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THE COMMON PRIESTHOOD IN LUTHERANS AND CATHOLICS

Abstract. Luther insisted on the royal, common or universal priesthood of all the baptised, as the Second Vatican Council also recalled, referring to the mutual complementarity between the common and ministerial priesthood, which, however, differ *non tantum gradu sed essentiam* (cf. LG 10). These pages review the main points on the common priesthood, according to Luther's proposal and the response of the Councils of Trent and Vatican II and, as a complementary counterpoint, add the teachings of a 20th century Catholic author, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, partly before and partly after Vatican II, which could be of interest for understanding the subject under discussion. The similarities and differences are thus noted here, which are conducive to the subsequent ecumenical dialogue on this subject, which is acquiring particular importance in the context of the theology of synodality.

Keywords: Luther; Trent; Vatican II; lay people; Escrivá de Balaguer.

In the words of Martijn Pouw, “Luther’s doctrine of the common priesthood plays a central role in his theological approach.”¹ Such statements ap-

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¹ Martijn Pouw, *Greatness & Limits of Common Priesthood in the 16th Century Reformation Theology. A Realist Phenomenological Study of the Common Priesthood in Luther and Calvin from a Roman Catholic Perspective* (Amsterdam: Summun, 2020), 63. Sobre este tema, puede verse Louis Bouyer, *Parole, Église et sacrements dans le protestantisme et le catholicisme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); Francisco Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero* (Vitoria: ESET, 1963); Jan Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther* (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, 1993); Hans-Martin Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); Henry Joseph Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Missio Dei: A Canonical, Catholic, and Contextual Perspective* (Weaton, IL: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013); Pablo Blanco Sarto, “El ministerio en Lutero, Trento y el Vaticano II. Un re-

pear above all in the great confessional writings of 1520: *To the Nobility of the German Nation, De captivitate babilonicae ecclesiae and On Christian Liberty*, in which the German reformer proposed a “declericalisation” and a “democratisation” of the Church.² A word of caution: the Lutheran concept of priesthood does not include an idea of sacramental and representative mediation, but “a form of piety, an active spirituality.” This idea, present in Scripture and the Fathers, will also be recalled from the Catholic side. The priesthood of the people of God is called “common” – as Blázquez defines it – for a double reason, namely, because it is received by each and every person, and because it is in “communion,” shared by the people of God and within the Christian community. It is also called the universal priesthood because all Christians participate in it, and baptismal, because baptism and the anointing of chrism are its foundation.³

For his part, Bravo understands it as “the divine gift of faith, given to all Christians, by means of which they acquire immediate access to God and become capable of sacrificing themselves out of love and dealing personally with the divine Word.”⁴ In this paper, we will take a historical look at this concept in Luther’s writings of, the Catholic Magisterium and the teachings of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, in order to examine in greater depth the relationship between the common priesthood of all the baptised and the sacramental priesthood of ordained ministers. In this way, we will be able to see that we not only face different theologies of ministry but also different ecclesiologies, while at the same time, we will see some hopeful points in common.⁵

corrido histórico-dogmático,” *Scripta Theologica* 40 (2008), 3: 733–776; Pablo Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae. Eucaristía, ministerio y eclesiología en el diálogo católico-luterano* (Salamanca: Bibliotheca Oecumenica Salmanticensis, 2017). El presente texto corresponde a una traducción actualizada de Blanco Sarto, “Un confronto temerario. Sacerdozio comune e ministeriale in Lutero ed Escrivá,” en *Prospettive sul lavoro. Percorsi interdisciplinari*, I/5, ed. Maria Aparecida Ferrari, 93–110 (Roma: Edusc, 2018). I am particularly grateful to Sven Grosse and Johannes Schwanke of the *Universitäre Theologische Hochschule* in Basel for the exchange of ideas on these topics.

² Luther, Martin, *Werke. Weimarer Ausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1983–2009) – cit. WA, 6, 404–469; 497–573; 7, 20–32; cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 30.

³ Ricardo Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia: En el centenario y canonización de Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-2002),” *Ius canonicum* 42 (2002), 84: 474–475.

⁴ Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 357, 374.

⁵ Cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 244–250, especialmente 247–248; Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae*, 544–565.

1. LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION

Let us undertake a historical overview of this concept in the Lutheran context. At the end of the Middle Ages, the feudalistic society continued to exist, with the nobility, the clergy (*geistliche Stand*) and the people forming watertight compartments between which there could be little permeability. Only the clerical establishment had a vocation in the strict sense of the word, and only the clergy could fully aspire to holiness. “Spiritual power” could only be exercised by clerics, who sometimes surrounded their ministry with a certain magical aura. As a consequence of the doctrine of justification and in reaction to this state of affairs, Luther questioned the real communication between God and a Christian through sacramental and priestly mediation. However, a meeting point between Lutheran and Catholic theologies could be found in the concept of representation. All believers have equal dignity through baptism, and differ only in the Church ministry that each performs, in their state or the world, the reformer asserted.⁶ “Baptism, the gospel and the faith spiritually constitute one Christian people.”⁷

Thus, Luther compares the anointing of baptism with that of ordination, which constitutes its radical and ontological consecration. In this way, he does not recognise the representative capital status of the ministry.⁸ The German reformer, on the other hand, based the ecclesial ministry on the common priesthood of all Christians *a laico nihil differat nisi ministerio*⁹ while establishing the ministry of preaching, which was “prescribed, instituted and ordained” by God.¹⁰ He related it to the figure of Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, who offered bread and wine as a sacrifice, which in turn he relates to 1 Pet 2:9 and Rev 5:10, and extends it to all the baptised, who share the priesthood with Christ.¹¹ In the booklet *De abroganda missa pri-*

⁶ Cf. WA 6, 407, 25s.; 537, 20ss.; 537, 38ss.; 540, 23s.; 566, 16ss. Véase también Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 67; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 34–35; Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae*, 126–127; Pouw, *Greatness & Limits of Common Priesthood in the 16th Century Reformation Theology*, 24–29, 57, 59.

⁷ WA 6, 407, 18.

⁸ Cf. WA 566, 16ss.; 407, 25s.; Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 69.

⁹ WA 6, 657.

¹⁰ Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962), 281; cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 195–198.

¹¹ Cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 33–34; Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 128–141.

vata (1521), the reformer affirmed the superfluous character of the priesthood:

Be certain, and be not deceived by any other persuasion if you want to be authentically Christian, that in the New Testament, there is no visible and external priesthood, but that instituted by Satan by means of human lies. There is but one priesthood for us, the priesthood of Christ, who offered himself for us, and with us all. [...] This priesthood is common to all Christians. We are all priests with the same priesthood of Christ.¹²

1.1. The baptismal priesthood

Thus, the problem of the foundation of the ministry – from above or from below – occupies a decisive place in the respective Christian doctrines, Catholic and Lutheran.¹³ The question arose when the principle of *sola Scriptura* was applied to the question of ministry, because, according to the reformers, “do this in memory of me” would not sufficiently prove that the ministerial priesthood was divinely instituted, but would only constitute a situation analogous to that evoked by baptism. Thus, Luther formulated a harsh criticism of the Church’s hierarchical structure in the years 1517-1521.¹⁴ In this way, the German reformer also intended to criticise the clerical excesses of the Middle Ages. Two years later, he argued with the Catholic theologian John Eck about the pope’s authority, and at the same time – in his commentary on the *Epistle to the Galatians* – created a dialectical opposition between flesh and spirit, the “inner man” and the “outer man,” the sinner versus the justified man.¹⁵

From this stems the whole critique of authority in the Church and, as a consequence, of ministry, although the extent of this will depend above all on later interpreters.¹⁶ Already in 1520, in his *Address to the German Nation*, the reformer argued that “all Christians belong to the spiritual estate,” and

¹² WA 8, 414. Cf. Karin Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester. Das Amt Christi bei Luther im Verhältnis zur Vor- und Nachgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 113–123; Werner Führer, *Das Amt der Kirche: Das reformatorische Verständnis des geistlichen Amtes im ökumenischen Kontext* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 2001), 78–85; Pouw, *Greatness & Limits of Common Priesthood in the 16th Century Reformation Theology*, 63, 69–70.

