

A Note on Joseph Ratzinger and Contemporary Theology of the Priesthood

MATTHEW LEVERING

Ave Maria University

Naples, FL

IN HIS ESSAY “On the Essence of the Priesthood,” originally delivered at the opening of the Synod of Bishops on the priesthood in October 1990, Joseph Ratzinger begins by depicting the current mainstream viewpoint regarding leadership in the earliest Christian communities. According to this mainstream scholarship, “Above all there is no sign that these offices were empowered for cultic worship: nowhere are they explicitly connected with the celebration of the Eucharist. Indeed, their content appears to be principally the proclamation of the Gospel and, in second place, the ministry of love among Christians, along with functions of a more practical sort within the community.”¹ Lacking the aspect of cultic worship, no hierarchical priesthood would be needed, since teaching and service require no unique priestly participation in Christ beyond that which all Christians receive. As Ratzinger observes, this mainstream position leads to a functional rather than ontological/sacramental account of Christian priesthood: “All of these data arouse the impression that these offices were seen, not sacrally but in purely functional terms, that is, that they were administered entirely according to considerations of practical utility.”² Corresponding to this functional account of the priesthood, he goes on to say, is a non-cultic understanding of Jesus’ Cross, which becomes an exemplar of love that radically overturns every “cultic”

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “On the Essence of the Priesthood,” in *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996 [German 1991]), 105–31, at 107.

² *Ibid.*

system and thereby frees human beings from sacrificial worship.³ In this light it is not surprising that many Catholic theologians now seek to go beyond both Trent and Vatican II's teaching on the priesthood, so as "to abandon the ancient conceptions of cult and priesthood and to seek a Church at once biblical and modern that would resolutely take up the challenge of the profane world and would be organized solely according to functional considerations."⁴

Is Ratzinger's description of the contemporary situation correct, and if so how might theologians reclaim an understanding of the cultic priesthood? The two sections of my brief essay seek an initial answer to these questions. First, in order to flesh out Ratzinger's depiction of the contemporary situation, I summarize the views of the sacramental theologian David Power. Second, I suggest that Ratzinger's essay offers an exemplary path for moving beyond the current mainstream view that Jesus abolishes the cultic/hierarchical priesthood.

³ Ratzinger challenges the notion that such exegetical conclusions are "objective," arguing instead that they are "the fruit of the fundamental hermeneutical options developed in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The central point of these options was a reading of the Bible based on the dialectical opposition of law and promise, of priest and prophet, of cult and promise. The mutually coordinated categories of law, priest and cult were classified as the negative aspect of the history of salvation: the law, it was maintained, leads man to self-righteousness; cultic worship presupposes the error that man stands on a sort of equal footing with God and can establish a relationship of justice between himself and God by offering certain gifts; priesthood, on this reading, is, so to say, the institutional expression and the permanent instrument of this perverted relationship with God. The essence of the gospel, which is said to appear at its clearest particularly in the major Pauline epistles, would then be the overcoming of this structure raised by man's destructive self-righteousness. The new relationship to God rests entirely on promise and grace, and it finds expression in the figure of the prophet, who is accordingly construed as strictly opposed to the cult and the priesthood. Catholicism appeared to Luther as the sacrilegious reinstatement of the cult, of sacrifice, priesthood and law. He therefore saw it as the negation of grace, as apostasy from the gospel, as a return behind Christ to Moses" (108). Ratzinger adds, however, that "there were countertendencies even at the time of the Reformation, even within Lutheranism and Luther's own works. In spite of everything, ordination was soon understood as much more than a purely functional decree that could be revoked at any moment but was conceived as having at least a certain analogy to a sacrament. Its connection with the celebration of the Eucharist quickly reemerged, and it was even seen once more that the Eucharist and preaching are not to be disjoined. . . . Accordingly, it was precisely the branch of Protestantism tracing itself back to Luther that also developed a strong cultic tradition, whose deepening in the liturgical spring of the twentieth century made possible fruitful ecumenical encounters" (109–10).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

