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Theme: The Sacrament of Reconciliation

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Renewing and Promoting the Sacrament of Reconciliation

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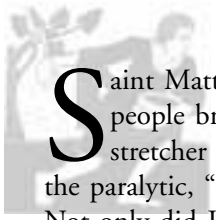


Saint Matthew's Gospel records how, when the people brought to Jesus the paralytic lying on a stretcher and the Lord saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." Not only did Jesus forgive sins, he made a point of responding to those who challenged his assertion by healing the paralytic. "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher and go home" (cf. Mt 9:1-8).

Later, after the Resurrection, Jesus appears to his Apostles, breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:23). Jesus not only forgives sins, but he entrusts to his Apostles and to their successors the power to forgive sins.

In the ordination ritual, the bishop prays over the newly ordained, asking that they be "worthy coworkers . . . so that your people may be renewed in the waters of rebirth and nourished from your altar; so that sinners may be reconciled and the sick raised up." Among the priestly powers that come to him through the anointing of the Holy Spirit are the abilities to celebrate the Eucharist and to grant absolution for sins.

In this article, I would like to reflect on the church's understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation, describe one very successful pastoral initiative to renew the sacrament of penance, and share a few thoughts on elements in formation to strengthen one's awareness of the importance of the sacrament of confession.

Throughout this article, as does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, I shall use interchangeably the various names of the sacrament. This wonderful gift from God is called the sacrament of conversion, the sacrament of penance, the sacrament of confession, the sacrament of forgiveness and the sacrament of reconciliation. Each name highlights some particular aspect of this rich sacrament of spiritual healing.

Any reflection today on renewal of the sacrament of reconciliation should take place in the context of the New Evangelization.

I often tell the story of the encounter I had at an airport some time ago. A young man about 35 years old, waiting for the boarding announcement, asked me if I could explain something to him. He claimed that he had more or less been raised as a Catholic and that Catholics "do something that helps them get rid of all the excess baggage they carry around so that they can start again brand new." I said I assumed that he was talking about the sacrament of confession. His reply was that he knew we had something like that; he just did not know how to use it. He had never been properly instructed nor had he participated in this "Catholic way of getting rid of excess baggage."

The condition of this young man relative to his knowledge of the faith and, therefore, his real connectedness to the church is replicated in hundreds of thousands of young adults across this land. That disconnect is part of the reason for the call for a New Evangelization.

Pope Benedict XVI used the word "repropose" to describe the New Evangelization. Somehow in what we

do and how we express our faith, we have to be able to repropose our belief in Christ and his Gospel for a hearing among those who are convinced that they already know the faith and it holds no interest for them. We have to invite those who form the generation of undercatechized to hear it all over again, as if for the first time. Any reflection today on renewal of the sacrament of reconciliation should take place in the context of the New Evangelization.

In preparing to embrace the challenges of the priesthood today and the renewal of sacramental life among so many who have not truly experienced it in a meaningful way, and particularly as we turn to the great gift of the sacrament of reconciliation, we do so aware of the lived context of the faith today.

Entire generations have become disassociated from the faith and are unfamiliar with the support systems that facilitate the transmission of the faith. Deficient catechesis has produced, by some estimates, two generations of baptized Catholics with little appreciation of the content of the faith and a fragile sense of allegiance to the church, its pastors and its teaching office. Coupled with this situation is the widespread effect of the "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," as labeled by Pope Benedict XVI, that has haunted so much of college and university theological instruction over past decades. Added to this background is the fact that the sins of some priests have encouraged a distrust in the structure of the church itself.

Living out a life of faith and attempting to share the excitement of our experience of the Lord, particularly in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of reconciliation, brings us into contact with many obstacles and barriers. Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to our country in April 2008, underlined three challenges the Gospel faces in our society today. In his homily at vespers with the bishops of the United States during a meeting at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., he reminded us that we are challenged by secularism, the materialism around us and the individualism that is so much a part of our culture.

Just as he diagnosed the problem, so too does our Holy Father present a practical solution and a challenge. In 2011, on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI summoned the entire church to the timely and timeless call of the New Evangelization. It is in that context that everything we do today, including the understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation and the invitation to experience it, has to be seen. The New Evangelization is the lens through which we see our ministry in the context of the realities of our culture today.

The young man at the airport, to whom I referred earlier, is not alone. All of us at times carry a great deal of "baggage" that we would like to unload. Despite our best intentions, each of us has experienced personal failure. The task of the priest is to help Catholics properly understand the power of the sacrament of confession to free us from the weight of our sins.

At the heart of the sacrament of reconciliation is the mercy of God.

The Church's Understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The sacrament of reconciliation is the story of God's love that never turns away from us. It endures even our short-sightedness and selfishness. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, God waits, watches and hopes for our return, every time we walk away. Like the son in the parable, all we need to do to return to our Father is to recognize our wrong, our need for forgiveness and our need for God's love.

