

The Sacrament of Holy Orders
Addendum #2 Functionality and Ontology in Holy Orders
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A sacramental understanding of Holy Orders is more than functional. The Sacrament of Holy Orders creates an ontological change in the person who is so ordained.¹ Even as the Eucharist is a holy mystery in which there is an ontological change in the bread and wine so that it becomes the Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood, so also in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the men ordained are ontologically changed so that they become true participants in the mission and Priesthood of Christ. A sacramental understanding of Holy Orders reaffirms the Christological foundations of ordained ministry, declaring that Jesus himself is the basis of this ministry, and that to comprehend the meaning of all Christian ministry and mission one must begin with the ministry and mission of Jesus.² While all Christians are called to conform to the image of the Christ, the person in Holy Orders is particularly identified with Jesus' self-emptying on behalf of the Church and of all humanity (Phil 2:5-9).³ The person who experiences a call to Holy Orders should understand the sacred trust, and the permanent sacrificial nature of this high calling.

Entering the Diaconate or the Priesthood, therefore, is more than the right to wear a clergy shirt and vestments, or even to perform a ministry role. It is not simply a change in what we know or what we do but in who we are. "I have *become* a Deacon." "I *am* a Priest." Those in Holy Orders are sacramentally and ontologically set apart by the Servant-hood and High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.⁴

Both the Church and the ministry are gifts of the divine Lord Jesus. He appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth. When he ascended on high he gave gifts to men. The apostle draws his commission and authority from Christ alone, and he uses an authority given to him when in Christ's name he ordains and commissions the presbyters. "Take thou authority for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God now committed unto thee

¹ Ontology is concerned with the nature of being. To speak of something ontologically is to refer to its essential nature. An ontological change in a person indicates a change of status, character, and nature of being.

² See Dermot Power, *A Spiritual Theology of the Priesthood*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998)) pp. 14-15.

³ This is depicted in the covering of the ordinand with the pall in the Ordination Liturgy.

⁴ The ontological nature of Holy Orders takes nothing away from the priesthood of all believers. Christian priesthood is a threefold mystery: the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the priesthood of all Christians, and the ordained sacramental priesthood.

by the imposition of these hands ... and be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of his holy sacraments.”⁵

The full ontological concept of Holy Orders centers on appointed men becoming Christ’s representatives in the ministry of reconciliation. The ordained man is a faithful emissary sent by God to rescue a whole people from death and to set them on the road to life. The mission involves self-offering and intercessory prayer for the sake of others. It also involves teaching and directing them in the ways of the new covenant with a view to their sanctification.⁶

As a result of being ontologically changed, the ordained man becomes a man of theology, man of reconciliation, man of prayer, man of the Eucharist; displaying, enabling, involving the life of the Church. The ordained man *displays* in his own person that total response to Christ to which all members of the Church are pledged. He is to be a *beacon* of the Church’s pastoral, prophetic and sacramental concern. By ordination a Christian becomes a sign of the ministry of Jesus Christ in his Church.⁷¹ Besides displaying the Church’s response the ordained also *enables* it, for by his professional training and concentration of labor he is able to discern and fulfill the purposes of God in the Church. And besides displaying and enabling he also *involves* the whole Church in his own activity. When he visits a sick person, for instance, it is not only the visit of a kind Christian; it is the Church visiting. Similarly the ordained man can be the Church praying, the Church caring for the distressed, the Church preaching. In the Church and for the Church he *displays*, he *enables*, he *involves*. That is the importance of the ontological change that accompanies the Sacrament of Holy Orders.⁷

⁵ Ramsey, M. (2009). *The Christian Priest Today* (pp. 10–11). SPCK.

⁶ Dulles, Avery, *The Priestly Office: A Theological Reflection*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), pp. 6-7.

⁷Op. cit. Ramsey (pp. 6–7).