SEMINARY JOURNAL

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SPECIAL THEME: Preaching

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VOLUME 16 NUMBER TWO FALL 2010

Note: Due to leadership changes in the Seminary Department, this volume was actually published in September 2011.

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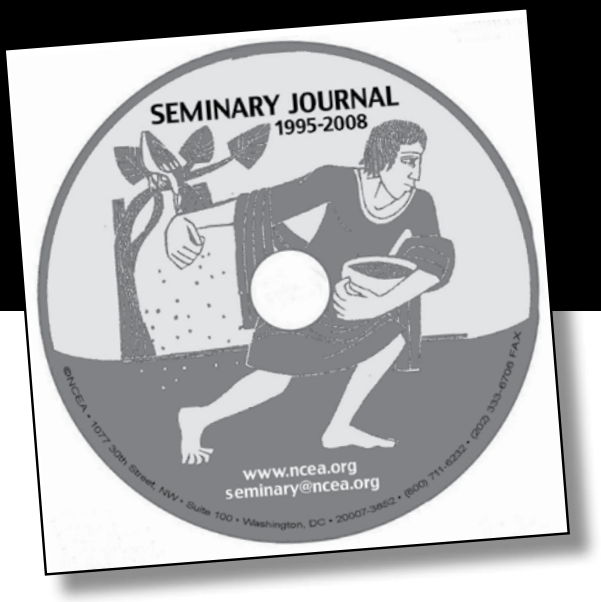

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From the Desk of the Executive Director

The Seminary Department, with the assistance of a grant from a generous donor who desires to remain anonymous, undertook a project to strengthen preaching programs in seminaries. Our project was part of a larger initiative called "To Preach the Good Word Well." Funds were provided to a number of organizations to develop new programs and research to improve the Sunday homily. You will find a report on each of these preaching projects in this issue. I am particularly grateful to Don McCrabb, president of the Catholic Youth Foundation, who served as guest editor for this issue.

Readers will find in these individual reports good ideas that are applicable to different settings. Several of the projects identify highly creative ways to engage parishioners and others to provide feedback to preachers. The reports are commendable for their candor in identifying successes and failures – a hallmark of a good research initiative.

Accompanying the reports are several additional articles that I think readers will find very insightful. Father George Gallaro provides an overview of the patristic tradition with respect to priestly ministry and identity. A critically important insight is the task of preaching the word and its inseparability from the sacramental life of the Church.

Deacon James Keating suggests a thoughtful spiritual underpinning for effective homilies by emphasizing the central importance of contemplative prayer. Making room for silence engages the hearers of the word and establishes a bond between the preacher and the congregation.

Steven Smith provides a thoughtful overview of the recent document from the Synod on Preaching, *Verbum Domini,* that suggests implications for seminary preaching programs.

Father Tom Rosica, CSB, delivered a compelling address in 2010 that I am happy to publish. Tom's reflections on the saintly lives of Cardinal Newman, Brother Andre Bessette, Fr. Michael McGivney, Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko and Blessed John XXIII affirm the healing power of selfless service that is so essential for the life of the church.

Father David Couturier, a noted expert on organizational management theory, offers a thoughtful appraisal of the effectiveness of the Year for Priests. Did this year-long initiative from Rome achieve its purpose? David suggests a model of evaluation that can be extended to address other areas in which we may seek to assess the impact of our ministerial efforts.

I hope that you enjoy this latest issue. As always, your comments and feedback are welcome. In addition, I invite you to submit articles for the journal. Email them to me at seminary@ncea.org.

Cordially,
Msgr. Jeremiah J. McCarthy
Editor

Calendar of Events • NCEA Seminary Department

2011

- **September 19-23**
  NCDVD Convention
  Marriott Renaissance Center, Detroit, Michigan
- **September 29 - October 1**
  MATS
  Chicago, Illinois

2012

- **Late January – Early February**
  Seminary Convocation
- **April 11-13**
  NCEA Convention & Exposition
  Boston, Massachusetts
- **June 10-13**
  A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part II. Cultural Competency– A focused conference for vocation directors, formation directors and psychologists
- **June 14-15**
  A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part I. Psychological Assessment Conference – An Introduction for vocation directors, formation directors and psychologists

Seminary Convocation 2012
A National Conversation for Rectors on the Next PPF

Beginning in late January
Exact dates TBA

Oblate Renewal Center
San Antonio, TX
(www.ost.edu/OblateSite/ORC/ORCHome.html)
Cost: $175 includes two nights lodging, meals.

The Seminary Department, working with the Bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, will host this gathering for rectors and other seminary leaders on issues related to the sixth edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation*.

More details coming soon. Contact the Seminary Department for more information.
(800) 711-6232 • seminary@ncea.org

Save the dates June 10-13, 2012 for *A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part II.* This conference will focus on the issues of Inter-Cultural Competency: Multi-Cultural Assessment and Enculturation. Our creative, innovative and research-based agenda will help you better serve the Church of today and tomorrow.

A post-conference workshop will be offered for those not able to attend the 2010 conference. Save the dates June 13-15, 2012 for *A Necessary Conversation: A Gathering of Experts, Part I.* Vocation directors, formation directors and assessing & treating psychologists are strongly encouraged to attend.

Our 2012 conference will again be co-hosted by Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary and Saint John Vianney Center. We hope you will join us!

For information on the 2010 conference, go to our website: http://www.sjvcenter.org/sjvc-events.php.

For details about the 2012 conferences, please contact Reverend Gerard J. McGlone, S.J., Ph.D., at gmcglone@sjvcenter.org

Please – Save the 2012 dates: June 10-13 and June 13-15. Spread the word!

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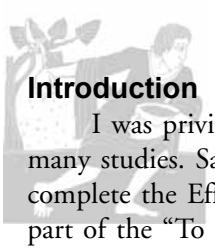
Improving Preaching through Feedback

Donald R. McCrabb, DMin



Introduction

I was privileged to work with Dean Hoge on many studies. Sadly, he died before we were able to complete the Effective Preaching project. This effort was part of the "To Preach the Good Well" initiative. One summer evening we drove out to a small-town parish in rural Maryland to conduct a focus group on what makes an effective homily. Dean was masterful in soliciting the thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the people. Listening over and over again to the taped focus group, Dean was able to key in to the common denominator from diverse comments. "I want one thing I can take home to chew on," "He needs to say what he has got to say and get on with it," and "I like a well-organized homily with a clear point," emerged as the criteria of "one clear message."

Later that summer Dean and I had a lunch focus group with priests. I recall four clear messages. First was their struggle to find the time to craft a homily. Second was the challenge of the scripture itself; what is this scripture saying to us, this community of faith, today? Third was their own vulnerability; standing in front of a group of people and breaking open their own faith journey in an effort to make sense of the Word of God. Finally, there was the press of life. Having survived the weekend Masses, there are the duties of the week before them, daily Mass, and then another set of Sunday readings to engage, understand, and interpret. Generally speaking, the homilist will see the same set of readings once every three years. Even if the homilist received feedback on how well they framed and delivered a clear message for any particular Sunday, any feedback may seem irrelevant to their next homily.

The purpose of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative was to improve the quality of preaching in the United States of America. Ten projects were funded and launched. Of those ten projects, 3 dealt with standards for preaching and 7 addressed some mechanism for receiving and giving feedback. The purpose of my article is to reflect on the importance of feedback, to understand the nature of feedback and the four types of feedback, to identify the three types of criteria for preaching that have emerged through the projects, and to draw out three implications for the future.

The purpose of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative was to improve the quality of preaching in the United States of America.

Feedback

Feedback is giving information to an individual in an effort to influence behavior. The focus of feedback is behavior. Within the work environment, that behavior is typically a task, skill, or goal. There are many routine tasks that fill our days – communication, making decisions, learning new skills, and planning are just a handful of examples. For any of these tasks, there are "generally accepted" criteria. Some criteria for e-mail, for example, are brevity, when to copy others, when to reply all, and when to use color type.

In giving feedback to another, I can use pure or personalized feedback. *Pure* feedback focuses on what or how. *Personalized* feedback adds emotion and personal regard; I express pleasure at the performance or displeasure. It is best to provide pure feedback because it validates the person's capacity to recognize and use the

feedback. This is especially true when a person is learning a new task or skill. "Paul, your last four e-mails to me were brief, to the point, and clearly written" is an example of pure feedback. Another example would be "Paul, your last two e-mails were long, well over five paragraphs, peppered with errors, and had no clear message."

Personalized feedback includes information on how you feel about the behavior. "Paul, I was delighted with your last four e-mails to me; they were brief, to the point, and clearly written. Thank you. They provided me with helpful information that I could easily access and use right away." Personalized feedback can be either positive, as this example was, or negative. An example of negative personalized feedback would be "Paul, your e-mails have gotten way too long and it is very difficult to understand your point. It is very frustrating to wade through your e-mails. I thought we were clear that we were going to keep our emails brief and to the point." Personalized positive feedback is best used when a person is learning a task or skill and their confidence in their own ability is fluctuating. Personalized negative feedback should be used only when the person is deviating from their own established level of performance; such as when Paul reverts to long emails after successfully demonstrating his ability to communicate clearly in short ones.

Consequently, there are four types of feedback; pure feedback that is either negative (how the behavior fell short of the standard) or positive (how the behavior met or exceeded standards) and personalized negative or positive feedback.

Feedback is a great gift. It gives us valuable information about our performance. It tells us what standards are relevant for the task or skill, it provides information on our behavior relevant to those skills, it builds our confidence when we meet or exceed those standards, and it gives us essential information on how we are falling short of standards so we can target our efforts for continued growth. Feedback also develops a relationship of trust between people. Asking for feedback validates a person's worth and ability. Accepting feedback creates a relationship characterized by openness and substance. When people give me pure feedback, they are helping me succeed.

Typically, priests and deacons who preach every Sunday do not ask for, are not given, nor do they receive feedback. This is not a character flaw among our clergy; it is a cultural problem. When I was a lay pastoral associate in 1979, the community would frequently gather for coffee and donuts in the church hall after Mass. There was time for some conversation with the preacher about the homily. Today, there may be 15 seconds when a parishioner can engage the homilist after Mass. This creates a relationship of exchange, not a relationship of trust. What the worshipping community needs is a culture of feedback.

The first step towards creating a healthy adult atmosphere for the receiving and giving of feedback is to establish shared standards.

The first step towards creating a healthy adult atmosphere for the receiving and giving of feedback is to establish shared standards. Many of the preaching projects dealt with this question. Are our homilists aware of the standards parishioners use for homilies, and do they care? Other projects focused on receiving and giving feedback among those who preach. While this latter practice can be very helpful for the development of skills, it does not build a relationship of trust between parishioner and homilist nor does it create a culture of feedback within the community.

As we ponder the results of these projects, three criteria emerge for the Sunday homily:

Quality Delivery
Clarity of message
Authenticity of Preacher

The preacher must be understood. The listener does not want to strain to hear the message and it needs to be communicated in an arousing and engaging way. Preaching is not theater or teaching, although both disciplines can inform and instruct the preacher. The delivery is what inspires since it weaves together pace, tone, inflection, emotion, and a message brimming with meaning for the listener. Through the purity and the power of the delivery, people hear the compassionate and compelling message of Jesus Christ. Delivery is the *art* of preaching.

Message is the content, the *work* of the Sunday homily. It is the synthesis of a life lived in and through the Word of God in this time and place. In breaking

open the Word of God, the preacher lays out the Gospel against which our lives can be seen and considered, confessed and celebrated. The message aligns our life story with the story of life. As our story encounters God's story, we find ultimate meaning: sin seeking forgiveness, grace demanding faith, hunger for justice, hope for compassion, and the infinitely renewing power of sacrificial love. The message becomes a mirror into our souls, as we are transformed into icons of the Holy One.

The preacher must be authentic. His very humanity becomes an instrument of the Word. Indeed, the Word relies on the humanity of the preacher to become truly alive. Authenticity asks for a high degree of self awareness, vulnerability, passion, and humility. As one priest put it, "the people do not want to hear that he believes IT, but that HE believes it."

Implications

Preaching is a communal act. The delivery, message, and authenticity of the preacher are supported, developed, and deepened in community. The richness of the Word of God, and how God's story is lived in the lives of our people, can illuminate the message. Building a culture of feedback where, in the words of Blessed John Henry Newman, "heart speaks to heart," will promote and protect authenticity. Today, with the reality of social communication, it is becoming increasingly possible for the communal dimension of preaching to come alive and thrive. Parishes that begin to accept "co-responsibility" with the preacher for the Sunday homily; that provide insight, feedback, and encouragement to the homilist; and that create systems for feedback, will see the Word of God come alive in their communities.

Donald R. McCrabb, DMin., is president of the Catholic Youth Foundation USA, located in Washington, DC.

Preaching In the Sunday Assembly: A Pastoral Commentary on Fulfilled in Your Hearing

Gregory Heille, OP

Note: The following article is a slightly edited version of Gregory Heille's introduction in the book, *Preaching in the Sunday Assembly: A Pastoral Commentary on Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, edited by James Wallace, C.Ss.R. and published by Liturgical Press in 2010, pp. vii–xi.

Preaching in the Sunday Assembly: A Pastoral Commentary on Fulfilled in Your Hearing, edited by James Wallace, C.Ss.R. and published by Liturgical Press in 2010, is a fruit of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" Initiative and celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, issued by the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry in 1982. Now, with the even more recent publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* by our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, the Universal Church has given the American Church an additional resource by which to reflect on the Ministry of the Word in our cultural and ecclesial context.

The road which led to the pastoral commentary began with a close re-reading of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* by The Catholic Association of Teachers of Homiletics (CATH) membership at their annual meeting in West Palm Beach in November 2006. This association is a small but vital network of men and women teaching preaching in Catholic seminaries, schools of theology, deacon formation programs, and other ministry formation settings in the United States. In 2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) invited CATH and several key Catholic organizations to give input about a possible new document on preaching. While thoughts of a new document were put aside by the USCCB until after the Synod on the Word of God, our CATH conversation triggered renewed appreciation of the profound influence that *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* has made on preaching and preaching education these many years.

Our CATH conversation triggered renewed appreciation of the profound influence that *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* has made on preaching and preaching education these many years.

Serendipitously, CATH was approached in 2007 with an offer to participate in "To Preach the Good Word Well." Generous funding enabled a CATH writing team to convene in St. Louis in September 2007 and April 2008. Funding also supported another annual meeting in St. Paul in November 2007, at which the entire CATH membership worked to conceive the scope and vision for this pastoral commentary on *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*.

In these conversations, CATH was blessed to welcome two members of the original Priestly Life and Ministry subcommittee and writing team—William Skudlarek, O.S.B., the principal writer of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, and Fred Baumer. Their stories about the subcommittee were so fascinating that CATH membership arranged for further interviews and research in order to include an appendix on the history of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* in this commentary.

The CATH writing team organized its work according to the original Assembly–Preaching–Homily–Methodology structure of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, and the following contributors were invited to comprise the team:

Project Direction

Fr. Gregory Heille, O.P., past-president of CATH and project director; Professor of Homiletics and Vice President and Academic Dean at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri; editor of *Theology of Preaching: Essays on Vision and Mission in the Pulpit* (Melisende, 2001)

The Assembly

Dr. Miguel Diáz, Associate Professor of Theology, St. John's University School of Theology–Seminary, Collegeville, Minnesota (now US ambassador to the Holy See)

Fr. Jan Michael Joncas, Associate Professor of Theology and of Catholic Studies, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota; author of *Preaching the Rites of Christian Initiation* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1994)

Dr. Deborah Organ, Vice President of CATH; Clinical Social Worker and Pastoral Minister at Holy Rosary Parish, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Preacher

Fr. Donald Heet, O.S.F.S., Secretary/Treasurer of CATH; Associate Clinical Professor and Director of Pastoral Studies, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

Sr. Theresa Rickard, O.P., Executive Director of RENEW International, Plainfield, New Jersey

Fr. James Wallace, C.Ss.R., editor of the commentary; Professor of Homiletics at Washington Theological Union, Washington, D.C.; author of *Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart: The Homily on the Feasts and within the Rites* (Liturgical Press, 2002)

The Homily

Fr. Guerric DeBona, O.S.B., President of CATH; Associate Professor of Homiletics, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, Saint Meinrad, Indiana; author of *Fulfilled in Our Hearing: History and Method of Christian Preaching* (Paulist Press, 2005)

Fr. Edward Foley, O.F.M. Cap., Professor of Liturgy and Music at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois; author of *Preaching Basics: A Model and a Method* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1998)

Five general themes of context, hermeneutics, liturgy, mission, and theology emerged as helpful signposts or rubrics for organizing an examination of each section of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing.*

Sr. Mary Margaret Pazdan, O.P., Professor of Biblical Studies at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri; Promoter of Preaching for the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, Wisconsin; author of *Earth, Wind, and Fire: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Creation* (Liturgical Press, 2004)

Homiletic Method

Dr. Fred Baumer, Vice President for Organizational Effectiveness at BI Worldwide, Minneapolis, Minnesota; co-founder with Patricia Hughes Baumer of Partners in Preaching, Eden Prairie, Minnesota; member of the writing team for *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (NCCB, 1982)

Fr. William Skudlarek, O.S.B., General Secretary of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, Rome; principal writer of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (NCCB, 1982)

Sr. Honora Werner, O.P., Councilor to the Prioress of Caldwell Dominican Sisters, Caldwell, New Jersey

History of FIYH

Ms. Trish Sullivan Vanni, doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California

While the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry chose to address *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* to priests and bishops presiding and preaching at the Sunday Eucharist, the introduction acknowledged the role of deacons as ministers of the Word, and also the responsibility of the entire Christian community, by virtue of baptism, for the proclamation of the Word of God. Clearly, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* has been read with great benefit by Catholic bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers, all dedicated to the proclamation of the Word of God. Upon careful consideration of today's ministerial context, CATH chose to address

this commentary to all Catholics charged by virtue of their ministry with proclaiming the Word of God, as well as to seminarians, candidates for permanent diaconate, and other ministerial students taking their first courses in preaching. Keeping in mind the growing frequency in the United States of preaching in the absence of a priest, the writing team also chose to nuance such words in the original document as "Sunday" and "homily" with the use of additional expressions such as "the Lord's Day" and "the Word." We believe that both *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* and this commentary may be studied with benefit by those who preside and preach at the Eucharist and by those who minister in the absence of a priest. Of course, we also welcome an international and ecumenical reading of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* and this commentary.

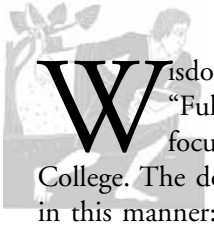
Rather than taking a didactic approach to an inspiring document, we used an approach of commendation/recommendation. Several insights and features of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* deserve notice, commendation, and celebration. Also, while *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* is by no means out of date, it is dated—in terms of several pressing issues of cultural context and in terms of a wealth of emerging insight in the fields of biblical interpretation, liturgical theology, and homiletic methodology. Five general themes of context, hermeneutics, liturgy, mission, and theology emerged as helpful signposts or rubrics for organizing an examination of each section of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* with a view to making recommendations. We hope these recommendations will prove helpful to preachers and preaching students, and also to bishops and their advisors, as we work together to address underlying issues pertinent to preaching in today's Church in the American context. CATH hopes to be a vital partner to this continuing conversation. With this issue of *Seminary Journal*, we invite teachers of preaching to participate in CATH, and we invite seminaries and *Seminary Journal* readers to make use of this fresh pastoral commentary on *Fulfilled in Your Hearing.*

Father Gregory Heille, OP, is professor of homiletics and academic dean at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri.

For more info on CATH, visit www.cathomiletics.org

Encountering the Gospel—Renewing the Preacher: The Preaching Program at Boston College

Msgr. James A. Mongelluzzo



Wisdom from the 1982 USCCB document "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" established the focus for the preaching program at Boston College. The document speaks of the preacher's role in this manner: "Ultimately, individual preachers will have to develop their own method for moving from the Scriptures to the homily, learning from their own successes and failures, as well as from other preachers, through whose words they have heard the Word of God." [1] Based on this insight, our ultimate goal was to help individual preachers develop and refine their homiletic methods so they deliver more vibrant homilies at Sunday Eucharist. We entitled our preaching program, "Encountering the Gospel—Renewing the Preacher."

The preaching program was designed and enacted through the collaboration of three institutions: the Archdiocese of Boston, the Boston College Church in the 21st Century Center, and the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.[2] The program was housed in the Church in the 21st Century Center.[3] Our strategy was to plan a pilot program for the first year, working with priests of the Archdiocese of Boston. Then, after evaluating our experience of the pilot program and making program modifications, we would expand our audience to encompass permanent deacons and lay preachers from all dioceses in New England to participate in the program in the second and third years. [4] At the conclusion of the third year, we would create a free, online, user-friendly preaching course utilizing the Boston College C21 Online Internet infrastructure. The course would incorporate selected videotaped components from our preaching programs over a three-year period, including presentations by speakers and examples of good preaching by program participants.

Our ultimate goal was to help individual preachers develop and refine their homiletic methods so they deliver more vibrant homilies at Sunday Eucharist.

The Pilot Program

In the pilot program, we invited 16 priests of the Archdiocese of Boston to make an eight-month commitment to a process that included four components:

- Two-day overnight October retreat
- One-day follow-up meetings in January and May
- Eight-month Internet weekly collaborative homily preparation
- Final evaluation by a panel of lay people on the progress achieved by each preacher

Pilot Program Details

Two-day Overnight October Retreat

The two-day overnight October retreat was held at the Boston College Connors Family Retreat and Conference Center, in Dover, Massachusetts, on October 22–23, 2007. With the ultimate goal of helping each preacher develop and refine his homiletic method fur-

ther, the principal aims of the retreat were to provide a prayerful and relaxed setting for preachers to reflect on their preaching ministry, explore their experience of preaching with a view to identifying one's strengths and identifying areas for improvement, and review homily basics.

Participation in preaching labs was the central pedagogical experience of the retreat. Working in groups of four, each priest preached his homily from the previous Sunday. Following each homily, colleagues offered the preacher beneficial feedback in terms of "commendations" and "recommendations." Both the homily and feedback session were videotaped. Later in the day, the preacher reviewed the videotape. Based upon the feedback, the preacher revised the homily for presentation in the next day's preaching lab.

Input sessions, offered by experienced homily professors,[5] expanded and complemented the learning acquired through the preaching lab experience. Input sessions highlighted key elements from the "Introduction to the Lectionary,"[6] "Fulfilled in Your Hearing,"[7] and selected material from Ken Untener's "Preaching Better."[8] Input session topics included: the liturgical context of the homily, the sacramentality of the Word, the individual and the collaborative homily preparation process proposed in "Fulfilled in Your Hearing," the difference between a homily and a sermon, inductive and deductive preaching, composing homilies for the ear and not the eye, and how to receive and process feedback from listeners.

Facilitated group conversation and silent time provided participants ample time and space to process their experience. In addition, participants celebrated the Eucharist each day, enjoyed healthful meals, and took time for quiet walks on the spacious grounds of the retreat center.

By the close of the retreat, each participant became reacquainted with homily basics and was introduced to new preaching skills. More importantly, each preacher acquired a new awareness of his preaching strengths and areas needing improvement. The preacher's "homework assignment" was to address these areas for improvement in the normal course of preparing, delivering, and evaluating his Sunday homilies. He would be invited to report on his progress at the one-day meeting in January and the second meeting in May.

One-Day Follow-up Meetings in January and May

The one-day meetings on January 8, 2008, and May 27, 2008, were designed as a "check- in" among preaching colleagues to assess their progress on the areas for improvement they had identified at the October retreat. The days were also intended to reinforce the new preaching skills introduced at the October retreat. The meetings were held in Fulton Hall on the main campus of Boston College. A major segment of the day was devoted to participation in preaching labs. Each preacher offered his homily from the previous Sunday and received feedback from colleagues. The preacher then compared his October preaching videotape with that of the homily just given. With the input from preaching lab colleagues, the preacher documented his progress and identified further areas for improvement. These areas constituted the "homework assignment" to be addressed during the interval between the January meeting and the May meeting. Input sessions and facilitated conversations were also part of the one-day gathering.

The one-day meeting in May followed a similar format. The main difference was that in the preaching lab, the preacher compared the videotape of his present homily with the October videotape. This exercise allowed the preacher to document progress achieved during an eight-month time frame. Each preacher formulated a final evaluation with the input of preaching lab colleagues. The evaluation was intended to identify both previous and newly achieved preaching strengths, identify areas for continued improvement, and slate concrete plans to address those areas on one's own initiative.

Eight-month Weekly Collaborative Internet Homily Preparation

Preachers engaged in a collaborative process for preparing and evaluating homilies for each Sunday during the interval between the October retreat and January one-day meeting, and again during the interval between the January meeting and May meeting. The weekly process followed the collaborative model for homily preparation proposed in "Fulfilled in Your Hearing," but was adapted for Internet participation. We utilized the Boston College C21 On-line Internet infrastructure for this component of our program. Participants worked with the same lab members they had worked with at the October retreat. Each week, participants exchanged ideas for the upcoming Sunday homily, submitted a first draft homily for peer feedback, and ultimately submitted a copy of the homily as preached for feedback. A facilitator guided the online conversations.

Final Evaluation by a Panel of Lay People on the Progress Achieved by Each Preacher

On June 21, 2008, a panel of 21 lay people gathered in Higgins Hall on the Boston College main campus to assess the progress of the preachers who had completed the eight-month process. The members of the panel had been recommended by the preachers who participated in the program. The preachers were not present for this exercise. The role of the panel was to view the October homily videotape and the May videotape of each preacher. Using the evaluative tool provided by our program staff, panelists assessed the progress of each preacher.

Participants appreciated the effectiveness of the preaching lab experience in raising their awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement in preaching, the constructive impact of receiving peer feedback, and the value of the input sessions.

Assessment of the Pilot Program

Sixteen priests from the Archdiocese of Boston registered for the pilot program. This was the maximum number of participants agreed upon in order to maintain a collegial group dynamic. Nine out of the 16 priests ultimately participated in the eight-month process. The others found it necessary to cancel at the last minute because of scheduling conflicts or emergencies. Working with nine participants easily allowed us to solicit feedback on the effectiveness of the program throughout the eight-month process.

Participants offered positive feedback for every aspect of the two-day overnight retreat. Participants particularly emphasized their appreciation for the prayerful and relaxed atmosphere of the retreat center, the effectiveness of the preaching lab experience in raising their awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement in preaching, the constructive impact of receiving peer feedback, and the value of the input sessions.

For the January and May one-day meetings, the participants found the meeting content, especially preaching labs and input sessions, to be a valuable contribution to their growth as preachers. They pointed out, however, that single full-day programs were not compatible with the complex schedules of the parish priest. Issues raised included morning Mass, funerals, emergencies, and commuting from suburbs to Boston College during peak traffic hours. Participants proposed afternoon programs as a more convenient arrangement. They also recommended that such afternoon programs might be more helpful to their preaching ministry if each program focused on a specific preaching topic, such as preaching at weddings or funerals.

As the program unfolded, our program staff came to see that an eight-month commitment to an Internet weekly homily preparation process was an unrealistic expectation. Circumstances at the parish level prevented some participants from engaging in the weekly process on a consistent basis while others had difficulty working with the technology.

The final evaluation by the panel of lay people had both strengths and limitations. The panel effectively identified significant areas of progress in preachers when comparing their October homily videotapes with their May videotapes. The preachers appreciated this positive affirmation. On the other hand, the preachers might have benefited more from their final evaluations had they been provided by members of their own parish congregations. In the context of the priest's relationship with the parish community, parishioners have their own expectations of their preacher to use as criteria for evaluation. In addition, conducting the evaluation at the parish level can foster ongoing beneficial conversation between preacher and listeners, which is not possible with a panel of individuals from outside the parish.

Program Modifications Suggested by the Assessment

Based on the feedback received from the nine participants in the pilot program and program staff observations summarized above, we offered program modifications to take effect in years two and three of the preaching program. The two-day retreat and its curriculum would remain in place. However, because we planned to encompass permanent deacons, their wives, and lay preachers into the program in years two and three, we planned to offer the retreat twice each fall. We replaced the January and May full-day meetings with afternoon workshops on specific preaching topics. We solicited recommendations for topics at the fall retreats. Accordingly, in the fall of year two, we hosted a full-day workshop on "Preaching Social Justice Homilies" presented

by Rev. Richard Clifford, SJ and Rev. Raymond Kemp. In spring of year two we hosted afternoon workshops on "Preaching at Funerals" presented by Rev. Thomas Schirghi, SJ, and "Preaching at Weddings" presented by Rev. Paul Turner. In spring of year three, we offered "Preaching Children's Homilies" presented by Ann Garrido and "Preaching to Multi-cultural Congregations" presented by Deborah Organ. We eliminated the eight-month weekly Internet homily preparation component. In its place, we devoted our resources to creating the free, online Internet preaching course, which is the final segment of our preaching program.

Internet Preaching Course

At present, we are preparing the final segment of our preaching program, namely, the launching of an online preaching basics course utilizing the Boston College C21 Online Internet infrastructure. The course is aimed at both new and experienced preachers. The course content will incorporate selected presentations from the fall retreats. We envision the curriculum to include these topics: the liturgical context of the homily, the sacramentality of the Word, best practices for homily preparation, the difference between a homily and a sermon, inductive and deductive preaching, composing the homily for the ear and not the eye, and how to receive and process feedback from parishioners to improve one's preaching. Examples of good preaching by participants of the fall retreats will be included as well as a listing of helpful online preaching resources. The course will be offered for free.

What the Program Staff Learned from Preachers During the Three-Year Experience

Our program staff learned much from the priests, deacons, and lay preachers who participated in the

preaching programs over these past three years. Our major insights include: (1) preachers genuinely desire to improve their preaching skills; (2) preachers are seeking models and resources for preaching to multicultural communities; (3) preachers are concerned about effective communication; (4) lay preachers envision themselves as exercising a valuable ministry in collaboration with clergy; and (5) the Vatican II vision for preaching has not yet been realized. The five areas are explained below.

Preachers genuinely desire to improve their preaching skills.

During the three years our program was active, the priests, permanent deacons, and lay preachers demonstrated a genuine desire to improve their preaching skills. This desire was evident in the loyal commitment of the nine priests to the eight-month pilot program. This desire was reinforced by the full maximum attendance of 16 participants at each fall retreat held in years two and three. The large numbers who attended the afternoon programs in years two and three served as a clear testimony of a desire to improve preaching.

During facilitated conversations at retreats and afternoon programs and through informal conversations at coffee breaks, participants were specific about why they desire to become better preachers. They recognize the centrality of preaching in the liturgical life of the Church. They are aware that parishioners are hungry for good preaching, which connects faith to life. They view effective preaching as a component of effective pastoring. They know that consistent, quality preaching at Sunday Eucharist keeps parishioners in the parish and that poor preaching sends parishioners elsewhere in search of a better experience.

Priests, in particular, expressed the realization that preaching classes in the seminary, as good as they may have been, simply scratched the surface of the preaching ministry. They mentioned that modeling good preaching and mentoring preachers after ordination are needed to grow into an effective preacher. Priests also voiced their regret that scheduling conflicts so often prevented them from attending the preaching programs. They stressed that serving in a one-priest parish or pastoring more than one parish is making it more difficult for priests to commit themselves to activities outside the parish.

Preachers are seeking models and resources for preaching to multicultural communities.

Preachers are aware that preaching to multicultural congregations requires new preaching skills. Experienced lay and ordained pastoral leaders recognize that the ability to preach in another language is only one piece of the task. Just as liturgy, by its very nature, is an inculturated expression, so also is the homily that is part of the liturgy. Translating an English homily aimed at an English-speaking North American audience into Spanish or Vietnamese remains an English homily for English-speaking people, now delivered in another language. Effective multicultural preaching requires the preacher to speak out of the cultural milieu of the listeners. Preachers ask: how does a preacher communicate the Word of God in the idiom of more than one culture in a single homily?

At present, homily textbooks, biblical and liturgical commentaries for preachers, and collections of model homilies, designed for North American preachers who preach to North American listeners, are abundant. Participants in our program, searching for preaching resources to help preachers develop multicultural preaching skills, report that such resources are not available.

Preachers are concerned about effective communication.

Preachers recognize that their listeners are accustomed to receiving information by means of highly stimulating, speedy, and engaging forms of communication. Preachers wonder, indeed worry, if the standard spoken homily can continue to be an effective medium for communicating the Word of God. Preachers are asking if homilies should take on more creative expression. Should homilies incorporate other media, such as music, drama, dance, sound, and lighting technology to mediate God's Word to modern listeners? As in the case of preaching to multicultural communities, preachers are searching for models and resources to guide them in discerning this question.

