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Liturgy, Mission  
and Ministry in  
Ireland Today:  
*Random  
Reflections and  
Thoughts*

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# Liturgy, Mission and Ministry in Ireland Today: *Random Reflections and Thoughts*

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## PART FOUR: MINISTRY AND LITURGY

When we examine our human and ecclesial reality in the context mission, the local needs of ministry can be more easily identified. This final part will begin by offering a fleeting impression of the manner in which the lived experience of ministry throughout the world expressed how various churches responded to mission. Developments in ministry will be read in the light of the ‘mission of God’, filtered through living tradition and the current needs of the churches. This will inform our theology more than some official writings. One insight will be that Church always ends up doing the correct thing, but for the wrong reasons!

### MINISTRY IN PRACTICE SINCE 1972

The development of a variety of ministries did not emerge in a painless way in the aftermath of Vatican Two. Even today, permanent diaconate (restored by *Lumen gentium* [=LG] 29) has been taken up enthusiastically by many churches, but not by churches in Asia and Africa where this ministry is thought to add an undesirable layer of ‘clericalism’ to what they already have. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to figures given on 23 October 2022 by the Vatican office, *Agenzia fides* (fides.org), 97% of a worldwide total of 43,635 permanent deacons are found between the North and South American continents (with some 17,000 in the USA alone); and 15,267 in all of Europe. Just 1,279 permanent deacons are registered for the continents of Africa and Asia; and 519 for Oceania. This ministry was not introduced into Ireland until 2000, almost 30 years after the new norms were issued by Pau VI in *Ad pascendum* (1972).

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Thomas R. Whelan works in the area of liturgical and sacramental theology. This is the final of four essays which have appeared in *The Furrow* addressing contemporary issues and challenges to liturgy in Ireland. The opinions expressed here are solely those of the author.

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The establishment of lay ministries by Paul VI in 1972 (*Ministeria quaedam* [= MQ]) suffered from its rather muddled beginnings. Commentators at the time pointed to the many inconsistencies which originated due to the divergent views of some Vatican dicasteries. Lector and acolyte were to be ‘instituted’ as lay ministries but were mandatory for candidates entering the ‘clerical’ state for which reason they were to be conferred on (lay) men only. In 1973, the Vatican issued *Immensae caritatis* permitting men and women to be ‘commissioned’, if required, to distribute communion as ‘*extraordinary ministers*’ of the eucharist. The French bishops (who had already created such a ministry in 1969) observed that there is no essential difference between the ‘*extraordinary ministers of the eucharist*’ (1973 document) and the ‘*acolytes*’ established by MQ except that the former may include women. The first is ‘instituted’; the second may be ‘commissioned’. This created yet another conundrum: we now have two ‘categories’ of persons ‘authorized’ to distribute communion! Roman concern for canonical matters and lack of theological clarity has characterised all that has happened with ministry over the past 50 years.

It has been praxis relating to the ‘explosion’ in new ministries in different parts of the world over the next 50 years that created the templates for a developing theology of ministry rather than Roman-led thinking.<sup>2</sup> Ministries emerged in response to local needs while simultaneously reflecting changing concepts in different places of what it means to be ‘church’. The delights of new Spirit-led paths were explored and weaknesses in existing theologies of ministry emerged.

The younger churches tended to be creative in how they expanded ministry. They have always lived with the reality of a chronic shortage of priests, but their concern was not primarily ‘vocations’ but facilitating the growth of churches as living embodiments of the Kingdom under the local leadership of lay people. Churches on the Latin American continent placed to the fore of its mission issues emerging from marginalisation and justice. Working from the roots (the people themselves), rather than episcopal initiative, the Base Ecclesial Communities facilitated communities to allow their daily experiences encounter and be interpreted by the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

2 A brief account of ministries in various parts of the world, up to approximately 1998, can be found in my ‘Clergy and Laity: Fragmentation or Fellowship?’ in *Ministry: Clerics and the Rest of Us*, ed. Seán MacRéamoinn (Columba, 1998), 26-53. David N Power has offered a more recent survey with some theological reflections in his *Mission, Ministry, Order: Reading the Tradition in the Present Context* (Continuum, 2008), esp. 11-65.