¹³ Cf. Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 9.

¹⁴ Cf. Gert Haendler, *Amt und Gemeinde bei Luther im Kontext der Kirchengeschichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1979), 16–27.

¹⁵ Cf. WA 2, 443–618.

¹⁶ Cf. Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 49–68, 69–82.

there is no difference in the ministry: as Paul said in 1 Cor 12:12, “all the members of the body, though many, are one body.”¹⁷ The fundamental equality of all Christians is one of the structural points of his ecclesiology and his theology of ministry. The Church is not a *societas platonica*, a republic perfectly compartmentalised into estates and different ecclesial classes. Through the sacrament of baptism, all Christians are equal and all share in the ministerial function of Christ. Thus, “evangelical freedom means freedom from all human commandments and ceremonies in virtue of salvation.”¹⁸

OMNES SACERDOTES, QUOTQUOT BAPTISATI SUMUS, as he insists in *De captivitate babilonicae*.¹⁹ “For Luther, the discovery of the common priesthood of the faithful is connected with a new vision of the Church.”²⁰ The concept of freedom is also at the basis of the Lutheran concept of the common priesthood of all Christians, and this requires a process of Church declericalisation, so that all may regain their place and their freedom within the *communio sanctorum*.²¹ The common priesthood of all Christians consists in teaching, offering and praying (*lehren, opffern und beten* [sic]).²² In *De instituendis ministris ecclesiae* (1523), addressed to the Bohemians, the traditional Lutheran position against ordination is set out, stating how all Christians can perform the usual sacred functions.²³ These include preaching, teaching doctrine, baptising, consecrating and administering the eucharist, absolving and retaining sins, praying for others, offering good works and discerning different doctrines.²⁴ The foundation will be Christological, “according to the rite of Melchizedek” (S 110,4), continuing the same Aaronic priesthood;²⁵ it also establishes the ecclesial ministry for the brethren as a task undertaken “out of love for others.”²⁶

¹⁷ WA 6, 214. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2012&version=NRSVCE>, accessed 1 February, 2023.

¹⁸ Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 33.

¹⁹ WA 6,527,36.

²⁰ Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 29.

²¹ Cf. Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 146-158; Führer, *Das Amt der Kirche*, 92-114.

²² WA 41,210,28.

²³ Cf. WA 18,189,18-20; Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 281-289; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 214-219.

²⁴ Cf. WA 18,180,1-4; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 235-239; Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae*, 145-159, 261-287.

²⁵ Cf. Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 81-82; Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 257-261.

²⁶ Cf. WA 12,521,19-22.

At the same time, Luther specifies that this offering has nothing to do with the “sacrifice of the mass” (*Meßopfer*), since it is a spiritual offering.²⁷ However, all ministries are closely connected to the ecclesial ministry: “The authenticity of a particular ministry is always closely connected to the ordained ministry.”²⁸ In short, “the Lutheran common priesthood means that a Christian must unceasingly offer holy and acceptable sacrifices to God.” Pouw points out that there is some mediation both downward (by establishing communion between God and man) and upward, by putting us in communion with God. However, it is above all through spiritual sacrifices (cf. 1Pet 2:9; Rom 1:12) that Christians become kings, priests, saints and members of the household of God through faith and baptism.²⁹

1.2. The ecclesial ministry

The Reformation insisted on not forgetting the *unio cum Christo* concept that all Christians have, from which follows the fundamental equality of all Christians:³⁰ “The person is at the same time Christian and ‘worldly’ (*Welt-person*). For Him, he is “alone under Christ,” at the same time as he is in the world and therefore in the ministries.”³¹ A Christian, being Christ's and being in the world, is at his service: “We are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power over the word and the sacrament, although it can only be used with the consent of the community or of a higher vocation. *Quod enim omnium est communiter, nullus singulariter potest sibi arrogare, donec vocetur.*”³² Luther put his finger on the sore point by claiming the common priesthood of all Christians (*allgemeines Priestertum*), but at the same time, he reformed the proper ecclesial ministry of those who serve in the Church through the ministry of the Word and sacraments (*besonderes Amt*). There is no great difference between the laity and pastors.

He made this theological insight, especially after 1523:³³ “The differentiation between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* is such an important foundation

²⁷ Cf. WA 17 II,7,25–27; Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 290–299.

²⁸ Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 70.

²⁹ Pouw, *Greatness & Limits of Common Priesthood in the 16th Century Reformation Theology*, 68, cf. 83–84.

³⁰ Cf., i.e., WA 2,146,14s.

³¹ Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 46–47.

³² WA 6,566,26ss.

³³ Cf. Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 105; for a discussion on proposals for the future of evangelical theology, see Barth, *Einander Priester*

of civil life that it constitutes a difference in the civil life of the Jewish people.”³⁴ The principle of the common priesthood is formulated as “I believe, therefore I am a priest,”³⁵ which means “to be for God.”³⁶ This means that every Christian carries out Christ’s offices or ministries – the prophetic, priestly and kingly.³⁷ The problem then lies in knowing and understanding what each ministry consists of: “Every state has a great number of *functions*, which everyone must take into account and whose demands everyone must fulfil. These functions are what Luther calls *ministries*.”³⁸ In one’s exercise of the common priesthood, all the baptised are priests not only by prayer but also by teaching, preaching and participating in the sacrifice of Christ. These sacrifices are to be interior, spiritual, and not merely external. Despite his criticism of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist (and despite seeming somewhat contradictory), Luther teaches that, at the Supper, Christ is offered and, together with him, our spiritual sacrifices. However, the only real sacrifice is that of the cross, in which we seem to participate primarily through baptism and faith alone. An offering of our good works at the celebration of the Supper would not be appropriate in the proper sense.³⁹

*Omnes status huc tendunt, ut aliis serviant;*⁴⁰ there is a common ministry of service to the brethren. From this arises the principle of *cooperatio*, whereby “whoever has a ministry is an instrument and co-operator of the divine majesty.”⁴¹ All Christians have the ministry of the Word and are *theodidacts* (John 6:45).⁴² True ministers must be “preachers of the Gospel” and not “heralds of bulls,” as the “papist priesthood” does.⁴³ At first, he forbade the ordination of new ministers, because he wanted to renounce the sacral dimension and focus above all on preaching the Word.⁴⁴ “In his understand-

sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive, 127–133, 232–235; Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae*, 146–151.

³⁴ Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 236.

³⁵ WA 10 III,398,24s.

³⁶ WA 41,213,23.

³⁷ Cf. Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 43, 80–96; Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 126–131.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁹ Cf. Pouw, *Greatness & Limits of Common Priesthood in the 16th Century Reformation Theology*, 70–80, 85; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 198.

⁴⁰ WA 15,625,7.

⁴¹ WA 40 III, 263, 9s.

⁴² Cf. WA 8,424–425.

