

**A Minister of the Divine Economy: Examining the Liturgy of the
Diaconate from a Trinitarian Perspective**

Capstone Paper for Diaconate Seminar for Certificate Candidates (DO965DE)

Presented to the Diaconate Institute

Pontifical College Josephinum

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Certificate in Pastoral Studies

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**Melbourne, Australia
29 December 2017**

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Introduction

The restoration in the West of the diaconate as a permanent order, and renewal of the restored permanent diaconate took place during Vatican II and in the years after. The Eastern Catholic Churches also received the call for restoration, through the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. As much as Vatican II could well be applied to the Eastern Catholic Churches, they had the extra task of restoring the authenticity of their liturgical, theological, and spiritual heritage. For the Eastern Catholic Churches, the focal point of unity is the Liturgy. It was not merely unity with the Universal Church, but it was also unity in the local community; but most importantly, unity with the Triune God.

Inspired by the principles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Melkite-Greek Catholic Church embarked on a journey of liturgical renewal through the studies of scholars both from the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. One very important outcome of this renewal was the need for bishops and priests to support deacons to serve the Church. In the context of liturgical renewal, and faithful to the call of Vatican II for the Eastern Churches to restore the ancient order of the diaconate¹, the goal was for the faithful to participate in a lively and communal manner through the facilitation of the deacon. Hence, it was to be through the role of the deacon in the celebration of the Liturgy as “prayer-leader”², the people would be able to *participate* actively in the Liturgy.³

In adopting this stance, the Melkite-Greek Catholic Church emphasised something very important: *Diakonia*. It was not just deacons that the Church was concerned with, but *diaconal service*. Hence, part of the Melkite-Greek Catholic Church’s liturgical renewal

¹ Second Vatican Council, “*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*: Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite” in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Index*, (Strathfield: St. Paul’s Publications, 2009), 17.

² Patriarch Gregorios III Laham, *On the Renewal of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church*, p. 15.

³ Liturgy in the Eastern tradition is always communitarian. The idea of “private Liturgies” is non-existent. Even as Eastern Catholic Churches maintain the Latin practice of daily Liturgy to this day, there must be at least one person for the Liturgy to proceed.

included the call for readers⁴ to assist with the chanting of the Psalms and the Epistle reading. The Church also called for subdeacons to exercise the role of a deacon, albeit to a limited degree.⁵ Of course, the deacon is more than just a prayer-leader in the Liturgy. In the Eastern Christian tradition, the deacon plays a role of mediator between the altar and the faithful. The deacon proclaims the Gospel and preaches the homily. Last but not least, administers Holy Communion.

However, unlike his counterparts in the Roman Rite, deacons in the Eastern Catholic Churches do not preside over liturgical ceremonies like weddings, funerals, baptisms etc. In every liturgical service, the deacon's role can be summed up thus, in the words of Symeon of Thessalonike:

The deacon receives a unique charisma with regard to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, namely the gift to serve, invite, and instruct. For, the deacon bears the gifts, commanding and addressing others to approach; yet, the deacon does not accomplish the rite itself.

Indeed, the deacon says "Bless!" but does not personally bless. The deacon urges people: "Let us pray to the Lord!" but does not offer the prayer. The deacon says: "In wisdom, let us attend!" but does not perform the [Eucharistic] rite.⁶

Despite this understanding, the deacon is referred to by the priest as "my fellow concelebrant"⁷. Of course, it needs to be asserted that the deacon is not a sum token of what he *does*, but who he *is* in relation the Eucharistic community that he is ordained to serve. In the numerous documents and theological treatises concerning the diaconate in the Catholic Church, very little is said about the Trinity and how it relates to the ministry of the deacon.

⁴ In the Eastern Christian tradition, particularly more so in the Oriental Orthodox Churches, minor orders (besides subdeacon) like reader, acolyte, and altar server etc. are considered *diaconal*, with the actual diaconate being considered "*full deacon*". In fact, minor orders are bestowed upon young boys as young as five or six years of age to assist with liturgical services in the Syriac and Coptic Orthodox Churches.

⁵ Patriarch Gregory III, *On the Renewal of the Liturgy*, 15. However, the limited scope of diaconal ministry exercised by the subdeacon in the Liturgy varies amongst eparchies.

⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), a. 4, quoted in United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium on the Diaconate: A Resource for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons*, (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), p. 232.

⁷ The Great Entrance, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople*, West Roxbury: Eparchy of Newton, 2009, pp. 58-59.

Of course, the 1998 *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* states that the diaconate must be considered “from within the Church which is understood as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension.”⁸

If the Trinity is to be the basis of all Christian mystery, what is it about the Trinity that can help us understand the diaconate better? Contemporary Trinitarian theology may offer a clue, as it reappropriates foundational Trinitarian thought of St. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. Hence, by surveying key highlights in contemporary Trinitarian theology and its implications for ministry, I offer the argument that the deacon can be seen as a minister of the Divine Economy if the diaconate is considered from a Trinitarian perspective.

⁸ John Paul II, *I Will Give You Shepherds: Apostolic Exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis, of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy, and Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media), 12

Patristic Trinitarian Thought: The Foundations of Contemporary Trinitarian Theology

In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicaea condemned the teaching of Arius and formulated a Creed that affirmed the consubstantiality of the Logos with the Father, with the use of the term *homoousious*. Whilst the official condemnation of Arianism through this Creed did not end the heresy, it marked the beginning of the development of foundational Trinitarian thought; through the contributions of Athanasius of Alexandria, and the Cappadocian Fathers; Basil of Caesarea (the Great), his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzen. Within the Western Church, Trinitarian thought was articulated by Augustine of Hippo. Below is an overview of their Trinitarian contributions; that is centred on the distinct roles and relations each person in the Triune Godhead plays in the divine economy.

In his *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius begins with creation so that it may be understood that the renewal of creation is undertaken by the self-same Word who made it at the beginning. It was Jesus Christ the *Logos* who made all things out of nothing. God made us out of nothing but also gave us freely, by the grace of the Word, a life in correspondence with God. However, death prevailed over humanity because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Hence, through the Incarnation, Jesus, the Image of God, is sent by the Father to restore and renew the image of God in humanity; bringing about a corresponding *theosis*. Through his Incarnation, Christ receives and assumes what is ours and in doing so, sanctifies it; thereby making it fit for fellowship with God by participation in the divine nature. God became man so that humanity may become God by grace.⁹

In his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*,¹⁰ Athanasius teaches that the Spirit is in Christ as the Son is in the Father. What is spoken from God is said through Christ in the

⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, no. 5-54, cited in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004), pp. 128-129.

