

## THE SPECIFICITY OF CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD IN A RELIGIO-PLURALISTIC SOCIETY: THE GHANAIAN CASE LEO ANDOH KORSAH<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Religious pluralism in Africa recognizes plurality of religious leaders due to the perceived religious functions they play. During national events in Ghana such as the Independence Day remembrance, religious leaders from the three main religions are invited to make prayers for the nation. How distinct is the Catholic priest from such religious leaders? Also, with the emergence of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana, there has been the rise of multi-form of pastors, priests, evangelists, prophets and many diverse men of God. This religious phenomenon appears to put into question the nature of the Catholic priesthood in such a religio-pluralistic society. Theologically, the Catholic priest is called out from the Christian community, ordained within and by the Christian community and sent out to the same Christian community. The Catholic priesthood differs in essence from that of Protestant tradition. It is also distinct from that of other religions such as African Traditional Religion (ATR) although they may share some essential features such as presiding over ritual sacrifice. Hence, this article elucidates the specificity of the Catholic priesthood in a religio-pluralistic society such as Ghana through a historico-theological survey.

**Keywords:** *Alter Christus, in persona ecclesiae, in persona Christi*, priesthood, religio-pluralism

### INTRODUCTION

In almost, if not all religions, there may be a distinct person chosen to lead worship. In a religiously pluralistic society like Ghana, there is the need to know and understand the specific roles of such people in their various religions in order to avoid confusion and know the appropriate terms to use for such people. The focus in this paper is to elucidate the specificity of the Catholic priesthood in the midst of Ghana's religious pluralism. The discussion commences with the religious plurality of the Ghanaian society, with references to brief historical overview of the three main religions, before delving into the historical and theological development of the Catholic priesthood. The main objective of the study is to determine the nature, identity and the functions of the priest among the people of God in a religio-pluralistic society like Ghana. The adopted method used is the synthetic approach through a historico-theological survey.

### Religious Plurality of the Ghanaian Society

Religious pluralism is acknowledging, accepting and respecting the existence and uniqueness of other religions without sharing in their faith. Ghana is religiously pluralistic; made up of three main religions and these are African Traditional religions, Christianity and Islam. Greater number of the Ghanaian population professes Christianity (71.2%), followed by Islam (17.6%), a minority but significant of the population adhere to African Traditional religions (5.2%) while another minority (5.3%) are not

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affiliated to any religion<sup>2</sup>. In terms of those who profess religion, adherents of the African traditional religions are in the minority although both Christianity and Islam are not indigenous to Ghanaians. These two religions were introduced into the country by the Christian and Muslim missionaries respectively.

There are over one hundred (100) ethnic groups in Ghana and these groups have not only maintained their ethnic identity<sup>3</sup> but also religious identity. The various ethnic groups have something distinct about their traditional religion which makes it particular to that ethnic group. The distinctions and particularities of what is practiced by the various ethnic groups make it possible to argue for African Traditional Religions as some African scholars have espoused. The existence of the distinctions in African primal religions further emphasizes the assertion that “Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved”<sup>4</sup>.

African Traditional religions are not foreign to the Ghanaian society. They are primal and the only religions in the country until the advent of the Christian and later Islamic missionaries. The worldview of the primal religions may be divided into the spiritual and physical. The spiritual consists of the Supreme Being, spirits (benevolent and malevolent) and the ancestors while the physical consists of the human beings, animals, trees and other inanimate objects. In the African society both the spiritual and the physical relate harmoniously to maintain a stabled society. For instance, the dead matters to the African, they are part of the society and are remembered and consulted whenever necessary. In African Traditional religion there is no formal distinction between the spiritual and physical because the religion is part of the African life<sup>5</sup>. The African does not separate the sacred from the secular; the two are always intermarried and this is seen in activities such as sowing and harvesting of crops or at parties or funerals. This is also applicable to the traditional religion in Ghana. Although African Traditional Religion has the minority adherents as compared to the other religions, it is very accommodative and has permeated Islam and Christianity with some of its practices.