⁴³ Cf. WA 8,476.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 83–112.

ing of Christ's ministry," Bornkamm concludes, "he concludes that both ministries are different forms of the ministry of the Word."⁴⁵ *Est enim apostolus nuncius verbi, et apostolatus officium verbi,*⁴⁶ and every Christian will therefore be both an apostle and a minister. Luther wanted to abolish the stratification of Christian life in which the laity were only "creatures" (*Larven*) left to the hand of God.⁴⁷

It was God who put them there; therefore, all ministries are both *geistlich und weltlich*: in them, *Amt und Werk*, ministry and work, being in the world and serving it, are united.⁴⁸ Neither of the ministries – that of a duke or a priest – is exclusively spiritual or temporal, because both combine both dimensions.⁴⁹ The royal priesthood (*königliches Amt*) of all the baptised is the basis for a member of the community to hold an office of public ministry in the Church. Luther had interpreted the ministry in an inner, non-clerical sense, not without theological consequences and practical implications.⁵⁰ "It would be," he wrote, "as if ten sons of the king who are entitled to the same inheritance chose one of them to administer the inheritance."⁵¹

"Christ has become my priest, who has asked for and obtained faith and the Spirit, and so I am also a priest, who has to plea on behalf of the world that God will give it faith,"⁵² he claimed. We are "born" by baptism into the royal priesthood, while the minister is "made" (*gemacht*). There is no longer a complementary distinction between "laity" and "priests," but between "laity" and "preachers." Therefore, the reformer argued from the very beginning that the minister is above all a delegate of the community who preaches the Word and administers the sacraments, and therefore, the person of the priest must not be sacralised, nor must he be thought of as having an indelible character because of a supposedly received sacrament.⁵³ In a certain

⁴⁵ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁶ WA 59,513,2493s.

⁴⁷ Cf. Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 55.

⁴⁸ Cf. WA 44,440,25s.; 23,514,4s.

⁴⁹ Cf. Freiwald, *Das Verhältnis von allgemeinem Priestertum und besonderem Amt bei Luther*, 58.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 39–40; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 227–250.

⁵¹ WA 6, 615.

⁵² WA 10/3, 309, 14ss.

⁵³ Cf. WA 12, 178, 7s.; 6, 441, 1ss.; 31/1, 196, 35s. See also Haendler, *Amt und Gemeinde bei Luther im Kontext der Kirchengeschichte*, 18–19. See also Wenzel Lohff, "Die lutherische Lehre von Amt und Gemeinde im gegenwärtigen ökumenische Gespräch," en AA.VV., *Der Streit um*

sense, a just precaution against falling into clericalism is combined with the denial of the purely sacramental sphere and resulting character.⁵⁴

The Reformation was against the interposition of the ministry between Christ and the believer: *Christus est sacerdos, ergo christiani sunt sacerdotes*, which Luther affirmed in his commentary on Psalm 21.⁵⁵ He also wanted the principle of *solus Christus* to be present in the ecclesiological sphere, with its inevitable consequences in the sacramental sphere: “The true Church is constituted not through its visible structures, but through the inner bond which unites the believer to Christ and the believers to each other, and which proceeds above all when the preaching is received.”⁵⁶ The emphasis is thus on the “hidden Church,” which is perceived by God but not by people; what is emphasised in this reformed ecclesiology is the universal and horizontal priesthood, the breaking down of institutional barriers and ecclesial mediations, as well as the relationships within the community. All this, however, is conceived in opposition to the ministerial priesthood: according to Cereti, “the Reformation denounced the division between clergy and laity, affirmed the value of marriage and ordinary work, abolished the law of celibacy for the clergy and the juridical forms of monastic life.”⁵⁷

As a consequence of all this, according to Bravo, the Lutheran doctrine is reduced to three points: a) it reduces the two states – laity and pastors – to one and the same ecclesiastical state; b) it distinguishes, within this state, different ministries; c) it equates the ecclesiastical ministry with human work, reducing it to an “earthly vocation.” These premises cannot be overlooked, given the consequences they will have in the future. In this respect, in addition to the problem of the *Notamt* already proposed by Luther, under which any layman could also perform any ministerial function, Hans-Martin Barth proposes the ministry as “a particular form of the common, mutual (*gegenseitig*) and universal priesthood” with a purely organisational character.⁵⁸

das Amt in der Kirche. Entfall der Ökumene (Regensburg: Pustet, 1983), 111–123; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 43–46.

⁵⁴ On the priesthood of Christ and the ministry of the Word, see also Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 234–304.

⁵⁵ WA 179,15.

⁵⁶ Giovanni Cereti, *Per un'ecclesiologia ecumenica* (Bologna: EDB, 1997), 27.

⁵⁷ Cereti, *Per un'ecclesiologia ecumenica*, 27–28; cf. Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 83–102; Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester*, 298–300; Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 43–56.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 105; for a discussion on proposals for the future of evangelical theology, see Barth, *Einander Priester sein*.

2. TRENT AND VATICAN COUNCIL II

The doctrine of the common priesthood of all the baptised appears not only in Scripture but also in the Fathers and in Thomas Aquinas, who appreciated “a certain participation in the priesthood of Christ” through baptism and confirmation (STh III, q. 63, a. 3).⁵⁹ The congregation of theologians at the Bologna period of the Council of Trent, which took place from April 29 to May 7, 1547, gave priority to the sacrament of Holy Orders, also because of its connection with the concept of the Church, while recalling that the sacrament implies that the priest’s primary mission is the celebration of the Eucharist, together with preaching; the ministry does not depend so much on his function as on the sacrament, and, therefore, a more ontological than a functional foundation was given.⁶⁰ However, Tridentine did somewhat mention the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all Christians: “With the concern to defend the ministerial priesthood against the reformers, the doctrine of the universal priesthood of the faithful was undoubtedly greatly curtailed,” says Jedin.⁶¹

For example, on July 13, 1547, five canons on the sacrament of Holy Orders were approved, stating – among others – that preaching is not a minister’s only mission (c. 2), that not all the faithful are priests in the same way (c. 3) and that the election and ordination of ministers is the responsibility of the bishops (c. 4). These balanced and nuanced responses to Protestant criticism did not allude – perhaps to avoid a pitfall – to the baptismal priesthood. Session XXIII of 1563 only mentions it in passing and in a somewhat negative tone. “In general,” Bravo comments, “the great assembly convened to condemn Protestant errors did not have much time to deal with the ‘laity,’ thus depriving theology of directives that no one could give later.”⁶² We will try to look at this problem mainly chronologically.

Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive, 127–133, 232–235; Blanco Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae*, 146–151.

⁵⁹ Cf. Joseph Lécuyer, “Essai sur le sacerdoce des fidèles chez les Pères,” *La Maison-Dieu* 27 (1951): 7–50; Engelbert Niebecker, *Das allgemeine Priestertum der Gläubigen* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1936).

⁶⁰ Cf. Hubert Jedin, *Historia del Concilio de Trento, III: Etapa de Bolonia (1547–1548), Segundo periodo de Trento (1551–1552)* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1975), 101–103.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶² Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 382; cf. Jedin, *Historia del Concilio de Trento*, III, 113–115. For the Catholic magisterium and post-conciliar theology on this topic, see Ramiro Pellitero, “El sacerdocio común de los fieles en la reflexión posterior al concilio Vaticano II,” *Annales Theologici* 33 (2019), 2: 319–353.