¹⁰ Long before the *filioque* controversy, Athanasius asserted that the procession and giving of the Spirit occurs in the indivisible oneness of the triad. The Spirit proceeds from the Father, since it shines forth, is sent, and is

Spirit. The Spirit is united to the Godhead of the Father and the Son. As the Father is the fountain and the Son is called a river, we are said to drink the Spirit. When we receive the Spirit we are made sons. When the Spirit is given to us, God is in us. When God is in us, the Son is in us. Furthermore, the Spirit receives from the Word, while the Word gives to the Spirit, and whatever the Spirit has, he has from the Word. Whatever the Word has is in the Father, he wishes it to be given to us through the Spirit. These *perichoretic* relations of the three persons underlie their inseparable involvement in the one work of God for our salvation.

Using *hypostasis*, Basil the Great denotes the way God is three distinct persons, thereby opening the way to speak of the Trinity in clearer language.¹¹ Basil speaks of the Holy Spirit as possessing the attributes of God himself. For Basil, the Holy Spirit is of the supreme nature, an intelligent essence, infinite in power, unlimited in magnitude, unmeasured by times or ages, perfection, lacking nothing, giver of life, omnipresent, and filling all things with its power etc. The salvation of humanity is established through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The original cause (*aitia*) of all creation is the Father, the creative cause is the Son, and the perfecting cause is the Holy Spirit. There is only one God worthy of worship; God in three distinct persons, with the Father as the principle cause. In the words of Basil, The Holy Spirit is:

... conjoined to the one Father through the one Son completing the adorable and blessed Trinity. He who fails to confess the community of the essence, falls into polytheism, and he who refuses to grant the distinction of the hypostases is carried away into Judaism. Merely enumerating the persons is insufficient; we must confess each person to have a natural existence in real hypostasis. Nevertheless, the Spirit in his relations with the Father is distinct from the Son. The Holy Spirit is

given from the Word, who is from the Father. The Son sends the Spirit. The Son glorifies the Father. The Spirit glorifies the Son. So, in the order of nature, the Spirit bears the same relation to the Son as the Son to the Father (*Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, book 1). In the opinion of some theologians, the *filioque* controversy could have been avoided if sufficient attention was paid to this document.

¹¹ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, no. 1-9 (PG 32: 72-109), cited in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, pp. 148-149

‘from God,’ not in the way that all things are from him, but ‘as proceeding out of God, not by generation, like the Son, but as breadth of his mouth.’¹²

In *Against Eunomius*, Gregory of Nyssa points out that the eternal generation of the Son does not compromise the unity of the divine nature. The Son is not the Father, but the Son is all that the Father is; the Son being coeternal with the Father. The *Logos* in John’s Prologue is as great as God the Father is. God is one in essence, three in persons, distinct, and united without confusion. In essence, he is incomprehensible and impossible to circumscribe. The persons are relational, for ‘Son’ entails a Father, and the Father is Father in relation to the Son.¹³

In his *On the Holy Trinity and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit to Eustathius*, Gregory writes that we know God from his works, not his essence. The works of the three persons are one, and so we conclude that their nature is one. These works are inseparable for it is impossible to separate the Holy Spirit from the work of the Father and the Son. The Trinity is one Godhead.¹⁴ The Father is the fountain of power, while the power of the Father is the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the spirit of that power. Thus, creation begins with the Father, advanced through the Son, and completed in the Spirit. On the other hand, grace comes from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. In worship too, there is a revolving circle of glory from like to like. The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son; again the Son has his glory from the Father; and the Only-begotten thus becomes the glory of the Spirit ... In like manner, faith completes the circle, and glorifies the Son by means of the Spirit, and the Father by means of the Son. Worship of any of the three is worship of all three and thus worship of the one.¹⁵

¹² Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, no. 10-26 (PG 32: 109-177); *Letters* 7 (PG 32:244-245), cited in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, pp. 150-152.

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, books 1-2

¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Dogmatic Treatises*, in NPNF, cited in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, bk 1:34-36; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, pp. 155-156.

Gregory Nazianzen, also known as the minstrel of the Trinity, develops his Trinitarian theology by saying that the monarchy is not limited to one person. In other words, essence is not severed, although the persons are numerically distinct; thereby dismissing tendencies to subordinate the Son and the Spirit to the Father. The Father is begetter and emitter, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit is the emitted. However, this concerns the relations of the persons and is in the context of equality of nature and of identity of being. The Son and the Spirit are from the Father, but not after the Father. To be begotten and to proceed are concurrent with being. This is beyond our comprehension but best honoured by silence.¹⁶

The Otherness and Particularity of the Deacon

Beyond affirming the knowledge that God is three persons and one essence, the most significant implication from the Trinitarian theology of the Fathers has been the ability to describe the characteristics that define the relationship-as-communion between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is marked by full equality, glad submission, joyful intimacy, and mutual deference. Reflecting on the Prologue of John's Gospel, the Father and the Son are presented as equals in that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Yet though the Son enjoys a relationship of full equality with the Father, in glad submission he "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). The Son defers to the Father by seeking to make the Father - not himself-known (John 1:18). He also enjoys intimacy with the Father, for he is "the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart" (John 1:18).¹⁷

The characteristics of this relationship-as-communion between the Divine Persons is evident in the liturgical ministry of the deacon. Though the deacon receives the same Sacrament of Orders as the priest and the bishop, and thus shares in the same Christ-ministry

¹⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Theological Orations*, book 29; cited in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 159

¹⁷ Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2005), p. 36

of teaching, governing, and sanctifying, the essence of the deacon's ministry is one of service. As a servant therefore, he is the primordial image of the Christ who submits to the will of the Father, and who in the Holy Spirit, serves as a deacon to the wellbeing of humanity. Beyond ordination, the Christ-like submission unto the will and work of the Father is well-written into the liturgical ministry of the deacon. Firstly, the deacon is a man of deep faith and virtue. Drawing on Gregory Nazianzen's meditation, the deacon's experience in his relationship with God can be described thus:

As soon as I begin to contemplate the Unity, the Trinity bathes me in its splendour. As soon as I begin to think of the Trinity, I am seized by the Unity. When one of the Three appears to me, I think that it is the whole, so fully my eye is filled, so fully the abundance escapes me. For in my mind, which is too limited to comprehend a single One, there is no room for any more. When I join the Three in a single thought, I behold a single flame, and I am able neither to divide nor to analyse the unified Light.¹⁸

Hence, it makes perfect sense that the first thing the deacon does when he enters the Church to prepare for the Divine Liturgy, is to stand before the Royal Doors making three reverences saying "O God forgive me a sinner and have mercy on me". Again, the order of prayer in the Byzantine tradition is Trinitarian, and apart from the Trinitarian doxologies that are uttered by the priest at liturgical services, the deacon invokes the mercy of the All-Holy Trinity:

All-Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, forgive our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon us and heal our infirmities for Your name's sake. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.¹⁹

The deacon then continues to pray for God's mercy:

Lord, have mercy on us, for we have put our trust in You. Rise not in anger against us, remember not our transgressions, but in the depth of Your mercy look upon us even now and save us from our enemies: for You are our God and we are Your people, we are all the work of Your hands and we constantly call upon Your name.²⁰

¹⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio XL, In sanctum baptisma* 41, PG 36:417C