For J.W. Agbeti, the genesis of Christianity in Ghana, then Gold Coast goes as far back to 1482 with the arrival of the merchants and explorers from Portugal at the Coast, to be specific Elmina in the central region<sup>6</sup>. The Portuguese merchants and explorers being Catholics, on their arrival mounted a cross and an altar and celebrated the first Mass. During this period, Christianity was limited only to the merchants, explorers and their crew. The Christian presence on the land was not intensive until the arrival of the Basel missionaries in 1828 who begun active and sustained Christian activities.

The Wesleyan Missionary Society arrived in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in the year 1835 as a response to the invitation by a “Bible Band” under the leadership of William de Graft and George Blankson<sup>7</sup>. This Missionary Society has now metamorphosed into the Methodist Church, Ghana. The Bremen Mission is a north German Missionary Society whose arrival in the Gold Coast is dated to March 1847 under the leadership of Rev Lorenz Wolf. The Bremen Mission commenced work at Peki but left as a result of high mortality rate only to return in 1853 to carry out significant missionary work<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Ghana Statistical Service. *2010 Population & Housing Census Summary Report of Final Results*. Accra: GSS, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Microsoft. “Ghana”. In: *Microsoft Student 2009 [DVD]*. (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*. (London: Heinemann, 1969), 4.

<sup>5</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2

<sup>6</sup> J.W. Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482-1919*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1986), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482-1919*, 55

<sup>8</sup> Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its Effect upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*, 48

The Roman Catholic Church officially sent out missionaries to the Gold Coast specifically Elmina<sup>9</sup> in 1880 for proper missionary activities. These missionaries were priests who belonged to the congregation of the Society of African Mission (S.M.A). By 1896 they had opened a station in Kumasi and by 1906 had opened mission stations in the north where Islam had already been established.

Out of nationalistic feelings, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion was started at Cape Coast and Keta in 1898. There were also other Protestant missions that had begun missionary work in the Gold Coast. By 1913 some indigenous people also established their own churches and these became known as the African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated churches (AICs). Classical Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism also became another strand of Christianity in Ghana. The current church development in Ghana is the Neo-Prophetic Movements. These movements are independent neo-Pentecostal churches who emphasize on prophecies, healings and deliverance. These churches exhibit some characteristics of the AICs.

Islam another significant missionary religion entered the Gold Coast mostly through the activities of invaders, traders and clerics. Cherlsoon Yim traces the advent of Islam to the northern part of modern Ghana to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, “when the Sudanic kingdoms began to grow in political and economical [sic] power because of the traders”<sup>10</sup>. By the middle of the 1500s, Gonja in the Gold Coast had experienced some Islam. In the northern areas, Islam was integrated into the life and culture of the people.

The Asante and the other southern parts of the Gold Coast did not experience much Islam until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Ghanaian population is made up of various strands of Islam and these include: the Tijaniyya, the Ahmadiyya Mission, Ahlus Sunna wal-Jama’a. The Tijaniyya group of Muslims forms the majority of all the Islamic groups in Ghana. Islam is presently an active force to reckon with in Ghana.

### **The Notion of Priesthood**

All the three various religions practiced in Ghana have someone who leads worship or deals directly with the object of worship on behalf of all the other adherents of the religions. In the case of African Traditional Religion there may be several religious leaders and those who deal directly with the deity may be mediators and also preside over ritual sacrifices when necessary. Such people are African traditional priests because of their priestly functions<sup>11</sup>. Islam also has religious leaders such as an Imam who leads in the offering of worship and even slaughters a ram to offer sacrifice during Eid ul-Adha. Although this act of offering sacrifice may be priestly, Islam does not recognize any notion of priesthood and does not interpret this function of the Imam as priestly.

In Christianity just like the other two religions, there are those who lead worship and even in some cases serve as mediating servants. Almost, if not all the denominations have people whose duty it is to make the presence of God real in their communities of faith “through the performance of sacramental, preaching, teaching and pastoral functions”<sup>12</sup>. Such people may be referred to as pastors, prophets, apostles, and priests etc. depending on the particular denomination.