David Power on the Priesthood

David Power's *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* bemoans the loss of a proper understanding of "sacrifice" in the early Church, a loss that in his view led to the development of a strict distinction between the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood, as well as to the deformation of the Church's understanding of the Eucharist. In the early Church of Justin Martyr, "sacrifice" in Christian worship meant not a bloody sacrifice, or a cultic (unbloody) reenactment of Jesus' bloody sacrifice, but rather a spiritual sacrifice, a "sacrifice" of praise and thanksgiving. In this way, the pagan and Jewish emphasis on the need for the shedding of blood in the worship of God was transcended. Early Christianity, Power notes, provided a "way to God that eliminated cultic sacrifice from the picture and placed the grateful memory of the cross in its stead and replaced the rites of sacrifice with the table of Christ's body and blood."⁵ By sharing a meal with the risen Lord and giving thanks for what the Lord did on the Cross, the early Christians indicated that pagan and Jewish bloody sacrifice, the need for violence in the relationship with God, no longer had a place after Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection made possible an entirely new way of relating to God, namely, relating to the risen Lord in table fellowship and praise.

The contrast between friends sharing a transformative meal in a spirit of rejoicing and priests slitting the throats of animals and sprinkling their blood upon the altar is clear. Power remarks that by continuing to use the term "sacrifice," however, the early Christians risked that their metaphorical understanding of "sacrifice" (as a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving) would be misunderstood by later Christians. More importantly for the development of the priesthood, the early Christians risked that the pagan and Jewish forms of cultic priesthood—built around ritual slaying of animals so as, among other things, to purify the people before God—would return in the Christian community. Where Eucharistic worship is a meal between friends who are rejoicing and giving thanks together, there need be no strict distinction between the friends; although one may preside, nonetheless such presiding need require no cultic consecration (cf. Exodus 29) that sets apart priests for the service of God, and that leads to a two-tiered relationship of the community with God. If all the friends are equally equipped to offer thanksgiving at the meal, then all the friends relate to God together, on the same level. By contrast, if some of the friends are consecrated priests, then the other friends have to relate to God in worship through the mediation of the priests.

⁵ David N. Power, O.M.I., *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 320.

The latter situation, Power holds, came about due to negligence in the early Christian community as regards the words “priest” and “sacrifice.” He explains the original situation: “As is well known, in earliest times no cultic vocabulary was attached to presiding at the Eucharist. The one pronouncing the prayer and blessing the table was given only a functional designation. Words like *presider*, *supervisor*, or *bishop* were enough to designate the officiant, just as they designated the ministerial role of leadership in the church.”⁶ Such words referred to a function, but not to an ontological status that elevated some Christians above others in the relationship to God accomplished in worship. Unlike pagans and Jews, these early Christians did not depend upon priestly, cultic intercession; Jesus had removed this barrier. He did not remove the barrier, Power emphasizes, by offering on the Cross the perfect sacrifice. This would be to place the Cross in a continuum of sacrifice, so that it would differ only in degree from other bloody sacrifices. Rather, in Jesus, an entirely new way of relating to God becomes possible. Christ’s supreme love in sharing his life with us, a life that overcomes death by his resurrection, makes us friends of God, no longer burdened with the weight of offering bloody sacrifice to God so as to propitiate and be acceptable to an alien God. Power states, “All ritual offerings ceased because of the way in which the Word Incarnate had wrestled with humankind’s alienation from God in death and sin.”⁷ Lives filled with love are henceforth the path of relationship with God, rather than requiring the mediation of priestly and cultic sacrifice. Thus, as Power observes, “The religious awe and power associated with cultic sacrifice was transferred to the memorial Eucharist, to the death remembered, to lives lived in obedience to this gospel, and to the witness of the martyrs.”⁸

The pagan and Jewish habits, however, remained close to the surface, and the early Christian effort to redefine the old words ultimately failed. This failure occurred gradually, making the Eucharist a particularly “poignant” instance of the tendency of human beings to reify what is originally a metaphor.⁹ Power remarks, “When the presider was in time called a priest, at first this meant nothing more than what was meant by designating the prayer or the blessed gifts a sacrifice.”¹⁰ A “priest” was not a cultic priest, no more than the “sacrifice” was a cultic sacrifice. On the contrary, the words simply evoked metaphorically the “religious awe and

⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 320.