3 Félix-Alejandro Pastor offers an impression in his ‘Ministerios laicales y Comunidades de Base: La renovación pastoral de la Iglesia en América Latina’ *Gregorianum* 68 (1987): 267-305.

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They trained their own lay leaders who coordinated the life of the community and presided at their weekly assembly on Sundays. (It remains normal for many communities to celebrate Eucharist only every six months or so when a priest visits.) In 1974 Brazil received a rescript from Rome to permit lay people preside at celebrations of the sacrament of marriage.<sup>4</sup> Lay ministries have been part of the landscape on the African continent since at least the 1880s when catechists, teachers, and community leaders worked tirelessly with missionaries for the establishment of churches. Reaction to their colonial background and a recovery of culture has helped shape how ministries work in various parts of the continent more so than Roman initiatives. (However, dependence on Roman funding has often influenced developments.) Some contemporary African theologians fear that styles of secular government are now to be found in church and these are autocratic and male dominated. 'Inculturation' of ministry for both lay ministers and ordained priests requires, according to theologians, a de-clericalization of seminary formation and a discouragement to having them trained outside the African continent.

The most significant characteristic element in new ministries in Asia was the centrality of Small Christian Communities (an episcopal initiative), and new ministries related to inter-religious dialogue, justice, and pastoral community leadership as well as those helping communities face the inherent challenges posed by changing economic, social, political and cultural realities. Collegiality and co-responsibility are important, and justice must be to the fore alongside the eradication of discrimination on the ground of gender, creed, class and colour.

The older churches in the northern hemisphere responded to the Roman initiatives by trying to implement them to the letter: they were cautious, conservative, hierarchical, and clerical in their approach. In the West it was supplementing the shortage of clergy, rather than good theology or a desire to encourage lay persons to take 'ownership' of their church, that prevailed as a driver.

Some of the issues seen in France some 60 years ago, for instance, are relevant to Ireland today. Sunday celebrations in the absence of Eucharist became the norm, increasingly, since the mid-1960s. Today France continues to forge a presence in a dechristianised society which espouses *laïcité*. Other expressions of ministry, unapologetically 'missionary', work to witness to Christ in the midst of religious pluralism and migration from other continents. Their sense of ministry flowing from mission was expressed in a strong and visionary statement (for its time) from the bishops'

4 See document in *Doctrine and Life* 25 (1975) 670-2.

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conference examining the role of presbyteral ministry in a church is ministerial at its core.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of ministry in the United States of America was quick and many forms of service in the community have emerged. What has emerged is more structured than what can be found, for example, in the more fluid situation of Brazil, but the USA tends towards a maximalist reading of documents on ministry, more so than most European churches.

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The number of clergy in Ireland peaked in the early 1960s after decades of growth. Such was the wealth in clerical numbers that Irish dioceses gave clergy ‘on loan’ to other English-speaking churches. It is against these artificially high numbers that Irish bishops and clergy measure today’s low figures. Some bishops even refer to Ireland being ‘missionary’ territory and that those younger churches formerly served by Irish missionaries must now come to assist us at its time of need (‘reverse-mission’). If, as I believe, the diagnosis is wrong then the proposed remedy is also wrong! Two issues come up here.

*Firstly*, we need to ask if there really is a shortage of ordained personnel in Ireland relative to other churches? Compared to churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia, western and central parts of the USA, much of Canada and significant parts of Europe, Ireland still has plenty of clergy. The shortage is felt principally because we have not adapted our structures and expectations to address our current situation. Warnings were given by many at least 30 years ago that this ‘train’ had left the station. Nothing was done. Importing priests only masks the problem. *Secondly*, importing clergy from other parts of the world (mostly Nigeria and India) without due regard for their ecclesial situations is a most selfish act. Why does the church in Ireland feel the right to invite clergy (even on short-term contracts) from elsewhere – places which themselves have chronic clergy shortages – when the needs for proclaiming the Gospel are so urgent, especially in Asia (containing 60% of the world population) and Africa (next in size, with 18% of the global population)? The needs for priests in Europe (third largest continent with a paltry 9.4% of world population) fades in comparison.<sup>6</sup> We have lost a sense of theology of church ‘catholic’.