Jesus continues to speak to us of our noble calling to holiness and of his loving forgiveness. He offers us reconciliation if we ask for it. His saving, healing and restoring action takes place in the sacrament of reconciliation, which is still often called penance or confession.

Why do we need reconciliation? Why is it that we fail? Why is it so difficult at times to be good and to do what is right? Even though we may have good intentions, why do we often find ourselves doing what we know we should not do or failing to do the good we know we ought to do? These perplexing questions arise from our awareness that a part of us is determined to do good while at the same time an element within us continually turns away from the good we know we can do.

In the seventh chapter of his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul describes this situation while writing about what we call the human condition. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I can will what is

right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me" (Rom 7:15-20).

Saint Paul's cry from the heart is something each of us has experienced. Why is it that we have the best of intentions, sincerely make New Year's resolutions, firmly renew our aspirations, yet allow the worst in us to come out?

We can find an explanation in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. A description of this seemingly relentless and endless struggle between good and evil is described in the imagery of the serpent tempting Adam and Eve with the forbidden fruit. God said, "You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:16-17). The tempter, however, said, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5).

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. They chose their own desires over God's will and plan. This teaching, whatever the imagery, is very clear. Sin entered the world through the decision of a human being to choose self over God and God's plan. God is not responsible for the evil in the world.

At the same time the harmony of creation was destroyed. If we continue to read the book of Genesis, we see how Adam and Eve became aware of their sin and were filled with shame before God — hiding from him rather than seeking his face. This was not the way it was meant to be. Once sin entered into life and into our world, harmony with God was shattered and the whole network of relationships with each other and our world began to unravel — from the Genesis account of Cain's murder of Abel to the utter confusion at the Tower of Babel. This first sinful action — this fundamental breakdown — we call original sin. It results in what we call the human condition.

Each one of us is an heir to Adam and Eve. We are members of the human family. We trace our lineage back to this couple and their failure to respect God's law, will and plan. The actions that they took shattered God's created harmony not only for them but also for us. Their sin is reflected in us and is mirrored in our daily life. This helps to explain why it is so difficult to do good, to do what we know we should do.

Yet we are not lost. We are not left to our own devices. Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminds us that just as in Adam sin was introduced into the world and, through sin, death and all of its consequences; so, too, grace and new creation come to us in Christ. Just as death came through a human being, so, too, the resurrection of the dead came through a human being. As in Adam all people die, so in Christ all shall be brought to life — a fullness of life, a new creation already beginning in us through grace (cf. 1 Cor 15).

The core of the initiative is the simple invitation to people all over the archdiocese to realize first of all that there is confession and that it is readily available to them, that they are invited back and that they will be lovingly and generously received into the embrace of their spiritual home.

This is the message we proclaim when we face the mystery of sin, the reality of original sin and the problems of the human condition that lead us to personal sin. Just as Adam brought sin, death, disharmony, confusion, disruption and struggle into our lives, so too now Christ, the new Adam, gives us grace, redemption, new life and salvation. It is in Jesus Christ that we now find the beginnings of the new creation. He leads us back to the Father, overcomes the tragic alienation of sin and restores harmony. Jesus gives us newness of life in grace that begins to restore our relationship with God which will lead to full communion with God in glory. It is for this reason that we identify Christ as the new Adam. Grace is the beginning of a new creation for all of those baptized into Christ.

When we face daily frustrations and struggle to be good, we need to recall the teaching of the church that we have the power to triumph over sin because we have Christ's grace within us. We have the capacity to be victorious, but we must face it every day with our Lord and Savior, the new Adam, Jesus Christ.

At the heart of the sacrament of reconciliation is the mercy of God. The priest, who is Christ's minister in penance, listens to the confession in the name of the

Lord, to discover in the penitent's openness, sorrow and will to conversion, the grounds for forgiveness. It is in the person of Christ that the priest hears the confession of guilt. But such a confession is made with the full expectation of mercy, compassion and, ultimately, absolution, because Christ has already atoned for our sins.

Jesus became the new Passover, the unique and final sacrifice by which God's saving plan was accomplished "once for all" by the redemptive death of his son Jesus Christ. In God's holy plan, it was determined that the Word of God, made flesh in Jesus Christ, would be the expiatory sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world. In fact, we continue at the celebration of every Eucharist, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to proclaim before we receive the Body and Blood of Christ: "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

As the church has consistently taught, it is Jesus who merited our justification by his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father. The *Catechism* confirms that Christ's death is "both the *paschal sacrifice* that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men . . . and the *sacrifice of the new covenant*, which restores man to communion with God" (§ 613).

In a very graphic way the Stations of the Cross depict the power of sin. Jesus accepted the cross and took on our sins. Spiritual tradition tells us that Jesus fell three times under the weight of the cross and got up each time to continue his sorrowful way to Calvary, the crucifixion and our redemption.

Each of us bears the weight of crosses we fashion with our own sins, and without God's grace we would never be able to get back up after each fall. Only the grace of God's forgiveness extends the helping hand that lifts us from our failure, fault and sin and allows us to continue our journey to God.