Lay preachers envision themselves as exercising a valuable ministry in collaboration with clergy.

Lay preachers who attended our preaching programs are aware that Church law prohibits lay preaching at the celebration of the Eucharist, unless the preaching occurs following the prayer after communion. Nonetheless, lay preachers envision themselves providing a valuable preaching ministry to the Church. Lay preachers are preparing themselves to preach at children's liturgy of the word, liturgy of the hours, wakes, devotions, prayer services, retreats, and communion services in hospitals and nursing homes. They seek out and enthusiastically participate in training programs for preachers, wherever they can be found. Their desire to preach effectively emerges out of their own experience of how

good preaching has nourished their own faith. Lay preachers hold much hope that their preaching gifts will be utilized in parish communities, not as substitutes for clergy, but in collaboration with clergy.

The Vatican II vision for preaching has not yet been realized.

A significant number of ordained and lay preachers admitted that the concept of the homily being a constitutive element of the liturgy, not an "add on" for special occasions, and the notion that the homily is intended to be an interpretation of the sacred texts of the liturgy and not a talk given on the occasion of a liturgical gathering, are new concepts for them.

This admission by participants demonstrates that the liturgical significance of the homily as envisioned in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in 1963, unfolded in the "Introduction to the Lectionary" in 1969, and developed in "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" in 1982 has not yet taken hold of the imaginations of preachers or their listeners. One reason may be that when the Missal of Paul VI was introduced in 1970, the main focus of catechesis for the clergy was on rubrical changes. Clergy workshops on the changes were mandatory. High levels of curiosity about the changes motivated strong attendance at workshops. However, it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially when the USCCB published "Fulfilled in Your Hearing," that attention was called to the liturgical context of the homily and the dynamics of good preaching, that is, the elements listed under "preaching basics." Unlike the mandatory workshops for the 1970 rubrical changes, preaching workshops were optional. Thus, the homiletic vision of Vatican II remained in the background of liturgical renewal. This suggests that providing liturgical catechesis for preachers must remain a necessary and central part of preaching programs for those preparing for lay or ordained ministry, and for those currently serving in ministry.

The wisdom our program staff learned from our program participants suggests new, challenging, and exciting possibilities for Boston College to assist preachers in the days ahead. As we ponder these possibilities, we remain grateful for the generosity of our benefactors, who enabled Boston College to make a significant contribution to the life and ministry of preachers, and who in turn will preach the Word of God more effectively to the people they serve.

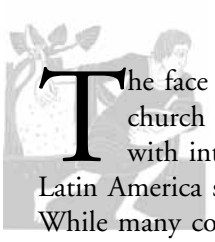
Msgr. James A. Mongelluzzo is a priest of the Diocese of Worcester, MA. He teaches homiletics and sacramental theology at Blessed John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, MA and in the Continuing Education Program at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Endnotes

1. "Fulfilled in Your Hearing," (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1982), 29.
2. The Boston College School of Theology and Ministry was formed on June 1, 2008. Three institutions merged to form the school: Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Boston College Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, and Boston College C21 On-line. The three institutions were part of the initial collaborative effort in planning and carrying out the preaching program.
3. The preaching program staff included Dr. Robert Newton, special assistant to the president of Boston College, who served as staff convener; Dr. John McGinty, acting director of the Church in the 21st Century Center, who served as program administrator; Msgr. James Mongelluzzo, associate director for liturgical and spiritual formation at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, who served as content and curriculum designer; and Dr. Barbara Radtke, director of the C21 On-line Program at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, who served as online program designer. Administrative staff from the Church in the 21st Century Center included Karen Keifer, Jessica Salefski, Nayla Tofal, and Alana Wong.
4. In addition to the Archdiocese of Boston, the New England dioceses include, in Massachusetts: Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester; in Connecticut: Hartford, Norwich and Bridgeport; Manchester, New Hampshire; Portland, Maine; and Burlington, Vermont.
5. Presenters included Rev. Thomas A. Kane, CSP; Rev. William P. Kelly, and Msgr. James A. Mongelluzzo.
6. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Lectionary for Mass" (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), xiii-xlv.
7. "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1982).
8. Ken Untener, "Preaching Better: Practical Suggestions for Homilists" (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999).

Preaching Across Cultures: Response to a Pastoral Need of the US Church Today

vanThanh Nguyen, SVD



The face of the priesthood is changing. Our local church is becoming a mission-receiving church with international priests from Asia, Africa, and Latin America serving in parishes across the country. While many communities embrace the presence of foreign-born priests and welcome these "strangers" as a sign of the universal church in extraordinary ways, others are less receptive because of language difficulties and theological differences. As the number of international priests grows, the US church is going through a time of challenge and opportunity.[1] Confronting the situation facing our local church, and responding to the pastoral needs of the time, Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago created a five-day intensive preaching program designed to help international clergy to improve their preaching sensitivities and skills for the American context.[2] In this article, I will examine four essential elements for good preaching, the ways in which the workshop sharpened those preaching skills, provide a description of the participants and their evaluation of the program, and give a brief history of the program and its prospects for the future.

1. Four Essential Elements of Good Preaching

The basic thrust of this workshop focused on four essential elements of good preaching: *biblical, rhetorical, liturgical, and cultural.* As such, four scholars provided two to three sessions from their respective disciplines: vanThanh Nguyen (biblical); Britto Berchmans (rhetorical); Richard Fragomeni (liturgical); and Roger Schroeder (cultural).

Professor Nguyen, who teaches New Testament and is Chair of the Bible department at CTU, dealt with the issues of advanced biblical exegesis for the purpose of preaching. For the Word of God to come alive in the hearts and minds of the American people, preachers must first learn the art of reading the biblical texts in their appropriate contexts. Only then can preachers re-contextualize the message for their audience today. Professor Nguyen shared that Catholic biblical exegesis involves a comprehensive analysis of the three worlds of a text: the world "behind" the text; the world "within" the text; and the world "in-front" of the text. His first presentation focused on the methodology of advanced biblical exegesis, while his second talk provided a step by step process to uncover the essential message and meaning then and now.

Professor Nguyen shared that Catholic biblical exegesis involves a comprehensive analysis of the three worlds of a text: the world "behind" the text; the world "within" the text; and the world "in-front" of the text.

Fr. Berchmans, a pastor in the Archdiocese of Chicago and an expert in rhetoric, gave several sessions on the art of persuasion. Rhetoric is the art of using language to communicate effectively and persuasively. Since preaching also involves the art of persuasion, one must know and implement some basic rhetorical skills in or-

Seated in the front roll are four faculty members: (starting from left) Fr. vanThanh Nguyen; Fr. Richard Fragomeni; Fr. Britto Berchmans; and Fr. Roger Schroeder. The two back rows are some of the participants from July 2010.

der to be effective. Besides building on fundamentals in communication and public speaking, Fr. Berchmans also gave seven basic steps for constructing an effective homily. His homily construction consists of: 1) reading the Scripture; 2) research and reflection; 3) identifying the theme; 4) extracting the Scriptural underpinnings; 5) expanding the theme; 6) applying it to real life; and 7) bringing it all together.

Fr. Richard Fragomeni, professor of homiletics at CTU, dealt with the issues of advanced liturgical preaching: 1) understanding that the lectionary is not the Bible; 2) appreciating alternative methods of interpreting lectionary texts; and 3) using other sources of liturgical preaching (e.g. the prefaces, prayers, vespers and specific aspects of feasts days). Fr. Fragomeni also offered concrete helpful tips in constructing a good homily: his dictum is "no banality!"

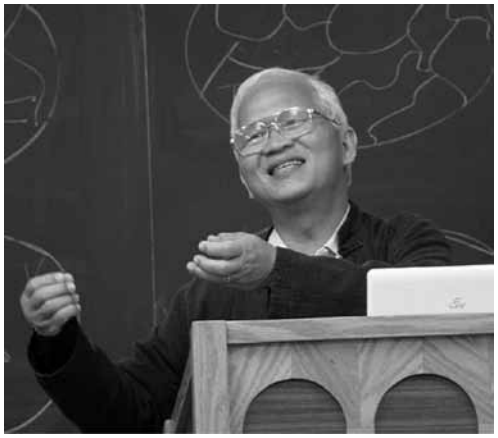
Professor Schroeder, a Divine Word missionary and professor of missiology at CTU, offered two sessions on contextual and cultural analysis and how different styles of preaching translate across cultures. Fr. Schroeder used the image of "Entering Someone Else's Garden" as an example of acculturation. While knowing one's own culture is important, understanding the norms and customs of the other is crucial for cultural adjustment and enculturation. Familiarity with the following issues is tremendously helpful when working in the US context: gender roles and women in ministry, value of time, theology and ecclesiology, politics, ecumenism, inter-faith dynamics and generational differences.

Participants were actively engaged in and found these input sessions to be very helpful and enriching. The overall assessment of these sessions, as reflected in the participants' written evaluations, was extremely positive.

2. Other Ways to Sharpen Preaching Skills

Realizing that storytelling is also an important element in good preaching, a professional storyteller assisted the participants with how to use stories more effectively in preaching.[3] There was also a session where participants were given an opportunity to watch short samples from a variety of preachers of different ethnic backgrounds who preached in different styles and contexts.[4] After each sample, participants were encouraged to share and discuss their observations of the sample preaching through a series of guided questions. In general, these two sessions generated a lot of discussion and were quite engaging. The conversation was at times entertaining. The overall assessment of these two sessions was also very positive.

Noticing that some of the participants might experience "preacher's fatigue" or banality in their ministry and preaching, the workshop also offered an opportunity for deeper personal sharing and healing. Thus, Sr. Maria Hong Nguyen, O.S.B., was present throughout the week to serve as counselor and spiritual director for those who wanted to share their personal struggles in ministry in a more confidential setting. Participants who turned to her for spiritual direction were grateful for her



listening skills and professional guidance.

Since this was a workshop on preaching, we intentionally designed it in a way that would be practical and useful. Participants were asked to video record one homily and have it evaluated by three parishioners before they arrived. In the first preaching practice session, participants were divided up into two groups of eight and were given an opportunity either to show their recorded videos or to preach it in person. While most preached their homilies live, some chose to show their recorded homilies. After each homily, two faculty members, plus their peers, gave helpful input and suggestions. Participants were given time to either revise their already preached homily or to prepare another homily (for example on the next Sunday's readings) and then to preach it during the second preaching practice with another rotating faculty member present to give input and suggestions. These preaching practice sessions were very beneficial for the participants. Their assessment of these "hands-on" preaching sessions was that they were practical, challenging, honest, beneficial, provocative and insightful.

The preaching conference also provided opportunities for spiritual enrichment and personal camaraderie. There were opportunities for everyone to come together to pray as a community every morning and evening. While the morning prayers were more simple, evening vespers were well prepared with music and songs. Eucharistic celebrations were also scheduled, with various faculty members preaching and presiding. In general, everyone appreciated these liturgies. They went away feeling spiritually and personally satisfied.

The tour of downtown Chicago and Navy Pier, followed by dinner in Chinatown at the Evergreen Chinese Restaurant on Wednesday were great treats for all the participants. The Thursday night cookout at the SVD residence was very enjoyable. It allowed people to relax and be themselves. Some told stories and jokes; others sang songs in their own language. It was a delightful evening for all.

The overall assessment of the five day preaching conference was very positive, even "excellent," as expressed by many participants orally and in their written evaluations. They learned, shared, and were enriched by the experience of being at CTU. Many went away wanting more. Some even wished to return if this program continues next year, or wrote reports about their participation in the workshop and published them in their community newsletter.[5] One participant created a blog as an online collaborative space where participants can share their homilies across the globe.

3. Who are these "strangers" in our midst?[6]

Since this was a "hands-on" workshop whereby participants needed to be actively involved, the number of participants was kept small. The first time we offered this workshop in July 2009, there were sixteen international priests and one seminarian who took part in the program. Most of these priests had served in the US between one and five years. They came from various dioceses of the US: Chicago, Milwaukee, Joliet, Los Angeles, Trenton, Memphis, Toledo, Houston and Lafayette. They were both diocesan priests and religious, who represented nations in four continents: India, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Ireland, Poland, Brazil, Nigeria and Venezuela. Most were in their late thirties and have been ordained within the last ten years. They came with enthusiasm and motivation to learn, share and be nourished. While they are good preachers, they earnestly want to become even better. A few are still struggling to communicate in English; however, most have a very good command of the English language. Others were experiencing "preacher's fatigue," for they have been in ministry for some time. Some found themselves feeling a bit exhausted and becoming "banal" in their preaching. Thus, they were very eager to be engaged in the discussions and the preaching practices that might help them become more creative and effective in preaching. Consequently, these eager and highly motivated indi-

viduals wanted to participate in the conference and were grateful for the opportunity to take part in this intensive program.

Since the workshop was a tremendous success and the needs were great, CTU decided to offer the same workshop again for the second time in July 2010. At this workshop, we expanded the make-up of the participants a little by not limiting it to priests. There ended up being twelve ordained priests, one deacon, one lay woman, and one seminarian, a total of fifteen participants. They came from Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria, China, Argentina, India, Viet Nam, and Ghana. Except for one person who is still struggling to communicate in English, most had a very good command of the English language. These participants, too, were highly motivated to learn, share and be nourished. They were very eager to sharpen their preaching skills by being aware of the cultural sensitivities and theologies of the American context. All the participants were grateful for the opportunity to take part in this worthwhile program and left feeling invigorated and recharged.

4. History and Prospects

This program was made possible through funds from a generous foundation. In the Spring of 2008, at the invitation of Fr. Donald Senior, president of CTU and Fr. Gary Reibe-Estrella, former Academic Dean of CTU, Fr. Ed Foley formed an advisory team and came up with a basic framework for the program. Due to some setbacks, the program was unable to take off at that time. In the Fall of 2008, Fr. Reibe-Estrella named vanThanh Nguyen as the director of the project. With the assistance of Fr. John Schmidt as manager of the program, Nguyen led the July 2009 program. The July 2010 program was also offered at CTU under the leadership of Nguyen, with the assistance of Stan Uroda. The organizers of this project are determined to respond to the needs of the US Church by offering this program again. We hope to expand the program to include deacons and lay women who might work in a multi-cultural setting. Those who are interested in this innovative and helpful program may contact vanThanh Nguyen (tnguyen@ctu.edu).[7]

Conclusion

The program "Preaching Across Cultures" is both timely and necessary. It is one appropriate response to an urgent pastoral need of our time. As the US church increasingly becomes more a mission-receiving rather than mission-sending church, foreign-born priests will become more and more a part of the church scene. The church as a whole needs to have a change of heart toward these "strangers" in our midst. While there are many challenges, for example the language barriers and different theologies, it is certainly an opportunity to embrace the extraordinary variety within our universal church. The US church can be greatly enriched by these foreign priests if we welcome them and assist them with their cultural adjustment. This innovative preaching workshop therefore aptly serves as an essential dimension of cultural orientation for international priests, deacons, and those working in cross-cultural ministry as it helps them to become more effective preachers in the multi-cultural context of the US Church.

vanThanh Nguyen, S.V.D., S.T.D., is an assistant professor of New Testament Studies and department chair of Biblical Languages and Literature at Catholic Theological Union, in Chicago, Illinois. He is the book review editor of *New Theology Review.*

Endnotes

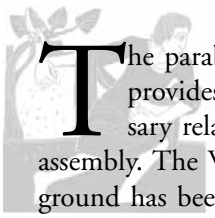
1. For a very helpful study that looks at foreign-born priests serving in the US from the perspective of parishioners, lay ministers, diocesan leaders, and priests, see Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2006. For facts at a glance, see Patricia Lefevere, "Study Looks at Foreign-born Priests Serving in U.S.," *National Catholic Reporter*. Accessed on October 20, 2010: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1141/is_17_42/ai_n16107683/.
2. To get a full picture of this program, a DVD version is available on YouTube. The whole video is cut into two parts; each part lasts around seven minutes. To watch the video, go to the following links: Part I: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pbOQRdNtTI; Part II: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6qjEHnRnx8.
3. Susan O'Halloran was the presenter in 2009 and Ed Foley in 2010.
4. This session was facilitated by John Schmidt in 2009 and Stan Uroda in 2010.
5. To view a sample report, see http://ctu-faculty.com/Faculty/tnguyen/PreachingAcrossCultures/WordUSA_Article.pdf.
6. To help put faces to these participants, see the photo album of the 2010 workshop: http://picasaweb.google.com/102764057075842510695/PreachingWorkshopCTU2010#
7. For more information, please go to http://ctu-faculty.com/Faculty/tnguyen/PreachingAcrossCultures2011.pdf.

With One Voice: A Program for Parishes

Very Rev. Denis Robinson, OSB

Note: This project, part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative, is ongoing as of July 2011.

Hear then the parable of the sower. When any one hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the Word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the Word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the Word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)



The parable of the sower in St. Matthew's Gospel provides us with a powerful image of the necessary relationship between the preacher and the assembly. The Word of God only takes root when the ground has been adequately prepared. So often in the homiletic world we focus on the preaching moment, equating the outcome of the homily each Sunday with the words produced on the page. As the Book of Hebrews reminds us, "The Word of God is living and active." (Hebrews 4:12) The activity of the Word, hopefully, extends beyond the confines of the aural experience in the church building to the fields of God's harvest in every corner of the world. The ultimate evangelical impact of the Word spoken in the Sunday assembly has a great deal to do with how well we prepare the ground for preaching and furthering the mission of the Word in the world.

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Why should we be interested in the assembly as a component of the homiletic experience? First, preaching is always preaching in a context. Preaching is by nature particular and not generic. As a preacher, I engage this community, this group, however broad the parameters of the group may be. Preaching that has no essential ground in the assembly is exegesis, not preaching. Preaching engages this people. St. Paul gives excellent witness to this particularity in his letters. In his later letters, as in his earlier preaching, he continually reminds the hearers that he knows them. Homiletics implies a level of intimacy. The preacher speaks to those he knows and loves, those with whom he has cast his lot. The preacher knows their sorrows and their joys, their disappointments and their triumphs. He unfolds a word that speaks to recent events and to still open wounds.

The dynamic of preaching in this context might well be related to the central principle of Christianity, the Incarnation. If the Word is a dynamic eternal principle, then the assembly, the living Church, is the temporal principle, a principle that is equally dynamic

and active. The homily will only have meaning for the assembly at one level: if they see themselves in it. When they see themselves in it, then they will respond, take the Word to heart, and in turn announce it to others. Second, in this same vein, the assembly extends the homiletic experience. Homilies heard in church that never get past the front doors are not particularly meaningful. Homilies preached with the assembly in mind use the evangelical power of the assembly itself to take the Word abroad. This happens in two ways: by the way in which the homily stimulates individual reflection on the Word and by the way in which hearers reflect on that Word with others. Finally, the assembly is a necessary component of the homily because assemblies are a necessary component of the Church. Blessed John Henry Newman speaks eloquently of the charism of infallibility of the faithful. He understands the faithful as the living body of the laity with their pastors, striving together toward the realization of the Kingdom of God. In this context, the homily is never something done to or for the laity, but, like the celebration of the Eucharist itself, is carried forth with the full, conscious, and active participation of all.

Practically speaking, how is this carried forth? Engaging the assembly in the homiletic experience first involves an awareness of how participation moves forward. The Word can take a number of forms in individual and ecclesial responses. The first form is spiritual. How does the Word speak to the internal disposition of preacher and hearers? Learning to process the spiritual aspect of hearing the Word requires a spiritual ground upon which to build. Preparing the spiritual ground takes into account the overall spiritual formation picture in a parish. How are we teaching people to pray? How are we engaging them in the great spiritual traditions of the Church? Returning to the parable of the sower, cultivation of the spiritual life ensures that there is a ground for receiving the Word. Without spiritual preparation, there can be no context for hearing and processing homilies.

Secondly, there is the intellectual preparation for hearing homilies. Here we see the need for ongoing formation with parishioners in the area of Scripture studies. The excellent programs available to parishes today make quality formation in studying the Bible a greater possibility than ever. Many parishes have well-established Bible study groups.

A third form of response to hearing the Word is

pastoral. How does the evangelical charge of the Sunday homily meet pastoral action? The development of social and pastoral outreach in the parish is crucial if there is to be a living form of response to the homily.

Finally, the form of response will be largely dependent upon the overall communications strategy in a parish. The ways in which the parish communicates, and the quality of that communication, will have an impact on how parishioners hear the Word and put it into action in their lives. Parishes prepare to "hear" the homily by getting the soil ready in and through the structure and systems of parish life.

What applies to the parish applies equally, and perhaps more so, to the preacher. The preacher must be prepared spiritually, intellectually, pastorally and communicatively for engaging parishioners with the Word of God through the homily. The preacher's ongoing formation will be crucial to the success of this endeavor. Likewise, the preacher must be aware of his assembly, realizing that in today's parishes, there may be hearers as adequately prepared, intellectually as adept and spiritually as attuned to hear the Word as he is.

Homiletic Method and Practice

The question of homiletic method has become increasingly prominent in the past 30 years. The appearance in 1987 of David Buttrick's *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* ushered in a new era of thinking about the construction of the homily in light of contemporary communication theory and the importance of homiletic method as a concern for preachers.[1] The concern for quality preaching brought new ways of thinking about the homily to bear on the task of homiletics. Two years before the appearance of *Homiletic*, Fred Craddock, a noted Protestant Scripture scholar published *Preaching*.[2] Craddock's text brought to the foreground two distinct methods of approaching the task of preaching, the deductive and the inductive. Simply stated, the deductive method uses the structure of the homily to come to particular conclusions, a kind of evangelical argument or apologetic. The preacher presents his points and lets the assembly know what they are supposed to conclude from those points. The inductive method proposed by Craddock uses a method in which the preacher presents his points but leaves the conclusion open, so that the assembly is drawn into the process, literally having to digest what they have heard away from the liturgical environment. Of course, neither of these approaches was new to the task of preaching; Craddock merely offered a new methodological model for bringing into existence what the preacher intended. Inductive preaching had long been a staple of homiletics modeled on patristic sermons. The classic example of this type of preaching, drawing his inspiration from patristic authors, was Blessed John Henry Newman.[3] Other important studies of homiletic method followed on the heels of Buttrick and Craddock making preachers more aware than ever of the craft of homilies and the need to consider the role of hearers in the process of preparation.

The preacher must be prepared spiritually, intellectually, pastorally and communicatively for engaging parishioners with the Word of God through the homily.

Some Historical Reflections

In the 1960's the Second Vatican Council changed the landscape of the Roman Catholic Church forever. In opening the windows and doors of the Church to the breath of the Holy Spirit, a radical transformation took place. Ultimately, the council called the Church to recognize the dignity of the laity and help them attain a full, active, and conscious participation in the life of the Church and its liturgy. In 1982, having had fifteen to twenty years to implement the changes ushered in by Vatican II and fully embracing its spirit, the bishops of the United States published *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*. This watershed document heralded a clarion call to renew preaching in the Catholic Church in America. Ultimately, the bishops invited preachers to acknowledge and affirm the importance of preaching for the whole Church and the vital role the assembly—the parish community—plays in the process of preaching.

Since the issuance of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* many strides have been made. Catholic seminaries have dramatically increased the formation and education offered in the area of homiletics. Many seminaries have gained a solid reputation for their preparation of good preachers. Doctoral programs in homiletics now exist within the Catholic world. Efforts at renewal have been made at the diocesan level too. However, little has been accomplished to help typical Catholics reach

a deeper level of participation in the Church's preaching. More often than not, preaching is a mental respite for the gathered community. The congregation mentally checks out, counting the minutes, reading the bulletin, or reviewing the demands of the upcoming work-week because the bridge between the preacher and hearer has yet to be built. There seems to be a missing link between the homily and those for whom it is preached.

How can the Church draw preachers and hearers together? *With One Voice* is Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology's response to this question. Listening is the bridge between preachers and hearers. Pioneering work has been accomplished in the past twenty years by Dr. Richard Stern in the role of listening as the foundation of good preaching. Preachers and hearers alike come to a homily in the hope of hearing the Word from God as it applies to them. Preachers need to listen to the Scriptures and the Living Word—that is, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Hearers need to listen for the voice of God in their lives, and in the preaching. Therefore, preaching involves an informed listening, a listening that has hearts and minds attuned to the voice of God. In his work with preachers around the country, Rev. Brendan Moss, OSB has used the Benedictine monastic discipline of *Lectio Divina* (holy reading) to form preachers and hearers alike in the practice of listening. Drawing on the work of Stern and Moss, Saint Meinrad has created a new program with the assistance of a grant from a Catholic foundation, part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" program. The new program, called *With One Voice*, seeks to draw preachers and hearers together in small groups within their parish, teaching them to listen to the Word of God and one another, thereby providing a bridge spanning the gap between them. *With One Voice* will help hearers and preachers become full, active, and conscious participants in the preaching ministry of the Church.

In *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, the bishops of the United States summoned the Church to renew the ministry of preaching. In the document the bishops outline four major components of the homily, three broad classifications of preaching, and make a set of recommendations to improve preaching. Briefly, the four major components are the assembly (the community gathered to hear the preached Word), the preacher, the homily, and a method for homily preparation. It is important to note that the bishops begin their exploration of the three major components of preaching with the assembly. Their first words call preachers and hearers to recognize that the role of the hearers is vital to any homily. Implicitly, they suggest that hearers have a responsibility, as do preachers, to prepare for the homily. The hearers should listen to the homily with an ear for a Word from God that speaks to the reality of their lives. Unfortunately little has been done to educate parishioners to listen to homilies, that is, to build upon the basic principles of parish formation spoken of above.

The three kinds of preaching the bishops identify are pre-evangelization, evangelization, and catechetical. Pre-evangelical preaching strives to "…dispose the hearers to be open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[4] Essentially, pre-evangelical preaching speaks to those seeking faith or membership in the Church. Evangelical preaching is catalytic. It is "…preaching intended to bring the hearers to an inner conversion of heart."[5] Those who believe in Christ are evangelized. They are called to join their hearts and way of living more closely to Christ's. Finally, catechetical preaching is "…intended to instruct the faithful in matters of doctrine and morality."[6] Catechetical preaching instructs the faithful concerning Church teaching and Christian behavior. Another way of organizing these categories follows:

1. Pre-evangelical preaching introduces hearers to Christ and the Church.
2. Evangelical preaching deepens the faith of those who already believe in Christ and are members of a Church.
3. Catechetical preaching assists hearers to integrate the beliefs of the Church into their daily lives.

At the end of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, the bishops make recommendations to begin the process of renewal. Of the fourteen recommendations made, six of them focus on local parish communities. The second recommendation suggests the formation of groups to help preachers develop and evaluate their homilies.[7] Saint Meinrad's *With One Voice* helps bring this recommendation to fruition by creating preaching circles wherein preachers and hearers come together to assist one another in preparing for the preaching event and evaluating homilies recently preached. *With One Voice* will further the work of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, using the ancient spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*, as well as educating participants how to listen to the Word of God in its many forms of revelation, ultimately bridging the gap between preachers and hearers.

With One Voice

With One Voice is a parish-based program aimed at helping to bridge the gap between preachers and hearers, teaching them to listen to the Word of God as it speaks in Scripture and in the hearts and lives of the gathered preachers and hearers and in the broader community. *With One Voice* will establish preaching groups within parish or quasi-parish settings.[8] Each group will have four goals:

1. Learn to use *Lectio Divina* in a group setting as a tool for reflection on Scripture. The parish group learns this ancient spiritual practice and uses it in a practical way to bring about a better engagement with the homiletic process. *Lectio Divina* has the advantage of using a tool that is squarely within the Catholic tradition and thus provides spiritual and formation resources for other aspects of the development of Christian life.
2. Learn the Catholic understanding of what a homily is and does. The parish group participates in a review of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, especially the segments on the assembly, the homily and the preacher as the mediator of meaning. This process has the additional benefit of teaching parishioners the importance of consulting Church documents and understanding Church teaching directly from the sources.
3. Learn to listen and evaluate a homily. The groups will use Tom Long's "focus and function" to listen to and respond to homilies they hear, usually homilies preached in their parish. The groups learn to use a feedback form by which they inititate conversation with the preacher.[9]
4. Establish a cooperative relationship with preachers for the advancement of preaching. This goal creates a conversation model for reviewing previous homilies and looking forward to future homilies.

Participating in the listening groups involves two training sessions of 90 minutes each. The first session addresses goals one and two. The second session addresses goals three and four. At the end of the training, a facilitator helps the listening group establish an ongoing group by attending their first group meeting. After four to six meetings have passed, the facilitator checks in with the group to evaluate how the program has enhanced the ministry of preaching in their parish.

After the initial training, parishioners and preachers are prepared to establish preaching circles within local faith communities: parishes, campus settings, etc. These preaching circles consist of a preacher and members from his community. The work of these groups will be multi-faceted. They will spend time listening to the Word of God as it is revealed in Scripture, their lives and their community. After reflection upon God's Word, the community will share their insights and together identify a focus and function for the preacher's next homily. They will also review the homily from the previous Sunday, listening for the presence of their communal insights from their last meeting.

Parish communities are complex realities, as is the Word those communities represent. Saint Meinrad has prepared *With One Voice* as one tool to assist parishes in becoming more familiar with the Word of God through a more thorough participation in the reality of homiletics. It is also one way of realizing the ideal presented to us in the parable of the sower in Matthew's Gospel: "As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the Word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Very Rev. Denis Robinson, OSB, is president-rector of Saint Meinrad Seminary and assistant professor of systematic theology.

Endnotes

1. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987).
2. Fred Craddock. *Preaching.* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1985).
3. See Denis Robinson. "The Mother of Wisdom: Exploring the Parabolic Imperative in the Early Works of John Henry Newman." *Louvain Studies* 27:2 (2002): 153-170.
4. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1982), 26.
5. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, 26.
6. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, 26.
7. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, 44.
8. A quasi-parish setting refers to communities like campus settings, nursing homes, etc.
9. Tom Long. *The Witness of Preaching.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

Effective Preaching: What Catholics Want–A Project of the NCEA Seminary Department

Katherine Schmitt

As part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative, the NCEA Seminary Department set out to investigate what lay parishioners considered the characteristics of good preaching, and to develop resources based on those findings. We produced an instructional DVD with lesson plans for various audiences, and entitled our project "Effective Preaching: What Catholics Want." It is primarily intended for homiletics professors to use while teaching seminarians to preach, but we hope the DVD and lesson plans will be used by other groups to increase lay parishioner's knowledge of church teaching on preaching and what both preachers and parishioners say makes for a good homily.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Steering Committee

The first step we took after receiving the grant in June 2007 was to create a steering committee. Steering committee members included:

- **Brother Bernard F. Stratman, SM**, NCEA Seminary Department Executive Director, was the project manger from 2007- 2009, when he stepped down from his position at NCEA and moved to San Antonio.
- **Dr. Dean Hoge**, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Catholic University, was our lead researcher. Dr. Hoge died of stomach cancer in September 2008.
- **Ms. Jackie Wenger** of Pew Research is a former student of Dr. Hoge. She took over the role of researcher upon his death.
- **Rev. Jim Wallace, CSsR**, Professor of Homiletics, Washington Theological Union, was our primary consultant on preaching.
- **Rev. Bob Duggan**, a retired priest of the Washington Archdiocese, was a consultant on preaching. He is affiliated with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University.
- **Dr. Don McCrabb** was on the faculty of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC, and was a lay consultant for the project. Dr. McCrabb took a new job in June 2008 and dropped off the steering committee, but returned as writer of the lesson plans accompanying the DVD. He is now president of the Catholic Youth Foundation. USA.
- **Mr. Gonzo Accame** is the owner of Visual Edge Productions and was our DVD producer and technical advisor.
- **Ms. Katherine Schmitt, M.Div.,** is the Semi-

nary Department's administrative assistant and associate editor of the *Seminary Journal*. She provided office support, managed the project after Bro. Stratman stepped down and contributed a lay woman's perspective.

The Steering Committee met every other week for 18 months, starting in June 2007, discussing the details of how to achieve the goal of gathering information from laity and producing a DVD. Through much discussion and the sharing of diverse viewpoints, the group coalesced into a working team with a common vision for the project.

Research Strategy

Focus Groups – The research strategy included gathering information from lay people on what they thought made for good preaching. Dean Hoge, with the assistance of others, held three focus groups with lay people, one focus group with priests and one with homiletics professors.

Survey – A survey was developed with a list of 15 qualities of a homily that were culled from the statements of focus group members. Survey respondents were asked to evaluate their own preferences for preaching on a scale of one to five, with one being "very important to me" and five being "I don't want it." The survey was posted online and more than 400 people completed it. Dr. Hoge completed an analysis of these data shortly before he died.