¹⁹ Prayers before the Holy Doors, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

The deacon enters the sanctuary through the South Door to vest; saying “I shall enter into Your dwelling place; before Your holy temple I will bow in fear of You.”²¹

With regards to diaconal vestments in the Byzantine tradition, there are three articles of vestments essential to the deacon’s liturgical ministry; the *sticharion*, *orarion*, and the *epimanikia*. The deacon does not vest on his own accord but first receives a blessing over his vestments from the presiding celebrant. As he puts on the *sticharion*,²² he recites Isaiah 61:10:

My soul rejoices in the Lord, for He has clothed me with a robe of salvation and covered me with a garment of happiness; as a bridegroom He has crowned me, and as a bride He has adorned me with gems.²³

The deacon then wears the *orarion*²⁴ over his left shoulder so that one end hangs down in front of him; saying nothing. He brings the other end around his back, under his right arm, and over his left shoulder so that it hangs down behind him. According to John Chryssavgis, Isidore of Pelusium saw the *orarion* as the towel with which Christ humbly washed the feet of his disciples. On the other hand, St. John Chrysostom defined the *orarion* as “the thin veil that lies on the left shoulder of the deacon reflects the wings of the angel”. In any case, the *orarion* can be seen as a banner of praise and adoration of the Holy Trinity by virtue of the fact that the word “Holy” is embroidered three times on the *orarion*, each “Holy” referring to one person in the Triune Godhead.

²¹ Prayers before the Holy Doors, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, p.4.

²² Like the alb, the *sticharion* is a reminder of the baptismal garment. Crudely put, the *sticharion* is like an alb, but has the ornateness and beauty of a dalmatic.

²³ Vesting Prayers, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople*, West Roxbury: Eparchy of Newton, 2009, p. 5.

²⁴ The *orarion* is the equivalent of the stole. The *orarion* is usually embroidered with crosses, or the words “Holy” (*Agios*) three times; indicating the holy ministry of the deacon in the Heavenly Liturgy.

Lastly, the deacon wears the *epimanikia*.²⁵ Quoting Symeon of Thessalonike, John Chryssavgis notes that the *epimanikia* symbolises the bonds with which the hands of Jesus Christ, the servant of the Father, were bound. At any rate, they are a girding of one's hands and one's heart in preparation for service to Christ and his people. Putting on the *epimanikia* on his right hand, he prays from Exodus 15:6-7: "Your right hand, Lord is made glorious in might; Your right hand, Lord, has crushed the enemies; and in the fullness of Your glory, You have routed the adversary."²⁶ On the left hand, he quotes the Psalmist (c.f. Ps. 119:73): "Your hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding and I shall learn Your commandments."²⁷

Whilst the priest is certainly necessary for the celebration of "the mysteries of the Kingdom", it is the deacon that facilitates active participation in the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy by calling the people to "pray to the Lord", "ask the Lord", to "be attentive" when listening to the Word of God, professing the Creed, and to participate in the actual celebration of the Eucharist itself. Last but not least, it is the deacon who calls the faithful to approach the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ with "faith, fear, and love"²⁸, and it is also the deacon who dismisses the faithful at the end of the Eucharistic Liturgy by saying "let us go forth in peace". Given the central role that the deacon plays in the Liturgy, it is not possible for the deacon to do so effectively unless he seeks to give himself totally and wholly to the Triune God, just as Jesus emptied himself for the Father (cf. Phil. 2:6-11).

²⁵ Cuffs worn on both left and right hands. Unlike the priest and bishop, who wear their *epimanikia* over the sleeves of the *sticharion*, the deacon wears it under the sleeves of his *sticharion*.

²⁶ Vesting Prayers, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, p.6.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Holy Communion, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, p. 78.

Between Altar and People: The Deacon's Trinitarian Ministry of Reconciliation and Communion in the Liturgy

Mission, as per the declaration of the 1952 International Missionary Council in Germany, "has its source in the Triune God Himself."²⁹ In Sacred Scripture, God the Father sends the Son (Jn. 3:17; 5:36; 6:57; Gal. 4:6; 1 Jn. 4:9); the Father and the Son sends the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:33); and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sends the Church into the world (Mt. 28:19-20; Jn. 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 13:2-3). It is from this missionary nature of God that the Church finds its missionary nature. The Church is sent on mission because God is Sender (Father), Sent (Son), and Sending (Holy Spirit).³⁰

The Second Vatican Council document *Ad Gentes* states that the Church is missionary by her very nature, since the foundation of the Church is rooted in the dual missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the eternal plan of the Father.³¹ Rightfully, because the Church has a mandate and obligation to preach the Gospel and to baptise, the deacon, in collaboration with his bishop and priest, exercises this ministry. According to the Congregation for the Clergy, what the deacon does and says "which is not of [his] wisdom but of the word of God, calling all to conversion and holiness".³² Hence, nourished by the Eucharist, to the extent that their professional and family life permit, the exercise of diaconal ministry places a missionary obligation and dimension on the deacon within the Universal Church.³³

The deacon exercises his mission through his ministry of service. Within the Divine Liturgy, the deacon serves primarily as mediator between the altar and the congregation, or eschatologically put, between heaven and earth. It is the deacon who receives the humble

²⁹ International Missionary Council of 1952, quoted in Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, p. 160

³⁰ Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, p. 161

³¹ Second Vatican Council, "Ad Gentes: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church" in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Index*, (Strathfield: St. Paul's Publications, 2009), a. 2.

³² Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), a. 23, quoted in *Compendium on the Diaconate*, p. 273.

³³ *Ibid.*, a. 27.

gifts of bread and wine from the faithful, and it is the deacon who brings it back to the faithful as the Body and Blood of the Lord. For this presentation, I limit myself in what follows, only to specific sections in the Divine Liturgy viz. the Litanies (with a specific focus on the Great Litany), the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The diaconate, as Deacon John Chryssavgis writes, is “an icon and symbol of the entire Church in an essential and theological way, for the deacon is a mediator, a minister, and a prophet”.³⁴ He adds:

If the Church’s calling as the Body of Christ is to act as mediator between heaven and earth, as a go-between connecting God and the world, the diaconal ministry of the Church may well serve as a means of reconciliation between the two... the Church is “in the world” but “not of the world” (cf. Jn. 17:11; 14). This means that both Church and world are interconnected and interdependent in ways far more profound than we can ever imagine. It is not just our worship and architecture that reflect “heaven on earth”. Our ministry and ecclesiastical structure should also realise God’s will “on earth as in heaven”.³⁵

In the Byzantine tradition, the deacon exercises this mediatory role when he enters the nave to intone the Great Litany. The intoning of the litanies emphasises the role of the deacon as the person who calls the faithful to pray to the Lord fervently and “in peace”. For the deacon, this is a significant privilege as the Litany of Peace is undoubtedly, the Church’s prayer for the whole world, and it is the deacon’s responsibility to call the people to affirm the manifestation of God’s kingdom and his infinite mercy.³⁶ The Catechism of the Ukrainian-Greek Catholic Church adds:

The Church’s prayer for the world is an expression of faith that all is in the hands of the Lord. It also expresses our readiness to accept from the Lord whatever answer he might wish to give. The name of the Litany of Peace indicates the need for inner peace and reconciliation with all... The Litany of Peace teaches the faithful to place common needs before private ones. The [response] “Lord have mercy” repeated by the faithful as their response to the petitions, includes the request for God’s merciful love and the community’s faith that unfailingly proffers that love.³⁷

³⁴ John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009), p. 106

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ It should be noted here that the context of “mercy” here is not equated to the penitential overtones commonly associated with Western thought, but from the Hebrew *rahme*, which refers to the mother’s womb.