5 *Tous responsables dans l'Église? Le ministère presbytéral dans l'Église tout entière 'ministérielle'* (Lourdes, 1973).

6 Latin America constitutes just over 8% of global population; and the North American continent (USA and Canada) represents 4.7%. Statistics are estimates of distribution of global population by continent and are taken from [statistica.com](https://www.statista.com) (for 2022).

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Ireland needs to welcome and experience a clergy that is multi-cultural. This is already beginning to happen – slowly – with the ordination of people who are now resident and part of the Irish ecclesial landscape. They endow a cultural richness on local churches and their contribution is immense, badly needed and permanent. Most Religious Congregations counter-witness to racism in Ireland thanks to their diverse membership and capacity to live interculturally in community. This has the effect of broadening the outlook of an otherwise insular church. An intercultural exchange is already happening in society and church can only be enriched by it.

Ireland is now reaching a crisis point regarding the shortage of ordained priests that was reached in other European countries decades ago. We panic and strive to hold onto whatever we can of our ecclesial structures, many of which no longer serve. We still hunger for a form of liturgiolatry (making liturgy the principal purpose of christian existence) that is theologically questionable. We need to relearn that the driver of christian living is the Kingdom and not ‘bums on seats’. We become burdened with administrative tasks, expending energy seeking financial support. We need to be a poorer church – not because of changed economic circumstances but rather out of evangelical desire. Let us not reinvent wheels. We should learn from others (not least our neighbours in France, the Germanic speaking countries, The Netherlands – and with caution, in the USA and Canada).<sup>7</sup>

With faith and an imaginative approach, the Church in Ireland can seek new ways of moving forward. We need to resist the temptation to advance short-term solutions to a situation which has been created by our tardy response to the decreased number of ordained personnel. A medium- and long-term vision is required. Our solutions must neither further clericalize the church nor reduce ministry to mere ‘functionality’. Good examples of Irish initiatives include the over 300 ministries in Mount-Merrion parish in Dublin, and the initiatives found in the Diocese of Limerick and at the Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies, Thurles.<sup>8</sup> We need to acknowledge the nature of the dilemma in which the church currently finds itself and examine it with pastoral as well as theological rigour – thinking, at all times, outside of the box. All churches in the western hemisphere, to different degrees, suffer from irrelevance

7 Sharing the English language with the North American continent can hide the huge cultural differences which exist between those churches and that in Ireland. Despite language differences, we might have more in common with many of our European neighbours and the UK. In a spirit of ‘receptive ecumenism’ we would do well to discuss issues relating to various forms of ministry with our Anglican colleagues.

8 Many other examples could be added.

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and fatigue. They no longer seem credible as bearers of the kingdom-message of Jesus. Other churches have benefitted from imaginative visioning of their reality and take it for granted that lay people minister with excellence and grace as leaders of worship and prayer, and pastoral leaders of parishes. Why can't we?<sup>9</sup>

We have been gifted with a *kairos* moment. Everything needs to be reimagined for the sake of the Kingdom. Opening church life to all baptised can serve a renewed vision of church rather than an expansion of the institution. Unfortunately, lay ministry is often considered a way to assist the clergy. (Many still view permanent deacons as 'mini' priests or substitutes for a priest rather than representing a more complete expression of a diversity of ministry.) If we create new forms of ministry to serve the church, then we must *value these in their own right*. Ministries must respond to the dictates of the *missio Dei* in this place and at this time. They exist to evangelise and witness to God's Reign in the wider social, political, and economic environments. Ministries of adult faith development and others are needed which will assist with the building up the church so that it might better fulfil its mission in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Ministry needs to be structured to avoid anarchy, but in a way that would create the space necessary for the exercise of its charismatic and prophetic elements. One thinks of the axiom (from architecture and literary criticism, for instance) that 'form follows function': we cannot manipulate functions to squeeze them into pre-determined forms.

