “offices,” they did have some sense of structure with leaders or

\(^{423}\) Ibid, 42.

\(^{424}\) Ibid, 99.

“presiders” (1 Thess 5:12, Rom 12:8), or overseers and ministers (Phil 1:1). Evidence that some leaders were supported by local communities (1 Cor 9:4-13, Gal 6:6) points to some degree of formalization in the early church for the diversity of ministries. Interestingly, Rausch points to the later books in the New Testament to show that very early on there was both this diversification of ministries and some concern for “nascent clericalism” found in the warnings of Matthew (Mt 23: 5 – 10) against ostentatious religious clothing or the desire for the first seat at religious meetings and special titles.

Indeed, tension between a more differentiated, traditionally hierarchical understanding of ministry and a more fluid, charismatic understanding of ministry seems to be a regular part of the history of the church. The foundations of ministry found in Jesus provide room enough for multiple interpretations throughout history. In the Catholic Church, that history drew more and more from the traditional understanding of a hierarchical ministry, with an increased emphasis placed on the clergy as the ministers, and a decreased emphasis on charismatic understandings of ministry. Certainly charisms, gifts from God for the good of the community, would continue to be understood as important for ministry, particularly in regards to religious communities; but the priority shifted, especially in the past millennium, to a more clerical understanding that focuses

---


427 Rausch, 54.

428 Ibid, 55.
the role of ministry to that of sacramental leadership.⁴²⁹ The Second Vatican Council opened the way for renewed conversations about ministry, but the language used allowed multiple possible interpretations. As has been noted in previous chapters of this dissertation, tensions both during and after the council led to calls for further clarification about terminology, particularly “ministry,” as well as tria munera and how the priesthood of all believers relates to the priesthood of the ordained. Competing understandings of communion ecclesiology led to differing interpretations of the proper role of the laity in the mission of the church. Shifts in the needs of the church happening at the same time led to new attempts to meet the needs by both lay people and the clergy. The ongoing interpretation of the Second Vatican Council reflects the complexity of ecclesial life and practical implications.

In regards to the issue of ministry in particular, Hahnenberg refers to the competing understandings of ministry as “high theologies of ministry,” or those that begin with the “hierarchical priesthood and emphasize their relationship with Christ, and “low theologies of ministry,” or those that begin with a broad understanding of ministry of all the baptized and emphasize that ministry is based on charisms given by the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁰ As was discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, the competing versions of communion ecclesiology offer differing frameworks for the conversations around ministry, with different emphases depending on the interpretation of communion ecclesiology. This does not mean that there are no points of common ground, again

---

⁴²⁹ O’Meara, 89-129. This section provides an overview of the shifts in the understanding of ministry. A more detailed account can be found in Kenan Osborne, Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, Its History and Theology. Such transitions have been noted in other parts of this dissertation also.

⁴³⁰ Hahnenberg, 40.
discussed previously, but that the shifts in priority lead to tensions that need to be addressed to help the discussion regarding lay ecclesial ministry move forward.

**Hierarchy and Ministry**

Both of Hahnenberg’s categories of theologies of ministry would certainly place Jesus as the source of ministry, and through him the Trinitarian God. The church itself, as a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among humanity, seeks to live out the Trinitarian *communio* in the world to best continue the mission of Christ. The minister as well, as one created in the image of God and who follows as a disciple of Christ with a particular responsibility in the ongoing mission, is also deeply rooted in the Trinitarian spirituality. For those who enter the conversation through the door of a high theology of ministry, such as John Paul II, the relationship between the ordained members of the hierarchy and Christ is the starting point. Certainly all Christians share in unity with Jesus, and this is an unequivocally equal share. However, for John Paul II the Twelve apostles represented the hierarchy, which has a great responsibility for the transmission of the gospel message. All disciples have a role and responsibility in the mission set forth by Christ, but the ordained members of the hierarchy bear a particular weight and have a particular relationship with Jesus. The priest acts *in persona Christ,* with a specific ontological bond that unites the priest to Christ.\(^{431}\) That ontological bond is the essential difference between the priesthood of all believers and the ordained priesthood. John Paul II was speaking within a tradition of understanding an ontological difference between the clergy and the laity. Osborne traces the evolution of thought in

tradition through which the term *ordo* gradually came to be associated with the leadership positions in the early Christian community. From there the term went through functional and theological descriptions until the point that it juxtaposed the societal use of *ordo* with the ministerial use. At that point *ordo* takes on the connotation of “being,” with an emphasis on the ontological difference between those in orders and those without orders.\(^{432}\) Such an understanding can be seen in the Second Vatican Council *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis)*, where the priest was described as receiving a “special character” in the sacrament of Holy Orders that configures him to Christ the priest.\(^{433}\)

This emphasis on essential difference and division between clergy and laity, and its particular application to ministry, was carried forth strongly in the *Instruction: Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests’ Sacred Ministry*. The document was very focused in its purpose, as is evident from its title, and did not aspire to offer a view of lay ecclesial ministry in a manner that highlighted all it could offer the church. It meant to clarify some of the lingering questions around ministry and the relationship between clergy and the laity that had been in tension for over thirty years at the time of its publication, and to provide a “clear, authoritative response” to questions raised by bishops, priests, and laity alike.\(^{434}\) The theological principles laid out in the

---

\(^{432}\) Osborne, *Ministry*, 38 - 39. Specifically Osborne identified five stages: 1) the emergence of the term *ordo* within the Christian community to denote those in leadership, 2) a functional description of *ordo*, used to describe what those in various orders do and how they function in the community, 3) a theological description of *ordo* that is connected to the ordering of Old Testament priesthood and the ordering of creation by God, 4) the gradual inclusion of the ministerial *ordo* into the socio-political structures of the Graeco-Roman world and those that followed until the Holy Roman Empire, and 5) the description of *ordo* with a structure of being.

\(^{433}\) PO no. 2.

\(^{434}\) Congregation for the Clergy et al, *Instruction*, 400.
document begin with the tension between the priesthood of all believers and the ministerial priesthood. The essential difference between the two priesthoods rests in the conferral of sacred power to the ministerial priesthood to be at the service of the common priesthood. It is rooted in apostolic succession, bears the responsibility of acting in the person of Christ the head and shepherd, and serves Christ and the church through the authoritative proclamation of the word of God, administration of the sacraments and the pastoral direction of the faithful.\(^\text{435}\) The essential functions of the ordained minister, of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, cannot be separated out to nonordained ministers even in times of need. The \emph{Instruction} states:

\begin{quote}
Therefore, since the exercise of the \textit{munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi} by the sacred minister constitutes the essence of pastoral ministry, the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other. Rather they must be viewed in terms of mutual correspondence and complementarity. Only in some of these functions, and to a limited degree, may the nonordained faithful cooperate with their pastors should they be called to do so by lawful authority and in accordance with the prescribed manner.\(^\text{436}\)
\end{quote}

It is important to note who does the calling here, namely the \textit{lawful authority}. This section is ended with a quote from \textit{Lumen Gentium} 7, “He [Jesus Christ] continually provides in his body, that is, in the church, for gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we serve each other unto salvation.” The \emph{Instruction} does not elaborate on the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{435} Ibid, 401.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{436} Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
quote or how it connects with the rest of the section on the collaboration of the nonordained, but it follows immediately with a quote from Christifideles Laici that specifies that only the sacrament of orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, and that the exercise of certain tasks does not make pastors of the lay faithful. By using the quote from Christifideles Laici as a response to the Lumen Gentium quote, the Instruction seems to limit the acceptable ways in which Christ provides for the church.

Immediately following the quote from Christifideles Laici is a paragraph that relates the rise in nonordained ministries to the decline in ordained ministries, and a concern that a mistaken understanding of the nature of the common priesthood can encourage a reduction in the vocations to ministerial priesthood, a “closely related phenomenon.” The succession of the two quotes and the section on reduction in vocations, as contrasted with an affirmation that Christ does provide his body the gifts of ministries in paragraph 7 of Lumen Gentium, seems to point to a great danger for the nonordained if they interfere with Christ, the head of the body with whom the ordained are uniquely united in ordination, providing gifts of ministries.

The Instruction pointedly did not use a similar quote from the same section of Lumen Gentium that draws form 1 Cor. 12: 1 – 11: “Also, in the building up of Christ’s body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different...
gifts for the welfare of the Church.” The scriptural quote in *Lumen Gentium* is immediately followed by another quote from 1 Cor 14, “Among these gifts the primacy belongs to the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit himself subjects even those who are endowed with charisms.” Considering the attention in this section of *Lumen Gentium* to both the diversity of ministries and the limits of even those endowed with charisms in the church, one might think that it would be more appealing for the *Instruction*. However, the reference to Christ as the head of the body seems to take precedence for the *Instruction*, and possibly a concern with introducing the concept of charisms into the conversation. The connection with charisms, while evident in all theologies of ministry, is more associated with “low” theologies of ministry and will be addressed further in a later section of this chapter. The emphasis seen here in the *Instruction* and in John Paul II’s approach focuses instead on the connection with Christ as the head, the identity of the ordained as different from other disciples and the indispensable responsibility of them to lead the ministry of the church, and this is indicative of the “high” theologies of ministry. This approach is not limited to the Catholic Church, as will be seen in comparison to issues within the Episcopalian Church.

**Comparison with the Episcopalian Church**

The relation of ministry within a hierarchical structure of church and the struggles that can ensue are mirrored in the Episcopalian Church in the United States. As a part of the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church is certainly not structured in exactly the same manner as the Roman Catholic Church. With its *via media* history as a part of the Anglican Communion it allows for the preservation of the creeds, teachings of the
Ecumenical Councils and threefold ministry of the bishop, priest and deacon alongside the “gains of the Reformation” with its emphasis on worship, preaching, and communal fellowship.\(^{439}\) The *via media* approach allows for highly diverse experiences of liturgy, but all within the large parameters of accepted liturgical practices found in the Book of Common Prayer. The organizational structure of the Episcopal Church revolves around the basic unit of church life as seen in the structure of the diocese, overseen by a bishop who is elected by Diocesan Conventions and who, in turn, consents to the election by the lay vestry of a priest in each of the parishes within the diocesan border.\(^{440}\) At the national level, the General Convention serves as the legislative body of the Episcopal Church, which is composed of a House of Bishops, including all bishops in the church, and a House of Deputies, which includes four priests and four lay people from each diocese.\(^{441}\) A Presiding Bishop heads the General Convention, as well as an Executive Council.

The Episcopal Church has experienced a series of major challenges in the past fifty years. The “boom-time” of the Episcopal Church in the mid-twentieth century was met with massive social changes, which reverberated through the church. The question of identity, of what is means to be an Episcopalian, began to rise along with changes in society, including long-standing assumptions about race and gender. These issues influenced new understandings in the church.\(^{442}\) The role of the church as an agent of reconciliation and transformation in the world changed from a more private expectation


\(^{440}\) Ibid, 9 – 10.

\(^{441}\) Ibid.

of the role of faith within each believer to an expectation of more public action.\textsuperscript{443} Revisions in the Book of Common Prayer, finalized in 1979, placed a new emphasis on the church as a fellowship in the love of God carrying out Christ’s mission, and thus changed the worship experience at the parish level in ways that were not always met with satisfaction.\textsuperscript{444} Certainly in recent years the question of how the Episcopal Church relates to the global Anglican Communion has been evident in the tensions and struggles around women’s ordination and the ordination of homosexual bishops.

Among all of these changes and challenges, though, has been the struggle to articulate the relationship between ordained and lay ministry. The changes in society in the United States through the 1960’s and 1970’s found many Episcopalian priests engaging in “secular” professions such as therapists or social activists. The new revisions of the Book of Common Prayer, however, focused on the ordained ministry in terms of word and sacrament in the context of worship.\textsuperscript{445} The role of the laity, and their embrace of their ministry by merit of their baptism, changed the way in which priests were called to view their own identity and understanding of ministry. Over the next few decades the challenges of those changes were evident. The Cornerstone Project was developed in the 1990’s to respond to the clergy who found the changes in their ministry confusing, discouraging and stressful.\textsuperscript{446} Questions remained for the laity and the clergy about their mutual expressions for ministry founded on the one priesthood of all believers. For some in the Episcopalian Church, the one priesthood of all believers is the call of all the

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid, 83.