³⁷ *Christ our Pascha* [hereafter COP], 1st ed. (Edmonton: Commission for the Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, 2016), n. 358

The petitions of the Litany of Peace express concern for the good of the Church and its leaders, of the civil authorities, country, and of all creation. The Great Litany prioritises the needs and concerns of the world. The deacon's role with the litanies does not stop here, but extends also to the little Litanies that take place in between the Antiphons, the Insistent Litany which takes place after the homily, and the Insistent Litany³⁸, which commonly takes place just before the Lord's prayer. It is at the Insistent Litany that the specific petitions of the local community are intoned by the deacon.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Church's preaching ministry finds its foundations in the opening chapters of Genesis where God, before the beginning of time and in the love of the Holy Spirit, reveals himself by speaking through his creative and powerful Word. In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says that "the novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us."³⁹

The same Word, through whom the Father created the universe and guides the course of human history is the same Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. In the New Testament, God's creative Word in Genesis is reflected upon in the Prologue of John's Gospel. The same Word, who is 'in the beginning' (Jn. 1:1) is also the same Word of God, through whom 'all things were made' (Jn. 1:3) and who 'became flesh' (Jn. 1:14).⁴⁰ It is Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, who saves the world through his Death and Resurrection and gives new life to the world by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. With this, the Word is

³⁸ Also known as the *Aitesis*. It is common for the *Aitesis* to be done twice; the first time being after the gifts are transferred from the Altar of Preparation to the Holy Table at the Great Entrance, and the second time just before the Lord's Prayer. However, at a decision made by the Melkite Catholic Synod of Bishops in 1969, in accordance with the 8th century *Codex Barberini* manuscript, the Melkite Church insisted that the *Aitesis* be done only before the Lord's Prayer. Whilst the Melkite Synod did not rule out the *Aitesis* in the first instance, the *Aitesis* must be done again before the Lord's Prayer, in accordance with the *Codex Barberini*.

³⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini (The Word of the Lord)*, no. 6.

⁴⁰ *Verbum Domini*, no. 6.

not merely heard, nor does it merely have a voice. The Word now has a visible face: Jesus of Nazareth.”⁴¹

Hence, the Gospels consistently portray the divine power of Jesus’ words. At the tomb of his friend, “he cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out...” (Jn. 11:43-44). Kneeling next to a young child who had died, he said, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise!’ The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around” (Mk. 5:41-42). With his frightened disciples in a boat during a storm on the Sea of Galilee, he “rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ The wind ceased and there was great calm” (Mk 4:39). Precisely because he is the Divine Word, what Jesus speaks comes to be.

After the Resurrection, this mission of proclaiming the Word was entrusted to the Apostles. Through the Pentecost-event, the Apostles immediately began to proclaim the Gospel to the crowds present in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). That dynamic and urgent mission of proclamation would continue as the Spirit impelled the Apostles and other missionaries to preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and his message to the ends of the earth.

Having received this apostolic mandate to preach the Word from his bishop at his ordination, the deacon is commissioned to defend Trinitarian doctrine. When he preaches, the deacon’s homily is always about one or more persons of the blessed Trinity. In fact, the deacon’s preaching ministry in itself is rooted in the Trinity, as it “professes a God who is in his very essence of infinite love relational and self-communicating.”⁴² When the deacon preaches, it is the deacon’s responsibility to enable the whole community and each individual believer to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit and say with one’s whole being, “Jesus is Lord (c.f. Rom. 10:9),” and to cry out to God, “Abba, Father (c.f. Gal. 4:6)!” To preach

⁴¹ Ibid., no. 12.

⁴² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily*, (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012), p. 7.

Christ is ultimately to preach “the mystery of God,” to preach the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).⁴³

There is also a Trinitarian precedent in the deacon’s role at the Liturgy of the Word. Drawing on the death of Jesus on the cross to develop his Trinitarian theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar sees the cross as an event of Trinitarian surrender. For Balthasar, the offering or “delivering up”⁴⁴ of the Son by the Father is perfectly complemented by the self-surrender of the Son. However, Balthasar also stresses Jesus’ abandonment on the Cross (c.f. Mt. 27:46). The Father wills that the Son suffers and dies, and does not attempt to save Him from suffering and death. The Son dies, is buried, and descends into hell; cut off from God⁴⁵. The abandonment on the Cross is thus understood as the economic form, a modality, of the difference-in-unity constitutive of the triune God. Thus, it reveals what God is in God’s eternal triune self⁴⁶.

Balthasar’s Trinitarian reflections on the mutual exchange between the Father and the Son offers us a Trinitarian perspective on how the deacon exercises the ministry of the Word. At the Liturgy of the Word, the presiding celebrant delegates the proclamation of the Gospel to the deacon. A mutual exchange occurs: On one hand, the presiding celebrant “surrenders” or delegates his authority to proclaim the Gospel to his deacon. On the other hand, the deacon, in obedience, surrenders himself to proclaim the Gospel. Just as he does during the Liturgy, the deacon calls on the priest to “Bless”. However, this time, the deacon seeks a blessing upon himself to be the herald of the Gospel:

⁴³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, translated by Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 11.

⁴⁵ In Balthasar’s theology, this separation and abandonment on the Cross reveals what God is in God’s eternal triune self. More specifically, it reveals the *diastasis* (difference) between the Father and the Son in the Spirit within the eternal nature of God.

⁴⁶ Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 65.

Deacon: Bless, Master, the herald of the Gospel according to the holy and glorious Apostle and Evangelist N.

Priest: God grant through the prayers of the holy and glorious Apostle and Evangelist N. that you proclaim the Good News with great power for the fulfilment of the Gospel of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As the deacon prepares himself to proclaim the Gospel, the priest silently prays. This prayer in itself is an epiclesis, invoking the Triune God to inspire a true metanoia in the hearts and minds of those who hear the Holy Gospel:

Shine in our hearts, Master who love mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our mind that we may understand the announcing of Your Good News; set us in the fear of Your blessed commandments, so that, trampling all carnal desires, we may live according to the Spirit, both willing and doing everything that pleases You. For You are the light of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and we render glory to You, and to Your Eternal Father and to Your All-Holy, Good and Life-Giving Spirit, now and always, and forever and ever. Amen.