A balance is required between the necessary collaborative work (teams) and the 'specialisation' that is required in ministries. At all levels in church structures the nature of collaboration should be such that ministers are at ease working with other ministers, irrespective of their designated functions. No one ministry is superior to another. The bishops could lead by example on this with regard to team ministry.<sup>11</sup> All ministry must be posited

9 There is a sense in some quarters, which I share, that the excitement generated around the restoration of the ancient ministry of catechist in the West (suggested by Paul VI some 50 years ago) might be misplaced and will not resolve our issues. To date, missionaries (lay and ordained) who worked on various continents – all with varied and rich experiences of diverse forms of ministry – have never been invited to share their experience when discussions of ministries are taking place.

10 Most are unaware that the official liturgical books now supply rites for the baptism of children by lay ministers (outside of an emergency), for presiding at the sacramental marriage of couples, and funeral liturgies. Should the ministry of preaching be confined to those ordained?

11 Why does Armagh always have to hold the Presidency of the Conference and Dublin the Vice-presidency? Surely there must be a formula that can allow any bishop be elected to either role (as happens in many other Conferences) for a fixed term of office (say, 3-5 years) while ensuring appropriate representation of the Armagh Province?

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firmly in community. Clericalism can be avoided when the entire community is conscientised, and the holding of workshops and seminars at local level is open to all who might wish to attend (minister or not). Anciently, all ministry was discerned by, designated by, and answerable to, the community in Christ. Official designation of ministry cannot be seen as an exercise of authority but as a formal and public *recognition* of the gifts of the Spirit and of the appointment by the *community*: this exercise is appropriately presided over by the bishop or other community leader.

If it reflects the Reign of God, then ministers will do as Jesus did – invert social ranking in the church and in society; be unambiguous about the place of those on the margins; and see radical *service* on behalf of others as forming the root of all church action and mission. Ministry is not to serve the church as *institution*, but to serve the Reign of God which supplies its criteria and grounds ministry in the faith-reality that states that the Cross is salvation. These criteria continue the inversion that sees leaders to be servants, that the last are first, the foolish are wise and the weak are strong.

### THEOLOGICAL POINTERS

The non-programmed expansion of ministry over the past 50 years raised new theological questions and placed old ones in a new light. The Conciliar Decree on the Laity, 3, implies that baptism is the fundamental sacrament of ministry: ordained priesthood is no longer the starting place for a theology of ministry; lay ministry is not secondary to this. There are several theological principles relating to ministry which go back to biblical and patristic times but which remain ever valid.

- (1) Ministry flows *from* the *ecclesial assembly*, but its reference point is service of the mission of God (*missio Dei*), not ‘church’.
- (2) All ministry is predicated on church. It follows that Church designates ministry *according to its needs*, ever changing as these might be. Without exception, all ministry relates to the ‘building up of the church’ (in the service of the Kingdom) and does not exist for its own sake. The gifts of ministry are never for the glory of the one who receives it, nor as a reward, nor on the basis of entitlement. How ministry is organised is a *pastoral* and not primarily a theological question.
- (3) The basic criterion relates directly to God’s Reign. *Discernment* for all forms of ministry (ordained or not) is not a democratic process but is a working of the Spirit in and through the community and entails a prayerful process.



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- (4) The model for ministry (episcopal, presbyteral, diaconal, and lay) is that of Jesus, who came *to serve* and not be served (see Mark 10:45) and is exercised in his name.
- (5) Contemporary political models, where leaders ‘lord it over’ others, employing authoritarianism and dictatorial forms of governance, are never appropriate (see Luke 24-27). This biblical standard remains theologically normative for today, but only in the sense that the *diakon-* family of words require.