The church believes in the forgiveness of sins. Not only did Jesus die to wash away all sin and not only in his public life did he forgive sin, but after his resurrection Jesus also extended to his church the power to apply the redemption won on the cross and the authority to forgive sin.

The *Catechism* points out that our faith in the forgiveness of sins is tied in with faith in the Holy Spirit, the church and the communion of saints. "It was when he gave the Holy Spirit to his apostles that the risen Christ conferred on them his own divine power to forgive sins: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (§ 976).

This power to forgive sins is often referred to as the "power of the keys." Saint Augustine pointed out that the church "has received the keys of the kingdom of heaven so that, in her, sins may be forgiven through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit's action. In this Church, the soul dead through sin comes back to life in order to live with Christ, whose grace has saved us"[1] (*Sermon* 214).

Our priests have demonstrated enormous ingenuity and creativity in taking the fundamental theme, The Light is On for You: a Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and expanding it to embrace a range of activities.

The *Catechism* tells us that the sacrament of reconciliation must be seen within the context of conversion. "Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom" (§ 1527). Even if our conversion is ongoing and only partial, we still are subject to the effort that will someday reach completion. Saint Peter's conversion, the Catechism points out, after he denied his Master three times, "bears a witness" to Jesus' infinite mercy.

Where do we find such forgiveness? Who can remove sin and wipe away our failures? In the sacrament of Penance we meet Christ in his church ready and eager to absolve and restore us to new life. The graces of Christ are conferred in the sacraments by means of visible signs — signs which are acts of worship, symbols of the grace conferred and the recognizable gestures through which the Lord confers his gifts. Forgiveness of sins and the restoration of baptismal graces are also attached to an outward sign.

The *Catechism* reminds us of another important element when forming an appreciation of the sacrament of penance. It quotes from *Ordo paenitentiae* § 31 that "'Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless

physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession'" (§ 1484) and reminds us that "[t]here are profound reasons for this. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses each sinner: 'My son, your sins are forgiven' (Mk 2:5). He is a physician attending each one of the sick who need him to cure them" (§ 1484).

What leads a person to the sacrament of Penance is a sense of sorrow for what one has done. The motivation may be out of love for God or even fear of the consequences of having offended God. Whatever the motive, contrition is the beginning of forgiveness of sin. The sinner must come to God by way of repentance.

There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow at least to the extent that we regret it, resolve not to repeat it and intend to turn back to God. Our sorrow for wrong we have done should lead us to the sacrament of penance. As Pope John Paul II teaches in his exhortation on reconciliation and penance, a worthy reception of the sacrament is "the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of sins committed after baptism. . . . It would be foolish as well as presumptuous . . . to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the sacrament which was instituted by Christ precisely for forgiveness" (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 31).

True sorrow for sin implies a firm resolve not to fall back into it. While we cannot be certain that we will not sin again, our present resolve must be honest and realistic. We must want to change, to be faithful to the Lord, to take steps to make faithfulness possible. Christ's forgiveness always calls for such a commitment: "Go and do not sin again" (Jn 8:11).

A Pastoral Initiative to Renew the Sacrament of Penance

The pastoral letters, *God's Mercy and the Sacrament of Penance*, *God's Mercy and Loving Presence*, *Belonging to God's Family* and *Reflections on God's Mercy and Forgiveness* were all part of a multi-year pastoral program entitled, "The Light is On for You." The Archdiocese of Washington undertook this initiative to invite people back to the sacrament of reconciliation. The core of the initiative is the simple invitation to people all over the archdiocese to realize first of all that there is confession and that it is readily available to them, that they are invited back and that they will be lovingly and generously received into the embrace of their spiritual home.

The program called for widespread advertisement using radio, website, iPod, metro rail and bus ads and roadside billboards to proclaim that "The Light is On for You." In every Catholic church across the archdiocese, every Wednesday night during Lent from 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m., the light is on so that people know there is a priest waiting for them.

The priest confessor must recognize that he is, for the penitent, *imago Christi*. He is also at that moment the personal presence of the church.

By setting a uniform time for confession in all parishes on one evening each week during Lent — each Wednesday — the program ensures the sacrament is readily available, particularly for the faithful who, for whatever reason, may have been reluctant to receive the sacrament or who may have been away from the church.

This initiative is not meant to replace parish activities which are already scheduled. Parishes should feel free to celebrate their own individual Lenten reconciliation services and activities in addition to and as a part of this initiative.

Accompanying this announcement and as part of the initiative were pastoral resources including a parish toolkit that contained homily hints, general intercessions, bulletin and pulpit announcements, logos that could be used to replicate the public advertisements, suggestions for implementation of the initiative and resources for catechetical material on reconciliation. Among those resources was the helpful brochure widely distributed which includes a "how to" guide for going to confession, including a detachable Act of Contrition.