\textsuperscript{444} Ibid, 29 – 31.

\textsuperscript{445} Ibid, 26.

baptized to say yes to being a minister, and being a part of a ministering community with
the priest as the one called to lead and coordinate, as well as call forth certain members of
the community for more in-depth formation and formally authorized ministerial roles.  
For others, such a view truncates the church to the understanding of a Congregationalist
relationship between community and holy orders and a functional view of ministry,
without fully acknowledging the Catholic relationship of the ordained minister with the
bishop and as being a representative of Christ.  

The parallels with the struggles in the Roman Catholic Church are quite obvious.
The questions around how one maintains an understanding of the common priesthood of
all believers while distinguishing the ministry of the ordained priest can be seen here.
Consider for example, Sarah Coakley’s thesis, which she herself describes as
“controversial” in the Episcopalian Church, that there is not an absolute or qualitative
distinction between lay and ordained ministries.  Instead ordained ministers would be
distinguished by two spiritual “marks” of a deep conversion of life and recognition of
one’s role as mediator between God and humanity.  Such thoughts stand in stark
contrast to the comments made by Archbishop Harold Goodhew who stated he was
“firmly committed to the priesthood of all believers but do not feel that this negates the
firm ontological basis of the ordained ministry which has been central to our

__________________________


448 Leander Harding, “What Have We Been Telling Ourselves about the Priesthood?” Sewanee

209.

450 Ibid.
Although the Episcopalian understanding of ontological difference would differ somewhat from the Catholic position, particularly in light of the issues of physical likeness of the male ordained to Jesus deemed necessary in the Catholic tradition but not in the Episcopalian, the call for a clear division between the ordained and nonordained is quite similar.\footnote{452}

The question of who presides at the Eucharist in the Episcopalian Church came in the context of all of these changes. As the number of available priests in parts of the country shrank, new ways of celebrating Eucharist arose. In places such as Michigan lay people began presiding at the Eucharist as an “alternative” to the ordained Presider.\footnote{453} Some communities took to placing the elements of the Eucharist in the midst of the assembly and reciting the prayer of consecration as a group.\footnote{454} The practice of lay presidency in the United States certainly did not receive the level of interest or acceptance found in another part of the Anglican Communion, the Diocese of Sydney, where the debate has continued since 1983. The debates across the country were addressed in the 1994 General Synod, which denounced the practice of lay presidency as an expression of the priesthood of all believers.\footnote{455} The denouncement did not end the efforts in the Diocese of Sydney, however, which tried to allow the practice again.


\footnotetext{452}{See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “A Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,” \textit{Origins} 6 (February 3, 1977) for the Catholic position on the requirement of male only priests.}


\footnotetext{454}{Harding, “Power and Dignity,” 199.}

\footnotetext{455}{Ibid, 216.}
Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia would not ratify the decision, declaring that in light of the wider theological understanding of the Anglican Communion, such a decision would be tantamount to starting a new church. As recently as 2008, the diocesan Synod voted again to allow lay presidency, showing that the issue remains unresolved.

Apart from the Diocese of Sydney, no other member of the Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church, has sought to cross the ministerial boundary between the ordained presidency at the Eucharist and the role of the laity. The isolated experiences of lay presidency in the United States have been met with disapproval, but the issue has served to highlight the edges of the debates surrounding the ministry of the laity and the ordained ministry. In particular, it highlights questions about the identity of the priest, the relationship of the Presider with the bishop and wider communion, and the tension between the authority and limits of the priesthood of all believers in contrast to the ordained priesthood.

**Baptism, the Priesthood of all Believers and Charism**

Hahnenberg’s category of “low” theologies of ministry is also founded on the Trinitarian source of ministry and certainly points to Jesus as the foundation for ministry. However, the theological articulation of the influence of the Holy Spirit is also imperative in the understanding of ministry. Aspects of this approach to ministry have begun to take root in Roman Catholic theologies, though not without qualification. Taken to its ecclesial extreme, this approach would see no need for ministerial structures and would

---

only emphasize the role of the Spirit in bestowing gifts upon individual Christians to
fulfill their discipleship in the world. This level of extremity seems unsustainable in the
long term, as eventually some sort of organizing structure is necessary for communities to
flourish.457

The Second Vatican Council laid the foundation for the priority of the baptismal
call and the reality that all the baptized are called to mission. Richard Gaillardetz,
borrowing a phrase from Avery Dulles, writes that in its theological affirmations of the
equality of all the baptized and the priesthood of all believers the council suggests a view
of the church as the “community of disciples.”458 All Christians, by merit of their
baptism, are called to discipleship as a part of a people who together are sent in mission
to help further the reign of God. In doing so, each disciple is imbued with certain gifts, or
charisms, from the Spirit. The terms “charisms” and “ministry” are not interchangeable.
All disciples are imbued with gifts, but not all disciples are called to engage in ministry in
an ecclesial sense. Part of the difficulty lies in the multiple meanings often given to both
terms. “Charism” is a transcription of the Greek word charisma, a word not frequently
used outside of New Testament and Christian writing. It is used 17 times in the New
Testament, 16 of which are in Pauline letters and one in 1 Peter.459 Albert Vanhoye points
out that as a transcription, which he seems to equate with transliteration, as opposed to a
translation, charism becomes a technical term in English as is has no linguistic

457 Hahnenberg refers to the writing of Möhler, and his influence on Congar’s understanding of a
pneumatological ecclesiology, but even in Möhler’s “true pneumatology” there is a place for “a certain
structure.” Hahnenberg, 69.

458 Gaillardetz, 27.

459 Albert Vanhoye, SJ, “The Biblical Question of “Charisms,”” in Vatican II: Assessment and
connection or context.\textsuperscript{460} It loses its linguistic connection from the Greek in which it had the connotation of a “gracious gift,” or “gratuity” and becomes a technical word whose precise meaning is up for debate, as was clear in the discussions at the council.\textsuperscript{461}

The Council did not refer to charisms frequently. The issue of charisms raised a debate at the council, with Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini protesting the inclusion of charisms into the documents at all. He believed the inclusion of charisms would lead to ecclesial disorder, with no sense of structure or authority, and was convinced that charisms had essentially ceased after the first years of the early church, occurring very rarely today and being entirely singular.\textsuperscript{462} This position was challenged by Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens who saw charisms as not only extraordinary phenomena, but also ordinary and a part of the daily life of every Christian. The Council did not further the debate, but did include charisms, albeit infrequently and inconsistently, fourteen times in the documents. According to John Haughey, most importantly, the council reiterated the understanding of Pius XII that the living organism of the Church is directed by two kinds of gifts, hierarchical and charismatic.\textsuperscript{463} Yet the council does not offer a deeper understanding of how those two gifts interact with one another. It does state in Lumen Gentium section 12 that charisms are a “special grace” (\textit{charismata}) that the Spirit distributes as he will among all of the faithful, some very remarkable, some simple, to be used for the needs of the church. These gifts do not require the authority of the institution for their existence,

\textsuperscript{460} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 441.


\textsuperscript{463} Ibid, 5.
but the end of section 12 refers to a passage from Thessalonians where Paul instructs those who have charge over the church to judge and test the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, though these cannot extinguish a gift of the Spirit (1 Th. 5:12 and 19 – 21). Vanhoye notes that the Council did not set up an opposition between ministries and charisms; on the contrary, they have a common source and special relationship with one another where the charism can make the individual ready to undertake various tasks and offices, both as members of the laity or clergy.\textsuperscript{464} The clergy also, as seen in LG 7, have a role in the discernment of the charisms of the community that they lead. In this sense ministry has a particular ecclesial role of oversight and discernment of the gifts that arise within the community.

**Comparison with Southern Baptist Churches**

The connection between charisms and ministry in the “low” theologies of ministry points to the broad use of the term ministry that understands all those who are baptized are ministers in the church in some sense. The degree to which the general ministry relates to the ordained ministry is the point of tension in the Roman Catholic Church. However, even in faith communities which follow “low” theologies of ministry a tension remains between the ministries of all the members and the ministry of the clergy. The experience of church and ministry for Southern Baptists provides an example of a model of ministry that draws from the understanding of church as the People of God and a pneumatologically oriented ecclesiology. The congregational model of church seen in the Southern Baptist tradition emphasizes local autonomy and the call of every

\textsuperscript{464}Vanhoye, 444.
Christian to be an active member of the community. Strongly influenced by the political process in the United States, the key aspect of participation in the local congregation is based on the democratic process. Any member of the local church can initiate policy, which can then be voted on by the whole community and adopted with a majority vote. The congregation is the final seat of authority in the Southern Baptist tradition.

Within the ecclesiology of Southern Baptists, there is a strong emphasis placed on the priesthood of all believers and, in connection with all belonging to the priesthood of Christ, a call to ministry for all members of the church. How each person lives out that ministry will be different, however. For most members of the community it will involve various aspects of service and mission on behalf of the community, using the term ministry in a manner that can be interchangeable with volunteerism. Some members of the community will experience a “call to preach,” understood as being divinely initiated, with such a call understood as engagement in the most sacred of religious activities for the Baptists. This begins a process whereby some members of the community are “set apart” in their ministry, experiencing the “peculiar” calling of the ordained ministry. Bill Leonard traces this division in ministry back to the early church, in post Pentecost

---


466 Ibid., 123.


468 June Whitlow, “Laypersons: Making a Difference in Today’s World,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 29.3 (July 1994), 9-11. The outward nature of this understanding of ministry, not service to the church but service to the world, is comparable to the broader understanding of ministry in the Catholic Church, that is, sharing in the mission of the Church in the world.

469 Ingram, 121.

days. Quoting Acts 6:1-4 he notes that the Twelve did not want the care of the ever growing community to interfere with their preaching, anticipating the “inevitable” distinction between clergy and laity.\footnote{Leonard, 626.} This division has created long felt tensions between the clergy and the laity, even though there is a considerable level of democracy within the Southern Baptist community. While the congregation is the seat of authority and establishes policy in the Southern Baptist tradition, there is a social dynamic that seems at odds with the democratic expectations. The congregation hires the pastor, yet as one “set apart” by his call to preach, the pastor is implicitly encouraged to engage in a more authoritarian type of leadership.\footnote{Ibid., 123.} The pastor is “hired” to be a leader, yet must in some way answer to the congregation that hired him. The pastor’s public call, licensing, and public vesting at his ordination all serve to establish distinction from the laity, who do not have such rituals associated with their ministries. Some congregations find that the laity in the community, while publicly claiming that everyone in the community are ministers, expect that the pastor is the one “called” to ministry and therefore he is the one who is responsible for the success or failure of the congregation.\footnote{Smith, 654.}

In light of such tensions, and in response to a call to evangelism geared towards the millennial celebration, the Southern Baptist churches celebrated the Year of the Laity from 1988 through 1989. There was some sense of hope of returning to the times of religious revival in the United States that followed World War II and going through the
1960’s. Additionally, some had noted earlier in the decade at the Southern Baptist Convention that there was a hunger in the laity to find their place in meaningful ministry and that this hunger was not being satisfied in the local churches. There was a need to help the laity express their ministry in its proper location, that of the world. The ministry of the laypersons is the ministry of the church in the sense that they are the ministers of the church in the marketplace. Indeed, the call to become “Marketplace Ministers” for the Southern Baptists is the ministerial goal for the laity, with the church becoming the educational and formative locus for them in their preparation for mission. The clergy are called to take on the role of “player-coach” for the laity as they engage the world, shedding the perception that the ordained member of the congregation is the key player in ministry.