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<sup>9</sup> Elmina is the first place in the Gold Coast to have a taste of Catholicism. It experienced the Catholic faith in 1482. 1880 was the second advent of Catholicism in the Gold Coast and at this time around the missionaries were purposely sent on evangelistic mission.

<sup>10</sup> Cherlsoon Yim, *Understanding Islam, its history in Ghana, and an effective evangelistic strategy to overcome Islamic influence in Ghana*. Doctor of Ministry thesis submitted to Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. (Lynchburg, Virginia: Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 76.

<sup>11</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 74.

<sup>12</sup> John D.K. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: a study of Priesthood in some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2009), 101.

In the Catholic tradition, some people are called and set apart, and through the rite of ordination are empowered to minister in the things of God, to their brothers and sisters within the community of faith. They become priests and perform priestly duties in the faith community. Schmaus affirms that ordination to the priesthood differentiates the priest from the people within the Christian community. The priest receives “the sacrament of differentiation within the people of God”<sup>13</sup> or is set apart by ordination for his priestly duties. Joseph Ratzinger explains the sacrament of ordination to the priesthood to imply “this man is in no way performing functions for which he is highly qualified by his own natural ability nor is he doing the things that please him most and that are most profitable. On the contrary (sic) — the one who receives the sacrament is sent to give what he cannot give of his own strength; he is sent to act in the person of another, to be his living instrument”<sup>14</sup> and for that matter is referred to as a priest.

In the midst of the Ghanaian religious pluralism, many people do not comprehend the specificity of the Catholic priesthood, which is sacramental by nature. This kind of priesthood is different from the common priesthood of all Christians and also different from the ministerial office of those in protestant tradition. The Catholic priesthood and the African traditional priesthood may be highly comparable due to the sacrifices they offer in their respective worship; it is significant to note as early as possible that they are of different nature. What then is the Catholic priesthood?

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD

The etymology of “priest” is from the French *prêtre* and the Greek *presbyteros*. The word in Greek was translated into English as “elder” and was mostly used in the late antiquity to refer to the elders of the Jewish and Christian communities. In the course of Christian’s usage “the semantics of the term shifted from the ordained person’s place in ecclesiastical polity to his role as a cultic celebrant”<sup>15</sup>. The Latin and Greek word for priest as a “cultic celebrant” is *sacerdos* and *hiereus* respectively. These words emphasize religious connotation in the sense that the *sacerdos* or *hiereus* plays religious functions such as interpreting the meaning of events, performing the rituals of the religion and offering sacrifices.

Among all the various ministries within the early Church, there is no particular priestly ministry as found in the context of Catholicism. Joseph Martos suggests that priesthood at that time was “identified with ritual offering of animal and other sacrifices to God, and there was no one in the community designated to do this”. Moreover “the first generation of Christians, who were almost all Jews, accepted the legitimacy of the Jewish priesthood, and showed this by continuing to worship at the temple” until its destruction in 70 CE by Roman soldiers and consequently the end of the Jewish cultic priesthood<sup>16</sup>.

A Jewish Christian who lived in Rome composed a response (Letter to the Hebrews) to the troubling questions that were raised after the destruction of the Temple. The author developed the idea that the crucifixion of Jesus was a perfect sacrifice to God which replaced the temple offerings. Joseph Martos (1982:464) affirmed that the priest and victim of the sacrifice was Jesus himself and his priesthood superseded that of the Jewish religion because he is not a priest by ancestry but - “a high priest of a new and eternal covenant between God and his people, a high priest of the same order as Melchizedek, whose priesthood had no beginning and no end. [The Church was then seen as the replacement of the old Israel with] A new priesthood and a new high priest, by his perfect life and sacrificial death had become the

<sup>13</sup> M. Schmaus, *Dogma 5: The Church as Sacrament*, (London: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1975), 185.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Nature of the Priesthood* [online] (1990) available at: <http://militeschristi.weebly.com> [accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018].

<sup>15</sup> M. Eliade, Gen. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. II, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 529.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, (New York: Image Books, 1982), 464.

perfect mediator between God and man (Heb 3:1-10:18)”<sup>17</sup>. The most striking theme in the response is the prominent presentation of Jesus as an eternal high priest. It is surprising because the historical Jesus was not a priest and appears to have been a critic of the temple practices and was at odds with the Jerusalem priesthood (Mk 11:15-18).