As the program developed, was repeated and became a part of the fabric of the pastoral life of the Washington Archdiocese, the initiative was supplemented by highlighting additional aspects of the church's life.

One year, parishes were invited to have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the church during this period when the light was on for confession. In this way, people coming to confession would also be, once again, reintroduced to the church's gift of the real presence.

While the practicalities varied in each local situation, parishes were encouraged to have a small group of people committed to adoration (perhaps for periods of a

half-hour each) to cover the hour and a half of the time each Wednesday evening during Lent when the priest heard confessions.

During another year, invitations were available for people to distribute as a part of the initiative, inviting people they knew who should be with us and who had drifted away, to join them for Sunday Mass. The process was a simple one. In each parish across the archdiocese, starting with the First Sunday of Lent and continuing throughout the season of "turning to the Lord," invitations were available for parishioners to take with them after Mass. The invitations were meant to be given to someone else. The message was clear and inviting: "If you have been away, please come back. You are an important part of our family and we miss you."

Our priests have demonstrated enormous ingenuity and creativity in taking the fundamental theme, The Light is On for You: a Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and expanding it to embrace a range of activities.

Some Thoughts on Formation and the Sacrament of Confession

Seminary formation is a time of coming to know, experience and love not only the great received Tradition of the church but its varied expression in pastoral ministry.

The one and unchanging priesthood is lived out and exercised in circumstances that change from age to age, generation to generation. This brings us to reflect on this moment of history. Seminarians today are the future priests of a church that was renewed in the pontificate of Blessed John Paul II. They will be the priests of the new millennium, the priests of the New Evangelization. Ministry today has to be seen in the context of the church that rejoices in and reflects the legacy of Blessed John Paul II, that recognizes the challenges of the new millennium and that embraces the call to the New Evangelization.

As seminarians in the circumstances of our day prepare to carry out their future ministry, they have as an enormous resource the legacy of Blessed John Paul II, which is their heritage. So many men responding to the call and now in formation for priesthood look to Blessed John Paul II for ongoing guidance just as they found in him the initial inspiration to consider priesthood. In his encyclicals and exhortations, Blessed John Paul II gave to the church a body of writings that address most of the issues we deal with today precisely from the perspective of the great living tradition of the church rooted in the Gospels. *The Gift of Blessed John Paul II: A Celebration of His Enduring Legacy* is an effort to gather brief reflections on all of the encyclical letters and apostolic exhortations of this extraordinary Successor to Peter and Vicar of Christ.

Among his writings the encyclical letter *Dives in Misericordia* (*God's Mercy*) is a rich source of inspiration as we reflect on the sacrament of reconciliation. The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (*On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*) will obviously be a primary resource as is the USCCB *Program of Priestly Formation* (Fifth Edition).

Increasingly, the usual Saturday time slot is not as convenient to the faithful as it once was. Evening times during the week seem to make the sacrament more available.

Good formation as a confessor and spiritual healer in the sacrament of reconciliation begins with a clear understanding and faithful acceptance of the church's teaching on penance as gift and sacrament. To accomplish this in our day and culture, a great deal of energy and teaching effort will need to be devoted to reproposing the sacrament of penance — reintroducing it to so many who are in need of the New Evangelization. In this regard, I have offered a few examples of pastoral initiatives that have borne fruit. There are many more, illustrative of pastoral energy all over this country.

Finally, I want to share these few thoughts on the preparation, the formation, of a good confessor. All good preparation for appreciating the sacrament of reconciliation begins with one's own frequent use of the sacrament. Here we are reminded in *Dives in Misericordia* that we all need to avail ourselves of the sacrament of penance. The practice of our faith should include regular sacramental confession. As the encyclical instructs us, "this is not a mere ritual repetition or a psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us even more clearly" (Introduction, 7b).

The priest confessor must recognize that he is, for the penitent, *imago Christi*. He is also at that moment the personal presence of the church. As priests in the confessional — in the space set aside for the sacrament of penance — we stand as Jesus the Good Shepherd who always goes in search of the lost sheep. Our response must always be welcoming and patient.

Many years ago as a young priest, I was helping to hear confessions as part of a very large parish penance service that had invited people back to the sacrament. At one point, a person entered the face-to-face section of the confessional and announced having been away from the sacrament for decades. My response, in an effort to be inviting, was "Welcome home. What kept you

away so long?" "You," he replied. Since I had never met him before and he could see the confusion on my face, he quickly interjected, "Not you personally — a priest." It took him decades to reach the point where he could get over what he described as "meanness."

From the pulpit, in our homilies, as well as in our teaching and writing, we must always present the truth in its fullness — unvarnished. In the confessional as in so much good counseling, we meet the penitent where he or she is and with kindness, caring and patience, trying to bring them to Christ — to his church — to where they need to be.

Conversion experiences abound. One very experienced and respected pastor years ago told me as we implemented "The Light is On For You" for the first time that he had just heard a confession that, as far as he was concerned, made the whole program worthwhile. Another much younger priest related to me that after hearing confessions one Wednesday evening for over three hours, he returned to his room and tearfully thanked God for this great priestly gift—the power to absolve sins.