The Southern Baptist model of lay ministries focuses on the call of all the People of God to minister in the broadest sense of the term. There is an ideal of equality in the governance of the congregation that, while not always lived out in practice, contributes to the egalitarian feel of the community. However, even with the foundations in democratic polity and congregational authority, tensions remain between the ministry of the ordained and the ministry of the laity. The ecclesial service done within the congregation by the laity is less connected with their true ministry in the marketplace and more with their

---

474 Reid Hardin, “The Year of the Laity in Southern Baptist Life,” *Review & Expositor* 85.4 (Fall 1988), 671. The document referenced by Hardin, “The Year of the Laity in Evangelization and Discipleship,” was a joint effort of the Evangelism Section, Home Mission Board; Church Training Department, Sunday School Board; Brotherhood Commission and Women’s Missionary Union.

475 Ibid, 672.

476 Ibid, 673.

477 Smith, 655.
expected level of participation within the community. The role of the ordained is one that is also struggling to address questions of ambiguity and confusion. How should a pastor lead a community that is the hiring agent, and which has, in some cases, turned over responsibility for the work of all aspects of ministry? How can a pastor empower others to engage in ministry when the pastor is evaluated by the congregation according to successful performance in ministry? What are the roles that are particular to the clergy in ministry and who should decide?\textsuperscript{478}

Thus, even in structures that are intended to promote participation in all levels of the community experience, the differentiations between the ministry of the ordained and that of the laity in the Southern Baptist tradition continue to be a source of tension. Their experience does not provide any ready answers to the understanding of ministry in the Catholic Church, but it does highlight the reality that even in a Congregational model of church with high levels of expectation of participation and democracy, tensions about roles, function and leadership persist.

**Ordering the Baptismal Ministries**

Finding a middle way between the high and low theologies of ministry in the Roman Catholic Church is no easy task. Yet if no attempt at a middle way is made, the divergent theologies may only continue to be in opposition. The best of both aspects of ministry may be lost in such a prolonged opposition. Struggling to articulate a middle way, or a bridge between the two, could bring the best of both approaches to our

\textsuperscript{478} Ingram, 119 – 120;123.
understanding of ministry and offer creative new ways of moving forward. Those most inclined to try seem to draw from some aspect of the low theologies of ministry as their entry point, and often using the work of Yves Congar as their foundation. Congar’s influence on the Second Vatican Council and his rich appreciation of the pneumatological dimension in ecclesiology, along with his groundbreaking work on the laity, make him the obvious choice. However, those who wish to articulate a common ground must also incorporate the Christological elements that high theologies of ministry find essential. Edward Hahnenberg offers such an articulation in his work on relational approaches to ministry.

Hahnenberg uses both the work of Congar and Thomas O’Meara in developing his approach. O’Meara, in his revised work *Theology of Ministry*, offers a definition of Christian ministry as, “the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to proclaim, serve, and realize the kingdom of God.”⁴⁷⁹ Note that O’Meara connects the pneumatological emphasis of the gifts of the Spirit, offered freely for all, with the sacramental foundation of all the baptized, who are baptized into a community and now are called to public activity on behalf of that community. The structure that O’Meara offers to describe the diversity in Christian ministry is concentric circles, circles of ministry that surround the leader of the community. For O’Meara, that leader could be “Christ or his Spirit, or the pastor or bishop,” depending on the scope of the community being represented.⁴⁸⁰ The concentric circles are not all the same, but encompass the

---

⁴⁷⁹ O’Meara, 150.
ordained, those working full-time, part-time or as volunteers. Their status as lay or
ordained at those levels of circles do not, for O’Meara, provide an important or helpful
cOMPONENT to their ministry. Instead, O’Meara depicts distinctions in leadership by the
level of the person on the concentric circles. The primary leader, in the center of the
circle, directs and enables other Christians in the community at various levels of the
circle in their ministry and acts as a coordinator for the communal life of ministry.
The image of the concentric circles is thus for O’Meara:

---

481 Ibid., 182.

482 Ibid, 183. O’Meara’s original diagram also includes reference to “teams,” which are one
possible structure of more established, full time ministers, and “signs” connected to the outer, more part-
time ministers. He also includes various types of ministries such as peace and justice; health and aging;
counseling, liturgy, education and evangelism.
Placement within the circles is full-time to part-time, with appropriate degrees of preparation. The designation of “lay” does not apply here for O’Meara, and he challenges any confusion between what he calls mode of life, particularly celibate, male, quasi-monastic or clerical, and ministry.  

Hahnenberg builds on this diversity of ministry understood in terms of concentric circles, and adds a more explicit articulation on the relational aspect of ministry. To do so, he calls upon Congar’s post-conciliar work *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, where he achieves a balance between the Christological and the pneumatological approaches that had not been present even in his own early works. In Congar’s view, the Spirit is the co-instituting principle, creating the church together with Christ and filling it with life. Thus, while there still may be tensions between charism and institution, there is also complementarity, with charisms forming the matrix out of which all ministries arise. The ordained share in the common matrix of charisms and, in addition, share a special Christological representation in the community of unity and apostolic succession. For Hahnenberg, Congar points to a common foundation of discipleship through which all members of the Christian community are, through their baptism, full and equal members with a full share in the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on the community for the good of the church, and fully engaged in the *tria munera* of Christ, lived out in various ways in the world. The ordained minister, already deeply understood in the Christological theology of ministry as acting *in persona Christi*, and in particular with Christ the head of the

---

483 Ibid, 191.

484 Hahnenberg, 78.

485 Ibid.
Body of Christ, *in persona Christi capitis*, can be additionally understood in terms of the
charism of community leadership, lived in the model of Christ as servant to the
community. 486

In this distinction alone, Hahnenberg brings a new possibility into O’Meara’s
argument. Ignoring or minimizing the ministry of the ordained and their unique and
irreplaceable contribution to the People of God cannot build the bridge between the high
and low theologies of ministry. However, by entering the conversation with the broad
approach that joins all Christians together, then making certain distinctions with the
ordained, Hahnenberg emphasizes the equality of the faithful more so than a division that
implies an unequal society. The identification of the ordained as the head of Christ in the
community does not extend to those engaged in lay ecclesial ministry or the diaconate.
To understand their ministries, Hahnenberg turns to his relational approach to ministry.

Relational ministry is, for Hahnenberg, founded on the Trinitarian principle of
personhood. Drawing from the work of John Zizioulas, Hahnenberg explores the
Trinitarian understanding of the divine personhood as defined in terms of relationship:

The Father is Father because of relationship to the Son and
to the Spirit; the Son is Son because of relationship to the
Father (being begotten); the Spirit is Spirit because of
relationship to the Father (proceeding from). 487

God is ultimately in communion, with relationship as God’s very being. Ministry can be
understood in light of that relational reality. All ministers, of all kinds, are in a vast
network of horizontal relationships as well as a vertical relationship with God through
Christ and the Spirit. For Hahnenberg, the Christian minister is called to live a particular

486 Ibid, 82 – 83.

487 Ibid, 89-90.
type of relationship, one of service, where one “takes up a new stance before others within and beyond the church.”\textsuperscript{488} All Christians are called to relationships of service, at the basic interpersonal level. However, \textit{ecclesial} ministerial relationships occur when interpersonal ministerial relationships take on a public and structured dimension, are done on behalf of the church and are formally integrated into the church’s mission.\textsuperscript{489} Ecclesial ministers are in a relationship with the community and with the leadership, which shifts their placement on Hahnenberg’s model of concentric circles. Hahnenberg’s model shifts the focus in its categories from O’Meara’s, pulling away from “full time” and “part time” categories and using types of leadership instead. In light of the wide diversity of full time, part time, and volunteer lay ecclesial ministers, which may or may not change their levels of responsibility or leadership for a particular ministry, such an approach is reflective of the lived experience in the local communities.

\textsuperscript{488} Ibid, 93.

\textsuperscript{489} Ibid, 94.
His model is, then:\(^{490}\)

Hahnenberg has removed the expectation that an ordained minister would necessarily serve as the center circle in the model, reflecting the experience of lay pastoral administrators or deacons who have been appointed to the leadership of a local community without a resident priest pastor in accordance with Canon 517 §2. It is important to note that the leadership in the center circle is not related to sacramental celebration or the role of the ordained acting *in persona Christi.*\(^{491}\) These actions are, for Hahnenberg, associated with ordination. The second circle includes those who have been prepared for ministry that is an exercise of leadership in some significant area, and are

\(^{490}\) Ibid, 127

\(^{491}\) Ibid., 54.
committed to it for a period of time. Those who would ordinarily be referred to as lay ecclesial ministers would fall in this circle, as would deacons who take on leadership for a particular area of ministry. The third circle would include those who are lectors, Eucharistic ministers, and others who have not made a significant commitment of preparation, education or time to the ministry, but still function in a public manner within the community. The outer circle is where the majority of the members of the community would lie, engaging in ministry in their relationships with others and the world as an expression of their baptismal call.

Movement from one circle to another involves an ecclesial re-positioning. By baptism all Christians experience their first repositioning within the “sacred order” or hierarchy. Richard Gaillardetz describes this repositioned relationship as threefold: vertically, into communion with God in Christ through the Spirit; horizontally, with all those who together comprise the communion of believers; and then an outward movement toward the world as one sent in mission. When one enters into ecclesial ministry, Hahnenberg sees the shift from one circle to the next as involving three factors: the minister’s commitment to ministry; the significance and public nature of the ministry; and the recognition given by the community and its leaders. The entrance of the laity into life long ministry in the church has changed some of the presuppositions of what commitment to ministry might mean, but the degree to which the minister is open to formation and education and is committed to a community would pertain to the

492 Ibid., 127.
493 Gaillardetz, 35.
494 Ibid.
495 Hahnenberg, 131.
repositioning. The public nature of a ministry speaks to the responsibility that a minister has to the community. As ecclesial ministers take on more and diverse forms with greater responsibilities, repositioning occurs in the eyes of those served, and the actions of the minister can have long term effects on the community.

The final factor of recognition by the community and its leaders leads to the question of how such recognition should take place. Hahnenberg notes the tension regarding whether laity can hold ecclesiastical offices has stalled the needed ritual for recognition within the community, signaling the re-positioning of the minister. The bishop, rightly understood as the center of the ministering church, is the one who is called to maintain the dynamic communio of vocations in the diocese and encourage and foster their growth, and therefore is also called to designate those in ecclesial ministry. 496 Hahnenberg deliberately uses “designation” as opposed to “delegation” to avoid the limited theology around the term that would suggest someone is appointed to act for, or on behalf of, someone else. 497 Designation is a recognition and naming of ministry, and shows the support of the bishop for the new role of the minister in relationship with the community. 498 By speaking of designation instead of delegation, multiple ritual forms are possible depending on the level of leadership entered into by the minister. Hahnenberg does not directly address how his use of the term designation differs from the Instruction’s understanding of the laity collaborating with the ordained. However, by using language without the theological connotations of delegation, Hahnenberg avoids

496 Ibid, 148.
497 Ibid., 149.
498 Ibid.
the concern of the *Instruction* that any liturgical ritual associated with lay ecclesial ministry should not create confusion between lay and ordained ministries.\(^{499}\)

**Relational Ministry as the Language of Lay Ecclesial Ministry**

Hahnenberg’s use of “relational ministry” to articulate a clearer understanding of ecclesial ministry offers important insights and possibilities in moving forward the conversation in Roman Catholic thought. Recalling the work in chapter two of this dissertation, tensions within the wider conversation of communion ecclesiology have influenced how ecclesial ministry, and lay ecclesial ministry in particular, fits within the community. The work of Yves Congar and Pope John Paul II typifies places of commonality in the wider conversations as well as points of contention. As Hahnenberg draws heavily from the work of Congar for his inspiration it would be no surprise that there is a great convergence between the ideas of the two theologians. However, the question remains as to whether relational ministry and its model of concentric circles are sufficient to bridge the tensions that remain. Recalling the five categories of communion ecclesiology from Doyle of divine, mystical, sacramental, historical and social, this section will attempt to show where Hahnenberg’s argument offers the most hope, and where there is a need for additional considerations. It will end by proposing how the approach taken toward the laity in chapter three of this dissertation might offer an additional component to relational ministry by more clearly articulating the nature of and need for the “lay” aspect of lay ecclesial ministry.