Rating Scale – The rating scale was used by listeners to rate a homily on 11 characteristics, on a scale of one to five, with one being very poor and five being outstanding. Each of the eight homilists filmed were rated by their own congregations and by 40 off-site raters who watched the homily on DVD.

Producing the DVD

Filming Homilies – Steering committee members asked friends to name "good" preachers and a list of possible preachers was developed. From this list, seven priests and one lay man who was authorized to preach were selected to be filmed. An effort was made to find a culturally diverse group of priests who were solid, ordinary preachers, but not superstars. On the Second Sunday of Lent, 2008 (Year A), film crews set-up at Mass and filmed the homilies. Afterward, the priests were interviewed about how they put together a homily and what they think makes for good preaching. Several parishioners were briefly interviewed, as well.

Rating Homilies – A compilation of all eight homilies was made on DVD and mailed to forty raters around the country, who were paid $100 to watch and rate all eight preachers. These data were analyzed and compared to the data from the parishioners who heard the homily in person.

DVD – With the guidance of Gonzo Accame, our technical advisor and DVD producer, we wrote a script and secured Bill Plante, White House correspondent for CBS News, as narrator of the DVD. We selected snippets from the homilies, preacher interviews and parishioner interviews to illustrate our findings and to demonstrate what makes for good preaching. In addition, the DVD correlates our findings to the four sections of the USCCB document, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*. Six homilies in their entirety were selected for inclusion on the DVD; two homilies were left off due to space limitations on the DVD. Interviews with six homilists were also included.

Lesson Plans – After the DVD was created, Don McCrabb was contracted to develop lesson plans for various groups in the church. A lesson plan for use by seminarians and homiletics professors was always planned, but in the course of conversation the steering committee saw the need to educate parishioners about the church's understanding of preaching, as well. Lesson plans were developed for an adult faith formation group, high school class or youth group, homiletics class, liturgy committee, pastoral council, priest continuing education session and RCIA group.

Each of the lesson plans includes various documents, including an instruction sheet for the facilitator and a power-point presentation for teaching the lesson. Other documents include a summary of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* tailored for the intended audience, and a worksheet.

PROJECT FINDINGS

Survey Results – In our survey, we listed 15 characteristics of homilies which laypersons said they wanted, based on focus groups, and asked respondents to tell us if each was important or unimportant. The online survey was completed by 434 Catholic laity who were invited to participate by means of e-mails and newsletters of Catholic groups. These online respondents were relatively active in the Catholic Church, as shown by their comments – more than a quarter of participants wrote in comments. We have no further information about the online respondents, and we make no claim that this sample represents all Catholic laypersons. See

Appendix A for a copy of the survey. The survey is not copyrighted and may be freely used by interested persons.

Here are the 15 characteristics of good preaching listed in order of their importance.

	Percent saying "Very important to me"
The message is clear and well-organized	83
It holds my attention	81
It inspires me to examine my life	79
It has a message I can take away with me	78
It is applicable to my daily life	66
The delivery is personal and sincere	64
It helps me understand today's Scripture	60
It is uplifting and inspiring	52
It conveys one concise, clear message	47
It helps me understand the Church's teaching	45
It is the preacher's own genuine words	41
It prepares me for the Eucharist	41
It ties the readings to each other	21
It is directly relevant to my parish Community	19
It includes humor	15

The sample shows the top four priorities: the message is clear and well-organized, it holds my attention, it inspires me to examine my life, and it has a message I can take away with me. This finding is important information for homilists to know. They need to be sure their homilies are clear, compelling, pertinent to life and memorable.

Eight more characteristics fell into a mid-range in terms of their importance. 41% to 66% of respondents rated the following elements of a homily as "very important:"

- Applicable to daily life
- A personal and sincere delivery
- Helps listeners to understand today's Scripture
- Uplifting and inspiring
- Conveys one concise message
- Helps to understand the Church's teaching
- Uses the preacher's genuine words
- Prepares for the Eucharist

Three options came out lowest: it includes humor, it is directly relevant to my parish community, and it ties the readings to each other. The laypersons in this survey did not much care about them. The fact that humor came in last may indicate that parishioners are longing for relevant and clear homilies and do not want or expect to be entertained at mass.

Homily Rating Scale Results – Using the survey results, we developed a rating scale for homilies – see Appendix B. The rating scale is not copyrighted and may be freely used by interested persons. The rating scale was given to 40 parishioners for completion at the same Mass that was filmed. Later, a control group of 40 raters watched and evaluated all eight homilies. The raters were split almost evenly between men and women and between those under 40 years of age and 40-plus years of age.

Priests were generally given higher ratings by their own parishioners than by raters watching on DVD. In spite of this difference, both groups gave the homilies similar scores. Preachers who scored higher in parishioner ratings also scored higher among the raters watching them on DVD. This pattern was the same across all the questions on the rating form.

There were no significant differences in the ratings given by male and female raters or between older and younger raters. We did find, however, that the best-liked homilies were judged as being "about the right length" while the least-liked were judged "too long." These judgments persisted regardless of the actual length of the homily.

Conclusion

Lay parishioners have much to say about the Sunday homily. They greatly desire good homilies that are clear, compelling, pertinent to life and memorable. Generally, there is agreement between priests and people on good preaching, though parishioners are weak in knowledge on some characteristics that the church says should be present in each homily. For example, the church clearly teaches that the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist are connected – that the homily should lead to and prepare the people for reception of the Eucharist. This characteristic scored low in our survey. We hope that the use of the DVD and lesson plans will educate parishioners and preachers alike, so that indeed, the good word will be well preached.

Katherine Schmitt, MDiv, is associate editor of *Seminary Journal* and director of religious assessments for the NCEA Religious Education Department.

Appendix A

RATING FORM FOR HOMILY

Seminary Department, National Catholic Educational Association, 2008, Form FC

Parish, City, State _____ Age of rater: [ ] 18-39 [ ] 40-59 [ ] 60+

Date_____

Please rate the homily from 1 to 5 on the following dimensions. Circle one number. 1 is very poor and 5 is outstanding. If the dimension does not apply at all to this homily, circle NA ("Does not apply"), but use NA sparingly.

	Very Poor			Out-standing		Does Not Apply
SPIRITUAL VALUE						
1. Touched me spiritually	1	2	3	4	5	NA
2. Inspired me to examine my life	1	2	3	4	5	NA
3. Applicable to my daily life	1	2	3	4	5	NA
TEACHING VALUE						
4. Helped me understand the Church's teaching	1	2	3	4	5	NA
5. Helped me understand today's Scripture	1	2	3	4	5	NA
DELIVERY						
6. The message was clear and well-organized	1	2	3	4	5	NA
7. Held my attention	1	2	3	4	5	NA
8. Personal and sincere	1	2	3	4	5	NA
9. **OVERALL RATING: CONTENT**	1	2	3	4	5	
10. **OVERALL RATING: DELIVERY**	1	2	3	4	5	

11. Was it too short or too long?

[ ] Too short
[ ] Too long
[ ] About right

Comments and suggestions:

Appendix B

WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A GOOD HOMILY?

A Survey by Catholic University, Washington, DC

How important are the following elements in a homily, for it to be good? Circle a number from 1 to 5 on each line, telling about <u>your own</u> attitude.

1 = Very important to me
2 = Somewhat important to me
3 = Slightly important to me
4 = Unimportant or optional
5 = I don't want it

a. The message is clear and well-organized	1 2 3 4 5
b. It holds my attention	1 2 3 4 5
c. It inspires me to examine my life	1 2 3 4 5
d. It is applicable to my daily life	1 2 3 4 5
e. It helps me understand the Church's teaching	1 2 3 4 5
f. It helps me understand today's Scripture	1 2 3 4 5
g. It ties the readings to each other	1 2 3 4 5
h. It is uplifting and inspiring	1 2 3 4 5
i. The delivery is personal and sincere	1 2 3 4 5
j. It prepares me for the Eucharist	1 2 3 4 5
k. It includes humor	1 2 3 4 5
l. It conveys one concise, clear message	1 2 3 4 5
m. It has a message I can take away with me	1 2 3 4 5
n. It is the preacher's own genuine words	1 2 3 4 5
o. It is directly relevant to my parish community	1 2 3 4 5
p. Other _____	1 2 3 4 5

Nourishing the Heart of Dominican Life: The Formation of Young Preachers in the First Years of Ministry

Gregory Heille, O.P.

The four Dominican Provinces in the United States have a longstanding tradition of convening friars in the first five years of ministry. This Dominican Integrative Gathering, referred to among the friars as DIG, is hosted each summer in either the home province, or as an interprovincial gathering. As young friars begin their first five years of ministry in the Order, DIG provides them time each year to integrate their years of initial formation with their experience in ministry. These gatherings offer Dominican friars who are new to the ministry an incentive for continuing lifelong ministerial formation and a venue for mutual camaraderie and support.

In June 2008, the Dominican Central Province hosted an interprovincial Dominican Integrative Gathering in Albuquerque under the auspices of a grant from an anonymous foundation and part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" program. Michael Demkovich, O.P., the Provincial Promoter of Continuing Formation, invited Gregory Heille, O.P., from Aquinas Institute of Theology, to do theological reflection with twenty-five DIG participants on the topic of the Gospel actualization of the listening community through the Ministry of the Word as exercised in catechesis, pastoral care, action for justice, and liturgical preaching. Fr. Demkovich reflected on the homilist as teacher of the faith. Fr. Allan White, O.P., Provincial of the Province of England, discussed preaching as a support to growth in virtue on the part of listeners. Junior friars also met with their respective Promoters, those responsible for life-long formation, for evening mentoring groups about preaching in the context of Dominican community life, pastoral ministry, and church and society.

The four Dominican Provinces in the United States have a longstanding tradition of convening friars in the first five years of ministry.

During the following year, the Dominican Central and Southern Provinces (the provinces of Saint Albert the Great centered in Chicago and Saint Martin de Porres based in New Orleans) undertook a joint venture in initial formation of their student brothers—living and studying together in Saint Louis at Saint Dominic Priory and at Aquinas Institute of Theology. Thanks to this collaboration and to the encouragement of "To Preach the Good News Well," the two Provinces also agreed to jointly sponsor Dominican Integrative Gatherings in 2009 and 2010 in order to promote interprovincial collaboration toward continuing formation in the preaching ministry.

In July 2009, twenty-five participants gathered at Aquinas Institute of Theology for a week-long study with theologian Donald Goergen, O.P., on "Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Interpreting the Word of God." Several probing questions were explored: How did Jesus as a preacher use a biblical text? What is the role of the

The genius of the event was the mentorship dialogue across generations between junior and senior priests—an idea the participants would heartily endorse for a continuing formation event in any diocese or religious congregation.

Holy Spirit in interpretation and preaching? How can biblical preaching be ecclesially, socially and professionally responsible? What are the roles of contemplation and community? How does one's worldview or the worldviews of those to whom we preach affect the Word of God? Afternoons during that same week were given to skill-building preaching workshops led by Aquinas Institute professors Daniel Harris, C.M., and Gregory Heille, O.P.

Unquestionably, the high point of these "Nourishing the Heart of Dominican Life" summers was the June 2010 DIG on "Preaching for Generations" given at King's House Retreat Center in Belleville, Illinois. In this intimate weeklong gathering of twenty-two participants from the Southern and Central Provinces, each junior-ordained friar invited a priest ordained fifteen years or more to participate as a mentoring dialogue partner. For many priests, there have been senior priests who helped form them in their first years of ministry. The dyad model presented a chance to spend time engaging priesthood and preaching as brother priests of different ages. Ample time was given to engaging each other in dialogue and in relaxation (including an evening excursion to the Fox Theatre in Saint Louis for *Wicked.*)

Each day a substantive topic was addressed under the guidance of one of the mentor priests, and each presentation included one-on-one mentorship dialogue in dyads, followed by large group sharing and dialogue. Fr. Seán Charles Martin, a priest of the Diocese of Dallas and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Aquinas Institute of Theology, led the first reflection on preaching the lectionary across generational boundaries. The readings that end the liturgical year—Matthew's sermons, Mark's instructions, and Luke's narratives (roughly Week 20 on)—and the readings for Advent present challenging themes for preaching across generational boundaries. Young and old meet their inmost self in these Scriptures. The DIG participants explored these themes with a sense of preaching to a multi-generational Church.

Building upon these initial reflections in the following days, Andrew-Carl Wisdom, O.P., Promoter of Vocations for the Central Province, discussed research from his book *Preaching to a Multi-Generational Assembly* (Liturgical Press, 2004). Robert Perry, O.P., Promoter of Permanent Formation for the Southern Province, reflected upon dimensions of generational experience and meaning. Michael Demkovich, O.P., Promoter of Continuing Formation for the Central Province, engaged reflection on being priests today and tomorrow, and Gregory Heille, O.P., Vice President of Aquinas Institute of Theology, led a concluding reflection on inter-generational leadership as preachers.

The genius of the event was the mentorship dialogue across generations between junior and senior priests—an idea the participants would heartily endorse for a continuing formation event in any diocese or religious congregation. Because each junior priest had invited a more senior mentor priest as a dialogue partner, this implicit act of honoring set a positive and appreciative tone and led to profound reflection in mentorship dyads, in Province groups, and in the large group about the intergenerational quality of one's ministerial life as a preacher. At a concluding breakfast, participants agreed unanimously that this cross-generational mentorship dialogue about substantive topics pertinent to preaching was one of the most powerful experiences of their Dominican lives. Through shared experience and inspiration as brothers and as preachers across generations, the power of collaboration of the two Provinces reached far beyond this joint venture for initial formation in Saint Louis. Thanks to "To Preach the Good Word Well," a required annual event for junior friars became a grace-filled building block of intergenerational collaboration in preaching for two Dominican Provinces.

Father Gregory Heille, O.P., is professor of homiletics and academic dean at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri.

Unmet Needs in Catholic Preaching: A Project of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Deacon David J. Shea

Among the many questions that we preachers have on the content of our Sunday homilies and the quality of our preaching are: How important is my homily to my parishioners' experiences of Mass and the Eucharist? What is the relationship between the quality of my homily and Mass attendance? Are parishioners listening to my homilies and what impact is my preaching having on their lives? What are the many different ways that my homilies are being received each weekend—what are people really hearing?

Few preachers receive meaningful assessment of their preaching. The majority of us are left with passing comments as we greet parishioners in the vestibule following Mass. Some of us receive occasional emails with more extensive comments of affirmation, criticism or complaint, particularly when the subjects of our homilies hit close to home, touch a nerve or open up an old wound. While certain preachers have made impressive commitments to meeting with parishioners to discuss the Sunday Lectionary readings and receive feedback on their homilies, it is becoming increasingly difficult for a priest or pastor to clear his calendar on a given day and take the time and patience to make homily meetings a priority. It's not that they don't produce valuable results, quite the contrary: those who participate in these feedback groups give them high praise and refer to them as great experiences. For many, though, there simply is not time. It may seem harsh, but most of us tend to preach in a vacuum where we are forced to assess our own preaching and draw conclusions using the few tidbits of input that we only casually and informally receive. We preach without the benefit of concrete feedback that could make a radical difference in what and how we preach.

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The "Unmet Needs Assessment of Preaching from the Congregation's Point of View" was conducted over a three-year period–2008 thru 2010–by the Athenaeum of Ohio-Mount St. Mary's Seminary in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. This project was funded by a grant from a Catholic foundation as part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative. The objective of the three-phase study was to obtain *hard data* on what parishioners wanted in the homily and in the preacher, what they received, how they evaluated what they received, and what was missing.

The **first phase** of the study was a comprehensive survey on Catholic preaching from 805 Catholics across the archdiocese to determine unmet needs. In the **second phase**, conducted in 2009, critical issues identified in the preaching survey were examined at a much greater depth through a series of focus groups. These critical issues fell into four distinct categories – *Inspiration*, *Motivation*, *Clarity* and *Relevance*. The **third phase** took an extensive look at the preferences and assessments of teenagers. All of the research conducted during the first

two phases of the study was targeted at adult Catholics, parishioners age 18 and over.

Phase 1 – What Parishioners *Want* From a Homily

The **first phase** of this study began with a series of focus groups. The focus groups engaged more than 50 Catholics on their understanding of the purpose of the homily, what subjects should be addressed, and their expected outcomes. These focus groups produced 63 attributes for the homily. A group of 805 Catholic respondents then rated the attributes as to their importance and provided an assessment on how well they believed the typical Sunday homily delivers on each attribute.[1] Some of the key findings of the survey included:

Parishioners felt that the desired performance levels of the typical homily included such parameters as: the homily delivers a clear message, speaks to you on your level, is thought-provoking and relates the Gospel to daily living.

Parishioners also indicated that the desired performance levels related to how the homily is preached, including: showing respect for the congregation, being well-prepared, practicing what is preached, and several other parameters that fall under the category of verbal and non-verbal skills.

Parishioners felt that the homily is most seriously lacking in key or critical areas relating to being *inspirational*, *motivational*, *clear*, and *relevant*.

Other areas where parishioners indicated that their expectations were not being met included being moved to action, being impacted at an affective level, and receiving new insights on the Scriptures and Church teachings. Over half of those interviewed said they want the homily to include instruction on Catholic teachings, morality and social issues.

One vital parameter and expectation for the Sunday homily is that it should help parishioners to build a personal relationship with Christ. As important and as primary as this expectation is, this is one area where the homily is failing to meet parishioner's needs.

In terms of homily length, few people said they want a homily that's shorter than 4 minutes, and few want a homily that lasts over 11 minutes. The "ideal" homily, according to parishioners, is just short of 8 minutes long. However, many said that if the homily is engaging and relevant, the length becomes unimportant.

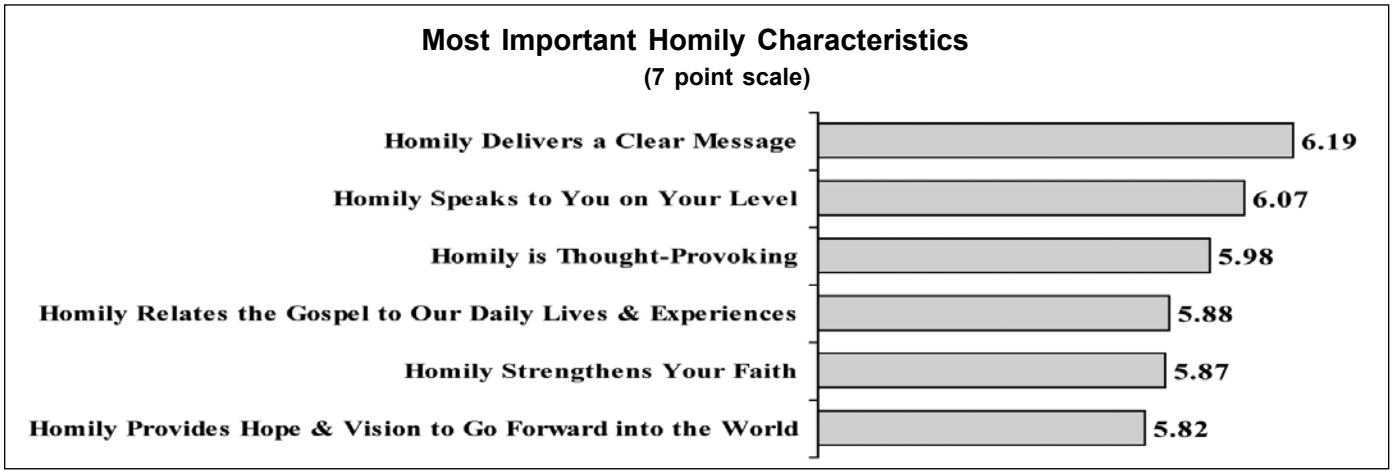
Parishioners reported that they want a homily that includes humor, not in the form of jokes or anecdotes, but the "natural humor" found in the everyday experiences of life. There is also a strong preference for the preacher's personal stories and for stories about the joys, hardships, and tragedies of real people. From the standpoint of homily content and impact, parishioners want a homily that delivers a clear message, speaks to the congregation on their own level, is thought-provoking and relates the gospel to daily life.

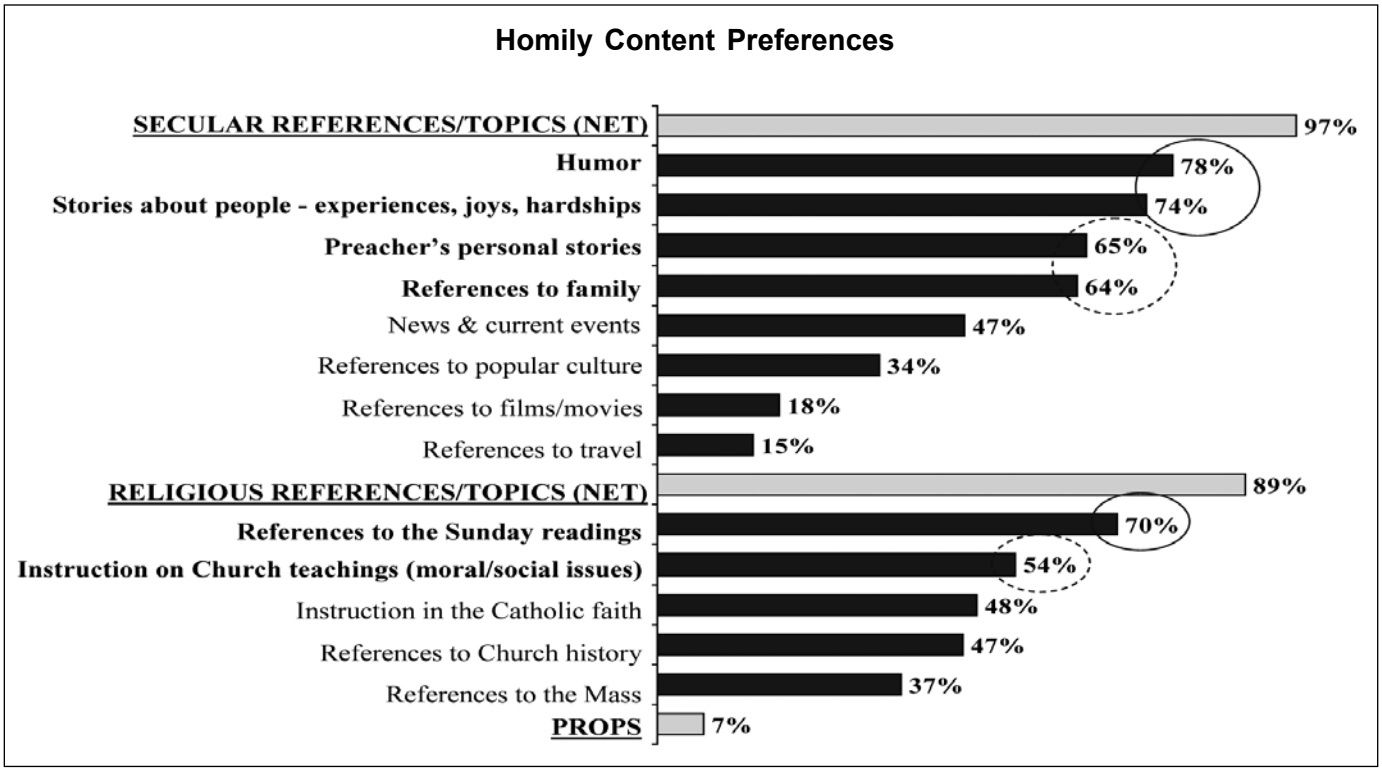
As to the preacher himself, parishioners wish to see respect for the congregation, that the preacher is well-prepared, and that he lives what he preaches.

What Parishioners *Get* From a Homily

Parishioners were asked to evaluate the importance of a specific aspect of the Sunday homily and then to express, in their experience, how well that aspect was being provided. The greatest differences between what parishioners want and what is preached were seen in the deliverance of a clear message, if the preacher draws you into the homily, and if the homily touches you deeply.

Interestingly, there are particular attributes where





parishioners reported getting *more* than they want. In the areas of predictability, disclosure of the preacher's personal beliefs, and disclosure of how the preacher lives his faith, parishioners reported getting "too much of a good thing."

Being told what and how to think, and traditional ways of thinking were attributes where the congregation wants to hear considerably less than is currently being preached in Sunday homilies.

The first phase of the study also identified the critical issues that are extremely important to parishioners and where the Sunday homily is consistently deficient.

Category	*Critical Issue*
"Inspiration"	• *Preacher draws me into the homily*
	• *The homily touches me deeply*
	• *The homily is thought provoking*
	• *The homily strengthens my faith*
"Motivation"	• *The homily provides hope and vision to go forward into the world*
	• *The homily makes a difference in my life*
	• *The homily helps me build a personal relationship with Christ*
	• *The homily gives me something to work on in the coming week*
"Clarity"	• *The homily delivers a clear message*
	• *The homily speaks to me on my level*
"Relevance"	• *The Preacher understands my daily life*
	• *The homily relates the gospel to my daily life and experiences*

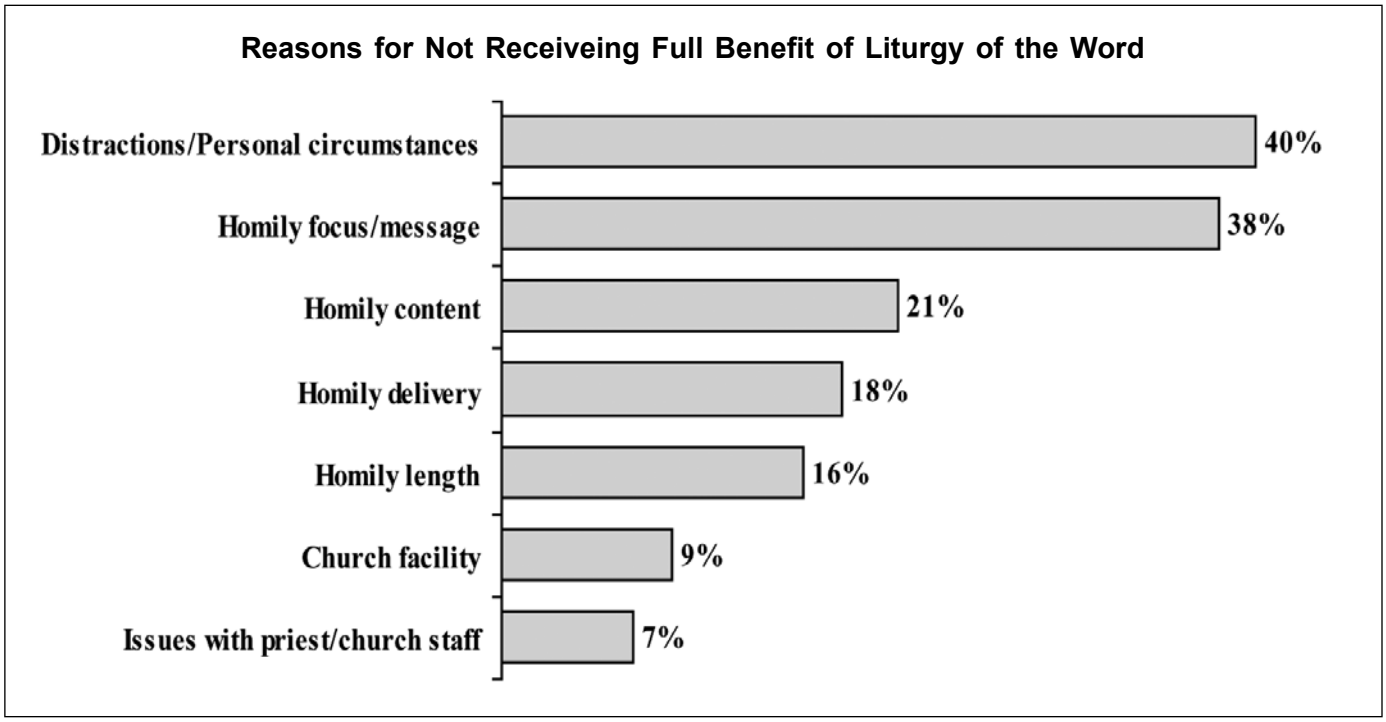
These critical issues fall into four distinct categories – *Inspiration*, *Motivation*, *Clarity* and *Relevance*:

The preaching survey also identified a second tier of critical issues, those that are not as important and deficient. In these categories, parishioners do not believe homilies are meeting expectations with respect to moving them to action, affecting them deeply and spiritually, and providing new insights about the Scriptures and Church teachings.

Obstacles and Distractions

Catholics were asked to identify the factors that both distract them and even prevent them from receiving the full benefit of the Liturgy of the Word. Cited at relatively high levels were issues surrounding the relevance of the homily message as well as the preacher's oratory skills. Parishioners also acknowledge that distractions can cause them to be inattentive. Specifically:

More than half cite homily content issues including not being relevant to daily life/today's world, unfocused/not on a single topic, not connecting to the day's readings, and simply being too boring or repetitious.



An additional three in ten mentioned issues relating to how the homily is preached, or its delivery style. People cited such issues as using a monotone voice, reading the homily, poor enunciation, not connecting with the congregation, and using a condescending tone.

Rating the Quality of Preaching in the Local Parish

Respondents were asked for their ratings on the overall quality of the preaching in their local parishes. Parishioners were given a 7-point scale, where 7 indicated "well above average" and 1 indicated "well below average." Thirteen percent (13%) rated the preaching in their parish at 7 or "well above average," with another 29% rating preaching at 6. Respondents who did not graduate from college were more positive in their evaluations than were college graduates.

More than half of those interviewed said they want the homily to have a catechetical orientation addressing Church teaching on everyday moral and social issues so that they may better live their Catholic faith. Parishioners also want a homily that delivers a clear message, speaks to the congregation on their own level, is thought-provoking and relates the Gospel to daily life.

As to the preacher himself, parishioners want to see respect for the congregation, that the preacher is well-prepared, and that he lives what he preaches.

Phase 2 – Focus Groups Yield Understanding of Critical Issues

The second phase of the study attempted to reach an understanding of the critical issues in the Sunday homily, areas parishioners feel are most lacking. Unlike the first phase of the research which was fundamentally quantitative in nature, this segment of the study used focus groups in thorough conversations on the Sunday homily to yield qualitative results. In the focus groups, the moderator led a guided discussion on one of the four Critical Issues. Overall, people came ready to work, bringing to the focus groups strong feelings and clear convictions on Catholic preaching. During the discussion, using their completed homework assignments, participants defined and expanded upon their experiences of those homiletic issues which they observed in their own parishes. For example, when is a homily *Inspirational*? How does a preacher develop a homily that is *Inspirational*? What are the characteristics of an *Inspirational* homily? How can we teach future homilists to develop *Inspirational* homilies? Without detailed answers to these questions the identification of *Inspiration* as critical homily attribute is of little value.

What People Want Most in the Sunday Homily

As a form of an ice breaker exercise, each focus group began with the question, "What do you most want to get from a Sunday homily?" Responses covered

a considerable set of expectations ranging from teaching on the Catholic faith, to receiving a tangible and concrete message they could recall after they leave Mass, to a focused and brief homily on a single point, to something that they are inspired to discuss with others. A frequently mentioned hope for the Sunday homily was a relevant interpretation of the scriptures of the day with a tangible connection with their daily lives.

Expectations of the Homilist

Many participants expressed their hopes for the homily by referring to the homilist. Specific knowledge of what is happening in the lives of parishioners was often cited as an essential measurement of an effective homilist. The use of a natural and conversational style of delivery was mentioned as a real value of the Sunday homily, one that enables the preacher to disclose his feelings, emotions, doubts, concerns and struggles, and one that helps parishioners to relate to him and to his message.

Another important preacher-related attribute was that of fundamental public-speaking skills. A number of people stressed that it is important to be able to clearly hear and understand what the homilist is saying, and that oftentimes this is an obstacle to an effective homily. Some of the older participants went even further by indicating that if they can hear the homily, then it is a good homily, underscoring the importance of such things as volume, projection, articulation, and inflection.

Understanding the Critical Issues

Clarity was defined as being directly related to how a homily is organized, developed and preached. Decisions that the homilist makes pertaining to strategy and use of form and story are all variables that are part of structure. Such parameters as unity, single subject, focus, and simplicity were words that people used to describe clarity, as were relevance and applicability to the lives of the congregation. Interestingly, in attempting to define *Clarity*, people often used the word "relevance," suggesting the strong and direct connection between the two critical issues.

Relevance was explained as the homilist's use of images and symbols that help the congregation to understand what is being preached. Such things as images that truly connect, the use of visual words and descriptive language, and the incorporation of multiple examples and illustrations related to the challenges that people are confronting every day, were cited as good measures of *Relevance* in a homily.

