CHAPTER III
PRIESTHOOD
IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Down the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church, basing itself on the Bible and tradition, and urged on by the demands of a world that undergoes rapid and continual evolution, has progressively articulated its understanding of the status, role and function of Catholic priests (PDV 3). While there is an essential element of priesthood that is upheld as permanent, the Church has manifested a keen commitment to adapt it to every era and circumstance of life (PDV 5). "The life and ministry of priests always develop within a particular historical context, at times replete with new problems and unforeseen changes, in which the pilgrim Church lives" (DMLP 34).

1. The Etymology of Priest

The etymological origin of priest is rather complex. It comes from the Greek word presbyteros (‘elder’, ‘city father’). It is related to two terms which are functional, namely diaconoi (servants) and episkopoi (superintendents, overseers). Presbyteros described a person of some age, experience or

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106 In the thesis the words Church, or the Catholic Church, if not specified otherwise, denote the Roman Catholic Church.

107 “New Evangelization needs urgently to find a form for the exercise of the priestly ministry really consonant with contemporary conditions so as to render it effective and capable of adequately responding to the circumstances in which it is exercised” (PTCM 1: 2).


109 These titles were not religious: they were all derived from Greek secular usage. The precise function of the officials to whom they refer, and their relation to another, is not always clear. There is much uncertainty about the organisation of the Christian community in New Testament times. Besides there was a great deal more of fluidity, flexibility and pluriformity. Cf. George M. Soares Prabhu, “Christian Priesthood in India Today,” Collected Writings of George M. Soares Prabhu. Vol. 2. A Biblical Theology for India, edited and with an introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), p. 227.
importance in a social group. It did not denote any specific attribute or function. Having no clearly defined roles, the presbyters gathered to themselves their collection of functions: first naturally and later exclusively they did those functions not done by diaconoi and episkopoi. For instance, in a family the head of the household presides, but when more than one family gathered, the presbyters presided. Thus the predecessors of today's priests seem to have been the "presbyteroi," "elders," chosen for their maturity, stability in the faith, and evident witness to the Christian virtues, to lead the community. As mature men of the community, they participated actively in secular affairs, reared their families, and advised the bishop on matters pertaining to community affairs, assisting him also in his performance of the Christian rituals.

2. The Biblical Foundations of the Roman Catholic Priesthood

Priesthood in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, two forms of priesthood may be distinguished. According to the first, possibly unique to Israel, in virtue of a covenant that God made with the whole people of Israel on Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish nation was believed to be "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:5-6), invested with a priesthood that is not tied up with worship or cult but a mission. The second is the concept of cultic priesthood that the Jews shared with their neighbouring nations.
In the evolution of the cultic priesthood, two phases can be seen, namely the phase of natural priesthood and the phase of professional priesthood. The beginning of the religious history of Israel, like that of most other religions, is marked by a non-specialized exercise of priestly functions: while in the premonarchical Israel the fathers of families and the heads of clans carried out the functions of priests, the kings, particularly David and Solomon performed the priestly activities during the age of monarchy. Though at this same time, groups of professional priests belonging to hereditary families, ministered at the various sanctuaries such as Shiloh, Gilgal, Dan, Beersheba and Bethel, they were occupied primarily with the giving of oracles, and not with sacrifices. By the end of the monarchy at the exile to Babylon in 587 BCE, the phase of natural priesthood disappeared from Israel. In the second phase, from a profusion of priestly families looking after the various sanctuaries of tribal Israel, the professional priesthood evolved into the solidly integrated, stratified priestly class, made up of chief priests, priests and Levites, all claiming descent from Aaron and Levi. During the transition from one phase to the other, groups of cultic prophets may have been absorbed into the priesthood, thus favouring the blending of prophetic and priestly competencies. Later, the priests were given the task of preserving and handing down the law (Deut 33:10). However, in the Post-Exilic Period legal scholars and scribes were entrusted with the interpretation of the law, and in effect, the priestly activities became confined more and more exclusively to the area of worship and cult.\textsuperscript{114}