¹⁰ Ibid., 321.

power” that pagans and Jews had associated with the cultic worship; the metaphors served to show that Christian worship had taken up and fulfilled the goals of pagan and Jewish worship, but no longer with the need for consecrated priests devoted to offering bloody intercessory sacrifice to God. As Power puts it, “When Justin Martyr said that Christians did indeed have a sacrifice but that it was no other than the thanks rendered for redemption in the death of Christ, his words recast religious reality in a new mould.”¹¹ Even when the priest’s sacramental action began to be seen as action “*ex persona Christi*,” this meant solely that Christ’s power, not the priest’s, infused the sacrament.¹²

What happened, in Power’s view, to finally overpower this fragile “new mould” for religious thinking, this transformation of worship into a meal of friendship and thanksgiving? By the fourth century the “new mould” was showing severe strains: “Already in John Chrysostom’s relation of the action of the bishop to Christ’s heavenly liturgy there is a tendency to employ the words *sacrifice* and *priest* in a more mythical than metaphorical sense.”¹³ What had happened, Power says, was that the understanding of the Eucharist as a *memorial* meal—“Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19)—had changed. The act of remembering Jesus’ gift of his body and blood now was understood to insert participants into Jesus’ very act of sacrificial self-offering. Instead of a memorial, the Eucharist thus became a representation or reenactment in the sense of enabling participants to share in Jesus’ very act. Instead of the linear horizon of time within which participants remembered Jesus’ past actions with hope for the future consummation of the kingdom, the Eucharist now inserted time into eternity in such a way as to enable the present to participate, ontologically, in the past and in the future. Power describes with dismay the resulting collapse of the early Christian attempt to move beyond the traditional religious framework of priestly sacrifice: “In this context, the language of sacrifice assumed anew something of its cultic and mythic character. The sacrificial act of Eucharist was again given propitiatory and cultic power. It appealed anew to the cultic shedding of blood and the offering of victims as a way of escaping evil and making retribution for sin.”¹⁴ Once the Eucharist came to be understood as a cultic sacrifice, Christian priesthood underwent a similar retrogression to the pagan and Jewish model of consecrated intercessors standing between the people and their (wrathful) God.

¹¹ Ibid., 320.

¹² Ibid., 321.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 321–22.

According to Power, although this radical distortion of Christian ecclesiology and worship has largely held sway for over 1600 years (in the Catholic Church at least), the present moment offers a propitious time for carrying forward once again the early Christians' rejection of cultic worship and cultic priesthood. He observes, "As things stand at present, the language of priesthood and sacrifice needs to be once more demythologized."¹⁵ In order to accomplish this, he suggests, one needs first to understand why the mythical understanding of the humankind's relationship to God, in which God is seen as requiring bloody sacrifice from consecrated intercessors, has proven to be so resilient. The answer is evident as regards rural people who depend upon the seasonal cycles of life: "If the spirits were propitious, the cycles themselves were benevolent. Angering spirits or showing them neglect was hazardous to the life-world."¹⁶ Among rural Christians, this worldview was transposed so that it seemed that Christ's "suffering appeased God and so rendered the surrounding world benevolent."¹⁷ Cultic participation in Christ's sacrificial Cross enabled such Christians to think that they had appeased God and would therefore be blessed. Although it is less clear why the sacrificial worldview holds attraction even for modern, urban people, Power speculates that the reason is that cultic sacrifice appears "to offer a means of overcoming the disorder caused by injustice and division and offense against rule."¹⁸ Cultic sacrifice, on this view, reestablishes "order."

How then can this notion be "demythologized," in accord with early Christian faith and practice? Power argues that once more the early Christian "reversal" of the pagan and Jewish bloodletting must be heard. (Holding that Judaism became less and less a cultic religion during the time of the prophets, Power adds the caveat that he wishes to make his point not "by way of comparison with Old Testament worship, which in its own way is a story of reversal, but by way of contrast with what appears to be a rather universal human instinct to want to 'make sacrifice.'")¹⁹ God is not a wrathful God who desires victims. Rather, God loves us and desires us as friends with whom he shares fellowship. Since everything is God's gift, God is not so needy as to require that sacrificial offerings from us. In faith, we can recognize God's infinitely gifting love, and we can thereby emerge from the cycle of cultic sacrifice. God need not be propitiated at special times or through special acts of worship; all

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

God asks, instead, is that we share his love. Above all, God completely renounces violence. Love is the opposite of violence, although love may at times be called to non-violent martyrdom. As Power says, Christ “reverses the attempt to set aside special times and acts of worship by revealing that the people freed in Christ are themselves ‘sacrifice,’ that true worship is a life lived in faith and according to the gospel and in the Eucharist celebrated as such. In the cross of Christ believers have been freed once and for all from evil powers, sin, and death.”²⁰