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If *Clarity* and *Relevance* were straightforward and easier to define, *Inspiration* and *Motivation* were far more challenging for the participants to explain. Where *Clarity* and *Relevance* are more concrete and tangible, *Inspiration* and *Motivation* were more elusive and abstract. People tended to describe *Inspiration* and *Motivation* in very similar ways, suggesting that there is little difference between the two. It was obvious that people searched longer and harder for ways to articulate their experiences of *Inspiration* in a homily. The use of clear and unambiguous language, the preaching of the truth, topical in nature, concise, and the use of multiple examples to underscore a point were some of the ways they described *Inspiration*. It seemed easier for people to describe their reactions to an *Inspirational* homily than it was to explain concretely what it was—"I pay attention;" "I remember what was said;" "I am excited about sharing it;" "I think about it during the week."

Motivation was described in varied and diverse ways, and was frequently expressed in action statements. Participants told us that they *act* in response to a *Motivational* homily. A *Motivational* homily is one that has an emotional appeal and results in a change of heart and one that makes a tangible connection with the Scriptures and the lives of the congregants. A good deal of what participants had to say about *Motivation* had to do with the homilist—when he is obviously and genuinely passionate, when he preaches out of his personal convictions, when he is decisive and delivers with authority, and when he is excited and "sweeps-up" the assembly in that excitement.

Third Phase of Research—Unmet Needs Among Teenagers

During the first phases of this research, parents who participated in focus groups repeatedly stressed their concerns about the impact that poor homilies and ineffective preaching was having on their children, particularly on their teenagers, stating "That's the generation you should be most concerned about in the pulpit." Parents expressed frustration and anxiety about the lack of inspiration that their teenagers were receiving in Sunday preaching and how that is translating into a general lack of desire to go to Mass. All of the research conducted during the first phases of study was targeted at adult Catholics, parishioners age 18 and over, essentially overlooking an entire segment of the Catholic population, a segment that is already experiencing a feeling of being disconnected from their religion. Preaching to teenagers in a meaningful and engaging manner poses special challenges that are unique from the challenges of preaching to adults. If few teens are finding meaning and value in Sunday worship, to what extent does preaching contribute to the crisis?

With this in mind, the third and final phase of primary research on the Sunday homily encompassed an in-depth examination of the preaching or homily expectations of teens, and how well those expectations are being met. This phase of the study determined the *unmet needs* of teenagers while also defining their unique needs, how closely those unmet needs parallel those of parishioners in general, and how preachers can accommodate the differences when preaching to the teens in their congregations.

What Teens Like Most in the Sunday Homily

During the preliminary focus groups, teens spoke with confidence and conviction about the Sunday homily and exhibited evidence of strong feelings and clear preferences. Much like adults, teens want to hear stories connecting the Gospel to real life and they want the homilist to shed light on current events with the message of the Gospel. They strongly prefer that the homily bring and explain perspectives about the Scriptures they've never heard before. They like it when the preacher is energetic, and stressed that when this happens, it has a direct and tangible impact on the congregation, commenting that "It shows that the preacher really believes what he is saying and it helps us to believe it too," and "I love it when the preacher makes it personal; it shows he's human, that he has faults too." Teenagers also outlined style parameters for the preacher, preferring "When he's looking at you and talking to you personally and asking thought-provoking questions that force you to look at your life instead of just standing in the pulpit."

Teens stressed the value of a homily ending with an impactful and challenging question,"A question that leaves us thinking, asking more of us while giving us something to do to make the homily active outside of Mass, because the Mass and the Eucharist are about what you do in the world."

There was value placed on *where* the homily was preached. Teens asked the preacher to frequently leave the ambo, stating that "When the preacher moves away from the pulpit and is near to us instead of 'up there,' it's more personal and it feels like he's coming down to our level. That's really engaging and it's almost like he's putting us on the spot."

What Teens *Dislike* in the Sunday Homily

The absence of clarity and unity were the first things that teens mentioned as *disliking* in a homily. Homily structure and organization were also criticized, such as "When it is too long and not going anywhere; when the point is made and the same point rehashed," or "Multiple endings and talking in circles; when it is obvious that the preacher has run out of material." Oral presentation and delivery skills of the homilist were often emphasized; teens noted the examples of "When there's an absence of basic vocal skills and you can neither hear nor understand what is being preached; when the voice of the preacher trails off," and "When there's too much repetition and relevancy is a stretch." The demeanor and composure of the homilist were also placed in the category of *dislikes* in the Sunday homily, such as "When he is not confident in what he's saying. When he's staring at the text and hunched over the pulpit. When this happens, it distracts us and we shift all of our focus to the preacher instead of on what he's saying. It even makes you feel uncomfortable."

Finally, teens mentioned the lack of sufficient respect for them and other members of the Sunday assembly. Adults mentioned this same issue, so it appears to be a general problem. This frequently takes the form of an attitude on the part of the preacher of not giving credit for what the teens know and live. Moreover, since teens spend so much time in the classroom, the last thing they want to hear on Sunday is a history lesson, commenting that "We get enough of that at school."

The inputs from the focus groups enabled us to revise and fine tune the original adult survey instrument for use with teens.

Teen Homily Ratings and Preferences

Catholic teens reported moderately favorable perceptions of the typical Sunday homily and preaching. The mean rating given for overall quality of homilies was 4.9 (on a 7-point scale) and the overall rating on the quality of preaching was 4.8 on the same scale. Similar to adults, teens who attend Mass regularly give significantly higher ratings than do those who attend infrequently. However, there is a tendency for both the homily and preaching ratings to decline as students progress to upper grade levels.

Not surprisingly, teens indicate a preference for homilies that entertain and engage them. Specifically, they like homilies that contain *Humor* (even more so than adults) and *Stories*, and they also indicate a liking for the use of props. Additionally, teens enjoy homilies they can relate to, wanting to hear references to *News & current events, Films & movies,* and *Popular culture*, the latter two topics at much higher levels than adults.

Another area where both teens and adults share concern is the treatment of religious topics in the homily. Both want to hear Church teachings on social and moral issues, and instruction in the Catholic faith. However, especially for the teens, these tend to be subordinate to secular topics in terms of homily preferences.

When asked to indicate the ideal homily length, teens indicated that the average should be about 7 minutes, just slightly shorter than the adult average of 7.5 minutes.

Critical Issues for Teens

The homily issues that emerge as most critical, where the homily is judged to be most seriously lacking to teens, is in the area of *gaining and keeping attention*. These crucial attributes are:

Crucial & Most Seriously Lacking Homily Attribute
Entertaining Experience
Uses Humor from Real Life
Delivers a Clear Message

The remaining critical issues relate to homilies not being perceived as *relevant*, *interesting*, *thought-provoking*, *inspirational,* or *motivating*, and to the preacher not meeting expectations with respect to showing his *humanity* and being *authentic*.

Other Critical Issues With Lower Deficiencies Homily Attribute
Relates Gospel to Daily Lives
Connects Gospel to Real Life
Relates Current Events to Gospel
Understands Your Daily Lives
Preaching is Speaking Directly to You
Speaks to You on Your Level
Gives Credit for What You Already Know

Secondary issues are those attributes that teens perceived to be *less important* but for which there are relatively high perceptions of deficiencies.

Lesser Importance & High Deficiencies Homily Attribute
Gives You New Perspectives on Scripture
Ends with a Profound Question
Open-Ended
Comes Down into the Congregation

There are certain other attributes that are classified as lesser strengths, by virtue of their lower *deficiency* scores, but which teens judge to exceed their expectations. As was the case with adults, these are the homily characteristics on which preachers are over-delivering.

Lesser Strengths & Lower Deficiencies Homily Attribute
Unfocused/Not Going Anywhere
Reads His Homily
Point is Made Again and Again
Preaching Instead of Talking
He Is the Teacher and We Are the Pupils
Tell Me What & How to Think
Reveals What He Believes

Teens believe that there is a need for more *clear*, *relevant*, *inspirational*, and *motivational* homilies. However, in a tradition that hasn't placed a high value on the presentation aspects of preaching, teens pose a unique challenge. The biggest difference between adults

and teens is that teens express a much stronger need to be *entertained* and *engaged* during a homily, reflecting to a certain extent teens' attitude towards life in general—they multi-task throughout the day, rarely devoting exclusive focus and energy to a single task, and when one activity doesn't fully engage them, they shift to another task, another conversation, another text message, another selection of music, oftentimes utilizing many at the same time. Keeping them engaged in a homily necessitates that a homilist use a dynamic preaching style, including, where appropriate, the use of props and moving down into the congregation. The homily has to be spiced with humor and stories, not simply for the sake of entertainment, but to help make, illustrate and reinforce its central idea. Teens, it would appear, bring a remote control with them to Mass and when the homily is boring and irrelevant, they change channels or simply push the off button.

Finally, while adults desire homilies that do a better job of leading them to *new insights* on the Gospel and Church teachings, teens indicate an aversion to preaching that is overly didactic. Since it would be difficult to inspire and motivate *without* educating parishioners about the Word, preachers must walk a fine line between being informative and insightful versus pedantic and boring.

Conclusions and Implications

After three years of primary research on the Sunday homily, consisting of 1,728 completed written surveys, 20 focus groups covering 180 participants and more than 38 hours of probative conversations, it is unambiguous that Catholics—both adults and teens alike—care deeply about the Sunday homily. They have a well-defined understanding of what they are seeking in a homily and they have especially strong assessments on what they are currently hearing. While they haven't studied homiletics in a seminary classroom, they have concise preferences for what constitutes an effective homily, and while those preferences do not always line-up with the academic guidelines for an inductive homily, we would do well to take their inputs into serious consideration. Finally, if we are searching for the motivation and incentive to devote hours each week to developing and writing our first Sunday homily or our thousandth Sunday homily, the results from these studies should *re-inform* our preaching and perhaps even take it into new directions. Our homilies *can* make a significant difference in the lives of our parishioners, but meeting their expectations is far more challenging than we ever thought.[2]

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The implications of the study are consequential. The data have to be publicized and placed in the hands of as many Catholic preachers as possible. It also has to be used in the homiletics courses taught to both seminarians and permanent deacons in an effort to build a convincing case that the time and effort required to develop and prepare an effective homily is worth it. Moreover, the curriculum of homiletics courses has to address how homilies can be written to effectively address the critical issues of *clarity, relevance, inspiration, and motivation*; in other words, the fundamental differences between a good and a bad homily.

The importance of preaching style and the development of public speaking skills, frequently treated as secondary issues in seminary formation, are now clearly an imperative. The content of oral interpretation and proclamation courses needs to be reevaluated, and greater time and importance placed on them. Our parishioners no longer have any tolerance, nor should they, for poor homily delivery. Despite the imposing oratorical demands of the ministry of preaching, the Church attracts the vocally gifted, the eloquent and the charismatic, as well as the soft spoken and the vocally challenged. Certain students need more help than others; as such, formators need to make more careful assessments of what they need, and be prepared to employ the skills of voice coaches and other professionals who are not usually part of our seminary faculties.

There is also the challenge of forming commitments to organize regular homily planning and feedback sessions with staff and parishioners. While working with parish groups is a required aspect of many advanced preaching courses in the seminary, and students claim to have favorable experiences in these sessions, few priests or pastors make such disciplines a priority once they are ordained.

The opportunities for future research could include measuring the impact and response to homilies that are inspirational, motivational, clear, and relevant and ones that generally address the congregation's unmet needs. A group of preachers could be recruited to participate in a special program where they would be trained using the research data and taught approaches for writing homilies closely paralleling the inputs of parishioners, particularly in the critical areas. Similarly, groups of parishioners from the parishes of the preachers could also be recruited and work with facilitators evaluating the homilies and preaching of their communities before and after the special training program. Data, impressions and other measurements could be obtained through careful interviews and feedback sessions with parishioner groups, both with and without the participation of the preachers. A before and after comparison could then be developed and used as a powerful classroom tool and as the subject of a book, *Unfulfilled in Their Hearing: Critical Issues in the Sunday Homily*.[2]

Deacon David J. Shea is a permanent deacon at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Anderson in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and is Assistant Professor of Homiletics at the Athenaeum of Ohio—Mount St. Mary's Seminary.

Endnotes

1 StrataMark Dynamic Solutions is a full-service marketing research firm located in Cincinnati, Ohio, specializing in custom research solutions that generate actionable insights. For this study, StrataMark was responsible for designing the research approach, implementing the data collection and for the statistical analysis of the results.

2 A booklet, *Unfulfilled in Their Hearing: Critical Issues in the Sunday Homily,* outlining the findings and results of the research on the Unmet Needs in the Sunday Homily, was written by Deacon David Shea, the author of this article, and is available from St. Anthony Messenger Press: http://catalog.americancatholic.org/product.aspx?prodid=B16996&pcat=213.

Appendix

Methodology

Phase 1 – A Survey

The goal of this first study was to identify the "unmet needs" parishioners are looking for in a Sunday homily. An email link to a survey, in the form of an electronic invitation, was sent to adults who had identified themselves as Catholics and who had indicated a willingness to participate as members of a consumer sample panel. Participants also had to reside in the 19-county area defining the Archdiocese of Cincinnati while volunteering that they attended Mass *regularly*. The online survey explored both the tactical aspects of the Sunday homily as well as parishioners' desires for the homily. The homily attributes were then rated to determine how important each was to the overall success of a homily, and how well performance lined up with importance. The magnitude of difference between the importance of an attribute and the performance rating was defined as an "unmet need."

Phase 2 – Small Groups

Participants from across the Archdiocese of Cincinnati were randomly selected based upon specific, yet somewhat different, criteria than was used in the first phase of the study. The change was in the area of Mass frequency. For this segment of the study, it was decided that qualified parishioners attend Mass at least twice each month versus only 5 to 6 times a year. In recruiting and choosing the small group participants, the following criteria were utilized:

- 18 years of age or older, to include an age distribution through 70+
- Consider themselves to be Catholic
- Attend Sunday Mass at least *twice a month*
- Resident of the Archdiocese for at least 1 year

The focus groups were held on different days and at different times in order to include both working and non-working men and women, younger and older parishioners, and individuals representing a variety of demographic segments. Twelve focus group sessions were held, three for each of the four categories of Critical Issues.

Participants were given a homework assignment in advance of the sessions and were asked to consider the assigned critical issue and develop a definition of that issue. They were provided with a set of index cards to document their thoughts and ideas and many brought those cards with them to Mass to make notes and record impressions as they listened to Sunday homilies. The guidelines for the assignments suggested that parishioners chronicle all of their thoughts and reflections on the issue—clues, images, words, illustrations, examples, methods of preaching, and anything else that would help them to describe the critical issue.

Each focus group met for two hours and addressed *one* of the critical issues. There was a high level of participation—100% of those recruited for the focus groups showed-up—and participants were not paid for their involvement and many incurred expenses in attending.

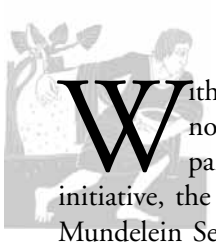
Phase 3 – Teens

Since the fundamental approach was to utilize the adult survey as the basis of a revised teen survey document, the starting point for this study was a series of focus groups to ensure that the homily attributes included in the adult survey were relevant and meaningful to teens. Three focus groups were held with Catholic high school students of different grade levels and the findings were used to fine-tune the questionnaire. The focus groups were lively and engaging and teens spoke with confidence and conviction about the Sunday homily. They exhibited evidence of strong feelings and clear preferences.

Catholic teens throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati were asked to participate in the research. Six Catholic high schools, representing 27% of the Catholic high schools, and four Parish Youth Ministry Groups (with students from an additional 9 Catholic high schools), in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati participated in the study. Invitations were issued to 50 students per grade level from each school and to 25 teens from each Parish Youth Ministry group. Both online surveys and self-administered paper surveys were utilized. Interviewing was conducted over a five-week period in the early spring 2010 timeframe. In total, 923 surveys of Catholic Teens were collected and tabulated.

Creating a State of the Art Homiletics Lab at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary

Reverend Daniel Siwek, M.Div., S.T.L.
Mark J. Teresi



With the assistance of a gift from a private donor and a grant from a Catholic foundation, part of the "To Preach the Good Word Well" initiative, the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/ Mundelein Seminary was able to design and build its first technically savvy and fully equipped homiletics lab to service seminarians, deacons and lay ministers housed on our campus.

Father Dan Siwek, chief designer of the space and instructor in the departments of Biblical Exegesis and Proclamation and Pre-theology, shared his thinking on the benefits of this resource for the seminary with interviewer Mark Teresi.

The University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary was able to design and build its first technically savvy and fully equipped homiletics lab to service seminarians, deacons and lay ministers housed on our campus.

Tell me a little about the seminary.

Mundelein Seminary holds the oldest university charter in Chicago, dating back to 1844. The seminary has trained thousands of priests and preachers for the Archdiocese of Chicago, and during the past two decades has expanded that training to more than 40 dioceses nationally and internationally.

Some famous churchmen who first learned scripture and the art of preaching at this great seminary are: Cardinal Edward Egan (retired Archbishop of New York); Archbishop John Vlazny (Archbishop of Portland); Archbishop Jerome Listecki (Archbishop of Milwaukee); Father Robert Barron (founder of Word on Fire); Father Daniel Coughlin (Retired Chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives); Archbishop Wilton Gregory (Archbishop of Atlanta); Bishop Gerald Kicanas (Bishop of Tucson); Msgr. Leo Mahon (established Panama Mission); the late Msgr. Dan Cantwell; the late Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand, and the late Msgr. Jack Egan.

Though wonderful theologians and preachers in their own right, they never had the benefit of recording their homilies as seminarians and receiving the critical feedback of their homiletics professors and fellow seminarians. Their training tools never allowed them to catalogue video recordings of their homilies and analyze their growing understanding of the scriptures.

What learnings can you share with regard to "designing" the new homiletics lab?

There are three separate parts of the lab, cor-

responding to the three needs of teaching preaching: lecturing, recording, and reviewing. Having three different venues in one classroom has worked well, and most students move easily between them.

What new benefits do you see from creating this new learning space?

Students can see what some of their classmates are trying to point out in their feedback. Any seminarian can review a student's practice homily, increasing accountability. Students can review their own homilies as their congregation would receive them.

What has been the seminarians' reaction to using this space for practicing their homilies?

Excited. In spite of the inconvenience of it being located in a building on the far end of campus, most arrive ahead of time. They are cooperative and enthusiastic learners.

What more could the seminary do in funding future projects to enhance preaching preparation and practice?

Although classmates volunteer to operate the equipment, a teaching assistant would help. Other seminaries provide them and this would be a helpful addition to the program.

As a professor and a preacher, why was this project important for seminarians? The seminary? Parishes?

It raises the profile of homiletics as it increases the excitement of practicing preaching. Non-classmates have been known to view the recordings for their own personal benefit. This lab will be an attraction in hiring future instructors and it shows institutional support for homiletics which otherwise could become the vulgarization of theology.

Any parish feedback sought on the quality of homilies, etc?

Yes, during internship we seek feedback from parishioners on the quality of our seminarians' homilies. I review the feedback, which with rare exception is encouraging.

Do you have any memorable experiences with the new lab?

Yes. Thomas Ongige, 37 years old and a fourth year seminarian from Africa, studying for the Archdiocese of Chicago, was a student in my first homiletics class to use this new facility. He came to class one day and while in an animated conversation before class, suddenly collapsed to the floor. After many attempts to revive him by his classmates and then a paramedic, he was pronounced dead at the Emergency Room of Condell Hospital later that afternoon. He died of an enlarged heart whose only ominous symptom is sudden death.

After Thomas' sudden death, we sent copies of his recorded homilies to his family in Africa. His last recorded homily was also reviewed by his classmates as part of a memorial service.

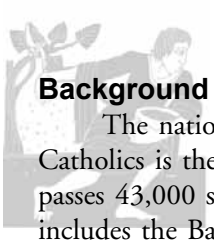
This record of Thomas' homilies provided us with a special gift — a living testament to the faith of our dear brother. This homiletics project is much more than a renovated room with state-of-the-art technical recording equipment; it was truly a ministerial gift to Thomas' family and our seminary community. It recorded for posterity the deep faith and Gospel-centered life of a man who went home to God, celebrating his life in the company of the saints for all eternity.

Reverend Daniel Siwek, M.Div., S.T.L., is an instructor in the Departments of Biblical Exegesis and Proclamation and Pre-Theology of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois.

Mark J. Teresi is vice president of institutional advancement at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois.

To Preach the Good Word Well: A Project of the Diocese of Rapid City, South Dakota

Rev. George Winzenburg, S.J.



Background

The nation's third smallest diocese by number of Catholics is the Diocese of Rapid City, which encompasses 43,000 square miles in western South Dakota and includes the Badlands and Mount Rushmore, popular destinations for visitors. It also is home to Native Americans living on five reservations. Bounded on the east by the Missouri River, the prairies of the diocese are scattered with farms, ranches and small towns. The Black Hills, the highest mountain range east of the Rocky Mountains, runs along the western edge of the diocese. There is a stark beauty to land in the West. It is rugged. It is also sacred.

Native Americans traveled the land for countless years before European immigrants arrived. The Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota were an alliance of friends who formed the largest indigenous population on the northern Plains of North America. They lived in harmony with the land and its animals, hunting bison and using every part of this magnificent creature to meet their needs for food, clothing, and tools. Native peoples saw the presence of the Great Spirit everywhere, especially in *Paha Sapa*, the Black Hills, where they spent the winter and practiced their sacred rites and ceremonies. The people believed they lived within a sacred circle, marked by changing seasons and the circle of birth, childhood, adulthood, and death. Family was the backbone of their culture and kinship was their connection to the world at large and everything within it.

European immigrants who pushed westward in the 19th century in search of arable land were challenged in ways they never imagined. They discovered abundant land but found little timber and water. It took all they could do to survive the harsh elements. Their most formidable challenge, however, was encountering Native people. They were separated from them by language, religion, and culture, yet joined by physical suffering, premature death, and the struggle to survive. The settlers lived apart from Native Americans. No wonder these homesteaders became independent and self-sufficient. They must have felt they had no one to rely on but God.

Lakota and non-Native people living today in western South Dakota may live apart or together, but they agree on how information is shared. You tell a *story.*

However, the settlers also learned to rely on the few neighbors they had, just as Native Americans relied on kinship groups. One could spend long periods of time alone or with family, but at times a neighbor's help was required – to build a house, to move cows, or to treat an injured relative. Railroads quickly changed their lives; small towns popped up, businesses were established, and churches were built. It became possible to gather socially and become a faith community.

Lakota and non-Native people living today in western South Dakota may live apart or together, but they agree on how information is shared. You tell a *story*. A good story sets a context, establishes commonal-

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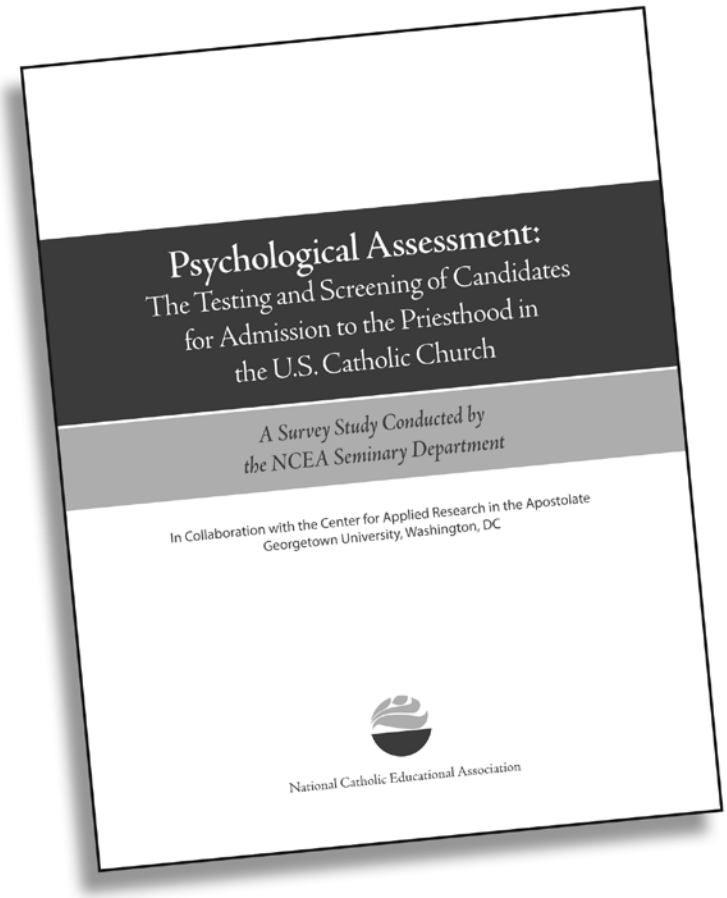

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ity, piques interest, conveys feelings, and addresses real issues. It also makes a point, tells a truth, and offers a variety of possible responses. A good story speaks to the whole person, what Lakota call body, mind, and spirit.

Fr. John Melloh told the story of a young woman who wanted to join the Catholic Church. She was afraid to tell her grandmother, a staunch Baptist, but finally did. The grandmother responded after a long pause and asked about Catholics: "Do they wash feet?" The granddaughter said they did. The grandmother then blurted out, "Any congregation that washes feet is a church of Jesus Christ!" This is the kind of story a South Dakotan would share if asked whether Catholics and Protestants in their town get along.

Lakota and non-Native Catholics know there is a story to each person's life. Each story has many joys and sorrows. Each story is unique. Everybody can say, "This is *my* story. Nobody else can live it for me." How each story plays out depends largely on the choices one makes in life.

There are as many stories as there are people. Christians have dreams and struggles they work out or discern when they come to church. They don't want their pastor telling them how to live, but they expect to hear that God is with them on their journey in life. They want to know that, as hard as life is, if they turn to God, things will work out.

Most of all, Christians want to hear about Jesus and His story. They want to know that He was fully human and fully divine and is present today as Risen Lord. They want the Word proclaimed in church to leap from the page and make Jesus present among them. Of course, they want to be uplifted when they come to church, but most of all they want to discover in the Scripture readings and to hear in a homily that they are not alone on their journey. They want their priest or deacon to comfort, confront, and challenge them so they may confidently believe that Christ is their companion and gathers all nations.

Christians use stories to help them make sense of their own individual story. They remember a homily if it includes a story, and they appreciate knowing that their priest or deacon has a story of his own. They don't expect his story to be perfect; they simply ask that he be honest telling it. And so they respond to his message when they sense his passion for God and for preaching. They are deeply moved when their preacher not only wants them to grow but asks them to help him grow as well.

The late Bishop Ken Untener said that the role of the homilist is threefold: "To discern what the Lord is doing or speaking through this event; to help illuminate this for the assembly; and to do all this on behalf of the church" (*Preaching Better*, page 12). Bishop Untener understood what it means to preach the Good Word well.

The late Bishop Ken Untener said that the role of the homilist is threefold: "To discern what the Lord is doing or speaking through this event; to help illuminate this for the assembly; and to do all this on behalf of the church" (*Preaching Better,* page 12).

Applying For a Grant

Bishop Blase J. Cupich decided in early 2007 that the Diocese of Rapid City would apply for a grant which would allow clergy and laity to focus on preaching from 2007 to 2010. He formed a committee in July to propose how the initiative could target the 30,000 Catholics living in the diocese (13% of the general population), of which 27% are Native American. Meeting everyone's needs would be challenging: Catholics in the area are separated by distance; three of the five reservations in the diocese rank among the five poorest counties in the United States.

The committee articulated two reasons for offering an initiative on preaching. First, Catholics were asking for ongoing renewal. Bishop Cupich had already introduced programs for laity, such as RENEW, Generations of Faith, and Continuing Education for Commissioned Lay Ministers. He now wanted renewal for clergy that would help them improve what they were already doing well: the art and practice of preaching.

A second reason for the initiative was that the future of all faith communities depends on shared ministry by clergy and well-trained laity. The call to ministry is learned and nourished by Word and Sacrament. The grant would help clergy and laity to *listen to* and *preach* the Word of God in the context of their lives.

The committee knew that Catholics living in western South Dakota are independent thinkers who *gather*

on Sundays as *community* to stay connected with one another by telling *stories* and hearing that Jesus accompanies them on their journey in life. They also knew that clergy and laity alike have strong opinions of what "good preaching" is, and have high expectations of the one who preaches. What do preachers and parishioners expect from a homily? The hunch was that Catholics want preaching to inspire, to challenge, to teach, to encourage, and to lead to action. It all comes back to the story of Jesus.

The **goals** of the initiative are as follows:

- The purpose of the initiative is to help all of us – clergy and laity – more effectively hear and proclaim the Word of God. We say *all of us* because preaching and proclaiming are everyone's responsibility. Everyone must hear the Word of God, even the one who preaches. All must respond to what is proclaimed, for without that response, no one will be changed and the gifts that the Holy Spirit lavishes upon us will not be shared (1 Corinthians 12).
- The initiative will encourage excellence in preaching. Preaching is not about what we are to do, but about what God is doing in our lives now. It begins with a sound knowledge of Scripture and includes reflection on the Church's Tradition down through the centuries to the present time. It helps both the one who preaches and the one who hears to notice "what God does" and "what God is doing." Excellence in preaching allows the Word of God to be proclaimed in ways that nourish the spirit and enliven parish communities. "It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Bishop Cupich endorsed the proposal because focusing on preaching coincided with the Holy Father's wish that the universal Church should reflect on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." It also implemented a primary goal of the Diocesan Synod of 2002, to provide "ongoing formation of the Christian life of our people." Bishop Cupich trusted that the initiative would improve the practice of preaching within parishes and heighten an interest in preaching. It would help clergy and laity alike to build up the Catholic community and it would strengthen families. "My mother and my brothers are those *who hear the word of God and act upon it*" (Luke 8:21).

The initiative targeted two groups: priests, deacons, and some lay ministers – those who preach – and parishioners in the diocese – those who hear homilies and reflections.

"To Preach the Good Word Well" (2007-2010)

Thankfully, the proposal was accepted and "To Preach the Good Word Well" was launched in October 2007. Bishop Cupich immediately consulted his 28 active diocesan priests, 18 religious order priests, and 25 deacons. Some clergy voiced reservations about the initiative, but all generously agreed to give it a try for the sake of their parishioners.

Who was involved? The initiative targeted two groups: priests, deacons, and some lay ministers – those who preach – and parishioners in the diocese – those who hear homilies and reflections. Each group had its own set of activities. Bishop Cupich participated in all sessions for clergy and some activities for laity.

The method used to achieve the goals was a two-track approach that included evaluations and surveys. The track for clergy was held in 2008. It was a series of five two-day workshops presented by visiting priest-professors and a bishop. Fr. Ray Bucko, S.J., presented "Preaching and Cultures;" Fr. Dennis Hamm, S.J., presented "Preaching in a Liturgical Season;" Fr. Joseph Juknialis presented "Preaching that Points to God's Action," which allowed clergy to videotape a homily and have it critiqued; Fr. J. Michael Joncas presented "Preaching and Liturgy;" Bishop Richard J. Sklba presented "Spirituality of Preaching." In 2009, Fr. Paul Turner, a consultant to ICEL, spoke to clergy about liturgical preaching and the new translation of the missal.

The track for laity began in 2007. Fr. J. Patrick Quinn, T.O.R., presented "How the Church Formed and is Formed by Sacred Scripture." In 2008, Fr. Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., presented "The Gospel According to Matthew." At the initiative's official Kick-Off, laity and clergy heard Fr. John Melloh, S.M., present "Preaching for the People of God." Later, a lector training workshop was offered on "Proclaiming the Word of God." In 2009, Fr. Stegman presented "The Holy Spirit

according to St. Paul," and a presentation was offered to train laity to give reflections at wakes, funerals, and other non-Eucharistic services. In 2010, Fr. J. Michael Joncas presented "Engaging God's Word through Liturgical Art." A workshop was offered on "Youth Engaging Scripture," and an Australian Jesuit, Fr. Brian F. McCoy, presented "Holding Men," which explains how Aboriginal men in Australia pass their values to a younger generation.

There were no significant adjustments or problems in the initiative. Attendance by priests and deacons (and some deacon wives) was excellent; 90% of active clergy attended the workshops. Activities for laity drew a modest crowd, partly because the diocese is vast and most parishioners had to travel two to four hours to attend a presentation. All presentations for clergy and some presentations for laity were videotaped. DVDs of presentations for laity were sent to pastors, and participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form at the end of each presentation.

The expected outcomes were that preachers and parishioners 1) would realize that they must help one another if the Word of God is to be heard and preached effectively; 2) would increase their knowledge of Scripture and theology and in the process develop greater skills of reflection and discussion about how they wish to live their baptismal call; and 3) would put their vision of Church into practice by prayer, work, study, service in their parish, outreach in their community, and evangelization.