2.1. The ministerial priesthood

Tridentine in its sessions of 1537 and 1563 insisted on the divine origin of the priestly ministry, as well as its ontological-sacramental, and not merely functional, dimensions. At the same time, it insists on the necessity of the *misio canonica* for preaching. Thus, according to the Council, not all Christians are equally priests, but pastors are those who, after ordination, have power over the Word and the sacraments. At the XXIII session, it was stated that, “if anyone should affirm that all Christians without distinction [*promiscue*] are priests of the New Testament, [...] he seems to do nothing else than disarrange [can. 6] the ecclesiastical hierarchy” (DS 960).⁶³ Trent confirmed the necessity of “a visible and external priesthood” (DS 961) and a “hierarchy [...] instituted by divine ordination” in the Church, thus making it an undeniable reality (DS 966). In the period of Bologna (1547-1548), this reality of biblical origin, whereby all Christians have equal dignity, was admitted, but a distinction was made between the common and the ordained priesthood. In the years 1545-1547, the council excluded the laity from ministering the sacraments. In the second period, from 1551-1552, Tridentine rejected the undifferentiated (*promiscue*) way of understanding the priest; however, in the third period (1562-1563), some exegetical insights led to the substitution of this expression by *ex aequo* or *aequaliter*. Equality did not imply indifferentiation.⁶⁴ In the mentioned session of July 13, 1563, he condemned the Lutheran doctrine of the common priesthood without denying this theological reality. The *Roman Catechism* (1566) differentiates between “spiritual” or interior priesthood and “external” visible priesthood.⁶⁵

Post-Tridentine ecclesiology, however, insisted on the institutional aspect, perhaps in a somewhat one-sided way, in an attempt to balance the process of spiritualisation to which the Reformation had subjected the Church. It thus sought to pursue a dialectic of complementarity rather than of opposition and exclusion: it insisted, therefore, on the Church and its historical continuity from Christ and the apostles and, consequently, on apostolic succession understood in an ontological-sacramental key. In a certain

⁶³ Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 383–393. <https://patristica.net/denzinger/#n900>, accessed 2 February, 2023.

⁶⁴ Cf. Nelson Hubert Minnich, “The Priesthood of all Believers at the Council of Trent,” *The Jurist* 67 (2007), 2: 345, 346–347, 353–354, 341–342, 360, for a detailed redactional history of the different decrees.

⁶⁵ *Catecismo romano*, trad. P. Pedro Martín Hernández (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1956), VI–I, 112: 1–4; IX, 16: 13–17; 18: 23–25; cf. Minnich, “The Priesthood of all Believers at the Council of Trent,” 361–362.

sense, Catholic ecclesiology focuses above all on the Church's supposed powers, while at the same time reviewing all its affirmations with a clear and decidedly apologetic tone.⁶⁶

In the opinion of some authors, a terminological reduction took place which had consequences: "The very term 'Church' is gradually restricted to common usage to indicate the persons who take part in the so-called 'hierarchy.'"⁶⁷ Later, thanks in part to biblical, patristic and historical studies, as well as to the ecumenical and missionary movements, 20th-century ecclesiology presented some novelties. The liturgical movement helped to discover the value of baptism, the origin of the common priesthood of the faithful, while the Eucharist was seen as the centre of the Church and its mystical and sacramental dimension. Pius XI in *Ubi arcano* recalled the text of 1Pet 2:9-10 applied to the laity, who "by their leading zeal in spreading the kingdom of Christ, work more effectively to establish general peace among men."

In his encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928), Peter's successor spoke of being "partakers in his eternal priesthood" and offering "gifts and sacrifices for sins" (cf. Heb 5:1), so that "all Christian people [...] ought to offer for sins both for itself and for all mankind (cf. *Hebrews* v, 3), in much the same manner as every priest and pontiff "taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God" (*Hebrews* v, 1)."⁶⁸ The liturgical concept of the doctrine of *Christus totus* led Pius XII to affirm in the encyclical *Mediator Dei* that "nor is it to be wondered at, that the faithful should be raised to this dignity [that of "offering" the sacrifice of the Mass]. By the waters of baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ the Priest."⁶⁹ The laity and the young churches also introduced a new ecclesial consciousness, as well as a new vision of the place of the minister in the Church.

In the post-Tridentine tradition, Cereti again states, perhaps in a somewhat dialectical way, the minister was seen above all as one who was called to administer the sacraments, which brought about a sacramentalisation of

⁶⁶ Cf. Ludwig Otto, "Die Lehre des Konzils von Trient über das Weihesakrament," en Ludwig Otto, *Das Weihesakrament* ((Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte), IV/5, Hrsg. Leo Scheffczyk, Michael Schmaus, Alois Grillmeier (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 119–127.

⁶⁷ Cf. Cereti, *Per un'ecclesiologia ecumenica*, 28.

⁶⁸ AAS 14 (1922) 763–700; 20 (1928) 178; Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 409–410. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280508_miserentissimus-redemptor.html no. 9, accessed 2 February, 2023.

⁶⁹ AAS (1947) 555; https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei.html no. 88, accessed 2 February, 2023; Bravo, *El sacerdocio común de los creyentes en la teología de Lutero*, 410–417.

the population with a very superficial evangelisation. Now the priority task of evangelisation and service to communion is rediscovered: the priest is a minister of the Word rather than of the sacraments, and has as his mission to serve the Church's *koinonia*.⁷⁰

Over time, greater maturity and balance is achieved: "The radical Christian vocation," Guerra affirms, "common to all the baptised, identifies the simple faithful and the hierarchy in an equality of being," but "this common being receives a profound sacramental transformation with the reception of the *ordo*."⁷¹ The Second Vatican Council took up these suggestions, balancing them in a critical way and without losing the overall vision of the entire faith. The decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* (no. 3; cf. no. 2) speaks of "the royal priesthood and a holy people," and mentions the common priesthood in other texts (cf. LG 10.34, PO 2.9). First of all, the last council insisted on the threefold *munus* of the pastors, as well as the decisive importance of the bishop's mission as a successor of the apostles.

Next, the entire people of God are called to the three dimensions of *liturgia*, *diakonia* and *martyria*, in the diversity of charisms and ministries; furthermore, he recalls the specific function in the three degrees of ministry (cf. 1Tm 3:8-13; 5:17-22), which is received by the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 6; 13; 1Tm 1:6; 4:14). Similarly, the last Council insists on the mission of the episcopate (LG 19-27), the priesthood (LG 28) and the diaconate (LG 29); thus, the "ministry of communion" is at the very heart of a pastor's task, to "make the universal Church visible in their own locality" (LG 28).⁷² Also – as an expression of the *lex orandi* – the preface of the Chrism Mass in the missal of Paul VI speaks of the Spirit who "not only confers the honour of the royal priesthood/ on all your holy people,/ but also, with brotherly love,/ chooses men from among this people,/ so that, by the laying on of hands,/ they may share in its sacred mission."

Jesus Christ's *tria munera* – king, prophet, priest – are actualised by the presbyter in a sacramental way, without forgetting the ministry of the Word: "Vatican II recovers the preaching mission of the presbyter which the Reformation considered essential, but which Trent had practically ignored, and even puts it in first place."⁷³ Cereti restates this, perhaps in a somewhat

⁷⁰ Cereti, *Per un'ecclesiologia ecumenica*, 34.

⁷¹ Aurelio Fernández, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial. Un problema teológico* (Burgos: Aldecoa, 1979), 15–16; on the biblical and patristic sources, see pp. 17–32.