The idea of ministry as service (*diakonia*) has been deepened and modified over the past 30 years or so and has invited a reconsideration of theology of ministry.<sup>12</sup> The biblical and patristic understanding of ‘*diakonia*-service’ is understood as something lowly and humble but in the sense that such service is undertaken by means of an ecclesial mandate and with authority. Different to charism, all ‘service’ in the local church refers to ministry that functions on behalf of Christ but is carried out through the ecclesial community by whose authority it exists. It is often claimed that all Christians are ‘servants’ and this is misleading unless this servanthood is recognised and ratified by the community.<sup>13</sup>

The idea that church embraces ‘two types of Christian’ is echoed in some Conciliar passages (see LG 32 and *Presbyterorum ordinis* 2). It should be noted that this duality is not found in LG 33 or, for instance, in *Gaudium et spes* 40.<sup>14</sup> It is important to affirm this because a Roman Instruction, curiously issued jointly, by no less than seven dicasteries in 1997, tried to assert an almost qualitative difference between the roles of the ‘common’ (the ‘non-ordained faithful’) and the ‘ministerial’ priesthood (‘those ordained to the sacred ministry’).<sup>15</sup>

12 This follows the ground-breaking research by the Australian Catholic biblical scholar, John N. Collins, on the idea of *diakonia*. His thesis of the mid-70s was published as *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (OUP, 1990). The same conclusion was reached, independently, by Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, 2007).

13 Collins has published a number of books on this and on the ministry of permanent deacon. His latest is *Dismantling the Servant Paradigm and Recovering the Forgotten Heritage of Early Christian Ministry* (Genesis, 2020).

14 The Conciliar working group stated that LG 31 intended merely a typological description of laity rather than any form of ontological definition. Schillebeeckx referred to this as being more a descriptive demarcation rather than an essential distinction. The fundamental equality of the baptised in dignity and action is reflected also in CIC 208.

15 Congregation for the Clergy, et al, *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest* (15 August 1997), in *Origins* 27/24 (Nov 27, 1997), 397-410. It carries the weight of papal authority. For a commentary on the canonical issues relating to this Instruction, see John Huels, ‘Interpreting an Instruction Approved in *forma specifica*,’ *Studia Canonica* 32 (1998): 5-46. Also helpful is Richard R. Gaillardetz, ‘Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinctions,’ *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999): 115-139.

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Unless corrected, this mistaken idea of ‘two types of christian’ plays into clericalism. Often lurking under the surface, clericalism refers to an attitude of superiority and privilege that is imbedded in how ordained ministry is understood and practiced. It prizes rank, power and the ‘sacred’. It robs laity of a quality they possess (‘baptised in the Lord’) and reduces them to being ‘in the world’. Clericalism is intrinsically *sinful* because it corrupts the essence of the ministry of Christ and the message of the Reign of God which he revealed.<sup>16</sup>

Seeking a single theology which might embrace *all* ministry is and has been the goal of a significant number of major theologians.<sup>17</sup> Collins proposes that the desire for two theologies (clerical and lay) relates more to a concern with ‘power’ rather than ‘service’. It does not appreciate that *all* ministry is ‘something for which the church as a whole is responsible and is a calling which falls upon each Christian in baptism’.<sup>18</sup>

### FOCUSED ON KINGDOM/WORLD, NOT SACRISTY

All ministry – explicitly liturgical or not – is centred on world and Kingdom rather than sacristy. It relates to the assembly that actualises the Mystery so as to become an agent of the transformative Reign of God.

Ministry, both inside and outside the worshipful gathering, serves the Kingdom and is directed to the marginalised in society and to the promotion of justice. An expression of this fundamental reality of the seamless link between liturgy and christian life – each identifying Christ’s real presence in people and the events of life – finds explicit expression for the first time in Paul VI’s MQ of 1972. Here some of the responsibilities which overflow the liturgical assembly for those instituted to ministry of lector and acolyte are suggested (in sections V and VI).<sup>19</sup> In their 1973 document (see note 5, above), the French bishops stated that, without serious evangelisation and building of a community of faith, there can be no witness (mission) and no genuine worship (liturgy). Celebrating

16 On this, see my ‘Culture of Clericalism: Towards a Theological Deconstruction’, *Broken Faith: Why Hope Matters*, eds. Patrick Claffey, Joe Egan and Marie Keenan, Studies in Theology, Society and Culture 10 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 175-212.

17 Among the principal writers exploring a fundamental theology of ministry (with publications from 1980 to recently) are Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Bernier, Thomas F. O’Meara, Kenan Osborne, Yves Congar, Edward P. Hahnenberg, David N. Power, and Susan K. Wood.