Consequently, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is an element of a new and better covenant of which himself is the mediator by virtue of his submission and willing offering of embracing death by the cross. He is the only mediator whose sacrifice is the means of reconciliation between God and human beings. By removing away sins, he re-establishes the relationship between God and humanity. The superiority of the new covenant to the old is based on the eternity of its priesthood that is in Jesus Christ<sup>18</sup>. The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus is a royal priest whose death has been the ultimate sacrifice that had rendered continuation of animal sacrifice ineffective. Christianity is also presented as a perfect replacement of the old Israel. Christians therefore thought of themselves as constituting the new people of God which was clearly different and separate from Judaism, and as a result the replacement for the Jews as God’s covenanted people. Christians then took on the identity of the new Israel, and needed to replace the Jewish bloody sacrifice.

According to Raymond E. Brown, the needed replacement was found “when the Eucharist was seen as unbloody sacrifice replacing the bloody sacrifices no longer offered in the now-destroyed Temple”<sup>19</sup>. As early as the beginning of the second century, Christians identified the Eucharist as a sacrifice. There cannot be overemphasis on the significance of the recognition given to the Eucharist as a replacement of the bloody sacrifices which were no longer offered in the Temple. So far as the second century Christian community thought of the Eucharist in a sacrificial context, it was only appropriate to recognize whoever presided over the celebration as a priest who led the worshipping community in offering sacrifice. This recognition given to the one who presided over the celebration significantly contributed to the emergence of the concept of ministerial priesthood alongside the episcopate and diaconate. These offices; episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate emerged as the most important ministries during the second century<sup>20</sup>.

J. Macquarrie asserts that “in the first few centuries, throughout the whole Church, the various kinds of ministry of which we read in the New Testament had become consolidated into the familiar three orders of bishops, priests and deacons”. He further suggests that “the bishops were thought of as the successors of the apostles, who were supposed to have founded [...] the principal sees of the ancient Church; the priests (or presbyters) corresponds to the pastors indifferently called ‘bishops’ or ‘presbyters’ in the New Testament; while the deacons represented those inferior orders of ministry which we can also see in the New Testament”<sup>21</sup>. It seems that the idea of the bishops being the successors of the apostles is more of tradition rather than any biblical evidence.

R.S. Wallace among others associate the presbyterate with the beginning of the Church, “taking their [presbyters] place along with the apostles, prophets, and teachers”. He identifies the presbyterate at Jerusalem with James in “the government of the local Church after the manner of the synagogue (Acts 11:3; 21:18)”<sup>22</sup>. Gleeson affirms the position that the presbyterate was “a form of leadership in Jewish synagogues

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, 464.

<sup>18</sup> M.M. Bourke, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1995), 926.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 19.

<sup>20</sup> McGoldrick, “Sacrament of Orders,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 898.

<sup>21</sup> J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 431.

<sup>22</sup> R.S. Wallace, “Elder,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 369.



(Acts 15:22) and practiced by the first Christians, who were themselves Jews”<sup>23</sup>. The presbyters functioned as overseers in the absence of apostles and essentially as teachers and preachers. We can deduce that the kind of presbyterate practiced by the first Christians is not same as today’s priesthood.

In addition to the happenings in the second century, Gelpi also observes the emergence of *monepiskopos*, which was a reference to one bishop presiding over a local Christian community; later on, “episcopal supervision of Christian cult evolved into episcopal control”<sup>24</sup>. By the third century bishops were often (and rarely presbyters) referred to as high priests of the new covenant. The tendency of referring to the bishops and presbyters as priests attained its highest point during the fourth century through a theological movement called Sacerdotalism. Sacerdotalist theology was a reflection of the new political status of Christianity as a religion recognized by the Roman Empire and later as the sole lawful religion of the state.