\(^{499}\) Ibid., 191.
Hahnenberg’s Trinitarian foundations recall the importance of a Trinitarian foundation to a relational ministry, and both Congar and John Paul II would agree. Certainly, Congar’s understanding of the ongoing, creative action of the Holy Spirit supports the dynamic fluidity of relationship in the ecclesial community. The concentric circles structure, while somewhat static in its representation, does point to a model that creates greater space for the Holy Spirit to be experienced. It also offers flexibility for the creative work of the Spirit that both honors the need for sacred order and the recognition that ministry can take different forms over the course of history.

Hahnenberg’s proposal then also offers some consideration for John Paul II’s perspective on the Holy Spirit in the sense of order. However, John Paul II understands the Holy Spirit as the one who reveals to the church the Truth, fully present in Christ’s revelation, in a manner that gives less creative emphasis in the role of the Holy Spirit and more deeply connects the Spirit’s mission with that of Christ. While relational ministry certainly is connected with the Body of Christ, it is more indicative of the creative understanding of structure and points to a more fluid experience of the divine in community than John Paul II would probably accept without reservations.

**Mystical**

As regards the mystical aspect of communion ecclesiology, Hahnenberg works to unify the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in all understanding of ministry, not simply splitting the role of Christ to be associated with the ordained and the role of the Spirit with the baptismal ministries, by connecting the understanding of acting *in persona*
Christi with all members of the baptismal priesthood, each in their own way. Congar’s inspiration is clear here also, with the Spirit’s work in the community extending from creation of the church to filling it with life. Since Hahnenberg specifies how the ordained are in a particular relationship with Christ, it seems that John Paul II’s concerns could be satisfied in a way that both respects the Christifideles and the uniqueness of the sacramental priesthood.

The call of all to holiness and into the communion of saints adds another important dimension here. The fact that all the baptized are called into interpersonal ministerial relationships broadens the work of the community to all its members while distinguishing the interpersonal from the explicitly ecclesial. John Paul II could probably find this universal, yet differentiated role acceptable. Even the role of Mary, in John Paul II’s understanding of her as the model of discipleship, but not a part of the apostolic succession, could find a place within this view. The relationships that Mary models, with God, with her community, and with the faithful, make sense when articulated in terms of relational ministry. Relational ministry allows the flexibility of various roles of leadership and a diversity of charisms.

Sacramental

It is in the category of communion ecclesiology as sacramental that Hahnenberg has the most difficult bridge to build. The difference between how Congar and John Paul II approach the Twelve as representing either the whole church or those in apostolic leadership alone sets the tension in the model. This difference is critical in how one understands Christ’s institution and structuring of the church, and in the call to participate
in the apostolic mission of the church. In the relational ministry model, Hahnenberg adjusted the center circle from O’Meara’s model, which has the bishop or priest in the middle. Hahnenberg includes the possibility that a lay ecclesial minister, entrusted with the care of a parish, could be in the center of the circles. There is an understanding that the person is “entrusted,” therefore by the bishop, with the care of the parish, but no explicit connection with the sacramental leadership is offered. Hahnenberg writes that the rise of what he calls pastoral coordinators, a term that the Instruction: Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests’ Sacred Ministry finds unacceptable, indicates less a new form of ministry than an old form seen in the presbyter-priest. The pastoral coordinators have been given responsibility over a community, but without the usual corresponding presidency at the Eucharist. What Hahnenberg describes as “disciplinary restrictions” of the pastoral coordinator, the separation of community leadership from presiding over the Eucharist, has limited the leadership from exercising their full ministry. Pope John Paul II would most likely challenge the restriction as being a disciplinary one as opposed to a theological and sacramental one.

The question extends into the debate on how lay ecclesial ministers could or should be recognized. Both Hahnenberg and John Paul II would agree that some form of recognition is due when a person is “repositioned” in the community. However, Hahnenberg’s broadening of the term ordination would be read by John Paul II as a clericalization of the laity. Hahnenberg discusses the ontological change that is “symbolized and effected by ordination” as a relational reality; that is, the priest has a

---

500 Ibid, 127.
501 Ibid, 143.
new set of relationships and a new “place” in the church.\textsuperscript{502} He is trying to bridge the debate on ministry as “being” versus “doing” by offering a relational ontology. Hahnenberg is cautious about his language, yet willing to probe more controversial implications. For example, the ritual of laying on of hands, which became uniquely associated with the ordination rite, could, for Hahnenberg, be incorporated into a wider array of ritual recognition.\textsuperscript{503} Hahnenberg is also willing to broaden the use of the term “ordination” itself, speaking of it in terms of a “process” instead of a moment in a ritual action that could encompass a plurality of rites.\textsuperscript{504} Such an approach does broaden the understanding of personhood and minister in relationship with the community, but will ultimately lead Hahnenberg to question any value in the “lay” designation of lay ecclesial ministers.

\textit{Historical}

The historical aspect of communion ecclesiology highlighted in chapter two mentions Congar and John Paul II’s understanding of the church as a fundamentally equal society and as a church that is in relationship with the world. Hahnenberg’s treatment of relational ministry would seem to articulate a deep appreciation for the fundamental equality of all of the members of the community. His ability to create a seamless approach to ministry that is carried out by all members of the community in their own way maintains the importance of continuity with the common matrix of all the believers while keeping distinct those areas of leadership that require great commitment.

\textsuperscript{502} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{504} Ibid., 199,203 - 204.
education and training. He gives ministerial language, such as ecclesial re-positioning, that counters concerns that somehow lay ecclesial ministers are seen as separated from other members of the laity. However, Hahnenberg’s treatment does not extensively deal with the issue of the church’s relationship with the world. The interpersonal ministerial relationships of all of the members of the community would include those who are in the world, are a part of the church’s mission and are the “general ministry” of all the baptized.\textsuperscript{505} Interestingly, though, Hahnenberg does not relate this even to Congar’s thoughts on how the world shapes the church and the role of the world in the reform of the church. The scope of Hahnenberg’s work may have prohibited such an exploration, but it would have added an important dimension which will be further addressed later in this chapter.

\textit{Social}

The final aspect of communion ecclesiology, the social aspect, highlighted the particular understanding of the laity and their relationship with the world. In particular, it noted the concerns that John Paul II had about the proper understanding of the laity as having secular character and a vocation that focused on the transformation of the world. Hahnenberg disagrees with any clergy-laity dividing line as a beginning point for discussing ministry, and this would include using the secular character of the layperson as a starting place.\textsuperscript{506} He does not explicitly say that he disagrees with the term “laity” itself or any attempt at a positive definition of the laity, but does note a number of theologians

\textsuperscript{505} Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{506} Ibid, 37.
who either find the distinction unhelpful or who question the possibility that there is a
definition of the laity that is somehow different from that of a Christian. Continuing to
use the term “lay” ecclesial ministry is, for Hahnenberg, a matter of clarity or consistency
with current usage more than any conviction that the adjective adds anything to the term.
Here John Paul II, and those who come from a similar perspective of communion
ecclesiology, would again raise concerns about the blurring of lines between the clergy
and the laity, as well as questions about divisions within the laity. Repositioning in the
community does offer a distinction in terms of leadership and the laity, but the relational
ontology does not fully bridge the concerns raised by John Paul II.

Does this mean that such an approach could not be a component of a relational
understanding of ministry? If one does not take secular character as the starting point,
could it still be incorporated into this model? If so, could some of the points of tension
within communion ecclesiology that have not yet been addressed be better clarified?

Relational Ministry and the Laity

Chapter three of this dissertation presented a description of the laity that could be
incorporated into Hahnenberg’s model to its benefit. The proposition began with the
understanding that all disciples of Christ, including the laity, have entered into a
foundational transformative relationship with God through baptism. That foundational
transformative relationship with the divine draws the disciple into communion with other
believers, forming the basis for the common matrix of discipleship in the community of
the church. Each disciple, however, enters into multiple relationships over the course of
his or her life. Some of these relationships have intentional levels of commitment and
mutuality, others are fleeting and relatively inconsequential, and many fall in between. Those relationships that are entered into intentionally, though possibly with different initial levels of intention, and which become mutually transformative for the disciple and the other, can be called principal transformative relationships. Disciples may enter into numerous principal mutually transformative relationships over the course of their lives. Once the disciple enters into these types of relationships, he or she is changed by the relationship in a permanent way. For example, in the context of ministry, a disciple may intentionally enter into a principal mutually transformative relationship when he or she discerns a call to lead the faith formation of a parish. The commitment to the relationships between the disciple and the catechists, and the openness to transformation both on the part of the disciples and of the catechists makes the relationship mutual. By entering into this committed relationship, the disciple is changed over time, as are the catechists. The level of intentional commitment makes this a principal relationship in the life of the disciple. Contrast this example to a situation of service where a disciple agrees to substitute for a DRE (Director of Religious Education) for a day because the DRE is ill. In this instance the disciple is not intentionally engaging in a committed relationship with the catechists, but is instead providing a temporary service.

For another example, outside of the ministerial arena, a mother enters into a relationship with her child in a way that can be understood as a principal mutually transformative relationship. Both the mother and the child are changed by the relationship in a permanent manner. From the time the woman becomes a mother, she will never again not be a mother. This remains true even if the child predeceases the mother. The woman does not return to a “pre-mother” state.
Hahnenberg’s Trinitarian foundations for his relational ministry would seem to function well with this understanding of foundational and principal transformative relationships. The understanding of God as communion, and of personhood as relationship, offers a natural starting point for transformative relationships. The idea that there are multiple levels of relationships within the life of disciples in some ways juxtaposes the concentric circles of relational ministry onto the lived experience of the individual disciple as well as the community of believers. The image of the concentric circles for the individual, however, is somewhat limited as principal mutually transformative relationships may overlap or may “shift” in degrees of intensity at different times in the disciple’s life. However, the idea that who we are is connected to the critical relationships in our lives, Hahnenberg’s relational ontology, would extend to different levels of relationships in our lives outside of the community of faith as well. In this sense principal mutually transformative relationships are “historical” in a manner that completes and complements Hahnenberg’s perspective.

Chapter three also proposed that some disciples, indeed many disciples, will enter into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world, understood both in terms of the political, social, and economic structures of the world and with the world as all of creation. This might be represented in relationships with individuals as well as participation in and transformation of structures of work and family. Since this is a mutually transformative relationship, the disciple would seek to transform those parts of the world that are in need of the healing power of the Good News to help bring forth the reign of God. However, since that transformative process of the reign of God is already begun, those parts of the world that are already in transformation could, in turn, transform
the disciple as well. As a part of a community of believers, the disciple could become a living witness to those parts of the transformation that might help the community of believers better understand the mission of the church at their particular moment in time.

If this approach has merit, how might it work in terms of relational ministry? As far as Hahnenberg’s outer circle, general Christian ministry, it would seem to fit very well. The general Christian ministry of a disciple called to be laypersons could include advocating to change the policies of their workplace to better reflect the human dignity of all those created in the image of God. It could also involve working to protect creation and raising awareness of our role as stewards. It could also be that they bring into the concentric circles practices from “the world” that are more equitable and better reflect equality and respect so that such practices might be integrated into the interpersonal relationships of the community. Those disciples who are called to occasional public ministry, Hahnenberg’s second level of ministry, as laypersons, also do so bringing in with them all that they have learned, experienced, and been transformed by through their principal transformative relationship with the world. Their ecclesial repositioning in the community does not change the fact that they are in a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world, but it does change their insights and manner of interacting with others during those moments of occasional ministry. Additionally, their principal mutually transformative relationships in the world may be transformed as well through their experiences in their new position in the ecclesial community.