Priesthood in the New Testament

The New Testament teachings on priesthood are meagre, but crucial to Christian faith. The traits of the new and definitive priesthood is best discerned in the faith of the Christian community regarding the priesthood of Jesus Christ. He was not (sociologically) a priest in the Jewish society in which he lived. He appears in the Gospels as non-clerical, even as a somewhat anti-clerical figure. He does not belong to a priestly family, and is shown in continuous conflict with the priestly establishment. Jesus does not call himself nor his disciples priests. His horizons are prophetic, not priestly. According to the Christian faith, Jesus is God and Man. So his priesthood effects and sacramentalizes that which cultic priesthood could not accomplish. "In goal and power, the priesthood of Jesus turns cult into reality and then brings that human and divine reality in word and life to the human race." Among the writings of the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews speaks theologically of Jesus Christ as the High Priest who not only instituted the Christian priesthood, but also is believed to have realized the model of priesthood in his own death on the cross. Therein priesthood is portrayed as acquiring new dimensions in Jesus Christ.

It (the Letter to the Hebrews) announces the radical death of cult. No cultic priesthood is any longer valid, except the one eternal priesthood of Christ; no ritual sacrifice is of any value except the one sacrifice of the cross. This implies a radical secularization of the priesthood too. For it is now the non-sacral 'layman', Jesus (who does not belong to any priestly class), who is the only true priest; and it is the utterly profane event of his crucifixion (the execution of a legally condemned criminal) which is the one

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115Tbid., pp. 222-3.
effective sacrifice. The days of sacral, mediating priesthood are over. There can be no return to the sacral priesthood of the Old Testament or of any other religion, past or present.¹¹⁷

In a manner similar to the priesthood of the whole people of Israel presented by the Old Testament, the New Testament makes explicit mention of the common priesthood of all Christians (I Pet 2: 9-10). But here it is founded on (Rev 5: 9-10) and exercised through (Heb 13: 15) the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice this priestly people is to offer a living sacrifice (Rom 12: 1) by integrating cult into the life of all Christians (Heb 13:15).

Another form of priesthood, founded on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, but distinct from the common priesthood of all Christians is the ministerial priesthood, that is, of a special body of professional priests. It refers to people exercising various functions or holding various offices in the Christian community. This notion of priesthood, in its evolution, is derived from presbyteros. Cultic terms like hieræus, sacerdos (Greek and Latin terms respectively for priest), signifying a person who is "sacred" (sacer in Latin, hieros in Greek), that is, who has been "filled with divine power" and/or "consecrated to the deity" and so "belongs to the divine sphere"¹¹⁸ are reserved for Jewish cult personnel, for the priesthood of Christ and for the common priesthood of Christian community; never used for an individual Christian. In the New Testament there are no Christian hieræis (sacred persons, or cultic priests).¹¹⁹


¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 214.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 227.
3. The Evolution of Roman Catholic Priesthood

Today priest has come to mean a special kind of religious intermediary, a sacerdos or hierus than presbyteros. But in the early Church, Christians resisted even the use of priest, as to the Jewish converts it smacked of exclusiveness (the order of the Levites), and to the Gentile converts, cultic privileges. Later, struck by the insight that Jesus was the last priest, as his sacrifice needed no further complement, the first Christians introduced the usage of priest to Jesus. At that time the presbyters were not always engaged in today’s obvious forms of apostolate such as social work, teaching of catechism or administration of parishes. Celibacy was not always required of them. They were not always separate from the laity, full-time professional religious workers supported by the Church and marked by distinctive garb and life-style. According to Kenan Osborne, it was by the end of the second century that the connection of episkopos and presbyteros to hierus, sacerdos, pontifex is heard. Leadership in the Church came to rest with cultic leaders. Gradually Christianity placed the priest back on the pedestal of privilege and exclusivity as in many religions.

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120 According to Brown, the early Christians acknowledged the Jewish priesthood as valid and therefore never thought of a priesthood of their own. At the beginning Christianity was not thought of as a new religion, but as a movement within Judaism, though differing only in some features. Cf. Brown, Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections, p. 17.