Measuring Results

The committee worked with a consultant to design an "in pew" survey to measure the results of the initiative. Laity were surveyed three times, in December 2007, February 2009, and April 2010. Clergy also were surveyed three times, in October 2007, October 2008, and April 2010, and both sets of data were analyzed by the consultant. The data revealed that most Catholics take seriously the call to hear the Word of God and they find most homilies meaningful, and that clergy want to become better homilists. The statistical findings and an interpretation of the data were printed in a booklet. A final report was submitted in 2010.

The surveys identified **what was learned**. Positive results indicated that:

- Clergy and laity increased their awareness of the critical importance of preaching and proclaiming the Word of God and the role each group plays in them.
- Clergy 1) recognized that Scripture-based and inspirational preaching *is* being offered in the diocese; 2) were invited to improve their preaching thanks to small group critiques of videotaped homilies; 3) received formation in theology and Scripture from presenters of high quality who modeled what preparation for preaching entails; 4) increased their bonds of respect and affection as priests and deacons.
- Laity received 1) ongoing formation in theology and Scripture; 2) training to proclaim the Word as lectors; 3) training to offer a reflection at a non-Eucharistic liturgy; 4) information about teaching youth to reflect on the Word of God.
- The initiative created resources for clergy and laity, such as hand-outs and DVDs.

Negative data demonstrated that:

- The initiative lasted too long. It should have ended after the second year.
- Presentations for laity were offered in Rapid City, the "center of the diocese," which meant that a limited number of parishioners from the prairie attended. Some presentations should have been offered in rural communities.
- Surveying parishioners three times became tedious for pastors.
- Most pastors did not discuss the results of the laity questionnaire with their parishioners. The hoped-for use of DVDs was sparse.
- Some clergy did not videotape a homily and have it critiqued.
- Only a few pastors introduced a program in their parish to discuss the priest or deacon's preaching; "Partners in Preaching" was offered as a model.

Learnings of the initiative included:

- Over all, the five-session Course on Preaching for Clergy increased the level of discourse among clergy about *what makes for good preaching*.
- Clergy were reminded how preaching at Mass and living in community between Sundays is at the core of their vocation.
- Most clergy want more ongoing formation in liturgy and preaching.
- Most clergy are willing to discuss their preaching at their deanery meetings.
- The Kick-Off event, lector training, workshop for youth, and presentations for laity on

theology and Scripture were enthusiastically received.
- A program was offered for youth called "Youth Engaging Scripture."
- Clergy and laity believe that *To Preach the Good Word Well* was as good as or superior to any program on preaching offered in the United States.

Impact

The impact of the initiative is best stated by letting the participants speak, based on a sample of the evaluations that were filled out after each session.

1. A committee was formed in 2007 to draft a proposal for Bishop Cupich to review and approve. The members reflected on their role and the possibilities for the initiative:
- I was deathly afraid of preaching [as a deacon]. I was afraid that I might say something wrong and hurt the people. I didn't get training in preaching while in diaconate formation. Lectors need training too – to learn how to project their voice and to enunciate.
- When I was teaching CCD I discovered the unfolding of salvation history through stories. Biblical stories, especially the story of Jesus, became my story and they become our story. That was exciting for me; it was a spiritual awakening. Stories help us to understand *how we see ourselves*. Studying scripture and training for preaching go together.
- There is a spirituality of preaching. Good preaching enkindles excitement. It transforms lives.
- For many Catholics the only faith formation they receive is the homily they hear on Sunday.
- We must not forget the youth in our parishes. Preachers must capture their attention. Kids have a different language and we have to understand it if we are to reach them in our preaching.
- It helped when preachers and lay people pray with the scriptures as they prepare for a liturgy later in the week.
- We must remember to be culturally sensitive. We have many Lakota in the diocese and a growing number of Hispanics. We must be sensitive to their needs and to their culture.

2. Clergy were consulted in October 2007 and asked not only if they would support the initiative, but what they would like to gain from it. One priest said it well: "I want to be as effective as possible."

3. Fr. Ray Bucko, S.J., offered the first of five presentations to clergy in 2008. He said that we stand between two worlds. We move in and out of different cultures (from working with youth to visiting the elderly, from ministry with Lakota to ministry with non-Native peoples). "Know where you are" and always listen. What people are hearing in homilies is not always what we preachers are hearing. Cultures have their own symbols. Preachers guide people to interpret symbols correctly. The priests and deacons evaluated the presentation.
- It increased attentiveness to the cultural context of our given congregations.
- It encouraged respect for where each person is.
- It made me understand that one must really know who is in the parish you are going to preach in.
- It helped me understand better the filters that people have when they hear a homily.
- I learned that 1) Preaching is a public event; 2) In preaching we address a multi-cultural human being; 3) Listening to and knowing people is the best preparation for preaching.

4. Fr. Dennis Hamm, S.J., offered the second presentation to clergy by presenting Scriptural exegesis. Always start with what the text meant then, so that we can understand what it means now. Use the tools of exegesis we learned in school. Correct understanding of a text is a key to proper application. Again, the priests and deacons evaluated the presentation.
- It made me think a lot about the context of the readings, and how they were applicable in Jesus' time and how I must make them apply to my congregation today.
- Exegesis is always important as part of the preparation.
- He drew me back into the commentaries and concordances that I haven't been using as much lately.

5. Fr. Joe Juknialis offered the third presentation to clergy. He said that preaching is not an idea but inspiration. It is two-thirds inspiration and application to life, and one-third information and insight. Ask how the story of Scripture is my story. Preaching points to

what God is doing today that God was doing then. The preacher must strive to be creative. The length of a homily should be about 9 minutes. Use metaphors. Stories are the message. Preaching is "announcing the Resurrection as if it's happening now." Preaching, therefore, helps me know that God is operating in my life. Ask as you look to the readings: What is God doing? What is God's promise in each text? How is it my story? How is it the Church's (or society's) story? The priests and deacons evaluated the presentation.

- Stories are extremely important to making the scriptures present today. Preaching requires the use of imagination – connected and validated by exegesis and traditional teaching.
- The presentations helped me understand my feelings when putting together my homilies. Prior to this I did not understand why I was feeling the way I was.
- Preaching is descriptive of what God is doing now in the lives of people and the community. Preaching is more effective when using stories and concrete language.
- I saw my own faults and strengths in others. I was challenged to strive to preach better – because I saw such good preaching in the videos – and my parish deserves the same.
- We were able to pick out the areas of the homilies that made sense and those that did not based on what we had learned. One could see if there was more than one point and it helped us to try and not make the same mistake.

6. Fr. J. Michael Joncas offered the fourth presentation to clergy. He said that preaching is a language event. Preaching includes knowing and praying with the Word revealed in liturgical texts, music, and art. Preaching is an act of God and an act of the Church, glorifying God and sanctifying the faithful. Preaching is inspired by ritual texts that are proclaimed and enacted: Scripture selections, liturgical texts, and seasonal feasts. Preaching is addressed to believers: spoken from faith, spoken to faith.

7. Bishop Richard J. Sklba offered the fifth and final presentation to clergy. He spoke about the spirituality of preaching. Preaching is always about the larger Church. Preachers introduce people to God as lived by the Church. He said that three months before leaving for Rome to begin biblical studies, he asked a renowned scholar how he should spend the summer preparing for graduate school. The priest told him to read novels. Scripture is story, and reading novels helps us to understand themes, plot, and character development. Our primary task is to proclaim the Gospel to all creatures. We speak of the experience of the living God by personal witness and the transparency of our lives. Only the one who gives personal witness and is transparent can preach. It's as if the evangelists said, "You have to meet our God!" and then they proceeded to tell us what God looks like. The big picture, therefore, is our relationship with the living God. The priests and deacons evaluated the presentation.

Preaching includes knowing and praying with the Word revealed in liturgical texts, music, and art. Preaching is an act of God and an act of the Church, glorifying God and sanctifying the faithful.

- Bishop Sklba's emphasis and re-emphasis on what it is to be an authentic Catholic preacher – in each of the topics – was particularly nourishing and encouraging to my preaching. His in-depth knowledge and experience of other faith traditions allowed him to contrast a Catholic preacher with other Biblical preachers.
- The theology and spirituality of preaching as a function of Christ's mission makes me more conscious of the sacredness of this duty and the need to be more than just an "entertainer" on Sunday morning. The "in-season and out-of-season" aspect was important. The "wide-vision" notion was important too.
- Programs like this provide meaningful ongoing education for all the priests and deacons, something that may not get done if left to individuals on their own.

8. Fr. John Melloh, S.M., spoke at the official Kick-Off event for clergy and laity in 2008. He said that preaching is an act of re-communication. We move from the script to the story in order to discern the text.

We must remember that we read from the Gospels "the memories of the apostles." Justin Martyr said we cannot live without having common memories. If we forget the Scriptures we will have "ecclesial amnesia." The proclamation of the Word is mediated by a witnessing Church. The Eucharistic Prayer is the Church's proclamation of salvation here and now. The Easter Vigil is a non-verbal way of saying "we believe." The first creed we recite is when we drive to church. The presence of Christ in the world is treating other persons with dignity. The homily, therefore, is about insight, feeling, and action. It is prayerful meditation on God's Word, conveying everything with people's experience. It is "hearing a person of faith speaking." The homily leads the listener to the Table of the Eucharist. Clergy and laity evaluated the presentation.

- Priest: I liked most his suggestion on how we deal with scriptural insights in the homily. He used the image of leading people through the winding path, up a mountain, and finally reaching the point of insight. It makes sense to lead others through the same images, challenges, twists and turns so that the insight of the preacher may yield better fruit for the hearers of the homily. Much better than simply dropping the insight in their lap.
- Laity: First, it helped me understand that a lot of hard work goes into developing a homily that will touch the people in the pew. The preacher – priest or deacon – must take the time to study the scripture, internalize it, and settle on a key idea on which to build the homily. He must also key into the human element of storytelling and relate the "now" relevance of the topic and convey it in a manner that reaches out and grabs the person in the pew.
- Laity: Preaching is not just the homilist preaching. Everyone has a role to play in "Preaching the Good Word Well." It is as important for the "listeners" to be prepared as the homilist. The points given to the homilists can be used by any one of us who must do even minimal public speaking. Living the Word Well is an important part of preaching. Preaching is not a stand alone activity but, as Fr. Melloh said, it prepares us to come to the table.
- Priest: I came away with a clearer view of how many different elements must come together in a homily: openness of preacher to prayerful reflection, openness of assembly to the Word of God, preacher's knowledge of the assembly's dynamic, setting the stage of the scriptural insight (original meaning), applying insight to today to show how we respond either faithfully or unfaithfully, pointing to the abundant grace at work in our lives today, drawing the assembly into the sacramental life of the Church, and leaving the assembly with a renewed sense of discipleship. Homily must carry all of these elements concisely, with a single unconfused thread of a theme.
- Deacon: It helped me to understand that there is a method to putting together a homily. One needs to study the scriptures and pray over them. I learned that the study of scripture is very important if one wants to understand what was going on at the time of the writings and present a homily that one can understand and use in everyday life in today's world. It is important to have a good thought pattern in order to present the material so that people can understand and use the information.
- Laity: I understand that hearing God's word is not just the act of having the words enter the ear of the hearer. It is much more and involves all that the speaker is and all that the hearer is. Individual life experience, culture, society, emotions all impact how we hear and share the "Word."

9. Fr. Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., offered a presentation to laity in 2008 on "The Gospel according to Matthew." Laity evaluated his presentation.

- I think understanding the background of the Gospel when it was written, for whom and by whom, gives meaning and enhances understanding of the Word. If one is familiar with the material and the lector and homilist are skillful, the listener gains new insights each time the Word is proclaimed. Listening to the Word is rather like looking at a painting; the background colors and textures support and enhance the primary object in the painting; without the background the primary object is flat and without depth.
- To get the full impact of the readings at Mass it is important to find out about what was happening in the place at the time in the lives

of the people about whom the scriptures are written. To understand their cultures makes for a much more bountiful response to the readings. Of course, the challenge is to get people to do the necessary preparation during the week so they will be familiar with the text before coming to Mass.

- I always encourage people to read, reflect and pray the Scripture prior to going to Mass. Since I have consistently read the Mass readings for the day, my relationship with the three persons in the Trinity has deepened and strengthened. My prayer life has changed and taken on new dimensions and new growth. I share this with folks.

10. Fr. Michel Mulloy, Rector of the Cathedral, and Ms. Margaret Simonson, Chancellor of the Diocese of Rapid City, offered a workshop for lectors in 2008. Laity evaluated the presentation.

- The content was presented in such a way that it opened my understanding of the beauty of the Word, and how important it is to be prepared when we proclaim.
- I learned the importance of praying for wisdom and understanding of the Word that you will be proclaiming so that when the word goes forth, it will be understood and a blessing.
- It helped me to remember that it was God who called me to this ministry, according to His will, not mine, to help others to hear God's word and to love it.
- I learned a lot about the mechanics of using text, voice, silence, eye contact, etc.

11. Diocesan priests were invited to reflect on the initiative during their annual retreat in June 2009. They offered their evaluation.

- Preaching is at the heart of the renewal of the parish.
- People in the pews want to hear the *character* of the preacher; they want to know if prayer and holiness are behind the words he says.
- Good preaching makes people hungry for Jesus.
- It's different preaching to ranchers. Men find their identity in what they do. I feel phony offering stories about ranching because that's not my experience, but the men say they enjoy hearing them. Ranch women enjoy preaching that invites them to find their identity outside their work. I am tempted to have men come to Mass on Saturday evening and women on Sunday morning.
- Preaching to Lakota is unlike preaching to non-Native people. Lakota love it when I tell a self-deprecating story, about a way I messed up. They say it takes me off a pedestal and makes me human, like one of them.
- Critiquing my own and other priests' videotaped homilies helped me.
- I desire to engage others in my preaching. My Caritas group has had stimulating conversations about preaching. My deanery group has done homily preparation. We should continue doing that a few times during the year.
- It helps me to pray the Scriptures with lay staff. I get more out of the readings when I hear them proclaimed; when that happens at Mass, it can change my homily; homilies are to be heard, not read.

Final Comments

We were the only diocese in the country to receive a grant for this very important initiative. We are grateful for the grant and are ready to share what we learned with other dioceses. We also are eager to keep learning. There is no Catholic college in the diocese, so we rely on visiting presenters to nourish our hunger for ongoing formation in Scripture, theology, and preaching.

We reaffirm our commitment to the mission of the Diocese of Rapid City, which is the threefold ministry of Jesus: to proclaim the Gospel; to build up the community of faith that is the Catholic Church; to reach out in love and service to those in need. As they seek to accomplish this mission, the bishop, clergy, religious and laity of the diocese all reflect the ministry of Jesus on earth.

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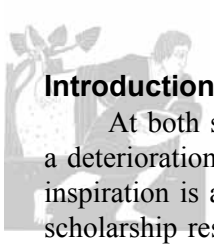
The God Who Speaks: *Verbum Domini* as a Means of Renewal in Seminary Formation in the Word of God

Steven C. Smith, Ph.D.



Introduction

At both scholarly and popular levels of society, a deterioration of sound, orthodox views of biblical inspiration is all too evident today. Much academic scholarship rests upon a hermeneutic that ignores, weakens or altogether disregards biblical inspiration. In place of it are, all too often, various constructs and hypotheses that treat Sacred Scripture as a mere historical reality, rather than a word of divine origin. Similarly, at the cultural level, there have been many developments which have not only dismissed the concept of biblical inspiration, but put in its place speculative theories about the Bible's origins. One only needs to visit the local bookstore, tune in to a cable television documentary, or worse yet, listen in on a Sunday morning homily to experience firsthand some of these toxic realities.

Thus, as a seminary professor of Sacred Scripture, I eagerly awaited, along with many, Pope Benedict XVI's recently published Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* ("Word of the Lord").[1] As I initially read the document, my thoughts returned again and again to several pertinent questions: What are the most essential principles of Catholic biblical interpretation? How can these principles shape the goals and expectations of both instructors and students in Catholic seminaries today?

In exploring these questions, this essay will reflect on *Verbum Domini* as a means of renewal in seminary formation in the Word of God. Specifically, this paper will argue that among the various precepts outlined in the document, none is more important than biblical inspiration, and hearing "the God who speaks" in Sacred Scripture. Adherence to and promotion of a robust conception of biblical inspiration is intrinsically necessary not only for the health of biblical exegesis but also for the life and mission of the entire Church: "Our whole existence becomes a dialogue with the God who speaks and listens, who calls us and gives direction to our lives" (*VD* § 24). The release of *Verbum Domini* represents a timely opportunity to evaluate our own work and to consider how we might contribute to the pope's vision. It is hoped that in some way, this essay stimulates further thought and action in the formation of Catholic seminarians with regard to biblical inspiration.

Adherence to and promotion of a robust conception of biblical inspiration is intrinsically necessary not only for the health of biblical exegesis but also for the life and mission of the entire Church.

Verbum Domini – Principles and Practices for the Renewal of Seminary Formation in the Word of God

Three contextual remarks are offered about *Verbum Domini* and its relevance to all who teach in Catholic seminaries today. First, *Verbum Domini* is a significant papal document, one that deserves to be taken seriously. This point may be obvious, but it is worth emphasizing, given how prolific this pope has been recently. *Verbum Domini* may not have garnished as much popular attention as the Pope's two-volume *Jesus of Nazareth* project, yet it is, objectively speaking, weightier than these two volumes of biblical exegesis.[2] At nearly two hundred pages, *Verbum Domini* represents Pope Benedict's formal reflection on the Twelfth Synod of Bishops Oct. 5-20, 2008, over which he presided. The aim of this particular Synod is well captured in its title: "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." In all, the Synod fathers submitted fifty-five *propositio* (propositions). Most of these propositions were taken up in *Verbum Domini*. As such, this document carries papal authority and reflects Benedict's own thoughts on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church today, and in addition, the concerns of the Synod fathers. The document is filled with robust and urgent admonitions and practical instructions for bishops, priests, religious and laity. As seminary theologians, we should read the document in a particularly self-reflective manner, asking questions such as those raised above, with sincere interest and openness to being shaped by this papal document.

Second, *Verbum Domini* should be read as a means of further implementing the principles of Vatican II. The Exhortation does not stand alone, but as a bold exhortation that seeks to implement the biblical directives of Vatican II and more specifically, of *Dei Verbum*.[3] The very name of the Exhortation reveals much about Pope Benedict's "conciliar vision" within its pages. Obviously enough, the title *Verbum Domini* bears similarity to *Dei Verbum*, a document with which Pope Benedict is in constant dialogue throughout the Exhortation.[4] Several times in *Verbum Domini*, he calls attention to an instrumental phrase of the Dogmatic Constitution. Specifically, he refers to Sacred Scripture as the "soul of theology" (*VD* §31; cf. *DV* §24) and in so doing, points us back to *Dei Verbum* and "the great principles of interpretation proper to Catholic exegesis set forth by the Second Vatican Council" (*VD* §34). Additionally, he recalls the fundamental criteria for proper interpretation of Sacred Scripture outlined in *Dei Verbum*, crucial for proper interpretation of Sacred Scripture.[5] Clearly, the pope is putting forth his vision of Sacred Scripture in keeping with the Second Vatican Council – and he does so as a means of further implementing the Council's principles in the life of the Church today.[6] Given its clear linkage with *Dei Verbum*, and its comprehensive scope, it is no wonder that upon its release, a number of observers described it as the most important Scripture document since Vatican II.[7]

Third and finally, the very shape of the document reveals the pope's interest in presenting principles of sound Catholic biblical exegesis in a decidedly Johannine fashion. Numerous Scriptural citations occupy the voluminous text of *Verbum Domini*. Yet, it is the thought of St. John the Evangelist that is utilized time and again. In particular, Pope Benedict seizes upon John's Prologue (specifically 1:14) as sort of a navigational star for raising essential principles of biblical interpretation. In this way, *Verbum Domini* can be read as an extended discussion of Catholic biblical exegesis that is "built upon" the foundation of St. John's Gospel. This is more than opinion. As Pope Benedict writes in his Introduction:

> I would like to present and develop the labours of the Synod by making constant reference to the *Prologue of John's Gospel* (Jn 1:1-18), which makes known to us the basis of our life: the Word, who from the beginning is with God, who became flesh and who made his dwelling among us (cf. Jn 1:14). This is a magnificent text, one which offers a synthesis of the entire Christian faith (*VD* §5).

Later, in his conclusion, this same point is echoed. There, the pope underscores the Johannine foundation of the entire Exhortation when he writes, "The Prologue of John's Gospel leads us to ponder that everything exists under the sign of the Word" (*VD* §121).

If one examines *Verbum Domini* as a whole, it is clear that John's Prologue and its thought provides the contours by which he lays out a number of precepts for Catholic biblical exegesis today. In particular, three broader principles are readily seen, as they correspond to the three subdivisions of the Exhortation itself:

1. Sacred Scripture is to be interpreted as God's self-communication, i.e., as an inspired word of the 'God Who Speaks' (Part One: "Verbum Dei")

2. Sacred Scripture is to be interpreted as an intrinsically meaningful word, i.e. as a living and effective word to the Church (Part Two: "Verbum in Ecclesia")
3. Sacred Scripture is to be interpreted as a missionary word, i.e., as the 'Logos of Hope' to the world (Part Three: "Verbum Mundo")

The God Who Speaks: Pope Benedict on Inspiration in *Verbum Domini*

Taken together, these principles have the power not only to illuminate more brightly the sacred pages of Scripture, but also to influence, even transform, seminary formation today. While all three principles merit serious attention, it is beyond the scope of this paper to take up and discuss each. Instead, this essay will concentrate on the first principle as a fundamental basis for renewal of seminary formation.[8]

The selection of this first principle is anything but arbitrary. Unless the foundational principle of biblical inspiration is adhered to and its implications taken seriously for programs of seminary formation, any discussion of the remaining principles will be utterly fruitless. The pope reminds us:

> Whenever our awareness of [Sacred Scripture's] inspiration grows weak, we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history (*VD* §19).

Even more recently than *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict has spoken poignantly about biblical inspiration. In his recent message to the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Commission, which is currently discussing the theme "Inspiration and the Truth of the Bible," the pope reiterates that inspiration is "an activity of God" and adds the following caution:

> Indeed an interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures which ignores or forgets their inspiration does not take into account their most important and precious characteristic, the fact that they come from God … It is in fact essential and fundamental for the life and mission of the Church that the sacred texts be interpreted in accordance with their nature: Inspiration and Truth are constitutive characteristics of this nature.[9]

Turning to *Verbum Domini*, the pope zeroes in on biblical inspiration, almost immediately, identifying it as the fundamental principle for all true and proper interpretation of God's Word today. Drawing upon vital passages from John's Prologue (Jn 1:1-3, 14), he describes the "cosmic dimension" of biblical revelation, analogous to the "eternal Word of God made flesh, the one Saviour and mediator between God and humanity … [and] the foundation of all reality" (*VD* §8).[10]

The Word of God cannot be properly understood or proclaimed apart from its being firmly and unequivocally rooted in God. All of Scripture, he writes, is revealed from God as a "single reality" (*VD* §18), a "single word expressed in multiple ways: a 'polyphonic hymn'" (*VD* §7).[11] Recalling a key passage in *Dei Verbum*, Pope Benedict underscores that Sacred Scripture originates with God, being given by the Holy Spirit as wholly inspired truth:

> We must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error, teach the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures. Thus, 'all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim 3:16-17).[12]

These words of the Council are perhaps the most important for him, as he understands inspiration as being "clearly decisive" (*VD* §19) in all biblical interpretation.

While the pope exhorts the Church to open itself up to the Divine author of Sacred Scripture, he urges that the Word must be simultaneously apprehended as an historical fact, stressing that the "full importance of the human author" must be recognized (*VD* §19). He adds that there is a great need today for a "fuller and more adequate study" of the texts of Scripture "in accordance with their nature" (ibid).

This latter observation is in fact a fundamental norm of all legitimate Catholic biblical exegesis; God's word can never be reduced to an either/or scenario. Sacred Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit in which "we can hear the Lord himself speak (*VD* §19) and, at the same time, it is the product of real human authors who bring human meaning and per-

Just as the Living Word took on human flesh and walked among us, so too the written Word of God takes human form and must be received as a historical fact, which is the very "constitutive dimension of the Christian faith" (*VD* §32).

sonality to the divine Word. With the Incarnation of Christ, His life, and particularly His death, "the word of God became thoroughly human 'flesh,' human 'history'" (*VD* §13). Here, Pope Benedict relies heavily upon that central truth of John's Prologue: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

Just as the Living Word took on human flesh and walked among us, so too the written Word of God takes human form and must be received as a historical fact, which is the very "constitutive dimension of the Christian faith" (*VD* §32). As such, the Word of God is simultaneously a divine act and a human act that demands to be received accordingly. All true biblical interpretation is integrative and not degenerative in its nature; thus, we cannot embrace one element (e.g. divine) without embracing the other (e.g. human). Neither can we reject the one without rejecting the other, and without risking the whole interpretative enterprise. Just as the Church rejects any rationale that creates a wedge between the divine and human nature of Christ, it follows that in searching for meaning in Scripture, Catholic Biblical interpretation absolutely rejects any "split" between the divine and human dimension.[13]

Biblical Inspiration: Several Challenges for Seminary Formation Today

Having analyzed Pope Benedict's discussion of biblical inspiration and its "decisive" role (*VD* §19) in biblical interpretation, we now turn to a discussion of several challenges facing seminary theologians with regard to this same issue.

1. **Better care must be taken to ensure that every seminarian is well formed in God's Word, knowing it as inspired truth given by the Holy Spirit and as capable of transforming their lives.**

All Catholic biblical exegesis must begin with what Pope Benedict calls "the *primacy* of the word of God" (*VD* §22).[14] In the divinely inspired Word of God, the love between Christ and the Church is revealed. This mystery touches every person:

> In this vision, every man and woman appears as someone to whom the word speaks, challenges, and calls to enter this dialogue through a free response. Each of us is thus enabled by God to *hear and respond* to his word … we cannot understand ourselves unless we are open to this dialogue (VD §22).

As such, reception of the Word must always begin with its true divine origins, as a Word that stems from and reveals "the inner life of God" (*VD* §6).

In my own experience working with seminarians, many enter seminary today with a desire to study Scripture as "God's own words." However, a number of candidates for priesthood enter seminary having been poorly catechized or, worse yet, misinformed as to what "God's word is inspired" does (and does not) mean. We have a responsibility to clearly affirm "the primacy of the Word" and to do so in ways that can be readily grasped by today's seminarian. In particular, due attention must be given to reading and explaining biblical inspiration as found within the Catholic documents on Scripture, especially *Dei Verbum*.

Our discussions should not be limited to the Scripture documents. Rather, they should be properly supplemented and under-girded with explanations from the Scriptures themselves, as well as provide a proper historical framework of the development of the doctrine of biblical inspiration (and its corollary, biblical inerrancy). Here, the teachings of patristic, medieval and modern theologians can and should be properly integrated into such discussions. By discussing *Verbum Domini* in conjunction with *Dei Verbum* and St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Blessed John Henry Newman and others, the seminarian may come to see how inspiration was, is and always will be the most important precept in proper biblical interpretation.

Yet, it is not enough to help seminarians understand "the primacy of the Word" on an academic level. The task of forming seminarians in Sacred Scripture is not only to have them believe but also to receive and be transformed by God's inspired Word. In fact, we miss the broader vision of *Verbum Domini* almost entirely if

we present "the precepts of the doctrine of inspiration" in merely academic and historical fashion, devoid of its transformative power. Pope Benedict himself speaks to this crucial point, urging that God's word be approached first and foremost as a dialogue, and he makes this point numerous times:

> The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us … God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Word who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself *in the dialogue of love* between the divine persons, *and invites us to share in that love* (*VD* §6).

The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord: the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him (*VD* § 24).

Given such emphasis in *Verbum Domini* on "dialogue" and listening to "the God who speaks," we would do well to ask ourselves questions such as the following:

- In the midst of our academic study and pedagogical preparation, how much time do we afford to such listening ourselves?
- Are we training our seminarians to know how to listen, and to approach God's word as a vibrant dialogue?

Here, we move beyond the sphere of intellectual acumen and pedagogical expertise and into the spiritual and experiential realm. Above all, such receptivity must involve the integration of the study of God's Word and the seminarian's life of prayer:

> Listening together to the word of God, engaging in biblical *lectio divina*, letting ourselves be struck by the inexhaustible freshness of God's word which never grows old, overcoming our deafness to those words that do not fit our own opinions or prejudices, listening and studying within the communion of the believers of every age: all these things represent a way of coming to unity in faith as a response to hearing the word of God (*VD* §46).

Unless we are regularly meditating upon Scripture in such prayerful ways, allowing our intellect and will to imbibe the "inexhaustible freshness" of God's Word, we risk a kind of deafness, listening only to what we wish to hear. As he writes, "The word … can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward" (*VD* §66). We would do well to study the Word of God, and encourage our seminarians to do so, with the contemplation of Mary: "Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence" (*VD* §66).

Such transformative pathways are worthy of ourself-evaluation:

- Are we allowing time, both in and out of the classroom, for seminarians to experience God's Word in such ways?
- Do we train our seminarians in the art of *lectio divina*?
- How well do we promote such practice today?

When we open ourselves, and encourage our seminarians to open themselves, to the Word of God, we enter into such dialogue. When we permit ourselves and urge our seminarians to go beyond natural predilections and limitations, we begin to listen with "believers in every age," to the Lord himself.

Our pedagogical preparation involves not only intellectual or academic study, but also spiritual rigor. We must discover ways to integrate into our busy lives a reverent silence before God's Word, seeking to open our hearts so that we truly can hear God speaking to us in Scripture. James Keating writes, "The pure heart possesses us and orders our theological work toward its fulfillment in prayerful discourse on the truth of who Christ is."[15] Such transformation of our own hearts is necessary, if we desire to move our seminarians beyond an intellectual receptivity of God's Word and towards such "pastoral desire." As Keating continues:

> In the formation of the diocesan priest, the pure heart of the professor helps to order the theology he studies toward increasing pastoral desire …. *Seminary theology serves pastoral desire*: It deepens it, purifies it, and orders it rightly in ways that respect the man's capacity to receive the truths of Christ.[16]

In short, all of our pedagogical efforts in this respect must be aimed at helping the seminarian come to see how inspiration was, is and always will be the most important precept in proper biblical interpretation. This challenge is twofold; first, to better prepare today's semi-

If we believe that the Word of God was genuinely shaped by authentically human authors, then a second challenge is to help our seminarians to engage the Scriptures in ways that are historically robust and theologically sound.

narian as to the "primacy" of the inspired Word of God. This will require academic rigor, lively discussion and proper attention to the Scripture documents and other sources. Second, we must help seminarians enter into a true dialogue with "the God who speaks" in Scripture. Seminary theologians and the seminarians we help form must develop and continue to foster a close relationship between the study of Sacred Scripture and the life of prayer:

> An authentic life of prayer cannot fail to nurture in the candidate's heart a desire for greater knowledge of the God who has revealed himself in his word as infinite love. Hence, great care should be taken to ensure that seminarians always cultivate this *reciprocity between study and prayer* in their lives. This end will be served if candidates are introduced to … methods which favour this integral approach (*VD* §82).

2. Seminary theologians must help future priests to apprehend the Word of God as a truly historical word, while avoiding the pitfalls of a "histocentric" view.

If we believe that the Word of God was genuinely shaped by authentically human authors, then a second challenge is to help our seminarians to engage the Scriptures in ways that are historically robust and theologically sound. All biblical interpretation must account for salvation history as a "true history, and it should thus be studied with the methods of serious historical research" (*VD* §32). Among other things, due attention must be given to understanding the literary genres of the biblical texts themselves: "This means asking questions like: What kind of book is this? What is the literary form of the work? Is it poetry, prophecy, history? How one answers will have a direct effect on the interpretation of the text."[17]

Many misunderstandings of seminarians about various biblical passages stem from a lack of knowledge in this area. Seminary professors need to make a renewed effort to help seminarians become more aware of how literary genre works – and how it contributes to meaningful interpretation of God's Word. We cannot discuss genre with our seminarians as a "passing remark" and expect that they will sort out the details on their own. Neither should seminarians be advised that simple recognition and application of the appropriate literary genre is sufficient; rather, "Sacred Scripture must also be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit in which it is written" (*DV* §12).

If we invest the necessary energy to explain how genre affects biblical interpretation and demonstrate this impact as specific Scripture passages are discussed, we will help seminarians grow in knowledge and confidence even after they leave seminary. Put another way, our dedication now may have long-lasting implications not only for our seminarians but also for the people of God they will ultimately serve.