⁷² Cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 120–123; see also pp. 124–127, although it is mainly a commentary on ecclesial sociology.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 191.

unilateral way, or perhaps reflecting the theological atmosphere of a certain moment. In this sense, Blázquez confirms that “nor would it be appropriate to systematise the three functions with precise and rigorously delimited contours[,] forgetting that they are part of the same regenerating grace in the Spirit and that there is a vital osmosis between them.”⁷⁴

“The priest-minister,” Guerra concludes, “is not a kind of super-Christian, nor even the first datum of the ontological constitution of the Church’s existence, although in the historical order, the apostolic college is prior to the Church-people.”⁷⁵ *Non tantum gradu sed essentiam*, states LG 10, referring to the difference and complementarity between the common and ministerial priesthood. This conciliar principle will be received by today’s theology, where the mission of the priest remains essential in order to make the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ present among humanity in a sacramental way. Gerhardt Ludwig Müller (b. 1947) refers to this central point: “The understanding of the apostolic power and mission which, according to the conviction of the ancient Church, continues in the ordained ministers – bishops, priests and deacons – is decisive for the ecumenical dialogue.” Only the priest ordained according to the apostolic succession – bishop and presbyter – has received from Christ in the Holy Spirit the power to govern the Church and to preside at the Eucharist, in which it is fulfilled to the fullest extent sacramentally (cf. DH 4541). “The indispensable presence of an ordained priest does not imply a personal privilege of a certain status or a feeling of superiority of some over others, but results from the Church’s sacramental nature.”⁷⁶ There remained, however, a certain distance between the Eucharist, the common priesthood and the priestly status of the entire Church.⁷⁷

The foundational and constitutive sacramentality of the Church has a number of consequences also at this level of sacramental realisation – such as the ordained ministry – which in turn leads back through the apostles to Christ himself. The Catholic Church has mediation, the direct and immediate succession starting with the apostles, which touches each of the bishops in existence today, those who teach the apostolic faith: “The faith of the Catholic Church,” Bouyer continues, “is none other than the faith of the apostles.

⁷⁴ Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 477–478.

⁷⁵ Fernández, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial*, 31. On this topic, see also Jose R. Villar, “El sacerdocio ministerial al servicio del sacerdocio común de los fieles,” *Ius Canonicum* 51 (2011) 29–41.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *La misa. Fuente de vida cristiana* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 2004), 223.

⁷⁷ Cf. Minnich, “The Priesthood of all Believers at the Council of Trent,” 362.

The Word her bishops proclaim is exactly the same as that which the apostles taught.”⁷⁸ *Traditio, successio* and *communio* are thus intimately linked.

As mentioned above, the Council of Trent did not directly address the problem of the common priesthood of the faithful, but was mainly concerned with defending the priestly ministry: “If anyone says that the sacred unction which the Church uses in holy ordination, is not only not required, but is to be contemned and is pernicious as also are the other ceremonies of order: let him be anathema” (DS 966), it ruled in its sixth canon on the sacrament of Holy Orders, dated July 16, 1563. In the following canon, ordained ministers are spoken of as the only “lawful ministers of the Word and sacraments” (DS 967). Moreover, earlier, in the fourth chapter of the decree on the sacrament of Holy Orders, he makes a statement that seems to reject the doctrine of the common priesthood of all the baptised:

But if anyone should affirm that all Christians without distinction are priests of the New Testament, or that they are all endowed among themselves with equal spiritual power, he seems to do nothing else than disarrange [can. 6] the ecclesiastical hierarchy, [...] just as if, contrary to the teaching of blessed Paul, all were apostles, all prophets, all evangelists, all pastors, all doctors [cf. 1 Cor. 12:29; Eph. 4:11] (DS 960).⁷⁹

It is therefore a hierarchical structure, so that it can be affirmed that, for Catholic doctrine, the ministry constitutes a structural element of the Church; it is always the *communio hierarchica* proclaimed by Vatican II, where the ministers and all the other faithful are part of the people of God and the body of Christ in a unitary and organic way. The ministers do so in representation of Christ the head (cf. LG 28), while the rest of the faithful constitute the rest of the body: “the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated” (LG 10). Here, then, we find a profound differentiation, albeit with its necessary nuances, for even a Lutheran author points out that “in the service of the unity of the Church lies (*liegt*) the meaning of the ministry, on which the

⁷⁸ Bouyer, *Parole, Église et sacrements dans le protestantisme et le catholicisme*, 54.

⁷⁹ On this topic, see also Luis Ruiz Poveda, “Los ministerios en la Iglesia. Punto de vista reformado,” *Diálogo Ecueménico* 14 (1979), 50–51: 287–294; Miguel María Garijo-Guembe, “Reflexiones en torno a la visión que del ministerio ofrece el documento «La presencia de Cristo en la Iglesia y en el mundo»,” *Diálogo Ecueménico* 14 (1979), 50–51: 269–286; Wolfhart Pannenberg, “El ministerio eclesiástico desde la perspectiva de la doctrina luterana,” *Diálogo Ecueménico* 25 (1990), 81: 87–112.

celebration of the Supper is based”;⁸⁰ the ministry would be the keystone from the sacramental to the ecclesiological.

Indeed, Vatican II devoted the entire *Lumen gentium* no. 10 to the common priesthood of the faithful: “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. 1Pet 2, 4-10).” While the difference between the common and ministerial priesthood is “essential and not only gradual” – as we have seen – and the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments is reserved to the ordained ministry, “the faithful, on the other hand, by virtue of the royal priesthood, participate in the oblation of the Eucharist, in prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, by self-denial and operative charity.”⁸¹

In number LG no. 11, reference is made to the exercise of the common priesthood in the sacraments: only in marriage are they ministers, but they are active subjects in almost all the others. This number ends with an immediate consequence of the common priesthood: “Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.” The vocational condition is fully recognised in the case of the laity.

Nevertheless, Guerra concludes that, in accordance with the doctrine of the fourth chapter of the constitution *Lumen gentium*, which makes secularity a specific mark of the laity, the conciliar doctrine understands the exercise of this triple function in the laity’s activity in the midst of the world, without making reference to issues which could be in conflict with the ministerial priesthood.⁸²

⁸⁰ WENZ, G., *Einführung in die evangelische Sakramentenlehre*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988, 208.

⁸¹ On this topic, see also no. 34 and Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia”, 471–474, 478.

⁸² Cf. Fernández, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial*, 67–97; here p. 79. In this journey, it is recalled that number 21 of the schema *De Ecclesia* already contained a section entitled *De sacerdotio universali et de sacerdotio ministeriali*, where chapter II of *De laicis* appeared. There we find terms that are familiar to us: “One priesthood does not exclude the other, but – on the contrary – both the ministerial priesthood and the universal priesthood, whose difference is essential and not only of degree, originate in their own way from the priesthood of Christ and are mutually ordered to each other” (*De laicis*, p. 37, in Fernández, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial*, 70–71; see also pp. 99–121). He in turn refers to the *Allocutio* “*Magnificate Dominum*”

“Both dimensions, fidelity in daily life and sacramental worship, are inseparable in the life of Christians.”⁸³ Thus, for Catholics, sanctifying one’s ordinary life will mean bringing it to the Eucharist, with all that this entails, in order to be a pleasing offering to the Father, offering “their bodies” as living, holy hosts, pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1; Mt 16:21; PO 2). Thus, we find parallels and differences between Lutheran and Catholic doctrine, albeit with interesting and important nuances. The problem lies above all in the distinction of ministerial functions. Even if it means multiplying the distinctions and, consequently, setting up barriers between the different ministries, it can be affirmed that there is a clear connection between the ministry and the sacrifice of reconciliation actualised in the Lutheran Supper. Therefore, this mission is reserved in the Catholic Church for the ordained ministry, even though the entire people of God participate in the eucharist. Moreover, more recent Catholic theology has also concluded that it is necessary not to differentiate too much between the common and ministerial priesthood, since the sacrifice is one and the same in both cases. Rehm states that “the question of ministry is presented as the problematic core for understanding the question of the sacrificial character.”⁸⁴

It is the priest who offers the memorial of the Lord’s Passover, and yet the distinction of functions does not imply a differentiation or diminution in Eucharist participation. All the baptised faithful:

taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, [...] offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. Thus, both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion, all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself (LG 11).