18 John N Collins, ‘Fitting Lay Ministries into a Theology of Ministry’, *Worship* 79 (2005): 152-167; 209-222, at 153.

19 The Pope continued this line in thinking in his 1975 Encyclical on mission, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 73ff.

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sacraments does not in itself build community. Around 1974, the Italian bishops observed that unless the liturgy can be seen to reflect a communion in faith and charity, its progress is of little worth.

From the earliest centuries, the principal task of the deacon was *not* liturgy but representing the bishop to the margins of society and to those who were weakest, concerned for their material as well as spiritual welfare. There was nothing ‘sacred’ about his ordained ministry. He proclaimed the Gospel because the gospels spoke of Christ’s ministry to the *anawim* and the disenfranchised. Likewise, he was deemed to be best placed to pronounce the prayers of the faithful because he was the voice of the voiceless in the assembly. The deacon’s ministry was considered to be a ‘sacrament’ or ‘incarnation’ of the community’s desire to be with the poor and the sick, and for this reason he stood with the bishop at the Table of the Banquet. Likewise, he who presided over the *life* of the assembly was the most appropriate person to preside over the *Eucharist* of the assembly. This came to be inverted in the second millennium: the presbyter presided over the Eucharist because he was ordained; from this arose the ‘power’ to preside over the life of the assembly.<sup>20</sup>

Church comes into being only in and through its active response to mission. To think of ministry as in some way being responsible for mission is to put the cart before the horse. It is unworkable and unproductive as an exercise. Liturgy is spoken of as being the ‘summit (*culmen*)’ towards which the activity of the church is directed and is also the ‘source (*fons*)’ from which all the church’s power flows in the Liturgy Constitution, 10. What happens in liturgy can be not only a living source of grace (*fons*) for christian life in the daily workings of society, but also express this ministry of the celebrating community (what the Greeks call the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’) back to the weekly gathering (*culmen*). All forms of liturgical ministry must represent the wider reality and activities of the community. There is little point in reforming liturgical rites unless the same liturgy can be seen to reflect a communion of faith and charity.

At a fundamental level, the very act of celebrating ‘liturgy’ is itself a ministry: the Greek work means service / ministry.<sup>21</sup> Liturgy is an activity carried out by the living Body of Christ *for the salvation of the world*. The corollary is also true: all ministry

20 See, Hervé-Marie Legrand, ‘The Presidency of the Eucharist According to the Ancient Tradition’, *Worship* 53 (1979): 413-438. This is an exposition of an idea expressed *twice* by Vatican II’s Central Theological Commission in its *relatio* on LG 28.

21 The Greek term *leitourgia* does not mean ‘work OF the people’ but rather, ‘work ON BEHALF of the people = service’, and among the Latin terms used to translate it is *ministerium*.

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relates back to the gathered assembly who do their worshipful and ministerial thing, *in the service of the Kingdom* – and therefore forms a liturgical act.

### OVERALL CONCLUSION

The article in *Worship* which prompted this stream of consciousness over the past four months sought to mark the centenary of Alexander Schmemmann' birth in 2021.<sup>22</sup> While Schmemmann did not have any formal systematic liturgical theology, the triad of cosmology (world as sacrament), eschatology (God's Reign in Christ) and ecclesiology (witness to and embodiment of Christ's presence) permeated and brought a sense of unity to his many writings and connected, in his unique Orthodox way, worship, mission and ministry. He spoke of the 'organic ... self-evident connection and interdependence of the Lord's Day, the Eucharist and the Ecclesia (coming together of the faithful as "church")'.<sup>23</sup> This, he claimed, shaped the liturgical tradition of the church and helped him frame an understanding of both mission as well as liturgical theology. Liturgy's transformative potential for the Church and Christians in society lies therein. The *mission* (from which ministry flows) of the Triune God is articulated through cosmology, eschatology and ecclesiology, which, as a single reality, describes the life of Christians as participants in Divine life, using the metaphor of worship.

