

Overview of Historical Background on Holy Orders

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Adapted from Deconstructing Sacramental Theology, Reconstructing Catholic Ritual by Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred by Joseph Martos and What Jesus Meant by Garry Wills

Jesus told his disciples if they wanted to be great, they would need to serve others. The earliest disciples of Jesus saw their role as one of ministry or service. (Doors to Sacred, pp. 404-405)

At the beginning Peter acted as leader of the Twelve and a speaker for the group, However, neither Peter nor the other disciples were priests or bishops. There were no bishops in Peter's lifetime, and none in Rome until the second century (as the letters of Ignatius of Antioch confirm). Peter calls himself one of the elders in the letter attributed to him in (1 Peter 5:10). The Catholic biblical scholar, Raymond Brown wrote, "Peter never served as bishop or local administrator of any church, Antioch and Rome included." There are no texts in the gospels in which Jesus passed on special power to perform sacramental actions like baptizing, laying on of hands or presiding over the Eucharist by a well-defined rite. (Doors, pp. 406-407)

Later James, a brother of Jesus, was the leader of the community in Jerusalem.(Acts 1;15-26). Neither Peter nor James acted alone, important decisions were made by the elders acting together with the approval of the community. (Doors to the Sacred, p. 405)

Paul's letters are address to gatherings in which there are no priests. Nor are there churches in the modern sense- that is church buildings. The early Christian community meet at houses. He describes Christians as "house gatherers of the faith' in Galatians 6:10) Wills, p. 79.)

In Romans 16: Paul greets women leaders such as deacon Phoebe and apostles Junia indicating that women were respected leaders in the emerging Jesus movement.

In the first three centuries there was no evidence of ordination into a clerical state or of an ordination rite. At most that approval and blessing of the community for diverse ministries in the community was symbolized by the laying on of hands. (Deconstructing, p. 288) These ministries included preaching, prophesy, healing, working miracles, speaking in tongues and interpreting what was said in tongues – 1 Cor. 12:12-30, Ephesians 4:11-12, Romans 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11)

By the end of the third century, Christianity had an emerging organizational structure headed by presbyters, bishops and deacons. (Doors, p. 409) Initiation into these orders was accomplished through a rite of ordination that inducted a person into a local office in a particular community, but does not bestow power that can be exercised in other places. Their main duties are to offer the sacrifice of the mass, and to preside over

baptisms and funerals. Some hear confessions and administer extreme unction. (Deconstructing, 290-291)

There is ample evidence that in the West women were ordained as deacons and abbesses in the patristic and early Middle Ages. Women continued to be ordained deacons in the East and were ordained to a variety of ministries. (Deconstructing p. 201-202)

It is also evident that women were ordained to the order of presbyter and bishop. Garry Macy, Ch. 3)

In the 12th century, ordination changed from its earlier history of a blessing for different ministries in service of a specific community to a bestowal of spiritual power “to confect (make it happen) the sacrament of the Lord’s body and blood and to offer God “placating sacrifice.” Atonement Theology

(p. 204)

The idea that there is an “apostolic succession to Peter’s fictional episcopacy did not arise for several centuries, at which time Peter and others were retrospectively called bishops of Rome to create an imagined succession. Even so there has not been an unbroken chain of popes. Two and three claimants existed at times, and when there were three of them, each excommunicating the other two, they all had to be dethroned. The Council of Constance started things over again with a new appointment in 1417. (Wills, pp. 80-81.) The apostolic succession that RCWP claims dates from the 16th century!

On November 30, 1947, Pope Pius XII solemnly defined Official teaching on Holy Orders in Apostolic Constitution Sacramentum Ordinis.

"The only minister of this sacrament is the bishop, successor of the Apostles. The matter of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the imposition of the hands by the bishop, in silence, and the form consists in the words of the Consecratory Preface." (prayer of consecration after the laying on of hands by bishop.)

In the 21st century the Church’s sacramental doctrine is still rooted in scholastic theology and medieval thinking which does not integrate contemporary theology or meet the needs of Catholics in the modern world. (p. 298) Ordination as a ceremony, whatever its ritual format, should empower the ordinand with the authority to perform ministerial service and fulfill his or her ministerial responsibilities. (p. 249)

Celebrating Sacraments Online During a Time of Pandemic- A Theological and Pastoral Reflection and Some Questions to Consider

The term "global village" is used a lot these days to describe how closely interconnected and interdependent the world has become. The Internet is one example of a modern-day tool that millions of people use to access information and communicate with individuals and groups across national boundaries and continents. Chat rooms bring people together in cyberspace to discuss a wide variety of topics. Even surgery and medical procedures that were once thought impossible are using this technology to save lives. In a very real sense, we can say that the world is becoming a smaller place as the human family gets to know one another better through the information highway.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us of a bond we share in Christ that is deeper than ever could be ours on the Internet. Each of us is part of a spiritual community so intimate that it transcends our individual differences of race, national origin and gender. Our communion is closer and more profound than anything we can imagine. In other words, all of us are sisters and brothers who belong to God's great family. We have gifts and limitations, similarities and differences, smiles and tears, fears and hopes to share. We have much to give and receive from one another. We are like a beautiful tapestry interwoven with many colorful threads that create a stunning work of art. The oneness we share in Christ is a mystery of grace so awesome that words barely evoke a glimpse into the reality.

"In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28 "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

Our experience of divine presence and spiritual communion is at the heart of sacramental celebrations whether physically, digitally, or virtually. Since March 2020 many in ARCWP and RCWP have participated in and/or led liturgical celebrations of Eucharist and anointings in Zoom.

For Dialogue :

1. Many of us have experienced presiding at and celebrating eucharist via Zoom as holy celebrations of Spirit moving among us in this time of pandemic. What is your experience and your thoughts and feelings about celebrating Eucharist in Zoom?
2. What theological and/or pastoral questions do Zoom sacramental celebrations raise?
3. What opportunities and challenges does technology bring?

ARCWP claims valid ordinations in the Roman Catholic Church as a prophetic witness for justice and equality in a community of equals. The Ordination Rite throughout the worldwide movement follows the RC formula on matter and form -bishop, priests and people lay hands on ordinand(s) and raise hands as bishop prays consecratory prayer. We have followed matter and form definition of RC Church declared in 1947.

1. Are you comfortable with the laying on of hands with bishop, ordinand(s) and people present in separate places through technological means like Zoom?
2. If so, how would you explain or make connection with valid orders in the RC tradition? Is this important to you and to your inclusive faith community?
3. In what ways have we expanded the Ordination Rite to include a larger role for the community?
4. What impact could Zoom celebrations of ordinations have on our ongoing development of a contemporary theology of Holy Orders and of the priority of pastoral issues?