For Power, then, sacrifice in its “demythologized” sense is a “language of reversal.”²¹ What is sacrificed in Christ’s death is the old worldview of pagans and Jews (the latter to varying degrees). Gone is the notion of the God who seeks our offerings and the blood of victims. In its place, Christ makes fully manifest the God of love, already active in the Old Testament. This God wants us to join him in love and friendship. Whereas the God of sacrifice emerges from our fears about our fragility in a world of suffering and death, the God of love proclaims good gifts and resurrection from the dead. Communion in loving fellowship, rather than sacrifice to a needy God, constitutes the real import of Christ’s death. In this “reversal of values,” the false god and the false religion are “sacrificed.” Power states that Christ’s “love proclaimed reverses the order of religion in which the judgment of God demands satisfaction to one in which a communion with a forgiving and loving God is possible. To celebrate this reversal, recourse can be had to some of the images other than sacrifice that tradition supplies.”²² Among these images are God’s vindication of the just and the release of those in bondage.

The resurrection, not the crucifixion, thus comes to stand at the heart of Eucharistic theology. The Eucharist invites people to the liberation from evil, sin, and death that God reveals and accomplishes through Christ’s resurrection, and that forms the basis of our eschatological hope. Against the view that the Eucharist represents and reenacts Christ’s Passion, Power remarks that the Eucharist promotes the kingdom of God “not by a mythic reenactment of a primordial sacred event, but by a retrieval of the eschaton into the story. In the story, the image of Christ’s return figures as judgment upon malevolence and as a reversal of values.”²³ Similarly the Eucharist, properly understood, should not for Power inspire self-sacrifice or mortification, but rather should inspire intensified communion in self-giving love and mercy. The Eucharist

²⁰ Ibid., 322–23.

²¹ Ibid., 322 and 323.

²² Ibid., 323.

²³ Ibid.

stands for the justice of communion (the God of love) rather than the justice of sacrifice (the God of fear). Power affirms, "It is the demythologization of sacrifice, the predication that relates it to Christ's love, to thanksgiving, to a life of obedience to the gospel, that offers a new paradigm for justice."²⁴ Christians thus should seek communion with each other in love, confident that "[i]n the bread and wine of the people there is the presence of a God who is revealed by being veiled under these symbols, just as the divine love continues to be revealed under the veil of Christ's suffering."²⁵

Clearly, this vision has an impact on how one should understand the Christian "priesthood." Rather than a two-tiered system in which consecrated priests offer up Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the people, the community that gathers for the common meal of thanksgiving in memory of Jesus enjoys an unqualified unity "in the communion of a common table that knows of no discrimination."²⁶ The task of the leaders of the community is to make manifest this unity in the gospel as received by the community and in the "common table." God's gifts of life and healing are for everyone, and do not require sacrificial or cultic priestly mediation. When Power discusses the priesthood, therefore, he emphasizes its transparency to the community rather than anything that sets it apart within the community. In his view, "The role of the priest has too often been spoken of as a power received. It is properly understood in what it says of the reality of church communion."²⁷ The priesthood should be understood, in other words, not as a power to consecrate the Eucharistic sacrifice in the divine worship, but as a service of communion: "Ordination to ministry in fact expresses the ecclesial reality of inner

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 324. Power later summarizes his understanding of God's presence in the Paschal mystery: "It is proclaimed in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that even in suffering the power of God prevails in the history of the world. In his death, Jesus is presented as eschatological judge in whom the triumph of God's power will prevail. . . . In the paschal narrative, the hearers of the word hear of their own future hope and expectation. The force of God's love prevails amid all the discontinuities of history and keeps hope alive. The memory of all who suffered is taken into the memory of Christ. This dangerous memory stands as judgment on human injustice and as promise of freedom. It liberates from prejudice and fear. It offers a critique of human ideologies and institutions, political and religious. In faith and anticipative memory, Christian peoples can always give testimony to an alternative world, in which love and justice prevail" (347).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

unity, Catholic communion, and apostolic foundation. The role of the presider is to let speak and work those realities that presidency serves.”²⁸

In particular, Power identifies three such realities: the power of the word, the community’s apostolic witness, and the communion table. The priest/presider serves “the power of the word” through the homily, which is best understood as “a community action” rather than as the work of the priest.²⁹ The community’s apostolic witness possesses a preeminence recognized, Power says, in the *Didascalia*’s “image of the bishop yielding his chair to the beggar,” an image that should inspire like actions.³⁰ Third, the priest/presider’s role at the communion table finds true expression “[w]hen the ritual performance of the communion rite is such as to express the bonding in Christ of members with each other in the sharing of Christ’s own gift.”³¹ In these three realities, the existing communion of believers in Christ’s love, not priestly cultic achievement of such communion through sharing in Christ’s sacrifice, is affirmed and celebrated by the priest/presider, whose role is strictly functional rather than ontologically differentiated from other members of the community.