It is the task of the deacon to proclaim the Gospel, and together with his bishop and priest, he preaches the Word of God. Through the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Gospel by the deacon is not just a form of teaching, but an event. Fr. Jean Corbon adds that:

The Incarnate Word arises in the heart of the Church under the action of the Spirit. This is the only word the Father can understand: he gave it to us in the economy; it returns to him in the liturgy. It was sown in the only-begotten Son; now it bears fruit in the adopted children... The Spirit reveals the Word to the Church. The word that is "given" then turns our humanity into the Bride of the Lamb. The more we listen to the Word made flesh and receive him, the more we become his body: "today" he whom we hear "is fulfilled" in us...⁴⁷

Questions arise as to how the deacon is to preach. Beginning with the 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, deacons as preachers should:

...set aside words of human wisdom and abstruse themes and preach to the Christian faithful the entire mystery of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life; let them show that earthly things and human institutions are also ordered, according to the plan of God the Creator, to the salvation of humanity, and that they can therefore make no small contribution to the building up of the Body of Christ.

Let them teach also the doctrine of the Church about the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, about family life, social and civil life, the sense of justice to be pursued in the world of work and of economics, a sense which can make for the building of peace on earth and bring about the progress of peoples.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Jean Corbon, O.P., *The Wellspring of Worship*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), pp. 155 - 156

⁴⁸ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (hereafter CCEO), c. 616, in *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: Latin-English Edition* (Washington D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 2001), 238

Hence, to preach the Trinity is to preach the faith and mission of the Church, which is in itself rooted in the economic Trinity. Fr. Brian Daley writes:

To speak of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is possible only from the perspective of the Church's faith: faith that it has become the heir of Israel, God's unique and special people, in bringing a consciousness of God's reality to the wider world and that it does this on the basis of its own experience of Easter and Pentecost. It is to say that we believe Israel's God - the God of Sinai - has entered the world in a new and final way by sending his own eternally generated Son to be human with us, to take our vulnerability on himself - the results of our sinfulness - and to bear it through death to new and glorious life. And it is to say that we believe the risen Son of God has sent the Holy Spirit, whom he and the Father eternally share with each other, into each of our lives and all of our lives together as a church: to be permanently present in us, sharing God's life with us in the sacraments of the church, guiding and forming the Church's faith, enabling us to cry out with Jesus, "Abba! Father!"⁴⁹

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life."⁵⁰ In regards to the Eucharist, the Catechism states that "the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith."⁵¹ The Eucharist is also called the "source and summit of the Christian life."⁵² As far as the relationship between the Trinity and the Eucharist, the *Catechism* says that "communion of the Holy Trinity...is lived out...above all in the Eucharist."⁵³

Like the Mass of the Roman Rite, the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Byzantine Rite is filled with Trinitarian references. From the Trinitarian affirmation that begins the Divine Liturgy ("Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"), to the greeting that begins the Eucharistic prayer ("The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all"), all liturgical prayer in the Church have a Trinitarian nature; and the Eucharistic prayer is no exception. Fr. Robert

⁴⁹ Brian Daley, S.J., "A God in Whom We Live: Ministering the Trinitarian God," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, ed. Khaled Anatolios (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 224.

⁵⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church [hereafter CCC], 2nd ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), n. 234

⁵¹ CCC, n. 1327

⁵² Second Vatican Council, "*Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (hereafter LG)" in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Index*, (Strathfield: St. Paul's Publications, 2009), 11.

⁵³ CCC, n. 2845

Daly sums up the celebration of the Eucharist from a Trinitarian perspective in these following words:

The Eucharist . . . is the high point of both the expression of and the inchoative realization of the Church's marital covenant relationship with God. The centre of this Eucharist is the Church's ritual action and prayer in which the assembly, led by its duly appointed minister, addresses God the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, praising and thanking God for the salvation-historical gifts of creation, covenant, and redemption, especially redemption in Jesus Christ, and asking God to send the Holy Spirit in order, by means of the transformation of the Eucharistic gifts, to continue the transformation of the community and its individuals toward their eschatological destiny as the true Body of Christ. The ritual celebration culminates in the Assembly coming forward to receive, as Augustine put it, "what you are," the Body of Christ. But this, of course, is still just the beginning. The full realization of the ritual celebration continues beyond what takes place in a church building. It continues as the Assembly is sent forth in the Spirit to live out this Eucharistic mystery in the world of everyday life, and it will finally be completed only at the eschaton when the universalistic hope expressed in the prophetic proclamation - "Blessed are those who have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (see Rev 19:9) - has been fulfilled.⁵⁴

There is a Trinitarian structure in every Eucharistic prayer. Preferring to refer to them as "moments", Fr. Daly defines three "moments" in the Eucharistic prayer: First, the self-offering of God the Father in sending the Son. Second, the commemoration of the totally free and loving response of the incarnate Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Father, for our sake. Finally, through the Holy Spirit, humanity begins to enter into the same self-offering and self-giving relationship that is the very life and being of the Father and the Son.⁵⁵ These "moments" can be translated roughly to *eucharistia* (thanksgiving), *anamnesis* (remembrance), and *epiclesis* (invocation).

The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God for all that He has done in creation, redemption, and sanctification, for us and for our salvation. This prayer is always addressed to the Father. In the Eucharistic prayer of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the exuberant praise and thanksgiving to the Father can be heard in its Preface:

It is fitting and right to sing to You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, to worship You in every place of Your dominion; for You are God, beyond description, beyond understanding, invisible, incomprehensible, always existing always the same, You and Your Only-Begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. Out of nothing, You brought us into being, and when we had fallen, raised us up again; and You have left nothing undone until You brought us to Heave and graciously gave us Your future Kingdom. For all these things, we thank You and Your Only-Begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit: for all these blessings, known and unknown, manifest

⁵⁴ Robert J. Daly, S.J., "Eucharist and Trinity in the Liturgies of the Early Church," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, p. 16

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

and hidden, that were lavished upon us. We thank You also for this Liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands...

In addition to being a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, the Eucharist is also a commemoration or “memorial” of the death, resurrection, and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified and who rose and ascended into heaven, and who becomes present to us in the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, which become his Body and Blood,:

When He had come and fulfilled all that was appointed Him to do for our sake, on the night on which He was delivered up, or rather delivered Himself up for the life of the world, taking bread in His holy, spotless, and blameless hands, giving thanks and blessing, sanctifying and breaking it, gave it to His holy Disciples and Apostles and said:

Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins.

Drink of this all of you, this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

Remembering, therefore, this precept of salvation and everything that was done for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into Heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, the second and glorious coming again...⁵⁶

In the *Epiclesis*, the Father is called upon to send down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and the wine and on the liturgical assembly. This is done, so that the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and the liturgical assembly is transformed into one Body and one spirit in Christ:

Priest: Moreover, we offer You this spiritual and unbloody worship, and we ask and pray and entreat: send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here offered:

Deacon: Bless the Holy Bread, Master.