The theologians within the movement (Sacerdotalism) intended to guard episcopal authority from imperial invasion. Basil of Caesarea is cited to be the first theologian to lay the foundation of the theology of Christian ministerial priesthood by teaching that “bishops participate directly in the priestly authority of Christ in church matters in a manner analogous to the emperor’s direct participation in divine authority in secular matters”<sup>25</sup>. Sacerdotalist theologians also portrayed bishops as the Levitical priests of the new covenant. This kind of teachings gave bishops priestly function different in essence from that of the priesthood of the entire faith community. Within the fourth century, presbyters or priests became second in terms of clerical authority to the bishops as the former began to preside over the Eucharistic celebration mostly in the rural areas where bishops could not be present.

Other authors assert that the scholastic theologians of the Late Middle Ages identified priests as the foremost ministers of the Christian Eucharistic sacrifice. For the theologians, the priests were endowed with power by ordination to transubstantiate bread and wine, forgive sin, baptize, and administer the last unction or the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

According to J. Martos, priests in medieval Christianity “were the primary mediators between God and man in almost every aspect of Christian life”<sup>26</sup>. Priesthood in that period was mostly thought of in terms of “sacramental, liturgical and cultic ministry in terms of authority, office, and jurisdiction”. Some theologians of that period limited the priestly function to the offering of the Mass and considered other functions such as preaching and administration as mere ministerial functions that are not necessarily priestly, and this kind of thoughts indirectly prepared the ground for the Protestant rejection of the priesthood.

The Second Vatican Council affirms that by the sacred power of Orders, priests are empowered to offer sacrifice and forgive sins and the ordained are to attend to their priestly duties in the name of Christ. The Council taught that the office of the priestly “ministry has been handed down, in a lesser degree indeed to the priests” (PO 2) through the bishops who are successors of the apostles. The bishops as successors participate in the mission that Jesus handed over to the apostles. The priests are therefore working together with the bishops to accomplish the mission.

The discussion so far shows that the priesthood has been going through gradual developments since the second century. From the fourth century through the Middle Ages to the Second Vatican Council, the priest has always been considered as the one endowed with power to preside over the Eucharist and

<sup>23</sup> B. Gleeson, “Ordained Persons and their Ministries: New Testament Foundations and Variations,” *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 7, 2006: 8.

<sup>24</sup> D.L. Gelpi, “Priesthood,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (editor: Peter E. Fink), (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 1015.

<sup>25</sup> D.L. Gelpi, “Priesthood,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 1015.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, 499.

administer the sacraments. The Second Vatican Council also places emphasis on the preaching of the Gospel as a priestly duty and not a mere ministerial function.

### A Theological Survey of the Catholic Priesthood

The notion of priesthood is inseparably tied to that of worship. The notion of worship of a deity and priesthood are ancient phenomena that are as old as humankind. It is therefore not out of place for a community to appoint one of its members as a priest to organize and lead in the worship of a deity. The danger involved in this is that there could be a notion of priesthood which could be of human standard without any divine essence. “The Gospel does not establish a religion which mankind set up for the worship of God, but a religion which God himself came down to reveal”<sup>27</sup>. The priest in this religion is not an ordinary man chosen by the community to lead and organize worship, but Jesus Christ who is the sole mediator between God and man. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not a mere human invention; it is divinely revealed. The Catholic priesthood is derived from this divine revelation and the priest with his functions can only be comprehended through the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

It is clearly stated in the Second Vatican Council’s document that the Lord Jesus Christ “has established ministers among his faithful to unite them together in one body in which ‘not all the members have the same function’ (Rom 12:4). These ministers in the society of the faithful are able by the sacred power of Orders to [...] perform their priestly office publicly for men in the name of Christ” (PO 2). The Council affirms and expounds that Christ instituted the sacramental priesthood and differentiates it from the common or universal priesthood that is attained by baptism. The difference is known by virtue of the former functioning publicly as priest in the name of Christ.