An important lesson that was learned from the "Light is On For You" was that, as a church, there is a need to offer the sacrament of reconciliation on a regular basis outside of the usual Saturday afternoon. Increasingly, the usual Saturday time slot is not as convenient to the faithful as it once was. Evening times during the week seem to make the sacrament more available. Once times are clearly identified, a priest should simply be in the confessional. Our people should know that we are there, even if there is no line waiting to access the sacrament. Even if a priest has no penitents, his presence in the confessional teaches a valuable lesson to his parishioners that confession is a high priority for the church, the priest and the parish. The great confessor Saint John Marie Vianney spent many hours alone in the confessional praying for his flock before they responded to the offer of God's mercy. This attitude should be emphasized during priestly formation. The priest's time spent in the confessional is never wasted. It is always his gift to Christ and to Christ's people.

In seminary formation, *practica* concerning the administration of the sacraments are very helpful. Even more important when dealing with the sacrament of reconciliation, however, is the mentoring and advice from successful confessors and spiritual directors. Unlike some of the other sacraments where there is a ritual technique to be developed, in confession what often serves the priest best is wisdom and experience. Older and experienced pastors can be a great resource in seminary formation as those preparing for priesthood have the opportunity for conversation and to learn the wisdom that has grown out of the lived experience of priesthood.

Conclusion

In all of the sacraments, Christ is present. As we reflect on and rejoice in the great gift of God's forgiveness and Christ's sacrament of spiritual healing, we recognize a unique dimension of priestly spirituality, particularly that of a diocesan priest. We find our continuing, ongoing, daily contact with the Lord Jesus precisely in the celebration of the sacraments. Jesus is present in a particular sacramental way every time a sacrament is celebrated. He is present not just for the one receiving the sacrament but for the priest who administers it.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, it is Christ who touches the penitent, but he does so through the outstretched hands of the priest. In this moment of grace, Christ is truly and really present every bit as much for the priest as for the penitent. In the mystery of absolution, not only is the penitent restored to spiritual health, but the priest is more deeply united to Christ the Good Shepherd, redeemer and our savior.

In all that we do to renew the appreciation of the sacrament of reconciliation and to find ways to make it more available to our people, we must, above all else, remind ourselves and those entrusted to our care that it is Jesus, who died on the cross, rose from the dead and breathed the spirit of forgiveness into his church, who is truly present today in and through his priest.

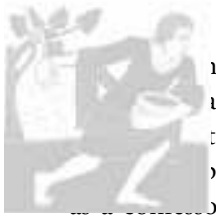
Cardinal Donald Wuerl, S.T.D., is archbishop of Washington, D.C.

Endnotes

1. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 214,11: PL 38,1071-1072; Qtd in Catechism 921.

The Making of a Confessor

Kurt Stasiak, OSB



…n the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation in the life of the church, it is curious that many priests feel their seminary training did not prepare them particularly well for their ministry as a confessor. Every seminary offers courses "surrounding" the sacrament of reconciliation—history, moral theology, canonical aspects—but time and attention devoted to the actual practice of "hearing confessions" seems inadequate. Many priests readily admit they learned *about* hearing confessions *by* hearing confessions. While on-the-job training is an essential and inevitable part of most any profession, it is unfortunate that, for some priests, the learning curve is quite steep and at the expense of their parishioners.

I began to consider how to help seminarians develop their "confessional skills" when I was obliged to reflect in a systematic way on what I thought (and hoped) I had learned about being a confessor. The first few times I taught our seminary's course on sacramental reconciliation there were plenty of notes and texts to help me cover the historical, theological and canonical aspects of the sacrament. I didn't have as much success finding resources that addressed the many questions about the sacrament's *practice*. And questions there were…

- What about the penitent who comes every week with the same sins?
- What about the penitent who hasn't been to confession in twenty years—and your Saturday afternoon Mass starts in 20 minutes?
- How much should the confessor talk?…Do we need to say anything?
- My pastor just listens, gives a penance and then says absolution. Is that right? Is it wrong?
- What if we're not sure what the penitent is talking about?
- When and where do you draw the line between concern about your penitent and invading his privacy?

Many priests readily admit they learned *about* hearing confessions *by* hearing confessions.

I spent a semester's sabbatical reflecting upon what I thought I had learned in my (then) almost twenty years as a priest, and how I could share what I hoped were some helpful insights. This led to *A Confessor's Handbook*,[1] first published in 1999—a book I can guarantee does not have all the answers, but a book of the sort I certainly would have read before my ordination.[2]

I am told *A Confessor's Handbook* has found its way into a number of seminary classes and libraries. Grateful that my teaching colleagues believe I have something of value to offer them and their students, I am pleased to share here some of my thoughts as to how we can help our seminarians learn the skills and embrace the attitudes that contribute to the making of an effective confessor. In this article I will first discuss the "confessional practicum" I have used for the past ten years in my seminary teaching. Second, I will offer some thoughts as to how, in addition to academic courses or practicum, seminary formation can contribute to the making of effective confessors. Third, I will conclude by returning to the beginning: by going back to the first confessions I heard; identifying the (now) obvious "malpractice" to which I still embarrassingly admit; and relating the invaluable lesson I learned about all of priestly ministry in my first hours in the confessional.