Priest: And make this the precious Body of Your Christ.

Deacon and People: Amen.

Deacon: Bless the Holy Chalice, Master.

Priest: And that which is in this chalice, the precious Blood of Your Christ.

Deacon and People: Amen.

Deacon: Bless both, Master.

Priest: Changing them by Your Holy Spirit.

Deacon and People: Amen. Amen. Amen.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The Anaphora, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, pp. 65

⁵⁷ The Anaphora, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, pp. 65-66

Having explored the Trinitarian nature of the Eucharist, and the Trinitarian structure of the Eucharistic prayer, we can rightfully say that the deacon does not play an active role in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons describes the significance of the deacon in the Eucharist:

... In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the deacon does not celebrate the mystery: rather, he effectively represents on the one hand, the people of God, and specifically, helps them to unite their lives to the offering of Christ; while on the other, in the name of Christ himself, he helps the Church to participate in the fruits of that sacrifice.⁵⁸

However, this does not undermine the deacon's ministry in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In fact, the deacon's role in the Eucharistic Liturgy has a Trinitarian significance: It is perichoretic.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus alludes to the *perichoresis* of the Father and the Son when he says, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11; cf. 10:38). He is speaking of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the incarnate Son, but his declaration also points to the mutual indwelling of the Father and the pre-incarnate Son from all eternity.

Describing the Trinitarian persons, John of Damascus writes:

The abiding and resting of the Persons in one another is not in such a manner that they coalesce or become confused, but, rather, so that they adhere to one another, for they are without interval between them and inseparable and their mutual indwelling is without confusion. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father and the Son, and Father is in the Son and the Spirit, and there is no merging or blending or confusion. And there is one surge and one movement of the three Persons. It is impossible for this to be found in any created nature.⁵⁹

Perichoresis conveys reciprocity, interchange, giving to and receiving from one another, being drawn to one another and contained in the other, interpenetrating one another by drawing life from and pouring life into one another as a fellowship of love. Yet while *perichoresis* involves permeation, there is no blurring of differences or merging with one another. There is coinherence but without commingling or coalescence. Distinctions between

⁵⁸ *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons*, a. 28, quoted in United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium on the Diaconate*, p. 276

⁵⁹ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxia* I.14.11

the Trinitarian persons are thus maintained, along with their essential dynamic unity. As Jurgen Moltmann indicates, "The doctrine of *perichoresis* links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness."⁶⁰

This *perichoresis* between the priest and the deacon at the Liturgy of the Eucharist can be first observed after the Holy Gifts are transferred from the Altar of Preparation to the Holy Table:

Priest: Remember me, my brother and fellow celebrant.

Deacon: May the Lord God remember your priesthood in His Kingdom.

Priest: Pray for me, my fellow celebrant.

Deacon: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Priest: The Spirit Himself will celebrate with us all the days of our lives.

Deacon: Remember me, holy Master.

Priest: May the Lord God remember you in His Kingdom at all times, now and always and forever and ever.⁶¹

Describing the *perichoresis* between the deacon and priest at the altar, Isidore of Seville says that "without the ministry of deacons, a priest has the name but not the office. The priest consecrates, but the deacon dispenses the sacrament. The priest prays, while the deacon recites the Psalms. The priest sanctifies the offering, but the deacon distributes what has been sanctified."⁶² Hence, throughout the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the deacon, "nourished by prayer and above all by love for the Eucharist"⁶³, is always by the priest's side, assisting and complementing the priest who performs the Eucharistic sacrifice. The presence of the bishop, his priests, and the deacon at the altar is an icon of Christ's total and full priesthood. In Christ, his priestly roles of unity & truth (bishop), sacrifice (presbyter), and service (deacon),

⁶⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p.175, quoted in Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, p. 142.

⁶¹ The Great Entrance, in *The Divine and Holy Liturgy*, pp. 58-59

⁶² De Ecclesiasticis Officiis (PL 83:788-89), quoted in Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, p. 63.

⁶³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975: AAS 68 (1976), 576

all mutually complement one another in a perichoretic dynamic in the celebration of the Eucharist.

At the *anamnesis*, as the priest recollects all the Blessed Trinity had accomplished for humanity, the priest steps backwards, and the deacon steps into the centre of the Holy Table to elevate the Holy Gifts. The deacon crosses his right hand over the left; holding the *diskos* with his right hand, and the chalice with his left, and elevates both the chalice and *diskos*. The priest proclaims: “We offer You Your own, from what is Your own, in all and for the sake of all”. This gesture also has yet another Trinitarian significance: Through the cross-wise elevation of the *diskos* and *chalice* by the deacon, the Church expresses the gift of herself to God the Father through the crucified Christ. In this, the Church proclaims the eschatological fullness of time, when Christ will bring all to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:28).⁶⁴

Holy Communion

As explored in the previous section, the Eucharist is the means by which “we live and move and have our being” in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity (c.f. Acts 17:28). When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful share of the same bread and the same chalice, the Church manifests becomes what it is meant to be: God’s dwelling amongst humanity (c.f. Rev. 21:4). The Munich Statement issued by the Latin Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in 1982 says this:

Taken as a whole, the eucharistic celebration makes present the Trinitarian mystery of the Church. In it one passes from hearing the word, culminating in the proclamation of the Gospel - the apostolic announcing of the word made flesh - to the thanksgiving offered to the Father and to the memorial of the sacrifice and to communion in it thanks to the prayer of *epiclesis* uttered in faith. For the *epiclesis* is not merely an invocation for the sacramental transforming of the bread and cup. It is also a prayer for the full effect of the communion of all in the [Trinitarian] mystery revealed by the Son.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ COP, n. 380

⁶⁵ Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church: Second Plenary Meeting, Munich, June 30 to July 6, 1982, “The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity,” *One in Christ* 19 (1983): 188-97, a.6.

To receive the Eucharist, says Fr. Jean Corbon, is to be one with God. When we receive Holy Communion, we are led by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father, to become “partakers of the divine nature” (c.f. 2 Pt. 1:4). Fr. Corbon adds:

The fruit of the Eucharist, to which all the power of the river of life is directed, is Communion with the Blessed Trinity. The living out of the divine agape in the authenticity of our mortal flesh – that is the synergy of charity that will bear fruit in the liturgy of life.

In this banquet of the Kingdom the gift is reciprocal and by its nature unreserved. In terms of the persons involved: I belong no longer to myself but Him who loved me and gave Himself for me; He, in contrast, is now mine. If we have lived the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist... we will be transfigured and divinised, from new beginning to new beginning, in the Light of Communion... We belong to him, and he belongs to the Father; we shall have life from him as he has life from the Father.⁶⁶

In addition to the Trinitarian nature of Holy Communion, the deacon’s role as minister of Holy Communion is in itself Trinitarian. Notwithstanding the *perichoretic* nature of the deacon’s ministry in the Liturgy of the Eucharist discussed earlier⁶⁷, the deacon’s ministry of Holy Communion is a celebration of the relational personhood of the Trinity.