Of particular importance for the understanding regarding lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation would be the two inner circles of Hahnenberg’s model: those called to leadership in areas of ministry and of communities. These are the levels of ministry that
Hahnenberg associates with what the bishops call lay ecclesial ministry, although a layperson in the center circle is in ministry in a canonically restricted way. Hahnenberg notes that the emphasis in official church teaching on the secular orientation of the layperson does not seem to make sense for those laypeople engaged in ecclesial ministries that are not obviously secular, such as religious education or the planning of liturgies. Instead those ministries would fall on the level of leadership in areas of ministry. This author would respectfully disagree. If secularity can be understood in terms of disciples who have entered into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world, then having ministers in leadership with such a relationship would influence their ministry, in my mind for the better. It would not change how the minister is repositioned in the community, but would change their relational ontology in a way that is distinct from the ordained. The principal mutually transformative relationship with the world would influence how the lay ecclesial minister leads, and the experience of ecclesial repositioning would in turn change how the lay ecclesial minister relates with and transforms the world. Hahnenberg’s model works very well to describe how that is possible and how that repositioning reflects a certain commitment to ministry, the public nature of the ministry and the recognition of the ministry on the part of the community.

The benefit of having ministers in leadership who are simultaneously in a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world is that they serve not only as living witnesses to the transformation of the world and the mission of the church, but also, as leaders, they are living translations of that witness for others. Lay ecclesial ministers offer the bridge for the laypeople they serve between the teachings of the

---

507 Ibid, 11.

church and the experience of the world. They articulate, in the language of a native, the complexity of two millennia of thought and faith of the church in a manner that can resonate with the lived experiences of those they serve, particularly those who have also chosen to enter into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world. So even though the Director of Religious Education at a parish, for example, does not “work in the world,” so to speak, he or she still lives out a principal transformative relationship with the world through his or her call to ministry in the parish by giving language to the experience of the children and parents, as well as the catechists themselves. It is the language of one equally immersed in the complexity and culture of the world, yet able to translate for others with the clarity of one who can discern how best to communicate the Word. The DRE is, in a sense, bi-lingual in the language of the world and the language of the church, and this allows him or her to give language to experience of both. This is not an easy call. Being bi-lingual does not mean that there are always obvious translations, and some translations are more difficult than others. The lay ecclesial minister stands as a living translation for others to show, though, that the ongoing, regular, ordinary process of articulating and living the faith of a disciple, while difficult, is possible and desirable. He or she serves as the embodiment and the actualization of discipleship as a lay person.509

Of course, such discipleship is ultimately only possible through the charisms of the Holy Spirit, given for the sake of the community. Discerning the gifts that the Spirit has bestowed upon a disciple would be a part of determining if, for example, that disciple

509 See Robert Imbelli and Thomas Groome, “Signposts towards a Pastoral Theology,” Theological Studies, 53:1 (March 1992) for a parallel with the pastoral theologian. They speak of the pastoral theologian as the one who embodies and actualizes the responsibility and concern for articulating the meaning and implications of Christian identity to the whole community (page 136).
should take the path of a principal of a local public school or the path of a DRE. Some of the skills involved in either path would be the same, and the disciple would need to possess or develop those skills to be successful in either path. However, to be in leadership in an area of ministry, to be committed to that ministry, formed not only in education but theology, to agree to the public nature of the call and to be prepared to live as a living translation for those who seek to live as disciples in the world necessitates the gifts of the Spirit for the good of the community. It is not only a different expression of similar skills, but also a call to a different mutually transformative relationship. The lay dimension of this ecclesial ministry must be incorporated into that discernment and into that prayer to the Spirit.

In addition to the grace and strength of the Spirit, the lay ecclesial minister also needs to be in cooperation with the ordained leadership of the community. Chapter three of this dissertation noted that entering into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world involves risk to the disciple and this risk is no less true for the disciple that is also a lay ecclesial minister. Acting as a translator in leadership requires risk, and sometimes the process of translation is flawed. Terrence Tilley refers to the risk of the translator as being a “traitor,” a word that has common etymological roots. Without an understanding of the context of the word or concept to be translated, the meaning can be lost or rendered inaccurate. To be effective, all disciples must be open to conversation and to the possibility that they have not seen or understood an important piece of the broader perspective. The layperson offers such perspective to the church when its members become closed off or rigid in their understanding of faith. The

---

ordained offer perspective as well, particularly for the laity who are searching to understand those aspects of their relationship that are life-giving, and as such should transform the disciple, from those aspects that are wounded, and as such need the disciple to act as an agent of change. The lay ecclesial minister benefits from the perspective of the ordained in maintaining the breadth and depth of the translation when trying, in whatever area of ministry they lead, to give language to the experience of faith. The ordained do this not because they are disconnected from the world; they are still in relationship with the world and the church would not expect them to be isolated from it. However, it is different to be in relationship with the world in general versus being in a principal mutually transformative relationship. A vibrant faith community needs people in multiple types of principal mutually transformative relationships, and then to have those people in regular, healthy communication with one another so that the transformation brought in from all types of transformative relationships can contribute to the growth of the whole and the effective mission of the church. The ordained could be understood as being in a principal mutually transformative relationship with the church, understood both in relation to all the faithful and to the bishop in a particular manner. This type of principal mutually transformative relationship does not presume ecclesial repositioning, which could be a distinct ritual associated with leadership of a faith community, but instead is about the relational ontology of the clergy. Obviously the understanding of the principal mutually transformative relationship of the ordained requires more attention than can be given here, but if this approach has merit then this would be an imperative topic to explore. Does this addition to the relational ministry model add to division between the ordained and the laity? Does it automatically recall the
clergy-laity divide that permeated earlier understandings? I would argue no. This clarification of principal mutually transformative relationships serves more as a distinction than a division. Even Hahnenberg notes, in distinguishing between levels of ministry, that distinctions are not meant to divide, but “to identify and to affirm identity, thus fostering a diversity and supporting an expansion of roles and services.”511 To suggest that there are different ways of thinking about the laity and that the “lay” in “lay ecclesial ministry” may actually have value as an adjective is not a call back to previous times in the history of the Catholic Church. In fact, in some ways it is a call forward to a release of old stereotypes and suspicion.

Moving forward, however, cannot happen without furthering the work of theologians such as Hahenberg in building bridges between the competing tensions in theology. The approach offered here has the benefit of incorporating some of the perspective that Hahenberg’s approach had not incorporated, namely how the term “lay” in lay ecclesial ministry could be understood in a manner that strengthens the argument for the ministry as a vocation. The addition of clarifying language around the distinction between the lay and ordained ecclesial minister would seem to address the concerns of the Instruction: Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests’ Sacred Ministry, as well as others who look for any signs of confusion between the ordained and lay ministers. It honors the relationship between types of ministers in a way that shows neither can substitute for the other, and each must collaborate with the other for a healthy and vibrant community.

Moving forward also means that an understanding of principal mutually transformative relationships, in the church and the world, would enter into the

511 Ibid, 128.
discernment and formation of lay ecclesial ministers in addition to the formation proposed in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. *Co-Workers* has four sections that deal with pastoral applications of the foundations of lay ecclesial ministry: Pathways to Lay Ecclesial Ministry, Formation for Lay Ecclesial Ministry, Authorization for Lay Ecclesial Ministry, and the Ministerial Workplace. In those four sections, the only reference made to the explicit nature of the lay ecclesial minister as “laity” is made in the section on formation. The only clarification of what “laity” means in the context of the lay ecclesial minister is that the “special character” of the laity “entails recognizing the different life circumstances of those who are married, single or non-ordained vowed members of a religious community.”512 Those “particular life commitments significantly shape and form each of them as persons” and “influence their commitments to ministry,” thereby affecting how they should be formed.513 Note that it is life commitments, marriage, single life or vowed life that is used to describe the secular character of the laity. However, none of those commitments are necessarily particular to the laity, and therefore are not sufficient to describe the unique aspect of being in relationship with the world and how it would impact ministry.

Indeed, this aspect would be helpful in all of the sections on the pastoral applications of the document. The first section, Pathways to Lay Ecclesial Ministry, discusses how one would discern a call to the ministry. However, it is difficult for someone to discern without a clear understanding of the particular ministry one is attempting to discern. It is even more difficult for those in leadership charged with


513 Ibid.
inviting others, in whom they see certain gifts, if they are not able to describe fully what they are invited to be and how it is different from other possibilities.

The Formation for Lay Ecclesial Ministry could benefit from this understanding of lay ecclesial ministry, not necessarily by adding it as a new area of formation, but by entwining it within all four areas of formation offered: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Elements within each of these areas, such as the basic understanding of self and others, the living union with Christ in spirituality, theological study as relates to the mission of the church in the world, and pastoral ministry skills that reflect the particularities of a layperson all could incorporate the manner in which having a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world would change the experience of ministry for the lay ecclesial minister and the community. The section on Authorization for Lay Ecclesial Ministry, and possibly the actual experience of authorization could benefit from a clear description of what makes lay ecclesial ministry so unique and such a gift to the whole church and to a local community. Finally, the section on the Ministerial Workplace, and indeed the experience in the workplace itself, would benefit with an understanding of how lay ecclesial ministers are distinct from ordained ministers. It could clarify the recruitment and selection of candidates, assist in creating effective support for lay ecclesial ministers, and possible help to relieve some of the tension within local communities between lay and ordained ecclesial ministers who may see each other more as competition than as collaborators.

If this final section of how one can articulate the “lay” aspect of lay ecclesial ministry has merit, and if it can in any way serve to further bridge the tensions that have been surrounding this issue, then it will be to the benefit of the church. What is left is a
final discussion on how this understanding of lay ecclesial ministry might be understood then as a vocation that can contribute to the mission of the church through the next stage of its life. Chapter five will take up these issues and point to future possible implications for this exciting ministry.
CHAPTER FIVE: LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY AS A PARTICULAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY

The ongoing question as to how we can understand lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation requires one final piece before pulling together all of the aspects presented in this thesis: how does one understand the term “vocation” in a post-Conciliar church? Derived from the Latin vocare, and its Greek equivalent kalein, “vocation” means, “to call.” For centuries before the Second Vatican Council the understanding of vocation, especially in popular usage, had been truncated to refer only to a call to the priesthood or religious life. The council advocated a broadening of the term through its emphasis on the laity and its inspiring passages on the call of all to universal holiness. It renewed interest in the biblical foundations of calling, of being called, and how those who are called live out that transformation.

There is still ambiguity in how the term “vocation” is used, however, with a continued tendency to use the term to refer to a call to the ordained priesthood, the diaconate, or to vowed religious life. To speak of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation one must approach the term in its broad sense first, as a dimension of the call of all the baptized to discipleship, then to the specific expression of that vocation in the life of the individual. Often referred to as a “state of life,” a more dynamic understanding of vocation that encompasses both the universal call to holiness and the particular Christian expression of that holiness is essential in a more fully developed expression of vocation.

---

Such an expression points to the need for further development in understanding how different ecclesial vocations work in concert to serve the mission of the church. All disciples must find the particular manner in which they live out their Christian responsibilities. To begin exploring the call to holiness of all Christians we will begin with the biblical foundations for the understanding of vocation and discipleship.

**Biblical foundations**

Biblically there are numerous passages in the Old Testament and New Testament about individuals and groups of people being called by God. The root experience of call, however, happens at creation. God has called all of creation into being through the life giving power of the Word, spoken with purpose and connecting all aspects of the created world with the divine and each other. Human beings hold a special place in that creation because they are created in the image and likeness of God. That unique existence comes with unique responsibilities. As the image of God, humanity is called to live in a manner that recognizes that it is not the primary source of life, but a reflection of the life of God; and that is then called to live out that “imagehood” by imitating the creative action of God in light of the responsibility for all that has been created. In this sense, the human is called into being and doing, dual aspects of vocation. This call continues even in the brokenness of the human condition, as God draws humanity into salvation history.