Such efforts may ultimately reach the people of God in a variety of ways. While many examples could be offered, I am thinking especially of the homily. Certainly, the homily is not the only encounter the people of God will have with Scripture, but it is a privileged occasion for them to hear the truth and beauty of God's Word – and how it is "present and at work in their everyday lives" (*VD* §59). Pope Benedict cautions the priest to avoid "generic and abstract homilies which obscure the directness of God's word" as well as "useless digressions which risk drawing greater attention to the preacher than to the heart of the Gospel message" (*VD* §59). But before the priest addresses the question, "What do the Scriptures being proclaimed *say to me personally,*" he must be able to first ascertain and proclaim the answer to the question, "What are the Scriptures being proclaimed *saying*?" (Cf. *VD* §59.)

In addition, the pope suggests that Catholic biblical exegesis must devote appropriate attention to the historical context in which a given text emerged (cf. *VD* §34). The study of both genre and context are, according to Pope Benedict, "basic elements for understanding the meaning intended by the sacred author" (*VD* §34). In the Exhortation, he refers specifically to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, calling it

"indispensable," in as much as it is bound to *the reality of the Incarnation* as an historical fact (*VD* §32). Neither here in *Verbum Domini* nor elsewhere in his thought is Pope Benedict beholden to this method or any one method of biblical exegesis. In the same way, we too should not preference or align ourselves with any one approach of biblical exegesis. Following in the wisdom of previous Scripture documents,[18] the pope reaffirms the historical footing of Scripture study and of Christianity itself: "The history of salvation is not mythology, but a true history, and it should be studied with the methods of serious historical research" (*VD* §32).[19]

Seminary theologians are encouraged to prepare seminarians to robustly pursue scientific study and encounter the Bible as an "historical word," provided that such methodological inquiry does not place a false dichotomy between Scripture and theology: "Only where both methodological levels, the historical-critical and the theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis, an exegesis worthy of this book" (*VD* §34).[20] Authentic Christianity and authentic study of Sacred Scripture are not merely able to engage history, they are *rooted in history*.

Yet, we must be aware of the dangers of a "histocentric" view of Scripture. Along these lines, the pope goes on to cite three dangers of such a dualistic approach. First, the pope writes, separating history from theology, and concentrating on the Word only as historiography, makes Scripture into something it isn't, into "*a text belonging only to the past*" (*VD* §35). Such a "reductive" approach does not allow God to speak to us today; neither does it allow us to truly hear the past as God's revelation, as God speaking in and through history. A second concern raised by the pope is that such dualistic approaches often rest not upon a hermeneutic of faith, but rather, a "*secularized hermeneutic* ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history" (*VD* §35). Finally, the pope urges that such an approach ultimately ends up harming the faithful by "casting doubt over fundamental mysteries of Christianity – as, for example, the institution of the Eucharist and the resurrection of Christ" (*VD* §35).

In light of such dangers, should seminary professors really emphasize the study of Sacred Scripture on historic grounds? Yes; but we must help our seminarians to steer clear of these perils. The primary impetus for historical inquiry of the written Word, we must remember, is located in the Gospel of John itself: *Verbum caro factum est*: "The word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In light of what Pope Benedict discusses in *Verbum Domini* on this topic, I make several suggestions to help our seminarians develop a healthy biblical hermeneutic.

By promoting a hermeneutic of faith aligned properly with reason, the pope writes, we can help seminarians avoid degenerating "into fideism, which in the case of Scripture would end up in fundamentalism" (*VD* §36).

First, we must help seminarians to identify faulty approaches to Scripture, and to learn to critique biblical scholarship and its philosophical underpinnings.[21] Today, some seminarians, especially those who have been put off or harmed by secularized approaches, may wish to avoid at all costs any sort of historical inquiry of Scripture. Such experiences make some uneasy or even afraid of legitimate historical study. Yet, these fears must be overcome, and faith restored in the logic and necessity of a hermeneutic that involves robust historical and scientific study of God's Word. Not all of these fears are entirely unfounded and we must help them to develop and strengthen a sound hermeneutic of faith and do so while they are still in seminary.

Second, and as importantly, we must help seminarians encounter the Word of God in an *integrative* fashion, which rightly harmonizes theology with history and faith with reason. By promoting a hermeneutic of faith aligned properly with reason, the pope writes, we can help seminarians avoid degenerating "into fideism, which in the case of Scripture would end up in fundamentalism" (*VD* §36). At the same time, we must help seminarians develop a biblical methodology which "in its investigation of the historical elements present in the Bible, is marked by openness and does not reject *a priori* anything beyond its own terms of reference" (*VD* §36).

Evaluative Questions For Seminary Formators

In closing, the following questions are put forth, in the hopes that they will stimulate further reflection for all who are called to help implement the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* in the forming of Catholic seminarians.

1. How accurate is it to say that the Word of God is the "soul of theology" in my own coursework, study and theological discussions with seminarians? In what ways could Scripture take a more primary place in my formation of seminarians? In presenting "inspiration," what resources do I rely upon? Are my seminarians reading the primary sources (e.g., *Dei Verbum* and other Scripture documents)? Do my lectures and writing reflect the depth and breadth of Catholic teaching?
2. How can I help my seminarians begin to discover the historical context of a biblical passage? How competent are my seminarians at identifying the genre of a biblical passage? What is their disposition about historical methods of inquiry? What hopes and fears do they have about biblical exegesis?
3. What steps do I take to insure that my seminarians are proficient at listening to the God who speaks, and not merely reading Scripture academically or intellectually? Do I encounter the inspired Word in silence? How comfortable are my seminarians with *lectio divina*? To what extent would my seminarians say that there is a sound link between their study of Sacred Scripture and their life of prayer? How can I help promote a stronger connection between the two?

Conclusion

Near the end of *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict observes the following: "Saint John's proclamation that the Word became flesh reveals the inseparable bond between God's word and the human words by which he communicates with us" (VD §109). Those of us who strive to form seminarians in God's Word face many challenges. Yet, *Verbum Domini* again reminds us that biblical inspiration is a truly decisive concept and doctrine. Presenting it is a challenge, and one which we must rise to in the formation of healthy and well-prepared priests. We may take some comfort knowing that as formidable a challenge as it is, it is one that has, over two millennia, "proved fruitful, as the history of the Church abundantly testifies" (*VD* §109).

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Endnotes

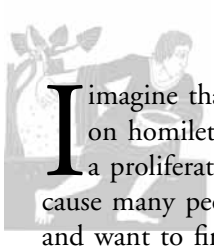
1. Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini.* Promulgated in Rome on Sept. 30, 2010 (Frederick, MD: The Word Among us Press, 2011).
2. Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth (Vol. I): From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); *Jesus of Nazareth (Vol. II): Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011). Benedict himself insists that he does not present them as "an exercise of the Magisterium" but rather, his own "personal search for the face of the Lord" (*Vol. I*, xxiii-xxiv). In comparison, *Verbum Domini*, as an apostolic exhortation, is to be read with due magisterial weight.
3. Pope Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. Promulgated at the Second Vatican Council on Nov. 18, 1965. (New York: Pauline Books and Media, 1965). The document is available online at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.
4. From the Introduction: "[Dei Verbum is] a milestone in the Church's history … Everyone is aware of the great impulse which the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* gave to the revival of interest in the word of God in the life of the Church, to theological reflection on divine revelation and to the study of sacred Scripture." Moreover, Benedict observes that a critical aim of the 2008 Synod is the further implementation of *Dei Verbum*: "By celebrating this Synod, the Church, conscious of her continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, felt called to further reflection on the theme of God's word, in order to review the implementation of the Council's directives, and to confront the new challenges which the present time sets before Christian believers" (ibid). See also *VD* § 6, 17-18, 23, 31, 34-35, 38-39, 45, 47, 51 and 86.
5. Ibid; cf. *Dei Verbum* §12. (See also: CCC 113-115.)
6. For an excellent discussion of these three criteria and their importance in Catholic biblical interpretation, see: Brant Pitre, "The Mystery of God's Word: Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 47-66, 62.
7. See Cindy Wooden, "Pope issues 'most important document on Scripture since Vatican II,'" *Catholic Herald* (11/11/2010). Available online at: http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2010/11/11/pope-issues-most-important-

document-on-scripture-since-vatican-ii/; also: Bernardo Cervellera, "Verbum Domini welcoming the Word of God to proclaim to those who do not believe," *Asia News* (11/11/2010). Available online at: http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Verbum-Domini-welcoming-the-Word-of-God-to-proclaim-to-those-who-do-not-believe-19980.html.

8. For a thorough and cogent review, see: Matthew Levering, "The Inspiration of Scripture: A Status Question," in *Letter & Spirit* (2010): 281-314. For a recent review of the Catholic position, see: Pablo T. Gadenz, "Magisterial Teaching on the Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Precedents and Prospects," in *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010) 67-91; cf. J. T. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Ignace de la Potterie, "Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in Which It Was Written," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives, vol. 1,* ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 220-66.
9. Pope Benedict XVI, "Message to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Biblical Commission" (Concerning "Inspiration and Truth in the Bible"), May 2, 2011. Available online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110502_plenaria_pcb_en.html.
10. See also: Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:1-3.
11. Cf. Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris* §9. Available online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20080511_instrlabor-xii-assembly_en.html.
12. *VD* 19, citing *DV* 11. While affirming the Church's firm belief in the inspiration of Sacred Scripture throughout the document, Pope Benedict seems content not to offer a new definition of "inspiration" itself. Rather, he refers back to the definitive statement in *Dei Verbum* 11 (Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, etc.) For an excellent summary of the implicit elements of *Dei Verbum's* treatment of biblical inspiration, see Germain Griesz, "The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Sacred Scripture," in: *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010) 181-191. Griesz reconstructs *DV* 11 in twelve logical and sequential statements. Likewise, Levering distills five salient points of *DV's* teaching on inspiration. Summing up his argument: 1) Inspiration has to do with both texts and human authors, i.e. "the charism of the human authors" cannot be excluded; 2) Inspiration works through the "graced intelligence and freedom" of these human authors; 3) "Scripture teaches the truth about God and humanity in the economy of salvation"; 4) "The whole of Scripture is inspired, although the Gospels have preeminence"; and 5) The inspiration of Scripture is located within the larger context of divine revelation (cf. Levering, 304).
13. Cf. *VD* §33.
14. Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris,* Prop. 4.
15. James Keating, *Resting on the Heart of Christ: The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2009), 37.
16. Ibid, emphasis added.
17. Pitre, "The Mystery of God's Word," 62. Cf. *Dei Verbum* §12.
18. Cf. Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, Encyclical Letter on the Study of Sacred Scripture (Nov. 18, 1893), 21-22, 40; Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Encyclical Letter Promoting Biblical Studies (Sept. 30, 1943), 3-4; *Dei Verbum*, 11-12. At present, the Pontifical Biblical Commission is studying the issue of biblical inspiration and truth. See: http://visnews-en.blogspot
19. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Intervention in the Fourteenth General Congregation of the Synod* (14 October 2008); Insegnamenti IV, 2 (2008), 492.
20. Ibid.
21. "The time seems to have arrived for a new and thorough reflection on exegetical method … What we do need is a critical look at the exegetical landscape we now have, so that we may return to the text and distinguish between those hypotheses that are helpful and those which are not." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*: *The Ratzinger Conference on the Bible and the Church*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 21-22.

Contemplative Homiletics[1]

Deacon James Keating, Ph.D.



I imagine that there are as many published opinions on homiletics as there are on prayer. Perhaps there is a proliferation of published works on homiletics because many people have been victims of poor preaching and want to find a way to stop the pain. Perhaps there are many works written on prayer because we think that our own prayer lives give us an expertise that warrants publication. These would be the subjective reasons for the abundance of literature on prayer and preaching. The objective reason for the existence of so many essays and books on prayer and homiletics is more compelling: *we exist to live in communion with God* (prayer) and we need to be fed by the Word in order to do so (homiletics). My reason for writing yet another essay on homiletics is to underscore that the signs of the times cry out for homilies that flow from prayer. We are rightfully fascinated with prayer and therefore in need of sources that assist our lives to *become prayer*. One of those sources is the homily.

Over the past decade of my diaconate I have experimented with various forms of preaching. I have discovered, however, only one form that truly impresses itself upon the consciences of the people and harmonizes with the nature of the Eucharistic mystery itself. I call it "contemplative homiletics." Its public manifestation appears in this way: it is brief; it is not read from a manuscript; it is more akin to prayer than to teaching; it carries healing; and the people receive it eagerly. I believe such a way of preaching could actually allow us to better connect the people to the mystery of Christ's love and His overwhelming desire to heal them and console them, as well as embolden them to evangelize. We all know, however, that preaching is as much gift as task. After working in the area of priestly formation for almost twenty years now, I am convinced that knowledge of communication techniques, public speaking, and theology do not *in themselves* create effective preachers in our clergy. I do believe, however, that expertise in these skills and studies, *once sublated into a contemplative life, will unleash a new power within Catholic preaching*.

A contemplative homily is brief; it is not read from a manuscript; it is more akin to prayer than to teaching; it carries healing; and the people receive it eagerly.

Why We Need Contemplative Homiletics

After more than forty years of preaching that accommodates itself to modern times, attendance at worship has plummeted. It is a good time then to look at the purpose of the homily and how we might better engage the Word and the people from the ambo.[2]

Preaching and Intimacy with Christ

To imagine preaching as an occasion of *intimacy with Christ for the preacher* and for the people may not be the first way that contemporary believers understand preaching. We have allowed the discursive educational model of public speaking to overshadow any contemplative nature of the homily. In fact, some homilies have more of a lecture feel to them than a call to vulnerable intimacy with the mystery of salvation. We might be able to attribute this lecture mode to the way clerics study scripture. Twenty-five years ago, at the height of the historical-critical method's sway over biblical studies, it was not unusual to be in church and receive a lecture on the distinction between a Sadducee and a Pharisee, or to be taken up into great detail about the gospel author's intention and the cultural accretions that found their way into the texts through early editors. The pedagogy of the enlightenment, science, hyper-objectivity, and historical consciousness had won the day, and its power showed its effects from the ambo.

The tools of scripture study are simply that—tools.

We are not to become fascinated with the tools but with what the tools are making. Here, in the Liturgy of the Word, the tools are making the Paschal Mystery clearer to the mind and heart. The Liturgy of the Word allows Christ to live His Mysteries over again in those who are open to receive such from the scriptures and the homilist's meditation. The homilist is invited to craft his words so that they are openings that allow Christ to share His prayer with believers. This occurs most concretely in Holy Communion. Intimacy with Christ's prayer is mediated through preaching as well. In contemplative preaching, hungry souls are met with images and concepts that speak to their deepest human longing. The contemplative preacher gives to his people places of rest, places to which they can return to be fed over and over again. What the reflective preacher gives is an occasion for each person to be vulnerable to the Spirit's movement within. The preacher opens a home for the believer. He invites his people to host interiority, and thereby host the Spirit, who will then define them and send them to serve others.

Preparing for Contemplative Homiletics

First the Word is to be received so that transformation of the homilist's heart can occur. As Christians we do not think that God is unreachable, that His truth is unknowable. We are not Gnostics thinking that what *is final* is silence and not *the Word*.[3] What secures the receptivity of the Word in us, however, is the faith wrapped in silence, the word that emerges from silence and is protected by silence as a womb protects life. What is final is not silence, that is for sure; rather, silence promotes, protects, and facilitates what is final: personal intimacy with the saving Word. This faith wrapped in silence is secured by love, the love of God, the love of the preacher for God and for the people, and the love of the people toward God and the preacher. Homilies break down when faith, love, and a period of silence are missing after their conclusion.

Silence is a constitutive element in the Liturgy of the Word. In the silence we let Jesus speak to us, to reach us with His particular word to us. All homilies are general. One homilist cannot read the hearts of eight hundred people. The Spirit, however, does "read their hearts" and ushers them to transformation in the light of their own particular needs—but only if the environment is conducive to such listening. Along with the symbols of the Eucharist and the art present in the church, the homily conspires to open the congregation to "hear" the Lord in the midst of an environment that lets Christ "see" us through symbol and art.[4] We are immersed in Christ as He labors to reach us through all the senses influencing the opening of our heart to Him. Without silence, the homily appears to be merely the completion of a "segment" of the Liturgy that transmits to the people that they can now relax and wait for their next speaking part. With a reasonable length of silence (more than seconds) after the homily, the congregation, when instructed on how to welcome silence, allows the Spirit to stir their hearts with His truth, a truth that radiates light upon each person's own conversion needs.

Two other features must always be present in contemplative homiletics: brevity, and a deep reverence for the beauty of the Word that is being delivered. Faith, love, and beauty wrapped in silence and delivered concisely can grasp and rivet the attention of a listener and awaken the need to be defined by the Good News. The contemplative homily carries the presence of God insofar as it carries the truth of scripture and human anthropology. As de Lubac noted in another context, "It is God who offers Himself through [Scripture], and He awaits more than a response, [He awaits] a return movement."[5]

Theology, Beauty, and Contemplation

What does it mean to form one's homily from within a contemplative context? Primarily it means that the homilist beholds the beauty of the living Christ within a mind that has become concentrated in the heart. This beholding is integrated and does not simply lead one to think about the scripture before him. Instead, this beholding ushers the homilist into a movement of the affect toward the truth of Christ. In other words, one allows the self to be taken by the beauty of Christ and gives permission to Christ to touch the self in the depth of one's heart, the place of decision, the place of encounter.[6] Contemplation is a loving knowledge of God, a knowledge given by faith and deepened by one's commitment to behold the beauty of God's own truth: the Paschal Mystery.

To *gaze* upon the text is to go beyond simply looking at and understanding words. To *behold* or *gaze* is to fix the heart upon the truth of who Christ is, of what God is revealing about His love for us in Christ, about what God is doing to one's mind and heart, what He is attracting the homilist to, what He is doing to the preacher's desires. To behold or gaze upon the text is to personally suffer the coming of its truth, a truth conveyed within the liturgy, guarded by the doctrines of the Church, and lived by the saints. To behold the

scripture is to see the beauty of salvation and weep—a weeping that becomes joy. "Those who sow in tears will reap with cries of joy. Those who go forth weeping, carrying sacks of seed, will return with cries of joy, carrying their bundled sheaves" (Psalm 126:5–6). These tears are tears of communion with the mystery of divine love. By its very nature, the mystery of divine love is eager to affect the homilist so that, in turn, his Spirit-filled words, born of tears, may affect the listening congregation.

The goal of contemplative homiletics is *to allow the truths of the text to silence and then purify the hearts of the listeners.* In other words, preaching is to be the *occasion* for the Holy Spirit's power of healing.

The Study of Theology

Ideally any approach to contemplative preaching should stem from a formation in contemplative theology: one that serves the purposes of a love-imbued truth.[7] This type of theology is founded not upon an individual's quest for discursive information about God but upon an individual's ecclesially-based desire for holiness, upon an integration of knowledge and love. Theology is knowledge that when left unobstructed by academic ideology races to completion in *contemplation*, knowledge that yields learning *and* savoring. It is a knowledge given as a response to Christ's urgent longing to abide with us and us with Him (John 15). When we live in Him and He lives in us, He makes our thinking about His truth and beauty a holy activity. "We should dispose ourselves *to go into God so as to love Him with our whole mind*, heart, and our whole soul…. In this consists … Christian wisdom."[8]

With the desire for holiness comes the concomitant desire for ongoing repentance. For homilies to be occasions for prayer, we need to purify *vain thinking* in our preaching and in our preaching's source, our theological musings. Here we enter the deep need to cry for the Holy Spirit, and the puzzling reality of preaching being *both* gift and task. If we immerse ourselves in prayer, allowing it to purify us and set us on the road to loving the mystery of the Eucharist, then soon such a mystery will dwell in us. We will become *gifted* to preach within the parameters of how well we have *worked* at becoming vulnerable to the message of the Gospel. When this indwelling occurs, we then can speak, preach, and pray out of such abiding.

Analogically, this is like the growth that happens in the early stages of marriage. In such a stage the husband may not yet wish to leave the safety of his "bachelor" identity, clinging to its comfort and wells of affirmation. He is not ready to die to self. The wife, however, calls out to him to allow *her* to define his place of living. She is insecure until the husband "pays attention" to her. Until he does so, she cannot internalize his presence and so clings to him in insecurity and not in freedom. When the husband finally dies to the "single" life and sees his wife, a seeing that opens his heart to be affected by her presence, both man and woman are set free to be who they said they wanted to be: spouses united in love. Since he is now one with his spouse, he thinks and speaks and acts like a husband. He doesn't cling to some past "script" of his single life. No, his spouse lives in him and he in her; the language of knowing and loving simply flows freely out of each of them. And so it is with those who have been "obedient" to the Gospel, those who have listened deeply to the truth of Christ. The beauty of such truth lives in them, and they live in it. From such intimacy flow homilies that carry the grace of union with God for all in the congregation. And, powerfully, the preacher's *own* intimacy with God deepens every time he preaches not from a place of stored data but from a place of intimate communion.

The Goal of Contemplative Homiletics

The goal of contemplative homiletics is *to allow the truths of the text to silence and then purify the hearts of the listeners*. In other words, preaching is to be the *occasion* for the Holy Spirit's power of healing; it is not about vainly thinking that the arranging and speaking of words *causes any* healing or conversion of life. That we could be the cause of such healing activity is, of course, impossible. We may think that the more we labor with words and study rhetoric, the more power to change minds will be released from the ambo. This commitment to labor and to study is necessary in the classroom, but at the ambo there is a call for measured and spiritually-substantive words presented succinctly. This economy of words flowing from a full heart of intimacy with God gives the Spirit a secure conveyance to pierce

the hearts of the people. "Intellect serves the spirit in prayer, but insights are not the essence of prayer. One who prays acquires … light beyond … the intellect." [9] It is not simply insight that the homily aims to facilitate, but healing.

The contemplative homily also edifies. The homily should create an environment for contemplation by way of the homilist's fascination with the Paschal Mystery and the receptivity of this mystery by the baptized. Only if truth is received with love will it bear fruit in the congregation's life. Thus, the *more one prays homilies* out of loving reverence for the truth given in scripture and liturgy, the more God's power will have an opportunity to affect the heart and will of the congregation. To paraphrase Balthasar, preaching is not simply an occasion for knowing about God; rather, *God is in the act of preaching*.[10] God uses the general words of the homilist to reach the particular heart of each worshipper. As Balthasar noted, "Jesus' mission is primarily one of discernment…. He wants no mass movement that will envelop the individual in anonymity, but a personal decision that each individual must make for himself alone." [11] The homily is not a discursive break from worship and prayer; it is worship's intellectual and affective apex. The homily is prayer that is born in the preacher's communion with Christ's own self-revelation in the scripture. In contemplative homiletics "we abandon ourselves to the love that moves the preacher." If the homilist's love for Christ is not evident in his affections, demeanor, and persuasive language, it will be harder for the people to abandon themselves to God.[12]

When the homily carries conversion, it reaches the hearts of those listening.

> The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.[13]

The contemplative homily is ordered toward encounter. It is a meeting place between the worshipper and God's search for this person. There is in this kind of affective experience not a mere eruption of emotion, but a meaningful, conscious relation to a person.[14] It is not simply a diffused attraction to good ideas or the

The *more one prays homilies* out of loving reverence for the truth given in scripture and liturgy, the more God's power will have an opportunity to affect the heart and will of the congregation.

preacher's style of rhetoric. When the homilist moves the people to be vulnerable to the presence of Christ in the liturgy and their own hearts, there is no reductionism. Such affective movement can "never be too intense" as long as there is mature integrity between intellect, affect, and will within persons situated within the sober context of the Eucharist.[15] To preach at such depth would be akin to what happens in contemplative spiritual direction, where the director "leans to one side," so to speak, allowing the directee to glimpse the eyes of God within the heart. The director simply facilitates this contemplative beholding, as if to say to the directee, "Here is the One who is looking for you, and you, Him." In homilies this is also what we want: people beguiled by God's love and assured of the grace necessary to deepen their participation in the Mysteries of Christ. What facilitates the Holy Spirit's power to silence and purify the listener is the homilist's *own suffering of the love of God and knowledge of Him*. This suffering leads the priest or deacon to speak out of love and not simply competence in discourse. Of course the congregation has to be on the road of discipleship as well, actively participating in an intimate relationship with Christ deep within their hearts, if such beauty is to be received.

Yves Congar once noted, "What God seeks in worship is neither ceremonies nor offerings of gifts—nothing extrinsic to the person who offers, nothing other than the opening up, the conversion and the gift of the hearts of believers themselves."[16] Congar wanted to emphasize that "real" worship carries with it a spiritual effect, a reception of grace that changes the affectively-imbued intellect. These changes can be, and normally will be, developmental—a person will slowly receive the intimacy afforded by vulnerability to the Mysteries of Christ. The Mysteries will be welcomed into the worshipper's heart as drops of water are absorbed on a

sponge.[17] The wisdom received by the congregation from the ambo will be as light at dawn: gentle, welcomed, and thoroughly recognizable as a reality bearing real change to a current situation.

What the contemplative homily aims to accomplish is an awakening of the spiritual intellect. One does not simply entertain with stories or progress through the homily alluding to abstract doctrinal truths. For a homily to facilitate such awakening it has to flow from the preacher's docility to the animating spirit, the *eros*. This *eros* is the attractive pull of divine glory (beauty) that opens one to prepare for the homily in true theological and not simply human inquiry.[18] What catches the homilist's attention is the glory of Christ himself, the love offered to humanity in His obedience to the Cross, to give Himself—and all that such giving means for healing and salvation—to His beloved ones. When approaching the text, the affectively-imbued mind searches for what is *more* and *beyond* the tools of historical criticism and exegesis. Disciplined by these tools, the mind is free to encounter the beauty of Christ Himself, the living One who is Revelation.[19] The mind connects with Christ not by knowing the mechanics of how the scripture came to be but by noticing how all but the word of God leaves us thirsty; we encounter Christ when we recognize that drinking deeply of culture's myths (e.g., happiness is in food, fame, money, sex, physical beauty, etc.) leaves us parched, dehydrated.[20] Here the dignity of the vocation of the homilist is sharpened. After finding rest in the Word of God himself, he can become a genuine guide to the geography of interiority, pointing out where thirst is truly quenched and where it is simply slaked for the moment.

How Might One Prepare a Contemplative Homily?

1. Receive the rationale for such a method: During the week, parishioners are being filled with intellectual content in the form of information, data, and distracting ideologies. To some extent they may be shutting down intellectually during Mass. We do not want to give them another round of data in the midst of the Mysteries. We do want to *refresh them* with the Word, conspiring with the Spirit to *heal them* and offer them *rest in the truth*, which they encounter in the Eucharist. This rest is received by their eager vulnerability to the truth proclaimed in the Gospel and in the sacrifice of Christ within which they are all now immersed. We also want to build on the work of the Spirit toward conversion—the Spirit has been communicating to them from within the very fabric of their lives during the week, subtle but sure.
2. As you prepare your homily, sit with the text and behold the beauty of love that emerges. Let the Spirit raise up the beauty; do not search for it as a task. As de Lubac taught, the letter should give way to the spirit.[21] The letter is vital but not ultimate. What is ultimate is the reception of grace that flows from the letter, the words.
3. Allow the love that is stirred in your soul over this beauty to be felt and appropriated. Let this love take you; receive this love, and abide with Christ in and with and over the text. Enter whatever level of prayer He wants to gift you with.
4. Ask Christ to deliver to you the image or word or affection[22] He wants you to ponder in the text, the one that bears beauty. *This* is what you share with the congregation. This should be a simple message, not one of great theological complexity or dense discourse. Simplicity in message and brevity in length guarantees that at least some of the words spoken will be held in the hearts of the congregation as agents of healing and purification.

   There is sometimes a necessity for longer meditations bearing more fulsome doctrinal content. For these occasions one can offer the traditional adult faith formation evening or a forum after the Eucharist has concluded. Another option would be to designate the last Sunday of the month as a catechetical Sunday, at which time the Masses would include a longer catechetical sermon.
5. Become attuned to time in your preaching. When the energy dissipates and drains out of your message, *this is the time to stop*. It is not the time to rev the engines again and go off in another direction. Do not be afraid of brief homilies that are based upon your contemplation of the beauty of Christ. As you are speaking, discern *with Him* when the power is draining out. You will know when continuing a little longer would be good, also—you will notice your words and affect connecting

We encounter Christ when we recognize that drinking deeply of culture's myths (e.g., happiness is in food, fame, money, sex, physical beauty, etc.) leaves us parched, dehydrated.

with a silent eagerness on the congregation's faces. This connection will be different from the energy you feel when you tell a good joke and it feels like people want more jokes; rather, this connecting is the result of one's heart and mind searching for the activity of the Spirit. The Spirit comes in silence and power to heal. *Is healing going on? Then go on*.

6. Before you begin to preach contemplatively on a regular basis, prepare the congregation to receive such. Invite them into longer silences at Mass after the homily and after the reception of Holy Communion. This is vital, because longer silences at Mass will necessarily accompany contemplative homilies. Teach them what to do with and in the silence. Instruct them on how to receive the healing that comes from preaching, or instruct them to deepen an already mature love of the Paschal Mystery.
7. Five-minute homilies spoken from the intimacy the preacher shares with the Trinity, and ordered by a life of "thinking with the Church," will be most effective. Try to release yourself from *reading* homilies —the sooner, the better. The prolonged habit of reading homilies simply delays a preacher's familiarity with interiority and slows his capacity to trust the Spirit during the prayerful preparation period. Also, people listen and receive homilies more readily when spoken from a place of interior intimacy.
8. The homily should then be followed by two-to-three minutes of silence. The homily sets up the healing that flows through the silence that follows. The silence is the time of *healing*. Silence is not elective; silence produces effective homilies, once the congregation has been instructed on what to do in the silence. As you complete your homily give the people a point for further prayer, or raise up a theme for their intentional appropriation that will help them be open to the fruit-bearing work of the Holy Spirit.
9. To preach from a contemplative fount is to speak from the communion you have with Christ. He uses each one of our personalities in His effort to reach parishioners. The contemplative homiletic way endeavors to integrate with your own style and personality; it is not to be a source of artificiality giving rise to anxiety or worry.

In the end, contemplative homiletics will move the congregation to receive a healing of the affect and an elevation of the intellect in its capacity to marvel over the Mystery of Christ's own love. From such a result will flow a parish that believes more deeply that Christ *is alive* and not simply that our memory and our knowledge *about Him* keeps Him so.

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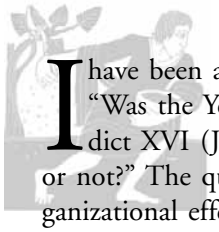
Endnotes

1. By contemplation I mean a way of approaching the scripture as prayer; more will be explained as the essay proceeds. In short the title of the essay is affirming what St. Peter Eymard noted: "Preaching is praying out loud" (Andre Guitton, *Peter Julian Eymard* (1996), 328.
2. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits, accessed August 2010), noted that only thirty-three percent of Catholics in the U.S. attend Mass at least once a week. While scripture studies and preaching do not bear the entire weight of such a slide, the loss of the transcendent in the culture and in the church has exacerbated the secularized mindset of Catholics.
3. Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 338.
4. John Navone, *Enjoying God's Beauty* (Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 43ff.
5. Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 346-7.
6. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1992), no. 2563.

7. "A progressively scholastic approach to theology … slowly eroded the patristic, medieval sense of the interconnectedness of theology, wisdom and love.… This growing sense of distance between *what knowledge can achieve* and *what is achieved by love* … drives a wedge between the psalmist's 'taste' and his 'see', between what is tasted (*sapida*) and what is known (*scientia*)" David Ford, *Christian Wisdom* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 269. See also, James Keating, *Resting on the Heart of Christ*: *The Vocation and Spirituality of the Seminary Theologian* (Omaha: IPF Publications, 2009).
8. St.Bonaventure, *Soul's Journey Into God*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), 1.4.
9. Joseph Conwell, SJ, *Walking in the Spirit* (St. Louis: The Institute for Jesuit Sources, 2003), 52-3.
10. In Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Theology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128.
11. See Edward Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* (NY: Continuum, 1994), 265.
12. Peter John Cameron, OP, *Why Preach*: *Encounter Christ is God's Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 113
13. CCC, no. 2563.
14. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Heart* (Indiana: St Augustine's Press, 2007).
15. Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 138 and 54, respectively.
16. Paul Philibert, ed., *At The Heart of Christian Worship* (Minn: Liturgical Press, 2010), 4. See also Romans 12:1 where St. Paul speaks of "your spiritual worship," the offering of the self.
17. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 335. There are many translations of the *Exercises*, but for one version see David Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship* (St. Louis: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1996), 264.
18. Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 14.
19. "The uniqueness of the Christian faith consists, first, of the fact that it is related to historical events…. These historical events are significant for the faith only because faith is certain that God himself has acted in them in a specific way and that the events carry within them a surplus meaning that is beyond mere historical facticity…. The surplus cannot be separated from the facts…. [Meaning] is itself present in the event, even though it transcends mere facticity." In other words, biblical exegesis does not exhaust the meaning of the mystery of Revelation. See Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 155, n. 16.
20. Raymond Studzinski, OSB, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina (Minn: Liturgical Press, 2009)*, 157.
21. Boersma, 160.
22. By affection I mean those feelings that arise as a result of the mind *being united to the objective truth of doctrine* and scripture, not a free-floating emotion unmoored from salvific truth.