123 There is no reference in the New Testament to the Christian ministry of leadership as a priesthood. Nevertheless, it was inescapable that in a world much concerned with the control of the divine, the leaders of increasingly larger and more visible Christian churches should appear not only as charismatic leaders but as hieratic figures of large assemblies. But this history
4. Contemporary Understanding of Priest in the Roman Catholic Church

Common Priesthood and Ministerial Priesthood

The Roman Catholic Church, first of all, adheres to the Biblical teaching\(^\text{124}\) that all the members of the Church, by their baptism, participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.\(^\text{125}\) “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood…” (LG 10). However, in Jesus’ action of choosing twelve from his many followers, and constituting them into a group called the apostles (Lk 6: 13-6), with Peter as leader (Mt 16:19), and in the early Church’s own custom of appointing leaders (Titus 1:5), it discovers its own hierarchical nature (LG 18).\(^\text{126}\) It understands that by divine institution the members of the Catholic Church are classified into two, namely the sacred ministers or clerics, and the lay people or the Christian faithful (CIC 207; CCEO 323).

The Catholic Church underscores the relationship as well the distinction between the common priesthood of all baptized and the ministerial priesthood of the members of the hierarchy. “Since priests participate in the authority of

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\(^{124}\)“You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

\(^{125}\)“Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 6:20). “The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the Priest. The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute “newness” in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christians and the priest in particular” (PDV 12).

\(^{126}\)When Jesus lived on this earth, he manifested in himself the definitive role of the priest, by establishing a ministerial priesthood, with which the Apostles were the first to be invested. This priesthood is destined to last in endless succession throughout history” (PDV 5).
Christ they differ notably from the faithful” (PTCM 4:3). “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 to one another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ” (LG 10). “The distinction between the common and ministerial priesthood, far from creating division among the members of the Christian community, harmonizes and unifies the life of the Church. This ... is an organic communion among all the members, in which each one serves the community by fulfilling his own distinct role and specific vocation” (DMLP 18). Schwartz enfleshes this teaching when he affirms. “By the very nature of the Church, the priesthood of the laity and the priesthood of the ordained are interacting components of a larger whole. The priest meets God in the community he serves, and the experience of God is unlocked and deepened in the community through the words and actions of the priest.”

Ministerial priesthood is not appropriated by anyone on merit, but bestowed. “No one has a right to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders ... Like every grace this sacrament can be received only as an unmerited gift” (CCC 1578). “The Church considers the ministerial priesthood a gift given to Her through the ministry of some of the faithful” (DMLP 2).

**The Establishment of Ministerial Priesthood**

It is maintained that the apostles, through imposition of hands (2Tim 1:6; LG 21), entrusted (LG 20) in varying degrees various members of the Church

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with the office of ministry they had been given by Jesus Christ. “Thus the
divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by
those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests and
deacons” (LG 28). By a particular sacrament, namely that of the Holy Orders, priest are “signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the
priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head” (PO 2).

“All priests share with the bishops the one identical priesthood and ministry of Christ” (PO 7). While the fullness of the sacrament of Order is enjoyed by the bishops (PO 7), the priests share in that one and the same priesthood of Christ. “The priests, prudent cooperators of the episcopal college and its support and mouthpiece, called to the service of the people of God, constitute, together with their bishop, a unique sacerdotal college (presbyterium) dedicated it is true to a variety of distinct duties” (LG 28). It is joined to the episcopal order and by sharing in the priesthood and mission of the bishop in each local assembly (LG 28) that the office of priests shares in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his Body, the Church.

128Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time; thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate” (CCC 1538). “The word order in Roman antiquity designated an established civil body, especially a governing body. Ordinatio means incorporation into an Ordo. In the Church there are established bodies which Tradition, not without a basis in Sacred Scripture, has since ancient times calls taxeis (Greek) or ordines (CCC 1537). The word ‘ordination’ today is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters or deacons, and confers a divine gift that permits the exercise of a sacred power. Ordination is also called consecration, for it implies a setting apart. The laying on of hands by the bishop, with a consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination (CCC 1538).