---


516 Ibid.
The Old Testament stories of Abram, Moses, and the prophets establish a pattern of calling and sending that carries into the New Testament as well. To be called by God, *kalien* and its variants, means both to be named and to be summoned.\(^{517}\) The individuals called are often mediators on behalf of God to call God’s People, either to a greater understanding of their identity, such as with the prophets, or to action, such as calling the Israelites out of Egypt and settlement into the Promised Land. The call of the whole People of God to enter into covenant with the Divine brings that corporeal identity into a tangible reality which has its own set of vocational aspects of being and doing. The community then becomes a part of its own transformation as it commits future generations to the covenantal relationship with God. This does not discount the individual responsibility of accepting the call of God, as is repeatedly seen in the lives of the prophets, but provides a context in which the individual is formed and the language through which the individual describes the understanding of God and salvation history.

**Jesus as Model of Vocation**

The gospel accounts of Jesus present him as the model of vocation for all who follow him. The Gospel of John in particular focuses on Jesus’ acceptance of his vocation and the implications for those who must choose for or against him. Between the two “book ends” of the gospel, the prologue and the appearance to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, the gospel presents the ministry and being of Jesus as rooted in his response to the call of the Father to be sent into the world for the sake of its salvation.\(^ {518}\) Throughout

---

\(^{517}\) Schuurman, 18.

184
the gospel, Jesus is presented as the one who perfectly responds to God repeatedly and at multiple levels. He responds and acts always with concern for the proper time, as seen in the initial experience of Cana, which sets the tension between the proper and improper hour. His escape from those who would either arrest him at the improper time (7:30) or his delay in going to Lazarus until after his burial (11:6), and Jesus’ acceptance and explanation of those timeframes to his disciples displays his reliance on God’s plan and timetable over his own wishes.

Jesus also acts perfectly as the one who is sent by the Father, and repeatedly refers to himself in that manner. He is the perfect emissary for the Father as he only seeks to do as he has been told. Yet Jesus is more than an emissary as he has been given the powers of the Father. Jesus is the agent of the Father, as the Son who carries out the mission of the one who commanded him. The relationship between the two, however, means that Jesus does nothing on his own, acting, speaking, or giving witness, without the Father and without working through the Father (5:19).

Jesus has emptied himself to be fully at the service of the Father and to do the Father’s will. Jesus comes with a mission from the one who has sent him, and Jesus sets out to fulfill the will of the one who does the sending (5:30, 6:38 – 40). It is a will that


519 Ibid, 58.

520 Ibid, 61.


522 von Walde 63.

523 Ibid., 64.
is entwined in the work of salvation history, and through its fulfillment Jesus makes manifest the glory of the Father. It is not a glory known in the world of humans, but “glory” in the sense of making manifest an identity, the identity of the Divine, and the recognition of that identity by others. ⁵²⁴ The manifestation of that identity is found in the command to love, even to the point of death (10:18) and to speak to others the good news (12:49). With the completion of his mission, Jesus appoints new agents to carry on the mission of the Father. ⁵²⁵ It is to love the world perfectly and completely, and live that love in service to one another (13:34). Jesus is the perfect example of the one who is, and always has been, in full relationship with the Father. In fulfilling his role as agent, living the mission and sending others, he becomes the one who calls the disciples to their own “yes.” Discipleship becomes the choice for or against this person who is in relationship perfectly with the one who sent him, and who challenges others to be the same.

**The Call to Discipleship**

What then does the New Testament offer in terms of what it means to respond to Jesus, and from whom is such a response expected? Are the expectations of discipleship for those in leadership alone, or are all who follow Jesus called to the responsibilities, joys, and challenges of discipleship? If the expectations of discipleship are of all who follow Jesus, could that make discipleship the common matrix for living out the Christian life? As was mentioned in Chapter three, Kenan Osborne does identify discipleship as

---

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 67.

⁵²⁵ Borgen, 143.
the common matrix for all Christians. The New Testament understanding of discipleship offers a foundation for what the Christian is called to in responding to one’s vocation.

**The Gospel of Mark**

The gospel of Mark offers a focused, clear understanding of discipleship as a call for all to follow Jesus, the only one worthy of such a following. The Twelve in Mark are not referred to as apostles, though they are sent, and are not offered as a separate priestly class apart from the other disciples.\(^526\) The community to which Mark addresses his gospel was still a part of Judaism, and had not separated into a distinct ecclesial structure. Discipleship for Mark is not connected to a church framework, but instead to a kingdom framework which all followers are called to enter into and live out.\(^527\) The disciples in Mark are those who were with Jesus, following him in his ministry and imitating him in his healing mission. The disciples themselves, however, are presented as both those who should be imitated and those who should not be imitated. The disciples are the ones who seem to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, as at Caesarea Phillipi (8:27ff), but also the ones who thoroughly misunderstand the role of Jesus as the one who will suffer.\(^528\) They are able to imitate Jesus in some healing ministry, but are presented as limited when confronted by some demons as with the father of the son who was possessed by the demon (9:28ff). Jesus alone is the one who can drive out all demons, and subtly suggests that some of the disciples are not even fully able to pray.\(^529\) Even at the resurrection

---

527 Ibid, 51.
528 Ibid, 57.
529 Ibid.
account in Mark, the women who had been faithful to Jesus all through his ministry and stayed even to the crucifixion are in the end not fully worthy of imitation, as they too fail to understand the significance of the appearance of the Lord or follow his command to tell the disciples that they will find him in Galilee (16: 6 – 7). Jesus alone is the one who is to be imitated in the gospel of Mark, Jesus alone is the focus of discipleship. All others, even the best of the disciples, are only followers of the Messiah and should never be confused with Christ. All disciples are called then to imitate Jesus alone, and to understand his leadership as the one who is seen as the least and the servant of all (10:35 –45).

**The Gospel of Luke**

The gospel of Luke, and the continued narrative of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles, presents additional nuances to what a call to discipleship might mean. While Luke identifies the Twelve as a special group in a way more distinct than seen in Mark, ambiguity in certain passages as to who is in the audience when Jesus is speaking once again leads the reader to assume that the expectations of discipleship offered are for all followers, not just a select few in leadership. Disciples in this gospel are not only those who are with Jesus, but also those who are sent by Jesus as emissaries to give witness to him. During the times of his public ministry, the sending of the twelve disciples in 9:1 – 6 is paralleled by the sending of the seventy two in 10: 1-12, with all

---

530 Ibid, 61.
531 Ibid, 65.
being given power and authority not only to teach but to heal as well.\textsuperscript{532} The Twelve serve as a bridge into the Acts of the Apostles, but the call to discipleship and witness extends well beyond them.

Two important features arise of the discipleship that all are called to in Luke. First, not all who hear the call will respond in the same manner. Some will hear the word, but the devil will carry it out of their hearts; others will hear the word and receive it, but with no depth or roots and will fall away during times of trial; some will hear the word but be stymied by the worries and cares of the world; and still others will hear the word, nurture it in their lives and persevere, offering a great harvest (8: 4-8). Though the call to be a disciple is the same for all, it cannot be presumed that the path of discipleship will follow the same course for all, even when there is an initial positive response. The initial “yes” of the disciple must be constantly nourished. This growth is not only for the individual, but includes the second feature of discipleship that arises in Luke and continues in Acts: discipleship occurs within the context of an organized, collective community. The disciple is called to a faith in Jesus, which necessitates repentance and conversion celebrated in baptism in a communal framework.\textsuperscript{533} It is an individual and communal expression of the new Israel that will need to be sustained during times of trial, persecution and death.

\textsuperscript{532} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid, 71.
The Gospel of Matthew

The gospel of Matthew adds the components of church identity and moral authority into the context of discipleship, with the example of Jesus leading all disciples into a deeper understanding of both service and leadership that is called to the same expectations of discipleship but lived in a public manner to a greater degree.\textsuperscript{534} Matthew warns against those who would like public recognition for their status as a leader (23:7 – 10) and also warns those who would seek the seat of honor at a gathering (23:6). The new people of God, the \textit{ekklesia}, is connected with its Jewish roots but fulfilled in the person of Jesus, who calls all to mission in the world. That mission goes from an initial mission of the Twelve to only the Jewish towns and villages during the earthly life of Jesus (10:5-16) to an unrestricted mission to all the peoples of the earth (28: 16 – 20) by all of those called to be a part of the new people of God in the course of salvation history.\textsuperscript{535} In Matthew the call and expectation of all of the \textit{ekklesia} to go and make disciples flows from the person of Jesus who has continued and fulfilled the salvation history of the chosen people, and offers the model of the servant leader as the example to the disciples of leadership of this new people.

The Gospel of John

The gospel of John offers a final aspect of discipleship, without which the mission of the church is empty. The ideal disciple for the Johannine community is the beloved

\textsuperscript{534} Ibid, 79.

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid, 86 – 87.
disciple, the one who encompassed both faith and complete love of the Lord.\textsuperscript{536} The primacy of love over authority, seen in the tension between Peter and the beloved disciple, is a mandate for all who would follow Christ. That this is a call for all disciples, not just those in leadership, is evident in the tensions between the beloved disciple and Peter, as well as the extended narratives between Jesus, Martha, Lazarus and Mary.\textsuperscript{537} Martha’s declaration of faith, that she has come to know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world (11:27) rivals those given in the other gospels by Peter.\textsuperscript{538} It is in the context of their relationship of love, made clear in the beginning of the passage (11:5) that Martha is able to make such a declaration of faith that transcends her grief over the death of her brother. The primacy of love extends beyond the structural expectations of the ecclesial community to the core of what it means to be a follower of Christ. One must not only be with Christ, but engage in a relationship with Christ that will transform the disciple, and the world, through the salvific power of love.

\textbf{Discipleship in Writings of Paul}

The lived expression of the life of love in Jesus as an individual and community is central to the writings of Paul as well. What began with the disciples walking with Jesus and imitating him in life takes on new dimensions after his death and resurrection.\textsuperscript{539} To

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{536} Ibid, 90 – 91.
\item \textsuperscript{537} Ibid, 92.
\item \textsuperscript{538} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
be a disciple of Jesus means to know him through his example and to live that example in the world. Those who know Jesus, who are in relationship with Jesus, become a part of the new creation made possible through Christ. One does not enter into that relationship alone, but as a part of a community of those called together to enter into salvation history and deepen the understanding of what it means to be fully human. The life of the individual and the church community is one of prayer (Rom 12:12) and praxis that calls each church into the daily practice of living, dying and rising with Christ. This is a gift: to be called out of sin by God and to be given the ability to say “yes” to that calling; to enter into the transcendent love and life of Christ as a part of a people, and to share that call with others. Paul sets the disciple as the gracious receiver who in turn becomes a part of the gift itself.

If Osborne is correct and discipleship is the common matrix in which all Christians are called, what then do the biblical foundations for the understandings of discipleship and Jesus as the model of the perfect response to vocation mean for an understanding of vocation to lay ecclesial ministry? The disciple is one who spends time with Jesus, who enters into a relationship with Jesus that is initiated by the Lord and requires continual response. The response to the call of Jesus is one first of repentance and baptism, into new life and into a community of believers who, together, are sent in mission to continue the work of Christ in the world. It is a mission that is lived out in the context of daily life and characterized by love lived in faith. The yes to the call of Christ is the primary vocation of all disciples, and the yes of the Lord to his own mission serves

---

540 Ibid, 228.
541 Osborne, Ministry, 99.
542 Ibid.
as the primary example of how one responds to the call. It is a vocation entered into with complete love, an entrance into communal life that is generative and outward, seeking to bring more into the life of the Trinity. The vocational response of the Lord points to a willingness to follow the will of the One who sends, in the timeframe of the One who sends, and to bear witness to the One who sends to others. The perfect yes of Jesus is not possible for the disciple, so the constant call to conversion is necessary. The communal life offers all disciples both the challenge to conversion and the support needed for the one discerning how to live more fully in Christ.