A Practicum in Hearing Confessions

Theology and practice

Being an effective confessor is not a matter of

mastering theological principles on the one hand, or acquiring a lengthy inventory of pastoral techniques on the other. Competence in both principles and practice is needed. Theological expertise without sound pastoral application has little use outside of the classroom. But a pastoral practice that is not informed and guided by sound theological study and reflection is dangerous.

Any professor knows you cannot do everything in one semester, and so a course that devotes most of its class time to the pastoral practice of reconciliation is by definition incomplete. I do spend most of our class time on the practical, but I have not entirely abandoned the theological. In the course of our thirteen morning periods during the semester (once a week for two and three-quarter hours) I do lecture on topics such as contrition and conversion, the liturgical structure and elements, the sacramental seal and the like. Our canonist devotes two half-mornings during the semester to the relevant sections in the *Code*. I invite our moral theologian to offer a half-morning session on formation and freedom of conscience (a review from previous courses), and I or another colleague will spend a full morning outlining the historical development of the sacrament.

These lectures do not exhaust the opportunities for considering canonical, theological and historical aspects of the sacrament. During the first class period I distribute a take-home exam consisting of about two-dozen questions on various aspects of the sacrament. The answers—to which the seminarians must attribute proper chapter and verse—are found in the *Catechism* and the *Rite of Penance,* and so this exercise assures a basic familiarity with the key teachings of the church and the key parts of the Rite. Furthermore, several homework assignments throughout the semester include written reflections on, or an analysis of, several ecclesial documents or contemporary articles. Finally, I use the first five minutes of each class period to conduct a quick oral Question & Answer review of the above material.

The Practicum

I have five goals for the practicum. I want, first of all, to provide seminarians with as realistic an experience in hearing confessions as is possible this side of their ordination. This means familiarizing them with the different ways penitents confess (even the same sins over and over), as well as the ideas, expectations, hopes and fears penitents variously bring to the sacrament. The very first lesson does not take long to get across: a *seminarian's* experience of the sacrament—his understanding, approach and actual practice—is usually not typical of the experience he will have with most of his *parishioners*.

As confessors, we are not trying to master a situation so much as we are trying to master our ears and our hearts, to listen to what is being said and to offer something other, and better, than a generic response.

A second goal of the practicum is to allow a seminarian the opportunity to develop his confidence, competence and sense of identity as confessor. The practicum's penitents (I and other seminary personnel, including students) provide plenty of examples of genders, age groups, sins and ways of confessing. I am sure that I take delight, in at least a venially sinful way, when I have a seminarian hear three confessions in quick succession. More or less the same sins are confessed, but in different ways and definitely by different penitents: the first, a 50 year-old, white-collar gentleman; the second, a 35 year-old homemaker; and finally, a twenty-something collegian. This role-playing exercise is a most effective way of illustrating the importance, and the difficulty, in really listening to the sinner, rather than simply hearing the sins.

A third goal of the practicum is to give the seminarians a broader exposure to what can, should and probably should not take place in the celebration of the sacrament by observing each other in action. This exercise raises the blood pressure, to be sure (I tell my students these are likely among the most difficult confessions they will ever hear because they have an audience), but it always raises excellent questions and issues. The seminarians are exposed to a variety of ministerial styles, including examples of both "a good way to do that" and "I'll want to avoid saying something like that."

Fourth, the practicum provides what may well be the only opportunity in the seminarian's life for an assessment and feedback of his ministry as confessor. Unlike baptisms, weddings and special Masses, video cameras and recorders must be checked at the door of the confessional, thus eliminating any chance to review, replay and perhaps even rethink. (There is the seal, too.) The seminarians rightly take advantage of this, and I

Another point I clarify several times throughout the course is that most confessions are neither complicated nor intense.

enjoy watching their confidence develop, not only as they hear confessions, but also as they critique the efforts of their classmates.

Finally, the practicum obviously allows ample time for the seminarians to address their "what if" questions (of which there are always many). These discussions are not limited to the practical, for answers and explanations frequently revert to discussing the meaning, purpose and significance of the sacrament.

I relate a final feature of the practicum, which contributes to the five goals outlined above. An extracurricular requirement during the last third of the semester is that each seminarian be videotaped hearing two confessions (with other, non-classmate seminarians usually playing the penitent), after which the seminarian and I review the two confessions. This extends the opportunities for feedback that the class sessions offer, but since this review is only between the student and me, it allows for an even more direct and unabashed critique. Experience shows me that the more private nature of this meeting also allows some seminarians the opportunity to raise issues or ask questions that they have been hesitant to discuss in class. Not often, but more than once and obviously building on our work together throughout the semester, this meeting has made it possible for the seminarian to set aside some "confessional demons" from his past.