(2 de noviembre de 1954): AAS 46 (1954) 669; encíclica *Mediator Dei* (20 de noviembre de 1947): AAS 39 (1947) 555.

⁸³ Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 481–482; Pedro Rodríguez, *La estructura fundamental de la Iglesia. Discurso pronunciado en el acto de toma de posesión como académico de número* (Madrid: Real Academia de Doctores, 2009), 25–31.

⁸⁴ Johannes Rehm, *Das Abendmahl. Römisch-katholische und evangelische-lutheranische Kirche im Dialog* (Güthersloh: Kaiser, 1993), 243; cf. también Alexandre Ganoczy, “Zur Sakramentalität des Dienstamtes,” en AA.VV., *Der Streit um das Amt in der Kirche. Entfall der Ökumene* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1983), 63–89; también *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?* III, Hrsg. Wolfhart Pannenberg (Freiburg im Br.–Göttingen: Herder–Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 216–236.

The decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* provides a theological and sacramental foundation for their mission in the world. After citing the diversity of ministries in the Church, it recalls that the laity “likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world” (AA 2; cf. PO 12).⁸⁵ Blázquez concludes: “Neither can priestly ministers monopolise the mission, hindering the mission of the laity, nor can the laity disengage themselves or feel exempted, burdening the priests with all ecclesial and apostolic tasks.”⁸⁶

2.2. The common priesthood of the laity

Let us take an example from 20th-century spirituality. After denying – as we have seen – the ministerial priesthood as such, and reduced to a special or ecclesial ministry by the Reformation, with Trent consequent rejecting this (cf. DS 1767), the recovery of the common priesthood of the faithful in the Catholic sphere would be visible already in the 19th century in the works of Johann Adam Möhler and John Henry Newman. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, Catholic Action would carry out a vast apostolate with the laity, but always guided by the hierarchy: they are a kind of *longa manus* for them, not just as a consequence of their baptismal priesthood. In this context, the light that Josemaría Escrivá received on October 2, 1928, when he founded Opus Dei also represented, according to Antonio Miralles, “a renewed vision of the Church.”⁸⁷ The importance of the daily life of the laity in the Church was underlined.

⁸⁵ On the redactional history of these documents, see Fernandez, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial*, 80–89; see also 89–91. On the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, cf. Barth, *Einander Priester sein. Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive*, 104–120; Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 483–484. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html, accessed 2 February, 2023.

⁸⁶ Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 490.

⁸⁷ Antonio Miralles, “Aspetti all’eclesiologia soggiacente alla predicazione del beato Josemaría Escrivá,” en AA.VV., *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, VI/1 (Roma: Edusc, 2002), 177; cf. Kurt Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt. Die Wiederentdeckung des Taufenpriestertums beim seligen Josemaría Escrivá,” en *Josemaría Escrivá. Profile einer Gründergestalt*, Hrsg. César Ortiz (Köln: Adamas, 2002), 317–318, 321–325. On this in detail, see Álvaro Del Portillo, *Fieles y laicos en la Iglesia. Bases de sus respectivos estatutos jurídicos* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1991), 202; José Luis Illanes, “El cristiano *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la enseñanza del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” en *Biblia, exégesis y cultura. Estudios en honor del Prof. D. José María Casciaro*, eds. Gonzalo Aranda Perez, Claudio Basevi, Juan Chapa Prado (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1994), 605–622; Pedro Rodríguez,

Kurt Koch, current president of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, said that – in the midst of secularism and fundamentalism – Escrivá remained “with his global and differentiated vision a shining star for the Church on its way into the third millennium” by pointing to the “rediscovery” that all the baptised have a contemplative vocation, “yet, in the midst of the profane realities of the secular world.”⁸⁸ “The most important aspect of this renewed vision,” add Burkhardt and López, “is undoubtedly the importance it gives to the vocation and mission of the laity through baptism.”⁸⁹ In this sense, new ecclesial awareness emerges among all the baptised as (co-)protagonists of the Church’s mission in the world. Fernando Ocariz, the current prelate of Opus Dei, recalled that “the awareness of the universal call to holiness helps us to contemplate the Church more deeply as a convocation (*ekklesia*) of saints.”⁹⁰

“Sacerdocio ministerial y sacerdocio común en la estructura de la Iglesia,” *Romana* 4 (1987): 162–176; Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 469–490; Josep Ignasi Saranyana Closa, “El debate teológico sobre la secularidad cristiana (1930-1990),” en *El caminar histórico de la santidad cristiana. De los inicios de la época contemporánea hasta el Concilio Vaticano II*, eds. Josep Ignasi Saranyana Closa, Juan Antonio Gil Tamayo, María Rosario Bustillo, Eduardo Flandes, Santiago Casas Rabasa (Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2004), 105–130; Javier López Díaz, “Sacerdocio común,” en *Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, ed. José Luis Illanes (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2013), 1079–1083.

⁸⁸ Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 325, 311. Escrivá thus proposes neither a “secularist” nor an “integralist” vision of the relationship between Church and world, but rather a “sacramental” one, in which the two realities are – he says in a Christological formula – “unconfused and inseparable” (*ibid.*, 325). Cf. also Pedro Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles”, accessed on November 16, 2021, http://www.mercaba.org/Enciclopedia/R/interrelacion_entre_el_sacerdoci.htm and https://encuentra.com/orden_sacerdotal/sacerdocio_ministerial_y_sacerdocio_comun_de_los_fieles14669/, 5-6.

⁸⁹ Ernst Burkhardt y Javier López, *Vida cotidiana y santidad. 2: En la enseñanza de San Josemaría. Estudio de teología espiritual* (Madrid: Rialp, 2011, ed. 4), 458. More on this topic, see 80ss., 458-462, 489–495.

⁹⁰ Fernando Ocariz, “L’universalità della Chiesa negli insegnamenti del beato Josemaría Escrivá”, *Annales theologici* 16 (2002): 128; cf. Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 313–315. Ciertamente Escrivá ha sido comparado con el pensamiento de Calvino pero no tanto con el de Lutero: cf. Luis Carandell, *Vida y milagros de monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer, fundador del Opus Dei* (Barcelona: Laia, 1975); Martin Rhonheimer, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Zur Aktualität des Opus Dei* (Köln: Adamas, 2006). For more on the topic of ministry, see also Alberto Di Janni, *Ministero ordinato: fondamenti cristologici di un dibattito. Accordi e dissensi nel dialogo tra la Chiesa cattolica e le Comunità luterane, calviniste e anglicane* (*Studia Anselmiana*, 164) (Roma: Ateneo Universitario de sant’Anselmo, 2015), 85–109; Blanco Sarto, “El ministerio en Lutero, Trento y el Vaticano II. Un recorrido histórico-dogmático,” 733–776.