**Vocation and the Call To Holiness**

**Truncation of the term**

If discipleship is the root experience for vocation, why then is there still tension and ambiguity in the use of the word? The historical truncation of the term occurred over time. As was noted in chapter four, the plurality of ministries articulated in the New Testament eventually gave way to a more structured, organized expression of ministry in the church. That structure impacted the use of the term vocation as well. By the third and fourth centuries, particularly with the state recognition of Christianity and the decreased likelihood of martyrdom, monasticism rose as the more perfect way of living as a Christian. The way of the “evangelical counsels” of poverty, chastity and obedience became the new, unbloody, perpetual martyrdom.\(^{543}\) As opposed to the threat and attack

---

of the world on the early Christian, the ascetic takes on the attack by turning his or her back on the world, splitting off to build a new world in the desert.\textsuperscript{544} 

This call, the extreme renunciation of the world as corrupt and the evangelical counsels lived in ascetic life, gave way to the more formalized experience of religious communities in the medieval church. In this era the understanding of vocation took on a legal cast, with the original understanding of a “state of life” coming from Roman civil law where a person incurred certain obligations from which dispensation from a proper authority were required.\textsuperscript{545} Vocation in this sense took on the entrance into a particular cast, or manner of being. More and more the focus of vocation became a specialized and restricted expression of Christianity, not something that all disciples are called to embrace. The primary distinctions between the clergy, religious and the laity became deep separations.

The Protestant Reformation sought to break through the restriction of vocation to only the clergy or religious. As opposed to the evangelical counsels, the Reformers focused on the virtues of business and family life, with most Christians answering the call of God by performing the ordinary duties of life.\textsuperscript{546} All Christians have what Luther referred to as a “spiritual vocation,” a common call to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, but also an “external vocation,” or particular calling.\textsuperscript{547} The particular calling of a Christian could be to be the spouse of a particular person, the employee of a particular business, or


\textsuperscript{545} Holland, 1089.

\textsuperscript{546} Ibid., 1089.

\textsuperscript{547} Schuurman, 26.
to live in a certain location. This approach to vocation faced its own form of rigidity, however, as distortions occurred over time. An external vocation to a certain location or station in life led to the justification of corrupt societal infrastructures and a hesitancy to change social norms that may be understood as designed by God. While in the world, this type of distortion leads a Christian to accept the world in some sense as unchangeable or irreparably corrupt. Engagement in the world ceases to be connected with one’s vocation in the sense of any active attempt to change sinful structures or systems, which may hinder the growth and development of others. This distortion has led some Protestant theologians to reject the notion of external vocation entirely and, surprisingly, to embrace an understanding of vocation that returns to a purely church-related understanding of the term.

Within the Catholic realm vocation continued to be focused on the life of the clergy or religious, though with renewed appreciation for the interplay between an internal call from God to a particular state of life and the recognition of that call by the community, meaning the proper church authority, in confirming the authenticity of the vocation. This relationship opened the door for a deeper understanding of the dynamic of call and grace in the life of every Christian. The theological development of the relationship between the individual Christian and the community would continue on through the twentieth century, though in new ways as the Second Vatican Council

548 Ibid, 27.
549 Ibid, xii.
550 Holland, 1091.
renewed the broader understanding of vocation of all Christians and the universal call to holiness.

The Universal Call to Holiness

Through the love of Christ, the Son of God, who “with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘holy alone,’” the church itself is holy. It is only through the merit of the risen Christ that the church is holy, and in the church all its members. This primary call, this fundamental vocation to holiness, is for all disciples of Christ. All are called by Christ to be holy and perfect, as the heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48). The Spirit moves those who walk in the way of the Lord interiorly, with their whole being (Mk 12:30) to love one another as Christ has loved them (Jn 13:34, 15:12). This return to the gospel discipleship as the common ground for the understanding of vocation unifies all Christians, though not without distinction. Each is called to a walk of life through which they are to live the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of love. That call to holiness is a call to see the face of God and live, to be a part of God’s people in the world as a reflection of God’s love for all of creation. It is the common character of all the pilgrim people of God to set out on a “quest for holiness and union with God.” That union propels us both into a life of conversion and a life of mission as a part of the church in the world.

551 LG no. 39.
552 Holland, 397.
554 Ibid.
Conversion and the Call to Holiness

The conversion necessary as a disciple goes beyond the initial yes to follow Christ. The parable of the seeds in the gospel of Luke points to the multiple levels of hearing the call, which continues through the life of the disciple, often with further challenges that may leave the disciple on infertile ground. The life long conversion of the disciple takes the understanding of vocation to a long term discernment of call, lived by the individual life in new and changing ways. John Haughey, S.J., drawing on the categories of Bernard Lonergan, described this level of conversion as a part of the personal call of the disciple as having three aspects: intellectual, moral and affective conversion.\(^{555}\) The intellectual conversion is a conversion to reality, from the call of reality Itself. In the desire to know, the disciple seeks out answers to ongoing, changing questions that require an objective, rational response. This search for answers is a search that leads outside of oneself, to authenticity that helps reveal the particular nature of an individual’s call.\(^{556}\) The one who is called must live in reality and test one’s decisions in the context of the senses.

The second aspect of conversion in personal call is a conversion of meaning, or moral conversion, where the individual operates within the framework of a community and experiences the decisions and actions through relationship with that community. The norms of the community shape the manner in which information becomes formation, and


\(^{556}\) Ibid, 3.
offers purpose and clarity to values that are self-transcending. The third conversion is affective, or a conversion to love, that is initiated by God and is directed toward God, but lived out in relationships with others that call us to death and new life. The human expression of that love is always tinged with sin and therefore a perpetual calling towards greater integration and expression of love. However, the outpouring of love again leads to self-transcendence and the recognition of the need for action and mission. Haughey points to the biblical passage on Pentecost as the quintessential expression of how the affective conversion is immediately missionary. Upon receiving the great theophany of the Spirit at Pentecost the recipients burned with fire, the fire of the love of God, which then immediately translated into deeds, and the sharing of the Good News with others.

Within the vocational call of each disciple all three components of conversion will occur repeatedly, drawing from one form to another as the path of the disciple unfolds. Each conversion is distinguishable, but not separate from, the other. The entrance point of conversion for any disciple may begin with any of the three conversions, but each type of conversion will inevitably lead to the other two. The personal call to holiness, universal for all in the church, becomes alive in the unique expression of the gifts of the disciple in the world.

In the time since the Second Vatican Council, the articulation of the universal call to holiness has continued even as the crisis of declining vocations to the priesthood has heightened concern for how the term is used. The biblical components of discipleship and

---

557 Ibid, 5-6.
558 Ibid, 7.
559 Ibid, 8.
560 Ibid, 22.
conversion continue to be incorporated into the language of vocation. However, the recognition that vocation has multiple levels of understanding has helped to broaden the use of the term to include all of humanity, Christians in particular, and within the Christian community a myriad of unique expressions of the response to God’s call.

*Human Vocation, Christian Vocation and Particular or Personal Vocation*

As a human being, created by a God who is communion, all people have a call to enter into relationship with the divine and to find fulfillment as human beings, thus engaging in the basic human vocation.\(^{561}\) The basic human vocation is rooted in the call to life, the basic creative act of the Father who has willed us into being and into becoming more fully human in the context of history.\(^{562}\) That this creative act on behalf of the Father is given freely to all allows all to participate freely in the full meaning of life: to love. Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.\(^{563}\) It is this call to life and love, redeemed through the Son, which is celebrated in baptism.

In baptism, the human being enters into his or her Christian vocation, through entrance into a new relationship in Christ and in the community of believers. This Christian vocation calls all believers to holiness, to be active members of the community, and to bear witness to the Kingdom in communion and cooperation with others.\(^{564}\) This common call of all Christians binds us together in our discipleship and propels us into

---


\(^{562}\) New Vocations for a New Europe: Final Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life in Europe, no. 16.

\(^{563}\) Ibid.

\(^{564}\) Eagleson and Scharper, 236.
mission on behalf of the one we serve. All, through the Spirit, are called to unity and witness within the vocation of the church, the call to be sacrament to the world. In this sense, all who respond to the Christian call, the call to discipleship, serve the church in its mission.\textsuperscript{565}

The final, specific vocation is the concrete manner in which the disciple serves the mission of the church and makes a personal contribution to the construction of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{566} This is done as a particular vocation because it generates a personal response in an original and unrepeatable history.\textsuperscript{567} The unique combination not only of the natural skills and gifts of the individual, but also of the historical moment of the individual come together in a manner that works through the gifts of the Spirit to serve on part of the larger story of salvation. In this particular or personal sense, vocation is both “necessary” and “relative.”\textsuperscript{568} It is necessary in that Christ is made visible in and through the church and the disciples who are an essential part of it, but also relative in that no one disciple can offer a complete witness to the mystery of Christ. All disciples, including the saints, bear witness to an aspect of the mystery, which is then brought together in the Mystical Body of Christ through the work of the Spirit. The church, in its communion and community, calls forth these vocations, supports them and sends the disciples so called into mission. As the church, in Christ, is in “the nature of a sacrament,” all particular vocations reveal something of the Trinitarian communion, and are therefore a sign that

\textsuperscript{565} New Vocations, no. 18.  
\textsuperscript{566} Eagleson and Scharper, 236.  
\textsuperscript{567} New Vocations, no. 19.  
\textsuperscript{568} Ibid.
reveals the face of the Lord. That revelation is then a ministry, at the service of the church, lived in mission, making vocation and mission two faces of the same prism.

**Lay Ecclesial Ministry as Vocation**

How then can the biblical understanding of discipleship, along with the broadened understanding of vocation and the universal call to holiness, come together in the experience of the lay ecclesial minister to articulate the understanding of lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation? As a human being, all are called into the foundational transformative relationship with the Creator, who is communion and calls all to communion. The Christian vocation, entered into at baptism, calls all into the foundational transformative relationship with the Trinity through Christ and the Spirit. This common experience of a foundational transformative relationship binds all disciples into communion with one another in the communio aspect that will be everlasting. It is the relationship of love that deepens the understanding of what it means to be fully human, and impels the disciples, as part of the People of God, into mission. The mission, which is the consequence of the call and entrance into the relationship of love with Christ, is fulfilled in and limited to the earthly expression. It is in the particular, or personal realm of conversion that one then sees the discernment of some disciples, already part of a common matrix of those called into communio and sent on mission as a

---

569 Ibid.

570 Ibid. While John Paul is addressing the Congress on Priesthood and the Consecrated Life, in this section he is speaking of vocation in the broad sense of the term, as a part of the common experience of all Christians. His specific use of vocation later in the document is directed towards the priesthood and vowed life, without reference to lay ecclesial ministry as such.

571 *Instrumentum Laboris* no. 17.

572 Ibid.
part of the church, toward the life of the laity. Those disciples who discern that particular call intentionally enter into relationship with the world as one of their principal mutually transformative relationships. They live the mission held common to all disciples as a part of the Christian vocation in a particular manner as a part of their personal vocation. Within the realm of the personal vocation comes the life long discernment process that requires conversion of intellect, a calling outside of one’s experience to a self-transcendent reality; a conversion of meaning, that calls the disciple to enter into the community construct and live within a framework of meaning; and a conversion to love, or the living out of the foundational transformative relationship in and through the particular principal mutually transformative relationships in the life of the disciple.