129The faithful who, maintaining their common priesthood, are chosen and become part of the ministerial priesthood are granted an indelible participation in the one and only priesthood of Christ” (DMLP 6).
"The function of the bishop’s ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of the priesthood and be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfilment of the apostolic mission that had been entrusted to it by Christ" (PO 2).

The Role of Roman Catholic Priests in the Understanding of the Church

The vision and goals of an organization, to a large extent, determine the role of its members. As significant members of the Church, Catholic priests are called to live by and for the ideals of Catholic Church. Therefore, to fathom their role it is mandatory to see first the self-understanding of the Catholic Church with regard to its own role.

i) The Self-understanding of the Role of Catholic Church in the World

The Catholic Church believes that Jesus Christ established and ever sustains on earth the Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all. It esteems other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities (GS 40) as well as the different religions that people look for answers to the unsolved riddles of human existence (NA 1). It gratefully recognizes that it has benefited and is still benefiting even from the opposition of its enemies and persecutors (GS 44). However, it holds that, itself being a reality in which human as well as divine

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130 This “Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines” (LG 8).

131 The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men…" (NA 2).
elements are blended, it is to be a leaven, and the soul of human society. It not only communicates divine life to humans but "in a certain sense casts the reflected light of that divine life over all the earth, notably in the way it heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, in the way it consolidates society, and endows the daily activity of men with a deeper sense and meaning" (GS 40).

The kind of impact the Catholic Church endeavours to have in the world is not a secular one. "The impact which the Church can have on modern society amounts to an effective living of faith and love, not to any external power exercised by purely human means" (GS 42). It believes that it is entrusted with the task of opening up, by its very presence, the mystery of God to humans who are in a process of fuller personality development and of a growing discovery and affirmation of their own rights (GS 41).

While the Catholic Church is primarily a religious organization, it maintains that it has a mandate for a unique involvement in the world. "Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God. In fact, the Church is able, indeed it is obliged, if times and circumstances require it, to initiate action for the benefit of all men, especially of those in need, like works of mercy and similar undertakings" (GS 42). To abstain from involvement in the world on the pretext of a heavenly orientation is reckoned as counter to the identity of the Catholic Church.
It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one. Let there, then, be no such pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on the one hand and religious life on the other. The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbour, neglects God himself and endangers his eternal salvation (GS 43).

By its nature and mission the Catholic Church defines itself to be universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. The Church addresses itself to all peoples. “All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (Acts 17:26), and also because all share in a common destiny, namely God” (NA 1). The Church desires nothing more ardently than to develop itself untrammelled in the service of all under any regime which recognizes the basic rights of the person and the family, and the needs of the common good (GS 42). It insists, “All Christians should do their best to promote dialogue between men of every class, as a duty of fraternal charity suited to our progressive and adult age” (HPD 1). The Church, therefore, urges its members to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. While maintaining their own faith and way of life, they are to acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths as well as the social and cultural values found among all peoples (NA 2).

ii) The Role Prescriptions of Roman Catholic Priests

Like in other religions, the need for mediation of the Divine is the purpose of Catholic priesthood. “The specificity of the ministerial priesthood lies in the
need that the faithful have of the mediation and dominion of Christ which is made visible by the work of the ministerial priesthood” (DMLP 6).\textsuperscript{132} “In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd ...” (PDV 15). The doctrines of the Catholic Church delineate three functions\textsuperscript{133} of priests, namely teaching (teacher of the Word), sanctifying (minister of the Sacraments) and ruling the people of God (leader of the community). “The ministry of the priest is, certainly, to proclaim the Word, to celebrate the Sacraments, to guide the Christian community in charity ‘in the name and in the person of Christ ...’” (PDV 43).\textsuperscript{134}

The documents do testify to the leadership role they have been entrusted with. “The priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church” (PDV 16). “The ministerial priesthood has the task not only of representing Christ - Head of the Church - before the assembly of the faithful,

\textsuperscript{132}Thus, the ministerial priesthood renders tangible the actual work of Christ, the Head, and gives witness to the fact that Christ has not separated Himself from his Church; rather He continues to vivify her through his everlasting priesthood” (DMLP 2). “The ministerial priesthood at the service of the common priesthood ... is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church” (CCC 1547). “The identity of the priest comes from the specific participation in the Priesthood of Christ, in which the one ordained becomes, in the Church and for the Church, a real, living and faithful image of Christ the Priest, a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd” (DMLP 2).