In agreement with the position that the ministerial priesthood was instituted by Christ, Kloppenburg explains that the Council of Trent affirmed: “Christ at the Last Supper, wishing to leave his Church a visible sacrifice, gave his body and blood to the Apostles, ‘making them priests of the New Testament at that time’”<sup>28</sup>. The purpose was to fulfil the command he gave for the continuation of the Supper in his memorial. The Apostles also transmitted the power to preside over the Eucharist to their disciples and the same power is transmitted to priests at Ordination. Scott Hahn therefore could affirm:

In time, those men [the apostles] passed on their priestly ministry through a sacramental rite: the laying of hands (see Acts 6:6). The apostles ritually placed their hands upon the men who would be their co-workers and successors. By this rite of ordination, the apostles conferred the gift of priesthood on a new generation (see 2 Tim 1:6). And so it has passed through the millennia, to the priests who serve us today. Through this action, those who are ordained receive the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and so they receive power to perform actions that are properly divine<sup>29</sup>.

The imposition of hands is a symbol of invocation of the Holy Spirit upon those men who became co-workers and successors of the apostles. It also signified the new office or order that those men were to assume. Granting that the same power given to the Apostles had been transmitted to them, then all priests are partakers in the office of the Apostles implying that they are obligated to continue the celebration of the Eucharist and also continue the mission of the twelve as mandated by Jesus Christ. In this mission the priests are called to the proclamation of the gospel to the entire human race. The focus of the proclamation is the conversion of unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ the high priest.

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<sup>27</sup> J.M. Perrin, *The Minister of Christ*, (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son Ltd, 1964), 19.

<sup>28</sup> B. Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 273.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Hahn, *Many are Called: Rediscovering the Glory of the Priesthood*, (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 33.

Jesus Christ the high priest established the ministerial priesthood and those belonging to this priesthood attend to their priestly duties publicly in the name of the one who established the sacred office. Kloppenburg affirms:

The mystery of Christ is present and operative only through the ministerial priesthood. The priest, the man chosen by God, is the visible sign, the means and living instrument, of Christ the eternal Priest amid the community of believers. Through the special sacrament he receives, the priest is ontologically qualified to build, sanctify, and rule the Church in the name and person of Christ and with his authority. As a possessor of genuine sacred power that is to be exercised publicly for men in the name of Christ, the priest can present himself to the people as the authentic representative or Vicar of Christ, in whose name and with whose authority he preaches, sanctifies and directs<sup>30</sup>.

He again reiterates that the priest does not act or attend to his priestly duties on his own accord; rather he does that as a representative of Christ among the people of God. He also agrees to the sacramental nature of the priesthood. After ordination the priest becomes the sacrament of Christ and one of his integral functions is to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist.

The priest who presides over the Eucharist does not play the role of Jesus, rather he allows himself to be taken over and be used by Jesus Christ who is the source of all priesthood and the true celebrant. However, other men can only have a share in that priesthood insofar as Christ the High Priest empowers them. Whenever the priest proclaims the Word, forgives sins, and transubstantiates bread and wine, he is only acting *in persona Christi* and *persona ecclesiae* “in the person of Christ and in the person of the Church”. During these rites the power of Christ and the power of the worshipping community are concentrated on him<sup>31</sup>.

The implication is that the priest derives his authority from Christ and the Church. In this context, the Church is a worshipping community of which the priest is a member. Being a priest and a member of “the body of Christ” does not make him the head because Christ is the sole head of the body. What makes the priest different from the other members of “the body of Christ” is his triple function of Sanctification, Teaching and Governing. He is a Sanctifier because he offers sacrifice, as a Teacher he proclaims the Gospel and as a King he governs and guards the properties of the Church.

The priest obtains the ability to perform these triple functions from his ordination as affirmed by Schmaus that “the ordination of priests is the sacrament of differentiation within the people of God. For the ordering of its life, different kinds of services are necessary which cannot be done by all members of the people in the same way: there are tasks whose fulfillment requires special authority”<sup>32</sup>. The triple functions of the priest are examples of the “tasks whose fulfillment requires special authority”.

Scott Hahn upholds that, “through holy orders, the Church’s priests are conformed to Christ in a unique way. In the priestly family, they serve in the person and place of the divine first born, the only begotten son of God. It is from him, above all others that they learn to be priests. They succeed as they imitate him”<sup>33</sup>. The inference is that the priest is not a man of his own; rather a man of Christ and a man for the community of believers as he is “conformed to Christ in a unique way [to] serve in the person and place” of Christ.