When the unique set of historical and personal aspects and charisms combine within the life of some disciples, a call to live out the vocation to the laity is further refined to the call to lay ecclesial ministry. It is an aspect of the personal vocation to the lay life and a particular call to mission in the life of the church. Indeed, it is the intentional entrance into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world as described in chapter three that provides not only the secular aspect of the lay life, but also the unique contribution of lay ecclesial ministry to the life and mission of the church. The secular aspect of the lay life becomes the strength of the lay ecclesial minister and part of the ability to distinguish the unique and unrepeatable expression of ministry that the lay ecclesial minister brings to those he or she serves.
Further Considerations

The complexity of issues surrounding lay ecclesial ministry as a vocation cannot be resolved with these preliminary arguments. If we are to understand lay ecclesial ministers as having a vocation in their own right, as a particular expression of the lay life lived intentionally as a set of mutually transformative relationships with the world, lived out through ecclesial ministry, there are implications for the relationship between lay ecclesial ministers and other types of ecclesial ministers which must be further addressed. In particular, the areas of lay ecclesial ministers who are members of religious orders, the relationship between lay ecclesial ministers and deacons, and lay ecclesial ministry in parishes without a resident pastor will need to be explored in depth. Some points of interest for those conversations should be noted.

Lay Ecclesial Ministers who are Members of Religious Orders

Many current lay ecclesial ministers are also members of religious orders, a reality that can add to the experience of ministry in the church as well as cause tension and confusion. According to Canon 574 §1 those who profess the evangelical counsels in institutes belong to the life and holiness of the church. Vowed life is, in and of itself, neither ordained nor lay and reflects the prophetic nature of the church. Using a negative definition of the laity, that is, not being a member of the ordained, can cause some confusion about the lay nature of non-ordained religious. In some sense, lay ecclesial ministers who are a part of religious orders could be seen in the same light as those who are not a part of orders. However, putting these two groups together without distinction does not serve to describe the reality. Living as a lay ecclesial minister who is a part of a
religious order is different, and must be explored as such. Distinction should not lead to
disparity, however. The question remains therefore, as to how lay ecclesial ministers
who are members of religious orders and those who are not may complement each other.

In light of the concept of mutually transformative relationships, entrance into a
religious order could be understood in terms of a principal mutually transformative
relationship in the life of the disciple. The same foundational relationship in Christ
would be present, as with all those called to be disciples. In addition, the call to
intentionally enter a mutually transformative relationship with the world would need to
be a principal relationship for one in a religious order. Entrance into communal life,
however, would add the charism of the community to the charism of the individual. Each
disciple would still be a unique combination of personal and historical aspects coming
together to build the kingdom of God, with the additional mutually transformative
relationship with the community of the order. The disciple would be transformed by, and
in turn transform, the communal life and live that out in the world in a manner informed
by the charism of the community.

Within that wider context of call to mutually transformative relationship there
would again be some members of religious communities who would live that call in the
context of lay ecclesial ministry. These individuals would bring the call to bridge the
world and the church through their very being, but also to bring the charism of their
community into the dynamic. The ability to consider multiple aspects of call and charism
would potentially help in the discernment of leadership in a parish. It could also assist in
the intra-parish relationships when lay who are members of religious orders and those
who are not find that, even though they are both considered a part of the laity, their experiences of the lay life and the lay life lived in ministry are remarkably different.

The differences, however, should not overshadow the gift that each brings to the other. Indeed, a greater appreciation of common ground both in discipleship and lay life can be of benefit to both. Lay ecclesial ministers who are members of religious orders may be better able to help other members of their orders discern a further call to ecclesial ministry. Lay ecclesial ministers who are not members of religious orders may benefit from a common spirituality of the counsels and a life of discipleship that is related to vowed life. It has long been understood that religious life is a call to a state of perfection, bound in unity to Christ and lived through a life of poverty, chastity and obedience that transcend, in some sense, the sacramental element seen in Holy Orders in the lives of religious who are ordained.\footnote{573} All disciples are called as a part of the universal call to holiness to live the evangelical counsels.\footnote{574} However, just as one should not try to “clericalize” the laity, one should not “monasticize” them by assuming all laity should live the counsels in the same manner as vowed religious. Paul Evdokimov offers a different option, one of “interior monasticism,” where all laity, consecrated and not, as well as all disciples, might find a common spirituality through the evangelical counsels. Evdokimov draws from the desert fathers, who saw the counsels as an applicable to all of the mystical body of Christ.\footnote{575}

Poverty, then can be expressed not only in deprivation of material goods, but right


\footnote{574} LG no. 39.

\footnote{575} Evdokimov, 137.
relationship with those goods in the world.\textsuperscript{576} Chastity is broadened to incorporate those who are celibate and those who are not, to an understanding of “chastity of the soul,” which can be lived in multiple state of life.\textsuperscript{577} Finally, obedience becomes obedience to the gospel, and the willingness to crucify our own will in order to arouse the final freedom of one who listens to the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{578} Further reflection on both the common spiritual elements and the distinct lived expressions of discipleship between lay ecclesial ministers who are a part of religious orders and those who are not will only benefit the experiences of both groups.

The Relationship between Lay Ecclesial Ministers and Deacons

An even more complicated relationship exists between lay ecclesial ministers and members of the permanent diaconate. While the foundations for the permanent diaconate can be traced to the Council of Trent, the modern impetus began during World War II when German clergy, imprisoned by the Nazis, began conversations about the need to reach beyond the walls of the church in service to the world as it rebuild.\textsuperscript{579} Those initial conversations grew into a larger context in the Second Vatican Council, which provided the authority for the restoration of the permanent diaconate. Yet the permanent diaconate continues to be a state of life that needs further theological articulation. Although its

\textsuperscript{576} Ibid, 146.

\textsuperscript{577} Ibid, 148.

\textsuperscript{578} Ibid, 153.

historical and theological foundations are firm, questions about its connection with the ordained priesthood have continued, as has debate on the inclusion of women.\footnote{Leo Scheffczyk, “Laypersons, deacons, and priests: A difference of ministries,” \textit{Communio}, Vol.4, Winter 1996, 647. See also Phyllis Zagano, \textit{Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church}, (University of Michigan: Crossroads Publishers, 2000).}

In 2003 the USCCB approved the \textit{National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States}. In it, the permanent deacon is described as being marked in the Sacrament of Holy Orders with an “imprint” which cannot be removed and which configures him to Christ, who made himself the servant to all.\footnote{USCCB, \textit{National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and life of Permanent Deacons in the United States}, (Washington, D.C: USCCB, 2005), 16.} The permanent deacon has his own identity, which is distinct, and neither “a lay person nor a priest.”\footnote{Ibid.} This statement poses the great tension. The deacon is supposed to fulfill his “obligations to his secular occupation, to his civic and public responsibilities, and among his family and neighbors.”\footnote{Ibid, 31.} However, this is not described as the manner in which he lives his vocation, nor does he have the same description of “secular character” offered in the lay life. The “obligations” of the permanent deacon are meant “to enable the deacon to bring back to the church an appreciation of the meaning and value of the Gospel as he discerns it in the lives and questions of the people he has encountered.”\footnote{Ibid.}

While the deacon is engaged in relationship with the world, the relationship seems to be described in a more unilateral manner. There does not seem to be the degree of expectation that the deacon would be transformed by the world as would be the case with a lay person. The deacon has as one of his principal mutually transformative
relationships that of relationship with the People of God in sacramental service. The deacon’s relationship with the world is seen to inform that relationship.

Therefore, when a deacon is assigned ecclesial responsibilities by a bishop, either in a part-time capacity in addition to his “secular obligations” or as a full-time ecclesial minister, his ministry is connected with his sacramental identity as a deacon, as one who is in a principal mutually transformative relationship with the church in sacramental service. This manner of being transforms the manner of doing, so that even if a deacon and a lay ecclesial minister have similar ministerial functions, the reality of their differing relationships, along with their particular set of charisms and gifts, will change how that ministry is performed and experienced by the community. 585

Again, the ability to articulate how ministers who perform similar functions in a parish are distinct allows the community the ability to appreciate different types of ministers, honor different manners of ministry, and call forth the type of ministers needed in a particular community. As the role of the permanent deacon is further integrated into the life of the church, more will need to be explored in terms of the expectations of their relationships with priests, lay ecclesial ministers, the People of God and the wider society. This will be especially true in those parts of the world where the priest shortage is pressing more members of the permanent diaconate into full time ecclesial ministry. This raises the additional area of the experience of lay ecclesial ministry in parishes without resident pastors.

Lay Ecclesial Ministry in Parishes without Resident Pastors

As the priest shortage and demographic shifts continue to shape the parish landscape, the use of Canon 517 §2 has added further nuances to the question of lay ecclesial ministry, particularly when the person delegated by a bishop to lead the local community is a layperson. Most theologians argue that the foundation for lay ecclesial ministry is baptism, which calls each disciple to mission. Certainly within the ecclesial structure the appropriate ecclesial authority must acknowledge those who are called to leadership. However, there is a sense that regardless of the priest shortage or demographic shifts, lay ecclesial ministry will continue to be a critical part of the life of the church. Can the same be said of those who lead parishes?

Of any lay ecclesial ministry the role of Pastoral Administrator or Parish Life Coordinator, a person appointed by the bishop to oversee a parish in accordance with Canon 517 §2, is the one that seems most transient. The role exists as a tool for a bishop to address the pastoral needs of the diocese. In the event that a sufficient number of priests were available, the need would no longer exist, nor, it would seem, the ministry. As parish facilities, priest numbers, and demographic shifts sort out over the next few decades, it will remain to be seen whether this particular expression of lay ecclesial ministry will continue. In that regard, it may be prudent to consciously separate this ministry from the wider conversation of lay ecclesial ministry until further reflection on the experience is possible. As its future becomes clearer, this type of ministry will need

---

586 Canon 517 §2 states: “If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care.”
further clarification as to whether those engaged in it are providing a service to the church through a temporary role in leadership or if this is more accurately understood as a vocation that arises from the vocation to the lay life.

**Secular Character**

One final area for further consideration is that of secular character. If secular character is truly a key aspect of the lay life, including the life and vocation of the lay ecclesial minister, then it must be taken into more account in the theological conversation. The question of when the secular character might be permanent needs to be considered, especially if secular character is enacted through an intentional principal mutually transformative relationship with the world. Also, should that reality be publicly and ritually acknowledged in some manner? Perhaps modeling the vowed life, the layperson could make some formal profession of commitment. In addition, the question of the relationship between the permanent diaconate, the priesthood, and the laity must be considered in light of secular character. If secular character is permanent, then can someone who has committed to lay life enter into the permanent diaconate or priesthood? Is there a difference in the permanence of secular character that could allow for a sacramental commitment in holy orders? It is possible that the answer to these questions is no, in which case one must then ask about the value of secular character as a distinct feature of the lay life. This in turn would require a new approach to the articulation of the laity, and to lay ecclesial ministry as well.
Conclusion

*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* concludes by recalling that the same God who called Prisca and Aquila to work with Paul continues to call thousands of men and women to minister in the church today, and that this call is a cause for rejoicing. Even with all of the tension and challenge that new understandings of ministry require, the bishops remind the reader that this is a joyful tension. This process of debate and discussion are a source of life in the church and a sign that there is more growth on the horizon. Lay ecclesial ministers provide the impetus for these conversations as pioneers who risk following their call while their community continues to try and articulate how their ministry can be best understood. Lay ecclesial ministers serve as a living example of how one can move from the call of God to enter into a foundational transformative relationship as a disciple who follows Christ and takes on the mission of the church in a particular way. Lay ecclesial ministers discern their specific vocation as members of the laity, who have entered into a principal mutually transformative relationship with the world and who live out that relationship in the context of their repositioning in the church as a leader in ministry. It is a life that in and of itself serves as a living testimony to the goodness of the world and creation and at the same time the need for transformation and conversion. The church is blessed to have in its midst those who have fearlessly agreed to risk such transformation and conversion in the context of the People of God. We can move forward in our work together, inspired by the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, that we

\[587 \text{ USCCB, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord,” 426.}\]
are a “community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in [our] pilgrimage toward the Father’s kingdom, bearers of a message for all humanity.”

---

588 GS no. 1.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Church Documents


**Books and Dissertations**

Apostola, Nicholas K. *A Letter from Christ to the World: An Exploration of the Role of the Laity in the Church Today*.


**Articles and Book Chapters**