When the underlying unity of the various aspects of liturgical studies is not respected, people get to pick and choose whatever suits their perspective. They lack any centre 'holding ground'. The pastoral consequences are unhelpful. Those involved with liturgical theology need to be trained in pastoral, sacramental and liturgical theology, be familiar with history of worship as well as ritual studies and textual questions, while never reducing the academic study of worship to any one of these. The focus of investigation and activity must be to facilitate the pastoral needs of *today* in the light of God's Reign, which in turn sets out the agenda of the

22 Nicholas Denysenko, 'Liturgical Theology in Crisis – Twenty-First Century Version', *Worship* 95 (2021): 292-298.

23 See Schmemmann, 'Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform', in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 38-47, here 41. As applied to theology of Sunday, this triad is central and is reflected in the practices of early centuries and some contemporary writing. Anciently the triad referred to one single reality, later refracted in western thinking. It is no accident that this triad is revisited by Gordon W. Lathrop with his trilogy: *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (1993); *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (1999); and *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (2003).

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mission of God. The problem is that higher education is market driven.<sup>24</sup> Serving the diminishing numbers of students enrolling for theology with few employment possibilities outside of second-level teaching, requires creative approaches to how hard decisions are made. Priorities need to be established. When standards are compromised to accommodate greater numbers, the quality of delivery and content is sacrificed.

The work of the National Centre for Liturgy needs to continue – maybe not in its current location and maybe under a different name. Localised initiatives might better serve new needs, given the demands made on liturgy (and church-life) post-covid, in the context of the Irish synodal process, the expressed desires for renewed church structures, and deeper spirituality. The absence of in-personal outreach and the lack of a unified programmatic approach of recent times in liturgy invites action.

There is a dearth of suitably qualified people in the fields of liturgical studies. Bishops must seriously consider investing in order to create the possibilities for suitable lay people and priests to study liturgy comprehensively up to licence and even doctorate levels. Previously, the college-level training of trainers has successfully taken place at Maynooth, Limerick and Dublin. Such are our needs at present that it would be harmful and offensive to the Gospel not to *collaborate* with each other rather than *compete*. Directing programmes in liturgical studies will require people with pastoral experience who have a deep sense of the Irish local church as well as a profound appreciation of how best to address the current needs in the field of liturgy. How we worship needs to be rooted in the cultural, social and religious reality of contemporary Ireland rather than get caught up with the reification of the ‘sacred’ that has, ironically, made liturgy (and Church) irrelevant to so many.

Liturgy can create the space wherein an assembly is immersed in Kingdom preaching and dining on Christ, engaging, as it must, with current issues – social, economic, cultural – that form the world in which it lives. The *theological* role of liturgy mitigates against such a vision being reduced to a study of ceremonial, or its study being thought of as being little more than an optional extra. However, for an assembly to be experienced as ‘Kingdom’, the marginalised must be invited to the top table.

Mission and ministry – properly understood – is at the heart of the church’s pastoral existence. For their part, liturgy and ministry are nothing more than a ‘sacramentalisation’, an efficacious ‘making present’ and enactment in the midst of others, of what the christian community is, because this is what Christ-in-the-Spirit

24 See Denysenko, ‘Liturgical Theology in Crisis’, 293-4.

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is. Worship *precedes* these, *encompasses* them and *proceeds from* them, and the Book of Revelation considered it to be the most appropriate metaphor to describe fulness of life with God, Father, Son and Spirit as we assemble for the Banquet.

**Becoming Holy.** Blessed Columba Marmion didn't found a new religious order like St Francis of Assisi, or give a new devotion to the Church like St Faustina, nor was he martyred. Aside from some very courageous moments during the First World War, his life was not so dramatic. But he was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in the year 2000. So what was so holy about him? What is holiness? Before he became a Benedictine monk he ministered for a while as chaplain to a mental hospital for the criminally insane in Dundrum, Co. Dublin and remarked in one of his letters that among the residents were people of great holiness. What did he *mean* by holiness? This question, fundamental to Columba's thinking, prompted him to begin his foundational book *Christ, the Life of the Soul* by outlining the plan of our holiness and explaining how it comes about.

- COLUMBA McCANN, OSB, *Becoming Human, Becoming Divine: The Christian Life according to Blessed Columba Marmion*, Dublin, Veritas, 2022. p. 17.