Joseph Ratzinger on the Priesthood: Three Principles

How might one respond to Power’s position? As a beginning step, I think that one can find in Joseph Ratzinger’s “On the Essence of the Priesthood” principles for challenging Power’s viewpoint. I will identify three of them here.

1. *Jesus Christ is the bearer of power to heal the world.*

A fully developed Christology and soteriology, Ratzinger suggests, finds in Jesus Christ both the newness of the gospel *and* the unity of the Old and New Covenants. Thus it will not suffice to conceive of Jesus “as the great ethical teacher who frees man from the constraints of cultic ritual and places him directly before God with his personal conscience.”³² Nor is Jesus the great liberator from institutional oppression, notably that of priestly institutions. Rather, “In all the Gospels, he appears as the bearer of a power received from God (Mt 7:29, 21:23; Mk 1:27, 11:28; Lk 20:2, 24:19, et passim).”³³

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ratzinger, “On the Essence of the Priesthood,” 111–12.

³³ Ibid., 112.

2. *The Gospels show that Jesus shares his power with the disciples/apostles.*

By configuring the twelve as the new Israel, after his Resurrection “Jesus confers his power upon the apostles and thereby makes their office strictly parallel to his own mission. ‘He who receives you receives me’, he says to the Twelve (Mt 10:40; cf. Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20).”³⁴ Could this power simply be the power to teach and serve, and thus a power that would not seem to require a hierarchical priesthood among Christians? Against this view, Ratzinger argues that the “power” is the power of divine gifting: “How could they [the disciples/apostles] possibly say ‘I forgive you your sins’? How could they conceivably say ‘This is my body’ or impose their hands and pronounce the words ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’? Nothing that makes up the activity of the apostles is the product of their own capabilities.”³⁵ Since their power is one of divine gifting, it must be uniquely received from God. It is received from God as a participation in Jesus’ own relation of total receptivity to the Father. As witness to this point, Ratzinger cites two texts from the Gospel of John: “The Son can do nothing of himself” (Jn 5:19, 30) and “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). The disciples/apostles receive all from the incarnate Son, just as the Son receives all from the Father. By receiving a share in Christ’s power of divine gifting—manifested in the forgiveness of sins, the Eucharist, baptism, and so forth—the disciples/apostles enjoy a power that goes beyond, while including, teaching and service. This power to communicate the divine gifting is rooted, as Christ’s power is, in radical receptivity, and so the power itself is a “sacrament” received from Christ.

3. *Paul makes clear the structure of gifting/receptivity that belongs to kenotic power.*

In 2 Corinthians 5, Ratzinger notes, Paul emphasizes the connection between his work and Christ’s:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in

³⁴ Ibid., 113. In this regard Ratzinger also cites other texts from the Gospels: “Pertinent here is the whole string of texts in which Jesus transmits his own ‘power’ (authority) to the disciples: Matthew 9:8; 10:1; 21:23; Mark 6:7; 13:34; Luke 4:6; 9:1; 10:19. For its part, the Fourth Gospel goes on to complete in especially clear terms the parallelism between the form of Jesus’ mission and the form of the mission of the apostles: ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ (13:20; 17:18; 20:21)” (113–14).

³⁵ Ibid., 114.

Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:18–20)

Paul's "ministry of reconciliation" communicates to others the reconciliation accomplished by Christ. Put another way, it communicates the power of Christ's Cross. As Ratzinger says, "Since as a historical happening it [the Cross] belongs to the past, it can be appropriated only 'sacramentally', though Paul does not explain in detail here how this takes place."³⁶ Most importantly, Paul's power itself is "sacramental"—that is, a participation in Christ's power—because it is a distinct ministry belonging to Paul as an ambassador, or steward (1 Cor 4:1), of Christ. For Ratzinger, such apostolic power serves to carry "forward that dialogical structure that pertains to the essence of revelation,"³⁷ by inscribing a structure of receptivity within which the divine gifting operates.