Cautions, caveats and clarifications

Each practicum session provides an opportunity both to learn something new and to reinforce or expand on a previous insight. However, I am careful to stress that our classroom is not a sacramental kitchen; we are not in the business of concocting recipes for reconciliation. Homiletic practicums do not prepare a priest to give the perfect homily immediately, and on every occasion; they provide basic principles for exegeting the text, considering theological and pastoral concerns, and then, after reflection, making a competent proclamation of the good news. Using the homiletic analogy, the confession practicum helps the seminarians learn to listen to each penitent's "text," so as to be able to respond effectively and directly to that penitent. As confessors, we are not trying to master a situation so much as we are trying to master our ears and our hearts, to listen to what is being said and to offer something other, and better, than a generic response. Our ministry through the sacrament offers us the opportunity to make Christ present to our people in an especially direct and personal way.

Most students want to please their teachers, and so I make it clear from the beginning that my interest in the practicum is not to have them hear confessions the way I hear them. They can certainly benefit from my experience and my suggestions, but they need to develop their own style. Again, an analogy with learning to preach would be appropriate. We can benefit from another's insights and techniques, but copying verbatim another's homily usually doesn't work. The practicum is about improving their ministry in the confessional: I want them to hear their next confession better than they heard their previous one. A common insight from the practice confessions (especially early on in the semester) is that while there is seldom only one way to minister to a particular penitent in a particular situation, there is almost always a better way. That better way—which comes with experience, discussion and reflection—is what the practicum tries to offer. "I can't tell you what to say," I will remark, "but I can tell you some things you should consider." The purpose of the practice confessions, the assessment and the feedback is not to wire into them a reflexive "when they say this, then you say that" mechanism, but to help them develop a habit of listening and of considering, always, a better response than they might otherwise offer.

Another point I clarify several times throughout the course is that most confessions are neither complicated nor intense. As the semester begins, some of my students suffer extreme pre-confessional anxiety, convinced that when it is their turn to put on the stole their first penitent will confess an abortion, an attempted homicide, an irregular marriage situation and a ten-year absence from the church. They are grateful that I disappoint them in that regard. I do pose some dire situations for them to deal with in the course of the semester, but I keep Saint Augustine-type confessions to a minimum. There are two points here: first, that most confessions are not particularly dramatic; and second, just because a confession might be comparatively routine or normal, does not mean that it is insignificant to the

penitent—nor does it mean that significant ministry cannot occur.

Finally, while I emphasize that even a routine confession need not be a bland confession, I suggest that effective confessors are neither suspicious nor pessimistic. Every confession does not contain key secrets that must be deduced by the shrewd wit of the confessor. Nor will a priest, upon entering the confessional, always find himself and his penitent engaged in fierce combat with a devil whose defeat is assured only if and when each penitent's contrition is perfect, and their absolute and binding conversion is guaranteed.

Some frequent questions

As we discuss the value of the dialogue between priest and penitent, a frequent question is, "How long should a confession last?" "As long as it needs to," is my usual response, and it is not meant to be flippant. Most confessions are routine: that is, they involve ordinary people confessing ordinary sins in an ordinary way. Many times we do not have to say a lot, and in fact there are times when we must take care that our words do not get in the way of what God is doing. The analogy of a medical doctor can be helpful here. The physician does not need to display all his knowledge, all his skill, with every patient. But a truly excellent physician will know when that extra measure of care or some additional questioning or discussion will contribute to healing and health.

Another frequent question is whether a priest needs to say anything at all. I have had more than one newly-ordained priest tell me how, as he was preparing for his very first Saturday afternoon confessions in his first assignment, his pastor advised, "All you have to do is listen, give a penance and say the absolution. Hearing confessions is the most boring job in the world, but fortunately it's also one of the easiest!"

I know some feel a priest should never ask questions about what the penitent confesses. "God knows the whole truth, I don't need to," as one priest-friend puts it. Yes, God does know the whole truth. But God speaks through the sacraments of our church—and God speaks through the church's ministers of those sacraments. A key point underlying sacramental reconciliation (and all sacramental theology) is that a Christian does not have a relationship with God that is private, a relationship that excludes the community to which the Christian belongs. In celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, Catholics encounter Christ and the church in the person of the minister. God does know the whole truth. Hopefully, the words of the minister will allow that truth to be spoken—and heard—clearly, tangibly and concretely.

People come to confession for all kinds of reasons, but perhaps two things they share are the desire to be forgiven and the desire to be taken seriously.