\textsuperscript{133}The Church documents have at times distinguished between the terms, function and power. \textit{Holy Orders} gives an ontological share in the sacred functions. “The word function is deliberately used in preference to powers which can have the sense of power ordered to action. A canonical or juridical determination through hierarchical authority is required for such power ordered to action. A determination of this kind can come about through appointment to a particular office or the assignment of subjects, and is conferred according to norms approved by the supreme authority.” From an explanatory note made by the Secretary General of the Vatican Council II. Cf. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery (Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1992), p. 383).

\textsuperscript{134}As ministers of God’s Word they owe it to everybody to share with them the truth of Gospel. As ministers of the Sacraments and the Eucharist they are servants in God’s work of sanctification. As rulers of God’s people, they “exercise the function of Christ as Pastor and Head in proportion to their share of authority” (PO 4-5).
but also acting in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice" (CCC 1552). “Finally, the priest is called to express in his life the authority and service of Jesus Christ the Head and Priest of the Church by encouraging and leading the ecclesial community ...” (PDV 26). “In the name of the whole Church' does not mean that priests are the delegates of the community... ministers are called ministers not only of Christ, but also of the Church. It is because the ministerial priesthood represents Christ that it can represent the Church” (CCC 1553). While the faithful have the right to be helped by the pastors, especially spiritually, the faithful are bound to obey the pastors (LG 37; CIC 212-3; CCEO 15-6), and provide for their maintenance (CIC 222; CCEO 25). Furthermore, the hierarchical authorities are entitled to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights which are proper to the faithful (CIC 223.2; CCEO 26.2). In juridical affairs, they are qualified to serve as official representatives of the community (CIC 532; CCEO 290).

The role of Catholic priests as envisioned by the Church is not confined to the sphere of the sacred, to employ Durkheimian terminology.135 Their power of governance is exercised in the external and internal forum (CIC 130; CCEO 980). As ministers of reconciliation, clerics are always to do their utmost to foster among people peace, unity and harmony based on justice (CIC 287; CCEO 384). They are to foster works relevant to social justice (CIC 528; CCEO 289). Even during the period of training, awareness of social problems is

135 "Very little good will be achieved by ceremonies however beautiful ... priests will make their help available to people to enable them to determine the solution to their problems and the will of God in the cries of life, great or small" (PO 6).
insisted upon (CIC 256.2). Priests are expected to attend to the integral formation of their charges so as to enable the latter to promote the common good of the society, attaining a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and taking active part in social life (CIC 795; CCEO 629). By their very presence the pastors are called upon to disseminate a value system that subscribes to all that genuinely contributes to human well-being. The life of priests is to be an antidote to separatist and divisive tendencies showing up in the world.

The Church documents clarify that “although those in Holy Orders may at times be engaged in secular activities, or even practise a secular profession, yet by reason of their particular vocation they are principally and expressly ordained to the sacred ministry” (LG 31). Large scale involvement in temporal matters is primarily reserved for the laity. Priests are invited to animate and promote the involvement of the laity in every sector of life in society.

136 “By their words and example ... let them [pastors of souls] show that the Church with all its gifts is, by presence alone, an inexhaustible font of all those resources of which the modern world stands in such dire need” (GS 43).

137 “Since the human race today is tending more and more towards civil, economic and social unity, it is all the more necessary that priests should unite their efforts and combine their resources under the leadership of bishops and the Supreme Pontiff and thus eliminate division and dissension in every shape or form, so that all mankind may be led into the unity of the family of God” (LG 28).