“St. Josemaría,” said López, “had a profound awareness of this reality and transmitted it vividly in his preaching and in his writings.”⁹¹ For this reason, he saw the layman not as a second-rate Christian, but as a true agent of the Church's missionary action. In parallel to Luther, the founder of Opus Dei deepened his understanding of the vocation of the laity and its nature: it is not only about what the Christian faithful have received through baptism and confirmation (and this would already be a difference with the German reformer); rather, the lay charism is also characterised by the vocation of the Christian to act freely and responsibly in the world, and thus to carry out the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church:

The specific way in which the laity contributes to the holiness and apostolate of the Church is free and responsible action within temporal structures, bringing to them the leaven of the Christian message. The witness of a Christian life, the word that enlightens in the name of God, and responsible action by serving others and contributing to solving common problems are all manifestations of that presence by which the ordinary Christian fulfils his or her divine mission.⁹²

Indeed, this is the core of the vocation and its contribution to evangelisation: “The mission of the laity is exercised, according to the Council, in the Church and in the world. This is often misunderstood by sticking to one or the other of the two terms.”⁹³

Like Luther but in a different way, Escrivá rejects clericalism, even that which seeks to clericalise the laity by making them perform only liturgical or ecclesial functions.⁹⁴ At the same time, paradoxically, he repudiates clericalism that pushes priests towards specifically temporal commitments. For him, the ministerial priesthood is undoubtedly at the service of the common, royal or baptismal priesthood; or, as Rodríguez says, the “sacramental priesthood” (with a “functional priority”) must serve the “existential priesthood,” endowed with an “essential” or “substantial priority.”⁹⁵ St. Josemaría used

⁹¹ López Díaz, “Sacerdocio común”, 1079.

⁹² *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer* (Madrid: Rialp, 2001; 1ª, 1968), n. 59.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, n. 9; cf. nn. 12, 14, 19, 21, 59, 62, 69, 90; *Es Cristo que pasa* (Madrid: Rialp, 2002; 1ª, 1973), 96, 79, 106, 120; *Surco* (Madrid: Rialp, 2001; 1ª, 1986), n. 318; *Forja* (Madrid: Rialp, 2001; 1ª, 1987), n. 685, 833, 882.

⁹⁴ Cf. Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 312–313.

⁹⁵ Vid. *Carta* (2.2.1945), nn. 25–26; citation by Pedro Rodríguez, Fernando Ocariz y José Luis Illanes, *El Opus Dei en la Iglesia. Introducción eclesiológica a la vida y el apostolado del Opus Dei* (Madrid: Rialp, 2000), 81, n. 106. Cf. Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles,” 2–9, 11–13; Rodríguez, *La estructura fundamental de la Iglesia*,

the image of “a carpet, so that his brothers may tread softly.”⁹⁶ Through this indispensable dimension of service, “Escrivá distinguishes,” says Koch, “in the best tradition of the Church, the sacramental priesthood of the ordained priest and the ‘existential priesthood’ of all the baptised.” In this sense, the common priesthood would have a sacramental origin, but would not imply a sacramental representation of Christ the head.⁹⁷

As is evident, the founder of Opus Dei considered the ministerial priesthood necessary for the sanctification of the faithful, but he did not allow that vision of a Christian life which considered the clergy as something superior: “I am repulsed by clericalism and I understand that – along with a bad anticlericalism – there is also a good anticlericalism, which comes from love for the priesthood, which is opposed to the simple faithful or the priest using a sacred mission for earthly ends.”⁹⁸ This “good anti-clericalism” considers that we are all equal through the sacrament of baptism and that the greatness of the Christian life comes rather from holiness, not from the ecclesial place or the charism or ministry exercised in the Church. After quoting 1Pet 2:9-10, the Aragonese saint adds: “The condition of the Christian faithful is one and the same in priests and laity, because God our Lord has called us all to the fullness of charity, to holiness.” This positive secularity – desired by Christ – will manifest both the “priestly soul” and the “lay mentality.”⁹⁹

In this sense, was he joking when he said that priests too are and must be faithful? Thus, there is no longer a “second-class holiness” and, in the Church, there will always be a unity of mission and a diversity of gifts, charisms and ministries recalled by Vatican II (cf. LG 4, 12; AA 2).¹⁰⁰ Thus, “all Catholics are themselves the Church, since they are full members of the one People of God”:¹⁰¹ it thus proposes the fundamental equality of all the baptised, and at the same time, the diversity of functions, which also includes the ordained

21–23; Pedro Rodríguez, *Opus Dei: estructura y misión. Su realidad eclesiológica* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 2011), 17–21, 27–37; Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 318–321.

⁹⁶ *Carta* (8.8.1956), n. 7.

⁹⁷ Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 319; cf. Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles,” 8–9.

⁹⁸ *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 47; cf. n. 20.

⁹⁹ *Amar a la Iglesia* (Madrid: Epalsa, 2002; 1ª, 1986), n. 37. Cf. Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles,” 1–2; Arturo Cattaneo, “Anima sacerdotale e mentalità laicale: Il rilievo eclesiológico di un’espressione del beato Josemaría Escrivá,” *Romana* 34 (2002): 164–182; Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 318–319; López Díaz, “Sacerdocio común,” 1080–1081.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 134; *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 61.

¹⁰¹ *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 53.

ministry. We are all the Church and co-responsible for its unique mission, entrusted by Christ to his apostles and to those who will come after them. Certainly, there is a diversity of functions and ministries related to the vocation and charism (even lay) that each Christian receives from the Spirit. In this sense, St. Josemaría invoked the beginnings and foundations of the Bride of Christ, meaning the situation experienced by the first Christians in the life of the Church:

This brings with it a deeper vision of the Church as a community made up of all the faithful, so that we all share the same mission, which each one must carry out according to his or her personal circumstances. The laity, thanks to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, are more and more aware of being the Church, of having a specific, sublime and necessary mission, since it has been willed by God.¹⁰²

López states that the doctrine of the common priesthood is of capital importance for understanding St. Josemaría's message, because of its relationship with two central themes of the spirit of a Christian life that he spreads: adoptive divine filiation, and sanctification and apostolate in the midst of the world.¹⁰³

They come directly from our filial condition of being sons in the Son, and from the specific mission entrusted by Christ to all Christians. Therefore, this participation in the life of the Church does not come from the hierarchy, but directly from Christ himself, who makes every Christian his disciple and sharer in his mission. An apostle is a Christian who feels grafted into Christ and identified with Christ by baptism; they are enabled to fight for Christ by confirmation; called to serve God by their action in the world, by the common priesthood of the faithful, which confers certain participation in the priesthood of Christ, which – while essentially distinct from what constitutes the ministerial priesthood – enables one to take part in Church worship and help men on their journey towards God by the witness of word and example, by prayer and atonement.¹⁰⁴

This participation in the life of Christ is to be found above all in union with his cross, and in this sense there are similarities but also differences with the Lutheran *theologia crucis*: “To be a Christian – and in a particular way to be a priest, remembering also that all the baptised share in the royal

¹⁰² Ibid., n. 59.

¹⁰³ López Díaz, “Sacerdocio común,” 1080.

¹⁰⁴ *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 120; Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 321–324.

priesthood – is to be continually at the Cross.”¹⁰⁵ Koch understands it as follows: the layman performs “a service to the *world* (*Welt-Dienst*) and at the same time it is a *holy* and sanctifying service (*Heil-Dienst und Heiligung-Dienst*). Yes, it is even an *ecclesial* service, in which the Church in her totality and in her original essence is for the world, that is, the *sacramentum mundi*.”¹⁰⁶

As Vatican II reminds us, the Christian’s participation in the paschal mystery of Christ is found in a special way in the liturgy (cf. SC 7, GS 22), while participation in the priesthood of Christ also enables us to take an active part in the Church’s prayer (SC 14).¹⁰⁷ A Christian participates in Christ’s priesthood and will therefore be “a priest by one’s existence,” especially through the sacraments:¹⁰⁸ that is, initiated in baptism and confirmation and consummated in the eucharist.