God, as we have seen from the testimony of St. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers, exists as communion. In the thought of John Zizioulas, the “Holy Trinity is a primordial ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it, as is the case in the dogmatic manuals of the West and, alas, in those of the East in modern times.” In other words, the substance of God, “God”, has no ontological content, no “true being, apart from communion”, a mutual relationship of love.⁶⁸ God’s being coincides with God’s personhood, which cannot be construed apart from communion, biblically expressed by the idea that God is love:

It thus becomes evident that the only exercise of freedom in an ontological manner is love. The expression “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16) signifies that God “subsists” as Trinity, that is, as person and not as substance. Love is not an emanation or “property” of the substance of God... but is constitutive of his substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what He is, the one God. Thus, love

⁶⁶ Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, p. 155.

⁶⁷ In the Liturgy of Holy Communion, the deacon pours hot water into the chalice, saying “the fervour of faith, full of the Holy Spirit”.

⁶⁸ John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), p. 17

ceases to be a qualifying property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate. Love as God's mode of existence "hypostasizes" God, *constitutes* His being.⁶⁹

God cannot be known merely as "God", but only as Trinitarian persons in communion: "man can approach God only through the Son and in the Holy Spirit."⁷⁰ Zizioulas insists that the way God exists as person is the community of three persons. Outside the Trinity there is no God. In other words, God's being coincides with God's communal personhood. For Zizioulas then, "the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means communion."⁷¹

Zizioulas' Trinitarian understanding of personhood lays the foundation for understanding the human person, who is made in the image and likeness of God (c.f. Gen. 1:26). Developing his point further, Zizioulas states:

The person cannot exist in isolation. God is not alone; he is communion. Love is not a feeling, a sentiment springing from nature like a flower from a tree. Love is a relationship; it is the free coming out of one's self, the breaking of one's will, a free submission to the will of another. It is the other, and our relationship with him, that gives us our identity, our otherness, making us "who we are" - that is, persons; for by being an inseparable part of a relationship that matters ontologically we emerge as unique and irreplaceable entities. This, therefore, is what accounts for our being, and our being ourselves and not someone else: our personhood. It is in this that the "reason," the logos of our being lies: in the relationship of love that makes us unique and irreplaceable for another.⁷²

In the Trinity, it is possible for an individual to be a person only when he or she is in relation with others. At the Divine Liturgy, the liturgical assembly becomes the Body of Christ, and each member in the assembly realises their true being as "persons" when they receive Holy Communion. When the deacon says "The servant (handmaid) of God N., receives the precious and Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life" and administers Holy Communion⁷³, the

⁶⁹ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, p. 46

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

⁷² John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 166-67

⁷³ Though belonging to the same Byzantine liturgical family, the Melkite Catholic Church administers Holy Communion via intinction. This marks a departure from the common practice Churches of administering Holy Communion from the chalice using a spoon amongst Byzantine-Rite Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

deacon affirms the communicant as one who is made in the image and likeness of God.

Through the ministry of Holy Communion, the deacon initiates a relationship with his fellow pilgrim. However, from the communicant's perspective, in addition to participating in the divine "life together", the communicant begins to participate in the Church's "life together".

Catherine Mowry LaCugna says:

Koinonia does not swallow up the individual nor obscure his or her uniqueness and unique contribution, nor take away individual freedom by assimilating it into a collective will. The goal of Christian community, constituted by the Spirit in union with Jesus Christ, is to provide a place in which everyone is accepted as an ineffable, unique, and unrepeatable image of God, irrespective of how the dignity of a person might otherwise be determined: level of intelligence, political correctness, physical beauty, monetary value.⁷⁴

Drawing on the thoughts from Zizioulas and LaCugna, one implication from Holy Communion arises: to be a person made in God's image and likeness and to receive Holy Communion involves being sent on mission. Fr. Brian Daley says that Holy Communion involves discerning our baptismal vocation to "transform and sanctify the historical human community, to redeem God's creation, as a personal responsibility, by sharing in the historical roles of God's Son and God's Holy Spirit - the very roles that reveal them, in the first instance, as distinct persons within the one divine mystery."⁷⁵ In other words, to receive Holy Communion indicates our desire to share in a limited yet real way in the triune God's responsibility for the world. Fr. Daley adds:

The calling of every human being is... an invitation to share in the way of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit: to love as Christ has loved us, to hope for life in the midst of death, to recognize God not simply as a metaphysical possibility but as our common Father. Understood in these terms, our very humanity sets us a distinct set of tasks: to resist the culture of death and the tyranny of individualism and self-promotion, to build the human family as a community of collaboration toward shared goals, to labour for a peace based on justice and mutual esteem. And our Christian vocation becomes the explicit call to bear a clear witness to this common human destiny, in our life and teaching as a Church.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 299, quoted in Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, p. 123.

⁷⁵ Daley, "A God in Whom We Live: Ministering the Trinitarian God," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, p. 227.

⁷⁶ Daley, "A God in Whom We Live: Ministering the Trinitarian God," in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, p. 228

Conclusion: Administering the Holy Trinity through Service

In the years following Vatican II, the Catholic Church experienced significant reform in the way Church was understood and expressed. Through the sacramental and communitarian vision of the Church as articulated in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, one resulting change was the re-emergence of the diaconate as a permanent order. As the Universal Church geared itself for renewal, Vatican II also provided for the revival of the theological, liturgical, and spiritual heritage of the then-21 Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with Rome. Included in this decree for reviving their authentic traditions, the Eastern Catholic Churches were also called to revive the permanent diaconate as an ancient order.

As the Church experienced this desire and need for renewal, the mid-twentieth century also saw a need for renewal in Trinitarian theology. Up until the mid-twentieth century, Trinitarian theology was confined to the textbooks, with no real relevance to Church, ministry, and the lives of ordinary Christians. Through the recovery of patristic Trinitarian thought which focused on the economic Trinity, the Trinity reclaimed its position as the basis and foundation of Church, ministry, and mission, and Christian living. However, could this recovered understanding of Trinitarian theology have had an impact on how the diaconate was to be understood?

The Trinitarian perspectives of the Greek Fathers allowed the possibility of describing the characteristics that define the relationship-as-communion between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is marked by full equality, glad submission, joyful intimacy, and mutual deference. The possibility of describing the relations between the Triune God then allowed the possibility of defining the specific-ministry of the deacon within the same Sacrament of Holy Orders received by the bishop and the priest. However, beyond the diversity and hierarchy within the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the deacon himself is a man

deeply rooted and devoted to the Triune God. In preparation to serve and assist at the Eucharistic Liturgy, the deacon submits himself entirely to the Triune God. The deacon places himself at the mercy and grace of the Triune God, so that he worthily serves both the altar and the people of God as mediator and herald. The deacon also expresses this solidarity and communion with the Triune God as he vests for service in the Liturgy.