138 “But by the reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (LG 31). “It is to the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties activity properly belong” (GS 43). “The priest should avoid falling into the contradictory position of abdicating exercise of his specific authority so as to involve himself in temporal, social or even political matters which God has left to the free disposition of man” (PTEM 4.3).

139 “The pastor, indeed, should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice and confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, leaving them freedom and scope for acting, indeed, they should give them the courage to undertake works on their own initiative. They should with paternal love consider attentively in Christ initial moves, suggestions and desires proposed by the
In order to be relevant, priests are to interpret the 'signs of the times' (DMLP 34). "In order to be a good guide of his People, the priest must be also attentive to the signs of the times: those larger and deeper ones which concern the universal Church and its sojourn in the history of man, and those which more closely affect the specific situation of a particular community" (DMLP 56).

Furthermore, they are called upon to interact with and serve all people (CIC 256, 771; CCEO 352.2). "The priesthood of Christ, of which priests have been really made sharers, is necessarily directed to all peoples and all times, and is not confined by any bounds of blood, race, or age ..." (PO 10). "The reason is that every priestly ministry shares in the fullness of the mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles" (PO 10). "They [the priests] should be mindful that by their daily conduct and solicitude they display the reality of a truly priest and pastoral ministry both to believers and unbelievers alike, to Catholics and non-Catholics, that they are bound to bear witness before all men of the truth and of the life...” (LG 28).

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In Jesus’ own words, the identity of priests consists of being and acting in the world, but not as of this world. “Priests, while being taken from amongst men and appointed for men in the things that appertain to God that they may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, live with the rest of men as with brothers” (PO 3). By the sacred Orders it is to Jesus Christ that they have been configured. They have been given a spiritual power whose purpose is to build up (PO 6). Their style of functioning is expected to be that of Jesus

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141 If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you” (Jn 15:19). “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (Jn 17:16).

142 The priests of the New Testament are, it is true, by their vocation to ordination, set apart in some way in the midst of the People of God, but this is not in order that they should be separated from their people or from any man, but that they should be completely consecrated to the task for which God chooses them. They could not be the servants of Christ unless they were witnesses and dispensers of a life other than that of this earth. On the other hand they would be powerless to serve men if they remained aloof from their life and circumstances. Their very ministry makes a special claim on them not to conform themselves to this world; still it requires at the same time that they should live among men in this world and that as good shepherds they should know their sheep... (PO 3). “God always calls his priests from specific human and ecclesial contexts, which inevitably influence them; and to these same contexts the priest is sent for the service of Christ’s Gospel” (PDV 5).

143 The priest’s relation to the Church is inscribed in the very relation which the priest has to Christ, such that the “sacramental representation” to Christ serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church” (PDV 16). “By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet and king” (CCC 1581).

144 The priest enjoys a certain prestige amongst the faithful and, in some places, with the civil authorities. He should, however, be aware that such prestige should be lived in humility and used correctly for the promotion of the “salus animarum” while remembering that Christ is the real head of the people of God. It is to Him that the faithful must be directed and not to any attachment to an individual priest... In Christ and the Holy Spirit, the priest is but an administrator of the gifts entrusted to him by the Church. He has no right to omit or deviate them or remodel them to his own liking... Concerning new evangelization and the pastoral leadership given by priests, all need to undertake a sincere and careful discernment. The attitude of “not wishing to impose”, etc., may well mask a misconception of the very theological substance of the pastoral ministry or a lack of character which seeks to escape responsibility. Neither undue attachment to persons or particular ministerial positions nor misguided desires for popularity nor lack of proper intention can be underestimated when making this discernment. Pastoral charity, void of humility, is empty. Pride or need to crave attention can mask seemingly motivated rebellion, reticence in the face of pastoral changes desired by the Bishop, eccentric preaching and celebration of the liturgy, refusal to wear ecclesiastical garb or alteration of ecclesiastical garb for personal convenience” (PTCM 4:3).
who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). They are to beware of two temptations, namely that of exercising ministry in an overbearing manner, and that of disdaining the configuration to Christ the Head and Shepherd because of an incorrect view of community (DMLP 16). It is a service (PDV 21) that demands sacrificing of oneself, even of very life, in the service of others (PO 13). “In close communion with his Bishop and with his faithful, the priest should avoid introducing into his pastoral ministry all forms of authoritarianism and forms of democratic administration which are alien to the profound reality of the ministry, for these lead to a secularization of the priest and a clericalization of the laity” (PTCM 4:3). As Jesus did, they are to treat everyone with kindness (I Pt 5:1-4),