“What is this Eucharist already imminent if not the adorable body and blood of our Redeemer, offered to us through the humble matter of this world, wine and bread, through the elements of nature, cultivated by man, as the last ecumenical council wished to recall (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 38). It is understandable, children, that the Apostle could write: all things are yours, you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s (1 Cor 3:22-23). It is an upward movement that the Holy Spirit, alive in our hearts, wants to provoke in the world: from the earth to the glory of the Lord.” We have, then, a sequence of work-prayer-Eucharist, often found in Catholic thought, but which Escrivá understands and communicates with special emphasis.¹⁰⁹

With a commentary on the *et operis innocentia tuis sanctis altaris deservire* of the prayer to St. Joseph, in 1968, he preached: “Serve him not only on the altar, but on that altar which is each one of us.” Then he added a sacramental note: “All humanity is made as on an altar, and each one of us [...] says in some way his mass, which lasts twenty-four hours, and so on until the end of our life.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ *Forja*, n. 882; cf. Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 323–324.

¹⁰⁶ Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 323.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 120.

¹⁰⁸ Vid. *ibid.*, n. 96; cf. Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles.”

¹⁰⁹ *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 115, cf. nn. 9; *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 102, 120; *Forja*, n. 69, 694. For more on this topic see José Luis Illanes, *Laicado y sacerdocio* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2001), 208–209; Rodríguez, “Una vida santa en medio de la realidad secular. La homilía de san Josemaría en la Universidad de Navarra: sentido y mensaje,” en Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Amar apasionadamente al mundo* (Madrid: Rialp, 2007), 35–75; Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt,” 217–218.

¹¹⁰ *Apuntes de una meditación* (19 de marzo de 1968), citado en Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, *Vivir la Santa Misa*, Madrid: Rialp, 2010, 17.

At this point, it can be understood that there is a perfect complementarity between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood in the Eucharistic celebration: the laity offers their gifts of bread and wine which, consecrated by the priest, become the body and blood of Christ. This liturgical analogy thus enables us to fully understand the simultaneous distinction and cooperation between the laity and the Church's pastors. In the first place, there is the distinction: in fact,

[...] God our Father has given us, with priestly orders, the possibility for some of the faithful, by virtue of a new and ineffable infusion of the Holy Spirit, to receive an indelible character in the soul, which configures them to Christ the Priest, to act in the name of Jesus Christ, the head of his mystical body. With this ministerial priesthood, which differs from the common priesthood of all the faithful essentially and not with difference of degree, the sacred ministers can consecrate the body and blood of Christ, offer to God the Holy Sacrifice, forgive sins in sacramental confession, and exercise the ministry of indoctrinating people, in *iis quæ sunt ad Deum*, in all and only that which concerns God.¹¹¹

The sanctification of daily life is possible thanks to the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, but above all through the Eucharist. Sanctifying work, family and social relations would rather lead them mostly to the Eucharist. Therefore,

[...] although it would be a mistake to claim that a priest is more faithful a Christian than any other faithful person, it can, however, be affirmed that he is more of a priest: he belongs, like all Christians, to that priestly people redeemed by Christ and is, moreover, marked by the character of the ministerial priesthood, which differs essentially, and not only in degree (cf. LG 10), from the common priesthood of the faithful.¹¹²

Along with this distinction, there is a mutual collaboration with liturgical acts: "The sanctifying function of the laity needs the sanctifying function of the priest, who administers the sacrament of penance, celebrates the Eucharist and proclaims the word of God in the name of the Church."¹¹³ (Here we can

¹¹¹ *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 79; as a theological insight on this doctrine, see Fernández, *Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial*, 123–166.

¹¹² *Amar a la Iglesia*, n. 41; cf. Koch, "Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt," 315–318, where he relates our author to Francis de Sales.

¹¹³ *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 69; cf. Koch, "Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt," 320–321.

also see the participation of the minister in the *tria munera Christi* of leading, celebrating and preaching with the authority of the Church). Blázquez states it above all in the liturgical see: “Christ’s sacrifice is placed on the altar, to which the Christian must say ‘amen’ in communion, including in this ‘yes’ union with Christ the head and in union with the members of Christ.”¹¹⁴ However, we must remember that the liturgy “does not exhaust the whole activity of the Church” (SC 9) and, on the other hand, the unity of the laity with their pastors will also be necessary, even though they have received the mandate to evangelise directly from Christ: the laity

[...] are more and more conscious of being the Church, of having a specific, sublime and necessary mission, since it has been willed by God. And they know that this mission depends on their very condition as Christians, not necessarily on a mandate from the Hierarchy, although it is clear that they must carry it out in union with the ecclesiastical Hierarchy and according to the teachings of the magisterium: without union with the episcopal body and its head, the Roman Pontiff, there cannot be, for a Catholic, union with Christ.¹¹⁵

Communion with their pastors determines the effectiveness and abundant fruits of their apostolate. At the same time, as Vatican II states, this expresses that the Church will thus be a “priestly community” characterised by its *indoles sacra et organice exstructa* (LG 11).¹¹⁶

To conclude, we can first of all say that (1) both authors – Luther and Escrivá – pay great attention to the common priesthood of all the baptised faithful, although the latter also professes – as is logical – a great love for the ministerial priesthood, since he understands its mediating function with divinity. He thus understands (2) the complementarity and necessity of both, which is manifested in their organic cooperation. For Escrivá, (3) participation in the priesthood of Christ is above all participation in his cross, but the closeness of this aspect to Luther’s *theologia crucis* is only apparent, since Escrivá does not express the one-sidedness present in Luther.

¹¹⁴ Blázquez Pérez, “Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la misión de la Iglesia,” 481; cf. also pp. 485–490; Cruz González-Ayesta, “El trabajo como una Misa. Reflexiones sobre la participación de los laicos en el munus sacerdotale en los escritos del Fundador del Opus Dei,” *Romana* (2010): 200–210; Félix María Arocena, *Liturgia y vida. Lo cotidiano como lugar del culto espiritual* (Madrid: Palabra, 2011); López Díaz, “Sacerdocio común,” 1081–1083, with its bibliography.

¹¹⁵ *Conversaciones con Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, n. 59.

¹¹⁶ “Pocas expresiones del concilio Vaticano II me han ayudado tanto a adentrarme en el misterio de la Iglesia” (Rodríguez, “Interrelación entre el sacerdocio ministerial y el sacerdocio común de los fieles,” 1).

Moreover, (4) while Luther speaks mainly of baptism, the Catholic Church also considers confirmation but especially the Eucharist to be “the source and summit of Christian life” (SC 10), “the font and root of Christian life,” in the words of the everyday saint. Finally, (5) he fully understands the teaching of Vatican II on the diversity of charisms and ministries in the Church’s mission, and he deepens the nature of the charism and vocation of the lay person rooted in Christ through participation in his Word and in the sacraments and, therefore, in the call to carry out his mission in the world with “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Therefore, (6) St. Josemaría advocates equality, not egalitarianism, but complementarity and cooperation between laity and priests, who together carry out the Church’s universal mission (cf. AG 1).

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