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<sup>30</sup> B. Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 292.

<sup>31</sup> W.J. O’Malley, *Sacraments: Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: Thomas Moore, 1995), 223.

<sup>32</sup> M. Schmaus, *Dogma 5: The Church as Sacrament*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Hahn, *Many are Called: Rediscovering the Glory of the Priesthood*, 134.



One significant role of the priest according to McCauley is to be the Christian community's "public reminder of the word and action of Christ"<sup>34</sup>. In his capacity as "a simple reminder" the priest is obliged to relive Christ's priesthood in all spheres of life. The Christian community must be reminded of who Christ is through the actions of the priest. In living and proclamation of the Gospel, the celebration of the Eucharist and administration of other Sacraments, the priest responds to his vocation and becomes the "simple reminder" of who Christ is to the Christian community.

In agreement with Burghardt, four general functions of the priest can be identified and these are: "the priest is ordained to proclaim the word of God"; he is to build the Christian community by assuming his leadership responsibility. Furthermore as an ordained priest, he must render service to humanity and most importantly the priest is ordained to preside over the Eucharist, which is the fulcrum of the Catholic faith<sup>35</sup>.

In his contribution to Catholic theology of the priesthood, D. N. Power emphasizes that the priest is also assigned through "ordination to the threefold ministry of Word, sacrament and pastoral care"<sup>36</sup>. The inference is that priests are ordained to proclaim the Gospel and this should not be sacrificed for anything. Furthermore, they are to administer the sacraments and shepherd the people of God entrusted to their care.

Discussing the origin of the Catholic priesthood, John D.K. Ekem, a protestant theologian affirms that the Catholic Church considers her priesthood as a direct derivation from the Christological priesthood expounded in the letter to the Hebrews. The priests of the Catholic Church are in a realistic sense "participants in Christ's unique priestly sacrifice, serving as mediators through whom the latter is vividly brought home to others [...] during celebration of Mass"<sup>37</sup>. Being "participants in Christ's unique priestly sacrifice" does not imply that they played a role in Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. Rather it should be seen in the light of re-enacting the exact sacrifice of the crucifixion at Calvary whenever they preside over the celebration of the Eucharist. In other words it means that they act *in persona Christi*.

The priesthood of Christ is the sole fundamental priesthood in the Church and all other priests are participants in that Christological priesthood. The participation is of two forms namely, the royal priesthood of all the baptized and the ministerial priesthood which is realized in the sacrament of holy orders. Hardon argues that, in that very night the Lord instituted not only the Eucharist but also the priesthood<sup>38</sup>. His argument underscores the notion that the Eucharist and the priesthood are inseparable and places the Eucharist in a sacrificial context. This implies it will take only priests to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, attempt has been made to elucidate the specificity of the Catholic priesthood in a religiously pluralistic society like Ghana. Reference has been made to its historical origins and its theological development. The catholic priesthood is distinct from the baptismal priesthood. The distinction lies in the fact that ministerial priesthood is different in degree from the baptismal/universal priesthood or

<sup>34</sup> G. McCauley, "The Priest: A Simple Reminder," in *The Sacraments: Readings in Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, (New York: Alba House, 1981), 177.

<sup>35</sup> W.J. Burghardt, "What is a Priest?" in *The Sacraments: Readings in Contemporary Sacramental Theology*, (New York: Alba House, 1981), 168.

<sup>36</sup> D.N. Power, "Order," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. II, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 292.

<sup>37</sup> John D.K. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: a study of Priesthood in some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> J.A. Hardon, The Priesthood [online] (2000) available at: <http://www.realpresence.org> [assessed on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018]

the priesthood of all believers. Catholic priests are *alter Christus* and acts *in persona Christi* when offering priestly duties such as administering the Sacraments. The Catholic priesthood is Christological in nature and this makes it distinct from the notion of priesthood held in African Traditional Religions. In the midst of religious pluralism in Ghana the Catholic priest has a unique identity and function which distinguish him from his parallels in other religions.

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