145 This munus regendi represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the Bishops” (PDV 26).

146 “The desire to serve is an essential element of priestly ministry and requires the respective moral disposition in the subject” (PTCM 4:2). “In reality, the priest, by the very nature of his ministry, is at the service of Christ and the Church” (DLMP 61).

147 “With the one definitive sacrifice of the Cross, Jesus communicated to all his disciples the dignity and mission of priests of the new and eternal covenant” (PDV 13). “As pastor of the community, the priest exists and lives for it; he prays, studies, works and sacrifices himself for the community. He is disposed to give his life for it, loving it as Christ does, pouring out upon it all his love and consideration, lavishing it with all his strength and unlimited time ...” (DMLP 55).

148 The Church warns against ‘Democratism,’ i.e. elimination or negation of the distinctions of the different roles in the Church. While the Church recognizes all the merits and values which the democratic culture has brought to human society, she resists democratism which, she holds, distorts the divinely instituted hierarchical structure of the Church (DMLP 18). One of the consequences of ‘democratistic’ mentality is ‘clericalization’ of the laity, i.e. considering the laity as ministerial priests. As a precaution, after the Bishop, the term ‘pastor’ can only be attributed in a proper and universal sense to the priest by virtue of the ministerial priesthood received with the Ordination.

149 The authority of Jesus Christ as Head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church” (PDV 21). “Therefore, priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the One High Priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care” (PDV 15).
while manifesting a predilection for the less privileged such as the poor, the suffering, the lonely, the exiled from homeland (PO 6).\textsuperscript{150}

Pastoral charity faces the danger, today especially, of being emptied of its meaning through so-called 'functionalism'. It is not rare, in fact, to perceive even in some priests, the influence of an erroneous mentality which reduces the ministerial priesthood to strictly functional aspects. To merely play the role of the priest, carrying out a few services and ensuring completion of various tasks would make up the entire priestly existence. Such a reductive conception of the identity of the ministry of the priest risks pushing their lives towards an emptiness, an emptiness which often comes to be filled by lifestyles not consonant with their ministry (DMLP 44).

"The indispensable exercise of the *munus regendi* by the priest, far from being a mere sociological concept or organizational capacity, derives also from the sacramental priesthood..." (PTCM 4:3). "The munus regendi, however, should never be confused with a merely bureaucratic or organizational task. It requires a loving exercise of strength on the part of priests ... This authority is not an oppressive domination but a spirit of and willingness to serve. This dual aspect - authority and service - is the reference point for the *munus regendi* of the priest ..." (PTCM 4:3). "Pastors must consider it of prime importance, therefore, not to allow the church to be run strictly according to business principles. Businessmen in the congregation may clamor for more efficiency, etc. (and their pleas must be heeded if the church has become inefficient), but
they must not (as a result) be allowed to reshape the church by the principles of business and management.\footnote{Jay Adams E., \textit{Pastoral Leadership}, Shepherding God’s Flock, No. 3 (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 20.}

The challenge of combining authority with service does not vindicate priests refraining from service due to fear or favour. One is obliged to exercise proper authority in those areas wherein he has been constituted to do so. “Those in authority must overcome the temptation to exempt themselves from this responsibility. If they do not exercise authority, they no longer serve” (PTCM 4:3).