Arguing that this dialogical structure of gifting/receptivity belongs intrinsically to the Church, Ratzinger cites Paul's farewell exhortation to the "elders" (*presbyteroi*) of the Ephesian Church as recorded in Acts 20:28: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians [*episkopoi*], to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood." These "presbyter-bishops," Ratzinger observes, "are successors but are not themselves apostles."³⁸ Their task, like Paul's, is to communicate the divine gifting so that the universal priesthood of Christ may be nourished.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid., 118.

³⁷ Ibid., 120.

³⁸ Ibid., 123.

³⁹ Ratzinger presents this point by quoting Jean Colson's words about the Old Testament priesthood: "'It is the chief function of the *kohanim* (ἱερεῖς) to keep the people aware of its priestly character and to work so that it might live in accordance with it, so that it might glorify God with its entire existence'" (127, quoted from J. Colson, *Ministre de Jésus-Christ ou le Sacerdoce de l'Évangile* [Paris: 1966], 185). Ratzinger comments on this quotation: "This statement is unmistakably close to the already-cited formula in which Paul speaks of his mission as *leitourgos* of Jesus Christ; the only difference is that the dynamic, missionary character of this expression now comes much more clearly to light as a consequence of the bursting open of the boundaries of Israel by the Cross of Christ. The ultimate end of all New Testament liturgy and of all priestly ministry is to make the world as a whole a temple and a sacrificial offering for God" (127).

Concluding Reflections

What then are the main differences between Ratzinger's and Power's positions? First, as regards Jesus Christ, Power understands him as the one who liberates human beings from the perceived need to placate an alienated god through sacrificial worship. Jesus reveals instead that God desires to unite us to himself in a shared celebratory meal. By contrast, Ratzinger denies that Jesus is primarily a teacher who frees human beings from the irrationalities of cultic worship. For Ratzinger, Jesus bears life-changing power from the Father. Jesus' power changes the world through his total self-giving on the Cross. His power, when applied to us, changes us from self-centered to self-giving. Second, as regards Jesus' sharing of his power with the disciples/apostles, Power argues that all human beings are equal in the celebratory meal, a meal that exposes God's triumphant and ever-present love. Since God does not need cultic propitiation, there is no need for anything but a functional distinction between the presider at the meal and the other partakers. For his part, Ratzinger holds that Jesus' sharing of his power with his disciples/apostles ontologically changes them and gives them a distinct role in the community. They receive a power that is beyond merely human capacities, a power to give the divine gift. Third, as regards the witness of Paul, Power emphasizes that the apostolic generation preached the triumph of love over fear and the recognition that everything is God's gift. There is thus no need for setting apart special acts of worship. We worship rightly when, freed from the myth of an alienated God, we recognize that God's gifting takes place all around us. Ratzinger's position again is quite different. He holds that Paul, with the other apostles, receives a "ministry of reconciliation" in which Paul serves as a "steward" of the power of divine gifting. The ecclesial hierarchy instantiates a structure of gifting and receptivity (a participation in the Son's relation to the Father) that is the opposite of the sinful human tendency to claim autonomous self-construction and self-sufficiency.

In short, Ratzinger's three principles suggest a path toward reclaiming the theology of the cultic priesthood. The first step is to affirm that Jesus' Pasch, as the supreme manifestation of his "power" from the Father in the Holy Spirit, brings about a real change in the relationship of human beings to God, rather than simply revealing God's unchanging love. The second step is to identify the apostles as receiving an ontological share in Jesus' Paschal "power" that enables them to bestow Jesus' sanctifying gifts upon the whole community. The third step affirms that Jesus thereby constitutes a community built upon a structure of gifting/receptivity, which reverses the human sinful desire for autonomous self-sufficiency.

By contrast to Power's depiction of Jesus as the revealer of the omnipresence of God's beneficent gifting, Ratzinger presents Jesus as answering, by the power of his embodied self-giving love, the need of fallen human beings to be liberated from their sinful pride and rejection of God. Jesus establishes hierarchical sacramental mediation in his Church because human beings need more than a celebratory meal that assures them of the omnipresence of God's love. Given the sinful tendency to cleave to self, human beings require ongoing formation in *receptivity* to Jesus' healing and elevating power. For Ratzinger, hierarchical sacramental mediation exists to form human beings in this cruciform image of radical receptivity. Ratzinger's approach thus provides a model for a renewed theology of Catholic priesthood. **N V**