Was the Year for Priests a Success? Measures of Organizational Effectiveness

David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap.



I have been asked to address an important question, "Was the Year for Priests, proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI (June 19, 2009-June 11, 2010) a success or not?" The question, I believe, goes to the issue of organizational effectiveness. Can the Church, at its highest levels, set a mandate, give a bold charge, and provoke momentum for change with the assurance that its international efforts reach a modicum of success?

There is no doubt that Benedict XVI was bold and prophetic in his mandate. In his letter proclaiming the inauguration of the Year for Priests, Pope Benedict XVI gave the year a deeply spiritual goal – "to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world."[1] Toward the end of his letter, the Pope continued his hope "to awaken in the heart of every priest a generous and renewed commitment to the ideal of complete self-oblation to Christ and the Church which inspired the thoughts and actions of the saintly Curé of Ars."

So, how did we do? Have priests deepened their commitment to interior renewal? Do they exhibit a stronger witness to the Gospel than they did before this year? Have their hearts been awakened to a renewed commitment to self-sacrificing for Christ and the Church? Are these kinds of questions even worth a response? Some might find the line of inquiry I am following strange or out of bounds.

Some might suggest that the "Year for Priests" was all about spiritual things and those realities cannot be subjected to any metric of institutional effectiveness. The only measure of the Church and its programs is Christ and the only true evaluator of the Church's initiatives is the Lord. And, in a mysterious way, that is absolutely true. As the Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, Christ is the only benchmark of truth and life – "Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the world. He 'acquired' this right by his cross. The Father has given 'all judgment to the Son.'" (c. 679).

Pope Benedict XVI gave the year a deeply spiritual goal – "to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world.

While keeping this theological principle clearly in mind, it is natural for us to assess the effectiveness of our institutions, even religious ones. The genius of Catholicism has always been its ability to organize the charity and justice of its faithful into charisms of service and institutions of good. Every institution has a mission, and healthy institutions keep a clear eye and a consistent focus on their mission. Hospitals are organized to heal; schools to teach; for-profit companies to sell products to make money for their stakeholders and not-for-profit institutions to serve their constituencies according to their founding purpose. It is proper, therefore, for organizations to assess how they are progressing

with their programs and initiatives. The relevant question is, what are the proper measures for evaluating the effectiveness of a religious institution and what it does? How do we know when we are achieving our goals and meeting our expectations? What is needed is a theology of organizational effectiveness.

Measures of Organizational Effectiveness

Measuring organizational effectiveness is neither simple nor straightforward, whether in the for-profit or not-for-profit world. It has long been confused with "efficiency," which Webster's Dictionary defines as acting "with a minimum of waste or effort" and "exhibiting a high ratio of output to input."[2] In this line of thought, an organization's effectiveness is a straight line from production to delivery, measured in purely quantitative terms.

Organizational researchers have theorized that organizational effectiveness is a function of several mutually-interacting institutional factors: strategy, structure, culture, technology and personnel.[3] That is, to be successful at what it wants to do, an organization first has to be absolutely clear about, and consistently focused on, its mission. Organizational effectiveness begins with a sense of purpose and vision. Secondly, the institution has to have its tasks and responsibilities efficiently organized around that mission. Institutional problems can be classified as a failure in one of three areas: (a) task (b) role or (c) authority.[4] Organizational ineffectiveness results when tasks are inconsistent with the institution's primary purpose, when roles are ill-conceived and poorly defined or regulated, or when people are not authorized to do the job they have been hired to do because of poor management or inadequate resources.

What is novel about more recent studies of organizational effectiveness is the role that "non-rational" factors play in an institution's success.[5] It is not enough to have "mission statements" and clearly defined policies and procedures. Beyond these, attention must be paid to an institution's "climate" and "culture." Researchers now understand that an institution's work culture must be supportive of the strategic priorities and goals of the institution. The emotional climate of the organization must allow people to work toward their strategic priorities with the education, experience, skills and abilities necessary to perform their tasks. That is, the emotional tenor of the workplace can't be at odds with its stated goals.

Effectiveness is a Relational Dynamic

Organizational specialists have suggested that institutional effectiveness is a profoundly relational dynamic. To be effective, an institution can't simply focus on the quality of its products, it also has to manage its multiple layers of relationships. Jamrog and Overholt have suggested that organizational effectiveness boils down to a series of alignments between (1) an institution's strategic priorities and people's values and behaviors, (2) those strategies and a successful focus on those being served; (3) a leadership style and communication pattern in the institution that motivates people in the organization to be productive; and (4) day-to-day behaviors that support the organization's strategic priorities.[6] Organizational effectiveness is not simply about the delivery of a program or a product. It is always a relationship and a service.

What does all this mean for a religious organization? Research would suggest that the effectiveness of our initiatives and programs is first due to the technical quality of what we are delivering, our proclamation and catechesis, and how we are delivering it. Religious institutions need a clearly articulated mission and a vision around which people are motivated to work. Mission cannot be taken for granted; a clear and certain task cannot be presumed. Too many organizations drift from their mission and fail to pay attention to their primary task.

Thus, pastoral leaders must pay attention to how pastoral strategies are conceived, designed and developed by the people who minister in the Church. They have to know when structures are advancing the mission and when they have become obstacles. Mission is not automatic and it cannot be the responsibility of leaders alone. There must be, as Pope Benedict XVI recently announced, a true and vibrant sense of "co-responsibility" that runs through the whole church, a sense of purpose and a commitment to action that go beyond an ethos of cooperation and collaboration.[7] Structures and strategies, policies and procedures must engage people and organize them with the skills, abilities and authority to achieve what is being asked of them.

Institutional Effectiveness and Pastoral Cultures

Beyond strategy and structure, the research would suggest that organizational effectiveness depends on the quality of relationships developed for and working toward the mission. As noted above, leaders must be sensitive to the alignment of their initiatives with the culture(s) of the people being served and attuned

to their values and beliefs. Pastoral initiatives will fail if they do not take the local "culture of learning" seriously. This dimension is one of the most sensitive and least understood aspects of formational strategies today.

Too often, pastoral leaders presume that their communities are a unified or monolithic culture of learning. They believe that their parishioners are "all on the same page" or "singing from the same hymnal." They would have us believe that pastoral differences are simply a matter of taste or style. The fact is that the differences in Catholic life are more profound. As noted previously, Catholic life is not a unified culture in the West anymore. [8]

One of the most challenging aspects of Catholic life in America today is the emergence of multiple cultures of formation in parishes. Seven divergent cultures shape the religious imagination of priests and parishioners.[9] It should be noted, though, that none of these cultures veer substantially from the essential doctrines of the faith and all are, for all intents and purposes, true to the dogmas of the Church. Instead, they are different modes by which Catholic groups mediate their world, interpret their experiences and understand what is happening in their spiritual lives. Many Catholic initiatives fall short, not because of a failure in the quality of the work produced, but because the program has been written or delivered in a "culture of formation" that is incomprehensible to members of alternative modes of thinking, believing, feeling and understanding.

Measuring Pastoral Effectiveness

Simply translating the tools of organizational effectiveness into the pastoral world fails to recognize a substantial philosophical assumption that underlies modern forms of institutional analysis. Most contemporary methods of organizational assessment are limited by their underlying assumption that (economic) productivity is the norm of effectiveness.[10] They still inhabit the profoundly competitive world, first proposed by Nicola Machiavelli, Adam Smith, and Thomas Hobbes, as our necessary and determined experience. They still presume and (unconsciously) propose the Enlightenment vision of a God who is stingy and reticent in generosity towards His sons and daughters.[11] Therefore, attempts to assess the organizational effectiveness of pastoral institutions cannot be satisfied with measures of structure and strategy, input and output, productivity and waste, even when they factor in the much-needed corrective of relationships. What is needed at base is a *theology* of organizational effectiveness, and it is to that task that we now turn.

Many Catholic initiatives fall short, not because of a failure in the quality of the work produced, but because the program has been written or delivered in a "culture of formation" that is incomprehensible to members of alternative modes of thinking, believing, feeling and understanding.

A Theology of Organizational Effectiveness

Church programs and initiatives are not, nor have they ever been, primarily about economic productivity, efficiency, or even about the quality of our human relationships. They are always about the transformation of life and a conversion to God. What is needed is a comprehensive understanding of how our projects and programs sustain this transformation. But the fact remains that our analysis of the dynamics of conversion has been too narrow, reduced only to the processes of individual change, however critical these are. And this is the dilemma that we have been forced to bear: either measure the effectiveness of our religious programs individually, one person at a time, or be satisfied with an organizational analysis that is tilted toward economic productivity. We have been given a false choice: we don't have to choose between the personal and the organizational. Both are important and both are critical to a true interpretation of what is going on in our religious institutions.

New research indicates that organizational effectiveness in church settings need not be a toss-up between each person's appropriation on the one hand, and an organization's productivity on the other. In fact, we can use a new quadrilateral tool that helps us measure pastoral effectiveness across four zones of transformation: the personal, the interpersonal, the ecclesial and the structural.[12] Pastoral effectiveness, thus, has four dimensions to it, not just one.

1. *The Personal Dimension of Pastoral Effectiveness*. Clearly, religious transformation is highly

personal and begins with the individual heart. This dimension looks at the personal dynamics that lead to a greater internalization of religious values. Organizational effectiveness at the personal level means a true appropriation of the ideals of our faith. It means knowing and accepting the revealed truths of our Christian faith and reducing the spiritual and psychological needs and defenses that are obstacles to the effective and consistent living out of these religious priorities. Religious psychologists have already developed accurate psychometric tools to measure how well individuals grow in their ability to live out their religious values in a consistent way.[13] A deepening commitment to a set of religious ideals can be carefully calibrated, if researchers are willing to distinguish simple dynamics of (behavioral) compliance from those of identification and internalization.[14] But, pastoral effectiveness is not simply a personal dynamic. It is also relational.

2. *The Interpersonal Dimension of Pastoral Effectiveness.* This dimension addresses the interpersonal or relational dynamics that lead to (or hinder) a greater internalization of the religious values being proposed. As we saw above, more recent studies of organizational effectiveness place a premium on the alignment between people's values and their behaviors in a group setting. We know from family systems studies that people take on and act out roles in institutions that are consonant with the roles learned in their family of origin.[15] We take the rules of interpersonal engagement from our family of origin and apply them (often unreflectively) to every other group we join, including our faith communities. Pastoral effectiveness is limited when dysfunctional family rules and roles are transported into a religious institution. Peter Steinke has demonstrated that congregations regularly get anxious and they get anxious in predictable ways.[16] The anxiety that is produced and the defenses that are developed are derived primarily from the unprocessed and unreflective dynamics taken from one's family of origin. If we wanted a more effective religious institution, we would then have to pay more attention to the interpersonal anxieties that working and praying with others cause.
3. *The Ecclesial Dimension of Pastoral Effectiveness.* The personal and the interpersonal form one axis of organizational effectiveness. They remind us that we are as effective as we are healthy (spiritually and emotionally) before God, ourselves and one another. But, there is another axis of institutional effectiveness. One end of that axis is the ecclesial; the other is the structural. The ecclesial dimension recognizes that Catholics are by nature "corporate" or "corporal" beings: that is, we belong to one another in the Body of Christ. Because of our baptism, we are intimately joined one to the other. This experience is a mystical reality and a pastoral one, as well. The ecclesial dimension of pastoral effectiveness looks at the way our church communities develop and how their development impacts us. There appear to be four phases of parochial development, four stages that parish communities pass through in their effort at evangelizing. These four phases are disciple-making, community building, outreaching to the poor and marginalized, and refounding when faced with death and loss.[17] We can measure a church initiative relative to the stage at which the parochial community has arrived and the stage that the community is trying to reach. There are some church initiatives and programs that are geared exclusively to the initial steps of disciple-making. They cannot and do not help parishes reach later stages of community building and justice-making. Similarly, an initiative designed for community-building cannot help a congregation facing the prospect of its own demise and loss. Programs effective for disciple-making and community-building will be counter-productive to the congregation that needs the discipline of refounding. With this in mind, we might argue that a church's organizational effectiveness could be evaluated by (a) diagnosing the congregation's present phase of ecclesial development (i.e. disciple-making or community-building) and (b) measuring it against the congregation's ability or need to reach another level (i.e. moving from community-building to outreach and justice).
4. *The Structural Dimension of Pastoral Effectiveness.* This dimension focuses on the health of the institution as an organization. Since the

> publication of John Paul II's social encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), we have become aware of the fact that all institutions carry the potential to create social sin. For the purpose of this article, social sin is described as
>
> …the refusal of communion that is embedded in the conventions, customs, policies, procedures and practices of our institutions. It is the denial of free communion to certain persons or groups of people, which is structured into the way we bring our communities together. It is the attempt to achieve a type of social harmony by means of domination or deprivation.[18]

We are aware today that an institution cannot be truly effective when there is bias, domination and deprivation structured into the customs and conventions of the organization, however well-meaning and well-intentioned the members of the organization may be. We know also that social sin is often a hidden and sometimes a largely unconscious dynamic in institutions. Social sins and their defenses have a way of hiding behind patterns of normalcy, under the banner that "we have always done it this way."

In a previous article, I described how scandals in a religious institution can be caused by conscious and unconscious social dynamics. Not all scandals are reducible to individual transgressions alone, although they always retain a highly personal dimension to them. The article states that:

> Criminal behavior, personal pathology and individual sin are tragically always a possibility for fallen human beings. But, there are other dynamics that are discoverable and reformable. These are the unconscious social processes that help leaders fail and thus mire organizations in administrative scandals. Attending to a group's emotional needs, paying attention to their social defenses, auditing their dependency and power relationship to the leader and calibrating their negative capabilities will go a long way in decreasing the number of administrative scandals religious institutions face and in diminishing their awful impact on the church and society. [19]

Organizational effectiveness has a social and structural component to it, one that is often unconscious to leadership and membership alike. A religious institution, like all other groups, has work to do to understand its corporate needs for power, control, dependency, aggression, harm, avoidance and domination, among others. Religious institutions must become more aware of the social defenses they use to keep these needs – and their harmful effects – out of consciousness, and thus away from the ability to work against them. The field of socio-analytic psychology provides both the theory and practice religious leaders need to mitigate the negative impact these social dynamics can have on the Church's effectiveness.[20]

Too often, religious organizations limit their effectiveness by bypassing the analysis of this critical dimension of institutional life. They believe that their effectiveness is due primarily to the success or failure of individuals in the organization, whether leaders or followers. However, organizational effectiveness is easily undermined by the customs and conventions of the institution, principally those that carry sin, bias, pathology and a group's emotional needs and defenses, especially when these are held by the group at an unconscious lev-

Four Dimensions of the Church's Organizational Effectiveness

Level of Effectiveness	*Questions*
Personal	Does this program lead to increased compliance, identification or internalization of the values of renewal within individuals?
Interpersonal	Does this program build communion, strengthen relationships and increase collaboration?
Ecclesial	Does this program lead faith communities to higher phases/ stages of ecclesial development?
Structural	Does this program reduce dysfunction and social sin within the community?

Organizational effectiveness is easily undermined by the customs and conventions of the institution, principally those that carry sin, bias, pathology and a group's emotional needs and defenses, especially when these are held by the group at an unconscious level.

The Effectiveness of the Year for Priests

We return to our initial question, "Was the Year for Priests a success or not?" The answer to that question depends on our level of analysis. We have demonstrated that the effectiveness of religious initiatives can be measured along four different but mutually-influencing dimensions: the personal, the interpersonal, the ecclesial and the structural.

The Year for Priests may have had a significant personal impact on some priests and congregations. There is anecdotal evidence that priests and laity alike have been genuinely moved and intensely inspired by the prayers, rituals, retreats, workshops, and conferences conducted over the course of the year. Priests have returned from international conferences and retreats reporting stronger bonds with one another, grateful for the Holy Father's direction in this important matter.

These diocesan and international events have focused our attention on the theology of priesthood and the dynamics of holiness that are required of priests in the modern world. Objectively, they are important for the building up of a priesthood that almost everyone recognizes as battered of late. But answering whether we have moved closer to Benedict's prophetic goal for the year, i.e. "to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world," requires a level of research that has yet to be conducted.

The kind of research required for this personal dimension of organizational effectiveness is doable. We could measure the values, attitudes and needs of priests that require renewal. We could then test the progress of these elements of vocational life to distinguish whether they have passed from compliance to identification and true internalization, as a result of the initiatives or programs undertaken by the Church. This kind of research has been done successfully in vocational recruitment and formation work over the past thirty years, but, to my knowledge, it was not utilized or applied to this project.[21]

Similarly, we have used no measures of organizational effectiveness that might gauge the relational and ecclesial levels of commitment of priests, those that would help us trace the "ideal of complete self-oblation," or generous offering of oneself completely to Christ and the Church, which Benedict named as his second goal for the Year for Priests.

Most striking of all is that the organizational effectiveness of the Year for Priests may have been undermined in some parts of the Church, notably in the West, by a failure of work or attention at the structural level. The revelations surrounding the sex abuse scandal in Europe unearthed not only the awful power of personal sin, pathology and criminal behavior, but also the tragic force of unconscious social processes that allowed priests accused of child abuse to be transferred from one parish to another, without adequate controls or supervision. Leaders found themselves caught in a largely unconscious network of silence, denial and minimalization, an almost global pattern of behavior, of which they were largely unaware. It is fair to say that the Year for Priests would have been less painful for victims and more effective for the Church's true mission (at the personal, interpersonal and ecclesial levels) had it proactively addressed the organizational dynamics that led to the scandals erupting in Europe. We see the effect of two separate and unrelated narratives, one scripted personally and one scripted organizationally.

Because the Church's strategies for the Year for Priests seem to have been scripted only at the personal level and measured only anecdotally, the structural or systemic problems facing the Church may have compromised the program's over-all effectiveness.

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the great benefits and legacy of this Year for Priests could be the conviction that the Church's effectiveness in the world today cannot be carried out at the individual level alone. There is no doubt that saints will always rise above the storms of dysfunction and social pathology; founders of religious life will emerge in every era to provoke institutional reform. But

their example only confirms that personal conversion is but one of four dimensions of the Church's effectiveness.

The Year for Priests was a bold and prophetic initiative. It set out a powerful challenge to priests around the world. For those who responded, the Year's retreats, workshops, lectures and conferences offered inspiration, enthusiasm, camaraderie, and hope. Whether it provided the interior renewal envisaged or the renewed commitment required of priests around the world is unknown. The Church has not yet used the measures of organizational effectiveness that would help us make that determination with confidence.

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Endnotes

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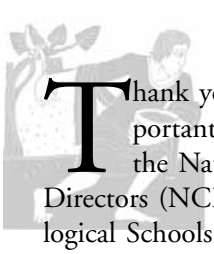
Thy Will be Done Through Us, Inspite of Us and Because of Us: Reflections on Pastoral Leadership and Ministry in the Church of 2010 and Beyond

Rev. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.



Thank you for the privilege of addressing this important and impressive international assembly of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD); the Midwest Association of Theological Schools (MATS) and the Seminary Division of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). Your invitation to me arrived over two years ago and I have given much thought to the theme you have chosen and the presentation I am about to give. I come to you as a member of a Religious Congregation – the Basilian Fathers – whose roots are in the diocesan priesthood of early 19th century France. Our *raison d'être* in the beginning was the formation of the local clergy in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

My reflections are based on many years of experience with those preparing for priestly ministry in the Church – in both diocesan seminaries and religious life – as well as with young priests, and those who work in seminaries, theological faculties and formation settings. In addition to working with those preparing for ministry, the experiences of teaching Sacred Scripture to candidates for ministry, of working in university chaplaincy, preaching priests' retreats, leading a World Youth Day, serving in congregational administration and heading a national catholic television network in Canada during these turbulent times have offered me invaluable insights into the lives and hopes of young adults today. I have learnt much about the challenges facing those in ministry, and those whom we strive to serve.

"My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history."

Doing the Will of the Lord

My starting point for this address is found in the homily of Pope Benedict XVI at the Mass for the Inauguration of his Petrine Ministry on April 24, 2005. In that very moving, programmatic address, Benedict XVI said: "Dear friends! At this moment there is no need for me to present a programme of governance.… My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history."

Imagine Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, one of the greatest theologians and minds of the Church, announcing to the Church and the world that he has come not to do his own will, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by the Lord, so that the Lord himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history! What powerful words to be taken to heart for each of us entrusted with priestly and pastoral ministry!

These words are very fitting for the theme of this conference in Milwaukee: "Thy will be done." The will of God is first of all the comprehensive plan of God for the universe and history. It is the marvelous plan through which the Father, "destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:5). The same expression "thy will be done" can refer also to any singular expression of the will of God. This "will" must be done first of all by God; it is God who fulfills his plan of salvation for the world.

Far from meaning some kind of passive, helpless abandonment to fate or circumstance, the "will of God" surpasses our wildest imagination and dreams, and reveals God's immense, providential, merciful care for each and everyone of us. To allow God's will to be done in us requires a conscious, decided "yes" or "fiat" on our part, and a sweet and sometimes bittersweet surrender so that something great may happen in us, through us, because of us and even in spite of us.

A vocation is not self-centered but comes to maturity in the context of a living, breathing, faith community. Allow me to share with you some reflections on our life together in the Church. What are the implications of doing God's will in vocation and formation ministry in the Church today? What are the challenges and opportunities before us as we try to understand and do the will of God, and as we help the young people entrusted to us to discern God's will for them? How is our priesthood related to the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal high priest? How is the will of God manifested to us? How is the will of God done in and through us?

I would also like to address several important questions that are surfacing among those preparing for ministry, and those recently ordained. Why are candidates for ministry and newly ordained priests raising questions about the validity and enduring significance of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council? Why does there seem to be a fascination with old liturgical practice and things that appear to be external and superficial? Why is the divide growing between younger priests and older priests? How can we foster dialogue and build bridges between the generations of the presbyterate?

To allow God's will to be done in us requires a conscious, decided "yes" or "fiat" on our part, and a sweet and sometimes bittersweet surrender so that something great may happen in us, through us, because of us and even in spite of us.

The Prophetic Priesthood of Jesus Christ

Before we speak of formation for ministry and the exercise of our priestly ministry, we must look carefully at the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not a priest after the Jewish tradition. He did not belong to the line of Aaron but to that of Judah, and thus the path of priesthood was legally closed to Him. The person and activity of Jesus of Nazareth did not follow in the line of the ancient priests, but in that of the tradition of the prophets of ancient Israel. As Pope Benedict pointed out in his homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi in Rome on June 3, 2010: "Jesus distanced Himself from a ritualistic conception of religion, criticizing the approach that attributed value to human precepts associated with ritual purity rather than to the observance of God's commandments; that is, to love for God and for neighbor, which 'is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices'. ... Even His death, which we Christians rightly call 'sacrifice', was completely unlike the ancient sacrifices, it was quite the opposite: the execution of a death sentence of the most humiliating kind: crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem."

Unlike the Levitical priests, the death of Jesus was essential for his priesthood. He is a priest of compassion. His authority attracts us because of his compassion. Ultimately, Jesus exists for others, he exists to serve. He has been tested in all respects like us. He knows all of our difficulties; he is a tried man; he knows our condition from the inside and from the outside, and it is only by this that he acquired a profound capacity for compassion. For one must have suffered in

order to truly feel for others. The priesthood of Christ involves suffering. Jesus truly suffered and He did so for us. He was the Son and had no need to learn obedience, but we do, we needed it and we will always need it. Thus the Son assumed our humanity and, for us, allowed Himself to be "educated" in the crucible of suffering, he allowed himself to be transformed by suffering, like the seed which to bring forth fruit must die in the earth. Without this fundamental principle and vision, any of our efforts to form the Church of Jesus Christ are in vain.

The Lasting Significance of Vatican II

When Pope Benedict met with the Roman Curia to offer his first Christmas greetings as Pope back in December 2005, he offered a long analysis of the legacy left by the 1962-1965 gathering of the world's bishops (known as the Second Vatican Council). This papal address is absolutely essential for understanding what Benedict is trying to offer the Church through his Pontificate.

One of the most important duties and responsibilities of the Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ is to preserve the unity of the Church. Benedict, in particular, feels deeply responsible for unity, and cares for those who still today find themselves outside of ecclesial communion, but also of those who find themselves in a state of tension within it, and he invites all to a reciprocal openness within the unity of the same faith, that same unity and faith which inspired John XXIII fifty-one years ago to convene the Council, and moved and animated Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II in their heroic efforts to give flesh and blood to the Second Vatican Council.

Nevertheless, there have been several significant events, statements, and misunderstandings these past years that have left us all perplexed. Are we turning the clock back on Vatican II? Are we trying to erase what the Council taught? In particular, in the area of liturgy, is there an effort to go backward rather than forward? I have been concerned that among younger clergy and even those in formation, there seems to be a greater interest in and familiarity with recent "Motu Proprios" rather than Conciliar documents. There appears to be a trivialization, a fastidious and affected attention to externals more than a deep desire to find meaning, and foster reverence and respect for the Sacred Liturgy.

The pillar of the renewal of priestly life is the liturgy. If the priest does not rediscover the true meaning of the liturgy in his life, he cannot find himself. The liturgy is the place of education to communion. The protagonist of the liturgy is Christ, not the Pope, the Cardinals in Rome, and not even the parish priest. By living the liturgy, we can enter into the life of God, and only thus can we priests journey effectively with the men and women of our time and of all time. Nevertheless, the liturgical reform must concern itself not only with texts and ceremonies, rubrics and rituals, vestments and the number of candlesticks on altars, but also with the spiritual hungers of human communities that we serve. Without authentic evangelization, participation in the liturgy is ultimately hollow – an aesthetic pastime or a momentary palliative; without the works of justice and charity, participation in the liturgy is ultimately deceptive, playing church rather than being church.

Nor can we forget that permission for the "Extraordinary Rite" of the Mass was granted for the sake of unity in the Church and nothing else. "The Extraordinary Rite" is exactly that: extraordinary. What is ordinary is what the vast number of our faithful celebrate each week. To impose what was meant to be "extraordinary" on ordinary situations does a great disservice to the unity of the Church and goes against the intent of the Holy Father. To misuse the special permission of the Holy Father for the Extraordinary Rite for political motives causes division. We must be about the work of unity in a Church that is often so divided.

Another perplexing reality I have encountered, especially among those in formation and those newly ordained, has been in the area of Sacred Scripture and preaching. A number of students, usually in their final years of the Master of Divinity or Master of Pastoral Theology program have complained, saying they would never take another Scripture course again; that their previous Scripture courses had nothing to do with the reality of the church and liturgy and that the courses were "without a soul." This topic was addressed numerous times at the recent 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, a Synod which I experienced in a very significant way, having served as the English language media attaché to this historic, world-wide gathering at the Vatican.

One cause of the present disinterest and seeming impasse in Scriptural studies has been the atomization and dissection of the Scriptures, and a lack of integration of biblical studies with faith and lived spirituality. Are today's Catholic Scripture scholars and teachers adequately prepared to draw from their exegetical knowledge and their own life of faith and prayer to help fellow Catholics discover the meaning of the biblical Word today?

In his 2001 brilliant and synthetic Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* at the close of the Great Jubilee, Pope John Paul II highlighted seven pastoral priorities that are key to effective pastoral ministry today: holiness, prayer, Sunday Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, the primacy of grace, listening to the Word and proclaiming the Word. The Word of God must be at the center of our priestly lives and ministries. It is fundamental to the preparation of those preparing for priestly ministry. Unless we build our lives upon its rock-solid foundation, we will not have any roots.

Moving Beyond Ideology

We must be honest and admit that today, some of us are still stuck in the ideological battles that followed the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps we are frozen in categories of left and right; traditional vs. avant-garde; male vs. female; hierarchical vs. lay-led, or prophetic vs. static. Excessive tensions arising from Church politics, gender issues, liturgical practices, language, confusion over the "spirit of Vatican II" and not the whole message of the Second Vatican Council – all of these influence today's candidates for ministry in the Church. Our inter-ecclesial and inter-community fixations and polarizations on all sides of the ecclesial spectrum can distract us from addressing with requisite depth and discernment the issues facing us today.

Many of today's young adults, including young priests and those discerning or preparing for ordained ministry, are searchers and seekers who desire to be truly Catholic. They seek nourishment in piety and devotion in ways very different from our own. They engage freely and generously in the works of social justice. They refuse to allow themselves to be ensnared by political or politically correct polarization or fashionable ideologies which are ready to exploit their human potential.

Whatever is not purified and transformed within us is transmitted to others – especially to the next generation. When we sell ourselves to cynicism and despair, meanness of heart, smallness of spirit and harshness in ecclesial discourse, we betray our deepest identity as bearers of joy, hope and truth. The manifestations of the Spirit must be accompanied by positive energy, because they are liberating. They ultimately set people free, and do not lead them into depression, sadness, cynicism, indifference or anger.

We must honestly ask ourselves individually and collectively: What ideologies have dominated our lives? How do we minister beyond ideology? What have been the dominant ecclesial ideologies at work among us? Is joy present in our priestly witness? What prevents me as an individual and us as a community from giving a robust, joyful witness to Jesus Christ, the Catholic faith and the Church?

Many of us are afraid of the new generation, of their robust sense of Catholicism, their manifestations of piety, their desire to "reclaim" many things that have been lost or forgotten. Deep down inside of many of our hearts, we would like clones of ourselves, and not new, free-thinking beings of a new age. There is a great wisdom to the Church's ban on human cloning!

The younger generation easily uses the word "solid" to describe those who are rooted in tradition and unafraid to manifest authentic piety and devotion. The younger generation is wary of those who equivocate and speak around issues rather than addressing them. What can we learn from their questioning? We must learn that we have to avoid the temptation to fudge – to adapt the Catholic faith so as to make it palatable to modern tastes and expectations. This so-called "accommodationist" approach generally fails. There is a risk in this approach that the Christian message becomes indistinguishable from everything else on offer in the market stalls of secularized religious faith. We have to be convinced that the fullness of the truth and beauty of the message of Jesus Christ is powerfully attractive when it is communicated without apology or compromise.

The Second Vatican Council recommends that older priests show understanding and sympathy toward younger priests' initiatives; and it advises young ones to respect the experience of older priests and to trust them; it suggests that both treat each other with sincere affection, following the example of so many priests of yesterday and today; the parish priest and other priests, including the religious, are called upon to testify to communion in everyday life.

The Resurgence of Triumphalism, Juridicism and Clericalism

Among a particular segment of the Church today, and among some of our young people preparing for ministry or recently ordained, there is a resurgence of triumphalism. The triumphalist approach would like Church leaders and pastors to exercise authority through aggressive condemnation and excommunication and believes that the Church not only has the truth but also all the answers to every modern dilemma! How many of this group would like to use a Catholic television network to be the voice piece for such an ecclesial view! Woe to me if I do that with Salt + Light Television!

Whenever we are manipulated by or become instruments of political pressure groups or tactics that would like to give the Church such new forms of triumphalism, juridicism, and clericalism, we fail in our mission of helping people to grow into a living, breathing, hopeful Church.

Jesus Christ is indeed the Truth, and the fullness of that truth is found in the Roman Catholic Church, but we must seek out with humility and in light of the Gospel how to respond to the many and varied demands of living in today's world. The Church must always proclaim the truth in love and charity. We do not impose the gospel on the world, but propose its alternative vision of compelling beauty, a beauty rooted in faith and reason. We seek to persuade by grace, truth and beauty through our liturgies, our pastoral programs and teaching moments.

Recently we have received a number of requests from our younger viewers and some younger clergy to "feature" the "old vestments" on our liturgical broadcasts. A fascination with such displays is symbolic of an ongoing "restorationism" in various pockets of the Church and represents an attempt to return to a triumphal past that the young never knew. In the midst of a world-wide pandemic of sex abuse, insistence on these elements is even more disconcerting. What does this message communicate to the world around us?

Again among a particular segment of the Church today, and among some of our young people, there is a resurgence of juridicism that searches out laws new or old to justify personal positions or ideologies in the Church. Juridicists take great delight in focusing on liturgical practices. They often create unnecessary hoops for people to jump through. While the Church needs law to insure good order, the purpose of all laws in the Church is the same as for all the works of the Church: for us, for our good and for our salvation.