The Church honestly admits the mistakes that have been committed, due to human weakness in carrying out this task.\footnote{This presence of Christ in the minister is not to be understood as if the latter were preserved from all human weaknesses, the spirit of domination, error, even sin” (CCC 1550).} “But it is by no means unaware that down through the centuries there have been among its members, both clerical and lay, some who were disloyal to the Spirit of God. Today, as well, the Church is not blind to the discrepancy between the message it proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted” (GS 43).

\textbf{Some Indicators to the Excellence of Ministerial Priesthood}

The fulfilment of the role of Catholic priests embodies several demands on their personal living, the most involving being holiness of life.\footnote{CIC 276, CCEO 368. “The priest is obliged to complement the objective spiritual authority which is his in virtue of sacred ordination with a subjective authority deriving from sincerity and holiness of life, and that pastoral charity which manifests the love of Christ” (PTCM 1: 2).} “The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfilment of their
ministry” (PO 12). Obedience and reverence to the Supreme Roman Pontiff, the Pope and filial submission to the bishops (LG 28) are insisted upon (DMLP 24; CIC 273; CCEO 370). It is imperative for clerics, celibate or married, to excel in the virtue of chastity (CCEO 374). Furthermore abstaining completely from everything that is unbecoming of their status is demanded of priests (CIC 285; CCEO 382). They are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power (CIC 285.3; CCEO 383.1). It is only with the explicit permission of their superiors that they can practise commerce or trade (CIC 286; CCEO 385.2). "The priest, as servant of the universal Church, cannot tie himself to any historical contingency, and therefore must be above any political party. He cannot take an active role in political parties or labour unions, unless according to the judgement of the ecclesiastical authority, the rights of the Church and the defense of common good require it. In fact, even if these are good things in themselves, they are nevertheless foreign to the clerical state since they can constitute a grave danger of division in the ecclesiastical communion” (DMLP 33; CIC 287.2).

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154 This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who “presides over” and “leads” a community, of an “elder” in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the values of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor” (PDV 26).

155 While according the code of the Latin Rite Church, celibacy is a sine qua non for the total and free service of God and neighbour (CIC 277), the code of Eastern Churches approves the tradition of married clergy (CCEO 373). “Convinced of the profound theological and pastoral motives upholding the relationship between celibacy and the priesthood, and enlightened by the testimony which confirms this day, in spite of painful negative cases, its spiritual and evangelical validity, the law which requires celibacy freely chosen and perpetual for candidates to priestly Ordination in the Latin rite is maintained” (DMLP 57).
The keen importance that is accorded to the selection and formation of candidates to priesthood bespeaks of the exalted office (LG 30) of priests. The Church, inspired by Jesus’ training of his apostles (Mk 3:13-5), considers their systematic training her duty and exclusive right (CIC 232; CCEO 328). The goal of their rigorous training lasting for a minimum period of six years, (two years allotted to philosophical studies and four years to theological studies) (CIC 250), under teachers qualified and of outstanding virtue (CIC 253), is to enable the candidates to arrive at an appropriate harmony between human and spiritual values (OT 8. 10; CIC 244), and to equip them to play their role in a manner relevant to time, place and people (CIC 255; CCEO 352 @ 1; PDV 42). Most commonly the training lasts ten years during which the candidates are taught doctrinal subjects and equipped with practical knowhow, including the use of several classical languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. Besides, every nation is exhorted to draw its own Programme of Priestly Training as only regulations of a general nature are given by the central ecclesiastical authority (OT 1). The authorities are entrusted with the responsibility of discerning the human, moral, spiritual and intellectual gifts as well as the physical and psychological health and right intention of candidates (OT 6; PDV 35; CIC 241; CCEO 342).

Through an ongoing understanding and interpretation of the scanty information that Christian revelation offers on priesthood, the Catholic Church has developed quite an elaborate doctrine. According to it, the role of priests...
is pivotal. In spite the changes witnessed in the world, few signs of let up are noticeable in the demands that the Catholic Church makes on its priests. The research at this moment awaits the results of the empirical study to ascertain the delicate balance between the sacred and the secular, the realization of the ideal of being ‘in the world and not of the world,’ in the role of priests in Kerala.