Founded on the dual missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Church acknowledges its missionary nature and mandate. In collaboration with the bishop and presbyters, the deacon exercises this missionary ministry of preaching the Gospel and to baptise. In the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the deacon serves as a mediator between altar and assembly. On one hand, the deacon exercises this ministry by bringing gifts of bread and wine to the altar, intoning the Litanies on behalf of the assembly, and representing the assembly at the altar during the Eucharistic Sacrifice. On the other hand, the deacon brings both Word and Holy Communion from the altar to the assembly. In each of these diaconal ministries, the Trinity is at the heart and soul of how the deacon performs these ministries.

In the Liturgy of the Word, it belongs to the deacon, in collaboration with his bishop and his priest, to preach the Holy Trinity. Inspired by the Father who, in the love of the Holy Spirit, created the world through his creative and powerful Word, the deacon is the defender of the Holy Trinity. By virtue of his ordination, the deacon preaches the mystery of the Triune God whenever he preaches Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who laid down his life so that humanity could be reconciled to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit sent after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, the Church continues the ministry of Christ; so that humanity may continue to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). In addition to preaching the Trinity, the Trinity also informs how the deacon exercises the Ministry of the Word. At the Cross, the Father's offering of his only-begotten Son for the redemption of the world (c.f. Jn. 3:16) is complemented by the self-surrender of the Son. Likewise, at the

Eucharistic Liturgy, the priest offers his “privilege” of proclaiming the Holy Gospel to the deacon, who “surrenders” himself to proclaim the Holy Gospel. The deacon seeks the blessing of the priest before proclaiming the Gospel.

From the Liturgy of the Word, the deacon’s ministry flows on to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Beginning with an affirmation or profession of the Triune God, and addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist in itself is wholly Trinitarian and full of references to the Holy Trinity. The structure of the Eucharistic prayer itself is also Trinitarian, as it give thanks to the Father for his gifts of creation, redemption, and sanctification, for our salvation. The Eucharistic prayer continues to remember the death, resurrection, and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lastly, the Father is called upon to send down the Holy Spirit so that the gifts of bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the liturgical assembly is transformed into the Body of Christ.

The priest-celebrant, not the deacon, is the central actor in the celebration of the Eucharist. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, the deacon represents the liturgical assembly at the altar, and brings the fruits of the Eucharistic Sacrifice to the liturgical assembly. The deacon is by the side the presiding celebrant; assisting him throughout the whole Eucharistic prayer. Rooted in the Trinitarian perspective of *perichoresis*, this dynamic shows that while the deacon and celebrant exercise distinct paradigms of Christ’s priestly ministry, the deacon’s ministry of service and the celebrant’s ministry of sacrifice perfectly complement each other.

At the celebration of Holy Communion, the deacon brings the fruits of the Eucharistic celebration to the faithful assembled from the altar for communion with the Holy Trinity. The deacon’s ministry of Holy Communion is also founded on a Trinitarian perspective: personhood. In John Zizioulas’ Trinitarian thought, God is God only as Trinitarian persons in communion. If the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, a person is truly

“person” only when he or she is in communion with others. Hence, when the deacon administers Holy Communion, the deacon affirms God’s image and likeness in that person. Mystically, a relationship is initiated between the deacon and the communicant, and in addition to participating in the divine “life together”, the communicant begins to participate in the Church’s “life together”. However, Holy Communion implies mission. Simply put, Holy Communion involves discerning our baptismal vocation to share in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit for the world. Holy Communion indicates a desire to share in the Triune God’s responsibility for the world.

Why consider the diaconate from a Trinitarian perspective? It should come as no surprise that the diaconate is considered in terms of the person and ministry of Christ.⁷⁷ However, John Zizioulas suggests that to consider the deacon solely from the perspective of Christ risks reducing the deacon to his “indelible character” received at ordination and his functions.⁷⁸ Zizioulas says that “there is no ministry in the Church other than Christ’s ministry”, and that this is possible only when our Christology is conditioned pneumatologically. Rosalind Brown says:

The Holy Spirit brings life where there is death, fullness of life where there is constriction and life is being sucked out of people, and empowers the people of God to do God’s life-giving work in the world. So Pharaoh recognised the presence of the Spirit of God in Joseph who proposed a way to care for the people during famine (Genesis 41.38) and Moses, burned out by care of the people, was assisted by men with whom the Spirit of God was shared (Numbers 11.17). The Spirit sent Isaiah ‘to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoner; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit’ (Isaiah 61.1–3).⁷⁹

Through a pneumatologically-conditioned Christology, Zizioulas says:

⁷⁷ A detailed discussion on this matter can be found in Part II of *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles*, prepared by the International Theological Commission (ITC). For an Orthodox perspective, refer to Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, pp. 21-29.

⁷⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 209.

⁷⁹ Rosalind Brown, "Expanding the Theological Foundation of the Deacon's Ministry," *Ecclesiology* 13, (2017):2, doi:10.1163/17455316-01302005.

Christ cannot be isolated from the Holy Spirit in whom he was born of the Virgin; in whom he became able to minister on earth, in whom finally, and most significantly... he can now minister to this pre-eternal plan of God for creation in or rather as the Church. What the Spirit does through the ministry is to constitute the Body of Christ here and now is to constitute the Body of Christ here and now by realising Christ's ministry as the Church's ministry.⁸⁰

With the Holy Spirit in mind, the identification of the Church's ministry with that of Christ has "existential soteriological terms which have profound anthropological and cosmological implications."⁸¹ If soteriology is understood as *theosis*, the Church's ministry exercised by the deacon realises Christ's salvific mission in the *here and now*.

The deacon realises Christ's salvific mission as he exercises his ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Eucharistic Liturgy. However, this ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Eucharistic Liturgy is an anticipation of the full potential of diaconal ministry, which transcends the boundaries of the local Church. Brown says that diaconal ministry is a "dynamic extension of the Eucharistic celebration". She adds:

From... proclaim[ing] the Gospel, to bring[ing] the needs of the world to attention of the Church in the [Litanies] before dismissing the faithful... it is deacons who lead the Church in taking that Eucharistic celebration and vision of the Kingdom of God into the world. Deacons are the ministers of the Eucharist in the forgotten, awkward corners of the world but are not Eucharistic [presiders] in Church. Without diaconal ministry alongside that of the priest in the Liturgy, the Church can become inward looking and the priestly role of presiding at the Eucharist of the gathered people of God may become diluted and deprived of its outworking in mission.⁸²

With these perspectives of the deacon's ministry now considered, the deacon's ministry cannot be undermined or reduced merely to his roles or functions. By factoring the Holy Spirit into the Christological understanding of the diaconate, and by looking at the diaconate from the perspective of the Trinity, the deacon can now be understood as a minister of the Divine Economy.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

⁸¹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 211.

⁸² Brown, "Expanding the Theological Foundation of the Deacon's Ministry", p. 218.

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