There is also an emerging clericalist perspective that exaggerates the authority of the priest or bishop, creating a new authoritarianism. The clericalist operates as if ordained ministers are entitled to special status and privilege in the Church and in society. It becomes even more pronounced when vocations are few, and those who are preparing for ministry and those recently ordained manifest a certain sense of entitlement because they have responded to the call while many others have not! Therefore they think that they deserve even more respect in this day and age. Clericalists give little merit to collaboration with the laity and the involvement of laity. I encounter this on a daily basis in a pocket of our television viewers who would be content with a whole series of "talking head" priests, sisters and Church leaders who simply "talk at people" rather than engage them in mature, adult conversation.

Whenever we are manipulated by or become instruments of political pressure groups or tactics that would like to give the Church such new forms of triumphalism, juridicism, and clericalism, we fail in our mission of helping people to grow into a living, breathing, hopeful Church.

One of the great insights that came to me during the recent "Year of St. Paul" was Paul's tremendous spirit of collaboration with his co-workers. It was not simply a personal style or political ploy imposed by necessity but flowed from the deepest experience of his faith and his theological convictions. Paul of Tarsus knew that every gift, no matter how brilliant, was subordinate to the gift of charity and the bonding of the community. This must be our approach if the church is to be renewed and our mission to the world sustained.

Our Current Ecclesial Reality

How could I stand here before the seminary rectors, heads of theologates and vocation directors of the United States and Canada without speaking about the ways that we are being pruned as a Church community, as a presbyterate and an episcopate during these very challenging days for the world Church? Over the past year in particular, the tsunami of headlines about abuse of minors by priests and religious in Ireland, Germany, Austria and numerous other countries, and re-runs of old stories from various places have brought the Church to her knees once again. To watch television networks or read the newspapers, one would think that the sexual abuse of children is a uniquely Catholic problem, one indeed facilitated by a wicked lot of priests and bishops.

Is it not true that many of us in the Church today feel like we are caught in a flash flood that is unexpect-

ed, powerful, destructive and filled with despair? The refrain sounds all too familiar: "Vocations are down, scandals are up. Problems are more and more complex, and demands are increasing. Complaints are more frequent and more strident. We are dealing with an aging population. We seem to have moved from "mission to maintenance." We feel battered and bruised. The flame seems to have gone out and our influence is terribly diminished. And the list goes on and on. Many of us have been hoodwinked into discouragement.

The media exerts a powerful influence on the thinking, the attitudes and the faith of people. The flash flood bears down with immense force on all of us. Some view our present situation with great pessimism and grow disheartened, depressed, and even cynical. Others don't want to admit what is happening and go whistling in the dark, clinging to the illusion that things definitively past can be recovered and the claims and facts of the present ignored. The media, magnifying various cases of pedophilia throughout the world, have forgotten the great majority of priests and religious who have lived out and continue to live out their fidelity happily, totally and with freely given dedication, and whose only goal is to seek God and do good for others.

Just as the Risen Lord entrusted himself into the hands of pathetic, broken people in the beginning, he does the same to us. The full significance of the Ascension of the Lord reminds us that Christ accepts our lack of self-confidence in ourselves. He accepts the shadowy and dark areas of our humanity. He accepts our capacity for deceit, betrayal, abuse, greed and power. And having accepted us, he calls us, gives us the eternal commission to be his people, and sends us to serve him and love him. No one has described this better than John Henry Cardinal Newman. Cardinal Newman wrote:

> "He calls us again and again,
> in order to justify us again and again –
> and again and again, and more and more,
> to sanctify and glorify us.
> It were well if we understood this;
> but we are slow to master the great truth,
> that Christ is, as it were,
> walking among us, and by his hand, or eye, or voice,
> bidding us follow him."

Five Holy Role Models for Our Time

In the Year of the Priest, we were invited to reflect on the life, message and example of St. John Vianney. The Curé of the little village of Ars in France offered to each of us a sterling example of holiness and virtue, especially through his ministry of reconciliation. Let me offer you five exemplary models of ecclesial ministers who embody a way and message for our own times.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman

The beatification of Cardinal Newman on Sunday September 19, 2010 in Birmingham is a very important event for the universal Church. This 19th-century theologian is considered by many to have anticipated the Second Vatican Council. In all his anticipation he was always very careful to keep a moderate balance. He never went over the top. Rather than highlight his brilliance of theological synthesis and grasp of history, I would like to stress one of his outstanding human qualities: his understanding of friendship.

Friendship is a positive experience in a person's emotional life. Friendships open us to the love of others and help us to understand who God is. Newman truly speaks heart-to-heart – "cor ad cor loquitur" – a phrase that he took from St. Francis de Sales as his personal motto.

Cardinal Newman often wrote to his friends as *carissimi* – "dearest ones" – but his was a more innocent age, far less suspicious of strong expressions of love between persons of the same sex. Newman was not afraid to be very close to a few people. He once wrote in a letter: "The best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection for those who are immediately about."

Are we able to foster such friendships today among priests and among the people we serve? Can such intimate friendships exist for us? Men and women often have intense friendships with members of their own sex, friendships that have no sexual component; yet we are at a loss to speak about them or even afraid to do so. Today "friend" is one you add to a social networking profile on the web. You can "friend" someone or "unfriend" them with the stroke of your keyboard. "Friend" is also a euphemism for a sexual partner outside marriage. Can a man nowadays even own up with pride to having a dear and close friend, another man to whom he is devoted?

The French writer François Mauriac once wrote about friendship: "If you are friends with Christ many others will warm themselves at your fire... On the day when you no longer burn with love, many will die of the cold." I am certain that the "kindly light" and

Christ accepts our capacity for deceit, betrayal, abuse, greed and power. And having accepted us, he calls us, gives us the eternal commission to be his people, and sends us to serve him and love him.

flame in Cardinal Newman's heart gave and continues to give life and warmth to millions of people. And the source of the unquenchable fire was Newman's deep friendship with Jesus Christ. We need Newman's kindly light and brilliant example today more than ever.

Blessed John XXIII

In 1958, at nearly 77 years old, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was elected Pope upon the death of Pius XII. He was expected by many to be a caretaker and transitional Pope, but he astonished the Church and the world with his energy and reforming spirit. He expanded and internationalized the college of cardinals, called the first diocesan synod of Rome in history, revised the Code of Canon Law, and called the Second Vatican Council with the specific purpose of renewing the life of the Church and its teachings and reuniting Christians throughout the world.

In his opening address on October 11, 1962 [the date established as his feast and not the customary date of one's death], at the beginning of the Vatican Council, Pope John said, "In the every day exercise of our pastoral ministry, greatly to our sorrow we sometimes have to listen to those who, although consumed with zeal, do not have very much judgment or balance. To them the modern world is nothing but betrayal and ruination. They claim that this age is far worse than previous ages and they go on as though they had learned nothing from history – and yet history is the great teacher of life."

On that same night of October 11, 1962, the day of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Papa Giovanni appeared at his window in answer to the chanting and singing below from a crowd estimated at half a million people assembled in St. Peter's square. Many were young people who came in procession with candles and singing. His impromptu window speech that night is now part of Rome's legends. He cried out to the crowd:

"Carissimi giovani, carissimi giovani, Dear children, I hear your voice." In the simplest language, he told them about his hopes for the Council. He pointed out that the moon, up there, was observing the spectacle. "My voice is an isolated one," he said, "but it echoes the voice of the whole world. Here, in effect, the whole world is represented." He concluded: "Tornando a casa ... As you return to your homes, give your little children a kiss – tell them it is from Pope John."

The emotion was palpable. The "patriarch" who was bearing the burden of age and sickness, gave and generated love with all his being. For all of the lofty words, words, words and texts that went into the Council, the historic nocturnal gathering on October 11, 1962 – the opening night of Vatican II – was infused with the deep and stirring humanity of its author.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was a human being, more concerned with his faithfulness than his image, more concerned with those around him than with his own desires. He truly embodied the words, "not my will but Your will be done." With an infectious warmth and vision, he stressed the relevance of the Church in a rapidly changing society and made the Church's deepest truths stand out in the modern world.

Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko, Martyr for the Truth

The recent beatification of the Polish Priest and Martyr, Jerzy Popieluszko offers us a magnificent model of courage, boldness, conviction and faith. He was born on this very day, September 14, 1947, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the village of Okopy in eastern Poland.

August 1980 saw the beginning of the Solidarity trade union. Fr. Jerzy regularly attended the trials of Solidarity activists, sitting prominently in court with their families so that the prisoners could see they were not forgotten. Jerzy was neither a social nor a political activist, but a Catholic priest. He wasn't a forceful speaker, but someone of deep conviction and integrity. His sanctity lay in fundamental righteousness that gave people hope even in horrendous situations. He knew that all totalitarian systems are based on terror and intimidation. The Communists saw him as an enemy because he freed people from fear of the system.

On October 19, 1984, he was kidnapped by security agents on his way back to Warsaw after a visit to a neighboring town. He was savagely beaten until he lost

consciousness and his body was tied up in such a way that he would strangle himself by moving. His weighted body was then thrown into a deep reservoir. The massive turnout of people for his funeral sent shock waves deep into the Communist establishment.

The blood of his martyrdom has become the seed of faith for his homeland and for the church. At this moment in history, when the priesthood and the church have suffered much because of the past "sins of the fathers," the life and death of Fr. Popieluszko remind us what the priesthood and the Roman Catholic Church are all about.

The Servant of God, Fr. Michael McGivney

Fr. Michael McGivney, a parish priest in Hartford, Connecticut, lived in 19th century America. He ministered to his flock with Christ-like compassion and recognized the material and spiritual poverty of so many members of the Catholic community of his day. He understood that it was part of the lay vocation to become actively involved in offering assistance to brothers and sisters in need. He knew that it is not only priests and religious who have a vocation, but that every Christian is called by Christ to carry out a particular mission in the Church. He died at the young age of 38 years old, leaving a lasting legacy in founding and establishing the Knights of Columbus, a lay Catholic fraternal organization that now has close to 1.8 million members worldwide.

Like the Good Samaritan, Christ's care for the sick and the suffering was an inspiration to Fr. McGivney who, as a priest, sought to be a living sign of Christ for the people he served. Fr. McGivney and his brother Knights throughout history have been binding the wounds of those they discovered lying by the wayside of history and helping restore them to health and strength. In so doing, they imitate Christ, who came that we might have life in abundance.

St. André of Montreal – Brother André Bessette, CSC

The last example I hold up for you is not a priest but a Brother of The Holy Cross, André Bessette, C.S.C. Born Alfred Bessette on August 9, 1845, in Saint-Grégoire d'Iberville, Quebec, he was one of 12 children and suffered from a chronic stomach ailment that kept him out of school and often without work. A few years after his father's death, his mother died, but their piety and trust in God had deeply influenced young Alfred. When he reached the age of 18, he set out for New England in search of employment. He spent four years working in cotton mills and farms in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In 1867 he returned to Canada and sought the help of his childhood parish priest, Father André Provençal. The priest encouraged the young man to pursue his desire to enter into religious life.

When Alfred entered the novitiate, Father Provençal sent a letter to the novice master saying, "I am sending a saint to your congregation." The Holy Cross brothers had initially turned the less than five-foot-tall André away from seeking a religious vocation because of his delicate health. In reference to his assignment as doorman, he once quipped, "When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door."

For more than 40 years, André contented himself with his humble tasks of welcoming visitors, cleaning the premises and running errands. He put himself at the service of everyone, especially the students, whom he would look after when they were ill. Many visitors would come to the college and ask André to pray for their loved ones who were ill, and many claimed they had been healed. News of his power to heal spread as people began to recover. In response to the many healings and conversions, Brother André would always insist it was the work of St. Joseph, not himself.

Brother André's special affection for St. Joseph inspired him to build a church in his honor. Using the small sums he received cutting students' hair, as well as donations, the brother was able to build a modest structure in 1904, which he continued to expand as more funding became available. Brother André was named the oratory's custodian in 1909 as hundreds and then thousands of pilgrims made their way to Mount Royal to meet Brother André and pray to St. Joseph. Brother André died on January 6, 1937, at the age of 91. Between his death and burial, more than 1 million people came to pay tribute to him. Beatified in 1982 by Pope John Paul II, Brother André, the humble porter of Mount Royal, will be proclaimed a saint on October 17, 2010, in Rome.

Brother André Besette is a gentle yet powerful witness who reminds us that in the midst of all of our pastoral endeavors, we must strive for humility, practice hospitality, and love the poor. Who can say why was André chosen? In a truly beautiful circular letter to the Holy Cross family earlier this year, former Holy Cross Superior General Fr. Hugh Cleary, CSC, wrote: "But perhaps André was chosen, like Mary and Joseph, because in the eyes of this world he was no one; he pos-

sessed nothing, nothing possessed him."

What struck me forcefully in the story of Brother André was the intuition and wisdom of his parish priest, Fr. André Provençal, who encouraged the young Alfred to pursue his desire to enter into religious life. Fr. Provençal saw a saint, not a small and sickly man.

I hope and pray that we who have been entrusted with vocational promotion and seminary formation may never forget one of the most important duties we have: to discern, recognize and acknowledge holiness in the young men entrusted to us. We must be discerners of holiness, fishers of men and not keepers of aquariums. Our task is not only to teach and form future ministers, but to call forth saints for the new millennium.

Holiness is the calling card of the Church. It is the face of the Church as we have seen in the remarkable lives of Jean Marie Vianney of Ars, John Henry Newman of Birmingham, Angelo Roncalli of Sotto il Monte and the Vatican, Jerzy Popieluszko of Warsaw, Michael McGivney of Hartford, and André Bessette of Montreal. Each of these men did not get caught up in the quarrels, squabbles and passing things of their age. They based their lives on God's Word, immersed themselves in the liturgy of the Church, drew strength from the Eucharist and the Sacraments, and put their devotion into practice through clear teaching, compassionate loving, gentle yet firm shepherding, patient suffering, and generously serving the poor. They allowed God's will to be done in their lives on a daily basis. The Lord worked through their doubts, strengths and human weaknesses to unite the Church. Their action on Jesus' behalf was all very positive, hopeful, courageous, and straightforward. Their active faith in him and their decisive following of him are the unchanging quintessence of the Church's vocation. They are the real heroes and role models for those who wish to serve the Lord in ordained ministry and religious life today.

The Lord entrusted Himself into Our Hands

Priesthood is not, first and foremost, something we do, but someone we are. It is not an earned trophy. It is about an intimate relationship to the vine who is Christ. The Character of Christ the High Priest is branded on our hearts. We must never imagine that it is ourselves alone, in new-found power and privilege, who accomplish saving actions. It is Jesus, the Christ, who baptizes and preaches and spreads the feast of His body and blood and provides for the helpless and heals the hurt and grants us peace. He does it though weak human beings like you and me. Who of us can ever be worthy of such a great calling? To victims, we must be an advocate; for the aimless, we must be shepherds; for the disheartened, heralds of good news; for sinners, disturbers of conscience; and for the guilty, forgivers. Let us take heart and be encouraged by the witness of the apostles and martyrs of the Early Church and the contemporary Church and never be afraid of giving our lives wholeheartedly to the Lord of the harvest. We come not to do our will but the will of the One who has called us and sent us.

Let me leave you with the deeply moving words of Pope John Paul II in his final homily at Canada's 2002 World Youth Day in Toronto. This great ecclesial event was prepared and took place under the terrible shadow of the sex-abuse crisis that erupted in the USA in early 2002. The Holy Father's words were so important and consoling then as they are today:

"Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more light will you make, all together, if you bond as one in the communion of the Church! If you love Jesus, love the Church! Do not be discouraged by the sins and failings of some of her members. The harm done by some priests and religious to the young and vulnerable fills us all with a deep sense of sadness and shame."

"But think of the vast majority of dedicated and generous priests and religious whose only wish is to serve and do good! There are many priests, seminarians and consecrated persons here today; be close to them and support them! And if, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross! At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit…"

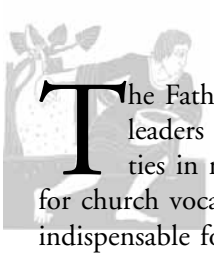
May our will always be the will of the one who sent us: Jesus the Good Shepherd. Our real program of governance and pastoral ministry is not to pursue our own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history. May God's will be done in us, through us, in spite of us, and yes, even because of us.

Rev. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B., is CEO of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation in Toronto, Canada.

Vocation: A Glance through the Patristic Sources

Rev. George Dmitry Gallaro

Editor's Note: Fr. Gallaro's essay provides an historical review of the patristic sources on the theology of vocation and priesthood. The well-attested linkage of the task of preaching to the sacramental life of the Church is particularly noteworthy.



The Fathers of the Church, those ecclesiastical leaders and teachers who are accepted as authorities in matters of doctrine, created a lexicon for church vocations. Their writing and reflections are indispensable for today's Christians to understand the meaning of vocation; through them we note a constant teaching: the connection of vocation to baptism and conversion is constantly stressed. Before his call, the candidate feels perplexed, cautious, and even reticent. The inclination of the candidate, the discretion of the people, and the decision of the bishop make evident the call of God.

St. Clement of Rome (c. 96) gives praise to the Creator of the universe "to preserve the numbers of the elect." From the call of existence we move to the call to faith; from darkness to light, from ignorance to the knowledge "of the glory of his name," and to hope in the name of Jesus Christ. The biblical persons to whom the Church Fathers refer mostly are Abraham and St. Paul. St. Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165) indicates the vocation of Abraham as a paradigmatic situation. Every Christian receives a true call, and this vocation comes from the voice of God, who exercises an *imperium*, that is, an authority, on a specific person as He did with Abraham. For us, the divine call comes through the Apostles (and their successors) but it is the same call that inspires in the called person a specific choice and a change of life. Even for the Christian called to faith, his answer is "credited to justice, having renounced the world forever." The vocation to faith is the base upon which different vocations are grafted as radical answers: martyrdom, conjugal fidelity, virginity, monastic life, ministerial priesthood, and so on.

The vocation to faith is the base upon which different vocations are grafted as radical answers: martyrdom, conjugal fidelity, virginity, monastic life, ministerial priesthood, and so on.

There is, to begin with, a single vocation to Christianity, because "we have one God, one Christ, and one Spirit of love spread above us." A prominent place is given in the vocation to virginity. The Fathers of the first century, in particular, St. Ignatius of Antioch (c.35-c.107), sees in the virgin an incarnate sign of being Church, and such a vocation is the result of many factors. First of all, it is a gift that descends from the blessed flesh of Christ. The choice of virginity is an experience of Church that is lived in the midst of a community of believers. Ancient Christianity, in its understanding of the vocation of virginity, includes all the credibility of its doctrine related to creation, to the goodness of the Creator, and the way of grasping the reality of humankind (anthropology and soteriology). The vocation to faith fulfilled in baptism is defined in the *Shepherd of Hermas* as "a great and holy call." This strict connection between vocation-faith-baptism is evident in regards to Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215) with repeated quotations from St. Paul: "In baptism we

are illumined, and when illumined we become sons, and when we become sons, we become perfect, and when we become perfect, we become immortal." It refers to a "new birth" to which all Christians are called. From the uniqueness of vocation we move to the universality of the call. This is not a generic call to virginity, but a pressing call addressed to single people, who by answering assume a precise ecclesial responsibility.

The first Christian communities felt strongly the vocation to martyrdom as an answer to the divine call, to existence, and to faith, as the imitation of Stephen the first martyr, and as a perfection of Christian life. Martyrdom is the highest imitation of the life of Christ; it is the ideal to which we must strive by meditating. On the same wave we find Tertullian (c.160/70-c.215/20) who, realizing that such a goal is not possible for everyone, speaks of a "substitute," that is virginity. Also, Origen (c.185-c.254), who exercised a rigorous asceticism and understood literally the evangelical counsel "for those who become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven," is among those who offered to God his own body as a radical answer to the faith. It is not a martyrdom sought by the person, but an answer to an interior call, a received gift, a gift which is irrevocable.

In regard to the vocation of matrimony, the Fathers refer to Mt. 19:3ff and Eph. 5:25ff. St. Ignatius wrote to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna: "recommend to my sisters to love the Lord and to be pleased with their husbands, in the flesh and in the spirit. And also exhort my brothers, in the name of Jesus Christ, to love their wives, as the Lord loves the Church." On the same subject the texts of the Fathers are numerous and underline the demand of the Christian vocation which manifests itself in the concrete state of life followed by the individual.

The "Golden" Period

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, around the year 357, wrote *The Life of Anthony*. Anthony was considered the "Father" of monasticism. This popular book, with its Latin translation, contributed remarkably to the spreading of the monastic ideal even in the Western Roman Empire. In this book, we encounter for the first time the description of a special vocation. At the age of 18, having heard the words of Jesus to the rich young man, Anthony followed literally the evangelical text. He sold the goods of his family to give to the poor and began to live an austere life on the model of the first Christians. It is a logical and radical answer to the call of the Master. The monastic literature is very abundant. Glancing through all this literature, we see a constant teaching that we must highlight because the subsequent evolution of monasticism has obscured it. It should be said that the primitive monk does not appear as a specialist: his vocation, the foundation of which was forgotten in subsequent centuries, and considered in our own days as a special vocation, does not appear in the ancient texts as a particular and exceptional vocation. The monk is a simple Christian, and more precisely a devout layperson, who limits himself to choose the more radical means in order to practice a more integral Christianity.

The experience of Anthony who "renounced the world to undertake the way of monastic life," was immediately considered a model for a special vocation. It was understood as an answer to the call of God, which is manifested at times as "an interior voice," at other times as "a word read in Holy Scripture" or from "the tribulation of life," or even as "sorrow and repentance of committed sins." After having described the different situations, the author affirms that it is the Holy Spirit who instills in us good resolutions. It is the Holy Spirit who makes easy the choice or the decision, and who accompanies the person called in his effort to unify his life to the will of God.

From the monastic school, therefore, comes a clear contribution that describes vocation in its dynamism and osmosis between the motion of the Spirit and the joyful answer of the person called. The witness of the Church Fathers in subsequent years are all in this line of thought and, speaking of priestly vocation, repeatedly affirm that no one can accede to the priesthood if not called by God. It is a direct and indirect call, that is to say, through the Church (faithful and bishop).

The first explicit text relating to priestly ordination is that of St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 308-373), who in his *Homily on the Priesthood* sings the praises of the great dignity of the priestly life, pointing out its manifold usefulness for the entire world. Ephrem declared himself astonished before the ignorance of those who dared, imprudently and presumptuously, to accede to the priesthood when not called by the grace of Christ. The deacon of Edessa manifested his indignation against those who for ambition accede to the priestly life, although not called by the grace of Christ and without the right intention stirred up by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. In this text, the emphasis is on the "interior vocation" and not the exterior vocation, "which is the ordination."

St. Jerome (c.347-420) is of the same opinion when he comments on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

The fiery priest from Dalmatia distinguished four kinds of apostles: 1. The ones who are called only by God; 2. Those who are called by God through human beings; 3. Those who are called by human beings; 4. Those who are called neither by God nor by human beings. Obviously, he chastises the fourth category and, speaking about those who belong to the third category, who have received the imposition of hands (the deepest vocation), but with intrigue and with money, he affirms that they are without the "right intention." It is only licit to aspire to the priesthood under the impulse of grace, that is, to be called interiorly by God, the author of grace.

St. John Cassian (c. 360-435), after years spent in Palestine and Egypt studying monastic asceticism, settled in the West. In Marseilles he wrote the *Institutes* and the *Conferences* in which he distinguished three forms of interior vocations: 1. God acts on the soul without intermediaries; 2. God acts through the word and the example of saints; 3. God acts using the different circumstances of life through which He orients the person called. In any case, it is always God who calls. The call from the bishop or the superior is the manifestation (or exterior validation) of the voice of God. The vocation is a gift freely given by God to the single person for the community, and it is the duty of the person called to use well the gift received.

St. Ambrose (c.339-397) became bishop of Milan following an "exterior call." His biographer, Paulinus, writes "…suddenly a voice of a child acclaimed, in the midst of the people: Ambrose! Bishop!" The governor Ambrose, who was just a catechumen, sought with every human endeavor to remove himself from the attention of the people, but at the end "he understood that he could no longer resist the will of God about himself." The same story is related by Rufinus, who concluded that Ambrose "…received the grace of God, and was initiated to the sacred orders and so became bishop. And he will be a great bishop!" Ambrose, who had a grateful remembrance of the sovereign freedom with which God had called him "with the voice of the people" affirmed clearly that it is God who calls his ministers. This is the style of God since the time of Aaron.

Also, St. Eusebius of Vercelli in Italy (+ 371), received the divine call "with the voice of the people." Among the literary works of Saint Ambrose, we must point out the 63rd Epistle addressed to the Church of Vercelli in which we find precious indications regarding the election of bishops and the vocation to the priesthood. St. Ambrose writes: "They approved Eusebius as soon as they saw him… Such a great man well merited to be elected by the whole Church; rightly it was taught that by divine disposition a man that all people requested had been elected."

"God never ceases to call, never ceases to instruct the person He has called, He never ceases to perfect the person He has instructed, and He does not forget to crown (reward), the person He has called, instructed, and perfected."

It is God who by his grace elects a man, and not human greed; it is by the call of God and not the self-candidacy of the subject that St. Ambrose defines "vocation." Through his writings, a lexicon was created which became a patrimony of the Church. By borrowing from the "administrative" lexicon of the Roman Empire, he used terms such as *divinum iudicium, populi suffragium, co-episcoporum consensus* (divine judgment, suffrage of the people, consent of the bishops) to indicate the intervention of the people and of the bishops who express their judgment and make a decision. Then follows ordination, that is, the episcopal or presbyteral ordination.

Similar cases of popular acclamation are frequent. The monk and historian Rufinus (345-411) related some episodes: 1. A certain monk, Moses, was requested as bishop by Mauvia, Queen of the Saracens; 2. Two young men, Edesius and Frumentius, became in strange circumstances apostles for the conversion of the Abyssinians to Christianity; 3. Frumentius was chosen by Patriarch Athanasius of Alexandria and his bishops' council as the first bishop of Axum.

With St. Augustine of Hippo (+430), the theme of vocation was treated according to the category of conversion: It is the grace of God who calls and challenges the candidate to a change of life. The initiative is from God and no one can claim this right; it is God who calls one to existence, to faith and to carry out a ministry in the Church. St. Augustine summarized his thoughts this way: "God never ceases to call, never ceases to instruct the person He has called, He never ceases to perfect the person He has instructed, and He does not forget to crown (reward), the person He has called,

instructed, and perfected."

The initial call is grace, to persevere is grace, to answer the call is grace. The reflection of the Bishop of Hippo is placed in the context of the delicate question about "predestination" and "free will." When he spoke about special vocations, in particular vocation to the priesthood, he was prudent, almost suspicious, regarding those who dare to come forward to seek ordination. Evidently, his personal experience had signed his life and theological thinking. As a matter of fact, his biographer, St. Possidius (+440) of Calama, related: "While bishop Valerius spoke to the people of God regarding the choice and ordination of a priest, they presented Augustine to him so that he could be ordained. This happened according to what was the desire of the people," even though Augustine cried warm tears. We can summarize the thought of a mature Augustine as follows. In the vocational dialogue, we encounter three wills: that of the candidate (Augustine in this case), that of the people who acclaim, and that of God. The call of God is first, and then follows the human answer. The call of the bishop and the acclamation of the people make evident the call of God.

Revisiting the vocational experiences of the great Fathers and Pastors of the fourth and fifth centuries, we note a constant theme: the candidate before the call and acclamation of the church feels very perplexed, extremely cautious, and even reticent. It is the classical case of St. John Chrysostom (+407) who avoided ordination by hiding. In his work *Dialogue on the Priesthood*, written after 386 when he was already a committed presbyter, well liked by the people, he justified his behavior of a few years earlier: "When I heard this discourse (the news of the imminent election to the dignity of bishop), I was overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, the fear of being forced against my will, by the anxiety of seeking continuously an understanding why the people had in mind a similar fate for me. Examining myself, I could not find to have anything meriting such dignity." In the year 397, he was called to the episcopal cathedra of Constantinople. His ministry would be as fruitful as it was bristled with difficulties and sorrow.

The Late Fathers of the Church

The monastic phenomenon has notably influenced the life of the Church on theological and spiritual matters. In the centuries of the Late Fathers of the Church or the High Medieval Age, the great abbeys and monastic communities were cultural centers that preserved and then transmitted the great works produced by the Fathers of the first five or six centuries. They established the basis for a further progress in theological search. Let us review some of these Church Fathers.

In the seventh century, we encounter St. John Climacus (c.570-c.649), abbot of the Monastery of Mount Sinai, who practiced the ascetical life and wrote the treatise *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. In the appendix, he composed *The Pastor's Book*, which was inspired by the *Pastoral Rule* of Gregory the Great. *Pastoral Rule* was translated into Greek around the year 600 by Patriarch Athanasius of Antioch. It outlined the duties of the superior of the monastery. To describe the religious vocation, he presents Christ as a king who calls people to be a soldier in his army. It is a personal call to which it is important to answer promptly, without hesitations, abandoning everything. To be called is a grace, a gift of which the Supreme Judge will ask for an account on the last day: Whoever rejected the invitation will be considered guilty of the sin of grave omission.

Vocation then, if authentically ecclesial, must result by a convergence of the "interior" vocation and the "exterior" vocation (the call of the Church).

St. Gregory the Great (+604), in his *Pastoral Rule*, specifically devoted himself to the priestly vocation, warning those who, without right intention, accede to the priesthood. He stigmatized those who take advantage of the pastoral ministry to seek honors and continued: "They cannot exercise with dignity the pastoral ministry which they have assumed, because they have arrived to a ministry of humility through their impulse of pride…without the divine call." Vocation then, if authentically ecclesial, must result by a convergence of the "interior" vocation and the "exterior" vocation (the call of the Church).

Also, St. Isidore of Seville (+ 636), presented the "true" vocation as an operative synthesis between the inclination and the habits of the subject with the call of the Church. In his *Sentences*, written by harvesting abundantly from the works of St. Augustine and St. Gregory, he so described the dynamics of vocation: the

"called" feels in the intimacy of his heart the voice of God, verifies his feelings with the Church, and "accepts on his shoulder the yoke of ordination." We know that the work of Isidore, *On the Ecclesiastical Offices*, was well appreciated during the entire medieval period.

St. Bede the Venerable (+735), borrowing from the teaching of St. Augustine, offers a complete commentary on the four gospels. Beginning with the phrase, "Levi left everything and went with Jesus" (with which the Evangelist Luke summarized the answer given by Matthew to the call of Jesus), he described a "typical vocation": When the "called" feels clearly the desire to follow the Lord, he does not absolutely pay attention to human respect nor is he concerned with himself. The evangelical text refers to an explicit and exterior call, but Bede sought to penetrate the heart of the One who calls and the one who is called and speaks of a "lively desire" to follow the master. Therefore, the interior vocation (the inspiration of grace), and the exterior vocation (the living word) are presented as two convergent aspects of the single divine call to the priestly ministry. This synthesis will be repeated in the period of Scholasticism, beginning with St. Bernard, (c.1090-1153) Abbot of Clairvaux.

Conclusion

This theological reflection which covers the first eight centuries of Christianity allows us to affirm that the Fathers of the Church understood vocation as a disposition of the soul and as a call that induced a person to determine which choices to make regarding a state of life. The "called" must live his election to the ministry not as a privilege or personal title, but as a service. The priesthood is not a tyranny, but a service; it is not the task of a magistrate who gives sentences authoritatively, but it is a rigorous and modest occupation. Gregory the Great reaffirms this same concept saying that the pastoral ministry is a call to service and not to a power that "escapes every control." And he adds, "The person who has not charity toward his neighbor must not exercise in any way the ministry of preaching."

The author of this article is greatly indebted to M. Dattrino of Rome.

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THE CORE ELEMENTS OF PRIESTLY FORMATION PROGRAMS

In recognition of the 10th anniversary of *Seminary Journal*, the Seminary Department has introduced a new publication series: *The Core Elements of Priestly Formation Programs*. These collections of articles celebrate the "best practices" and wisdom and insight of a wide variety of seminary professionals and church leaders. With only a few exceptions the articles were selected from the archives of *Seminary Journal* (1995-2005). Articles included from other sources are printed with permission.

The Core Elements series will be an ongoing publishing effort of the Seminary Department. The framework for the first three volumes reflects the four pillars as identified in the Bishops' Program of Priestly Formation: *Intellectual, Spiritual, Human* and *Pastoral*. The fourth addresses the topic of "addictions" and their implications for ministry formation.

These four volumes are produced as an in-service resource for faculty and staff development and personal study and as a potential source book of readings for those in the formation program. New collections of readings will be added annually.

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