People come to confession for all kinds of reasons, but perhaps two things they share are the desire to be forgiven and the desire to be taken seriously. Many times our comments can show that respect and seriousness. I remember asking a group of young women if they were afraid about what the priest might ask them in confession. That they admitted to some anxiety came as no surprise, but I was impressed that they also expressed a certain frustration at times when the priest said nothing. I cite here two references from *A Confessor's Handbook,* both of which point to the importance of a confessor taking the penitent seriously.

> *What's really disappointing is when you've mustered up the courage to go ahead and say something and you actually want to talk about it—at least a little—and the priest just lets it hang. When it's something I was afraid of, but really wanted to talk about, I don't leave the sacrament relieved. I leave feeling I've wasted my time. Wasn't he interested—really interested—in what I was saying? Did he think I was just doing this as a matter of routine?*

Here's much the same sentiment from a priest's perspective:

> *If we [do not] carry out Confession with all our strength and in a more personal, more serious and more interior fashion,…if we act merely as machines for giving absolution, if we do not take man seriously and do not allow him to have his say, if we do not force him to take himself and God seriously or help him to find himself and to*

identify himself in a personal way, then these people will find that they are taken more seriously by the psychotherapist and they will go to him.[3]

Some will insist that the unique and special focus of the sacrament of reconciliation—God's offer of forgiveness—be maintained. "The sacrament is a time to experience God's mercy, not solve all your problems," they will say, and I agree with much of that. God's forgiveness is the heart, blood, bone and muscle of the sacrament. And, no, the confessional is ordinarily not the best time or place for an extensive discussion about almost anything. Confession is primarily about the forgiving of sins, not the solving of problems—although at times both can take place. While I am not interested in turning the sacrament into a lengthy session of spiritual direction, pastoral counseling or psychotherapy, I think it is important to remember that for many of our parishioners, confession is the only counseling they will seek or receive, the only direction about matters spiritual *and* psychological or emotional to which they will have access. For a few of our people, it may well be their only personal, direct encounter with a minister of the church. Making neat distinctions about the goals and methods of sacramental confession, spiritual direction and psychological counseling makes sense in a seminary, where all three resources are readily available. Such divisions do not always work—nor do they always serve well—in a parish setting.

Our primary responsibility as minister of the sacrament of reconciliation is to be a steward—an ambassador, as Saint Paul says—of God's reconciliation. That is primary. There are many times, however, when we can offer, and when we can be, more. It is crucial that we learn to address the questions we should always ask ourselves (and answer) in the confessional: "Why is this penitent here now? What is she looking for? What does he hope to receive from this encounter with Christ through the priest?"

Thinking Outside the (Confessional) Box

In addition to the courses in sacraments and the various liturgical practicums offered by the academic curriculum, are there other ways the seminary formation program can help form men to be effective confessors? I offer here two suggestions for further reflection and discussion.

Don't wait for the course to begin learning

Sometimes a new seminarian will tell me, "I've heard about your course with the deacons. I can't wait to take it and learn about being a confessor!" I appreciate the enthusiasm, of course, and I hope it lasts. As it is, I try to offer something about becoming an effective confessor even in the "Sacraments in general" course I offer to first year seminarians. Concluding a brief introduction to the theology of the sacrament of reconciliation, I give them a case study:

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You look around this room and you see your twenty-five or so classmates. From what you know of them now, if they were all ordained tomorrow, which ones would you ask to be your confessor? Which ones would you most definitely not approach? And what makes the difference?

Even though the question catches them off-guard, most seem to know what I am talking about right away. And, year after year, class after class, their responses indicate that "what makes the difference" has little to do with the potential confessor's academic ability, theological acumen, or even, for the most part, social popularity. The difference has everything to do with how they perceive their classmate relating to and treating others. In a few words, is he a man of charity?

Seminary life, with its common exercises, common prayer, common activities and its common knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses, offers considerable opportunities for seminarians to practice their future ministry every day. Seminary life itself offers a practicum in how to live, pray and work with the weak and the sinful, and to embrace attitudes and habits that offer compassion instead of imposing judgment.

Charity is not a virtue one can take up as quickly or easily as one dons a purple stole. A seminarian with

a reputation for careless talk; one who delights in discussing the faults and foibles of others; he who comes across as impatient, arrogant and intolerant–we know these traits do not automatically vanish with the laying on of hands. Some dioceses, in their efforts to promote the practice of sacramental reconciliation, have launched fairly extensive public media campaigns, even to the point of erecting billboards along the highways. This is all well and good, but we advertise the kind of confessors we are all the time by the way we treat people.

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Part of a seminarian's yearly formation assessment should consider how he is learning to be with sinful humanity; not only how he deals with his own sins and weaknesses, but how he responds to those who would benefit from his support, understanding and fraternal correction more than from his criticism, disdain and intolerance. How a seminarian is seen living with others now is not incidental to how his future parishioners will experience him as priest.

Confession in the seminary: a possible Catch-22?

Seminarians are not immune from the attraction—in some cases, the addiction—to Internet pornography endemic today. Anyone who serves as a seminary counselor, spiritual director or confessor is familiar with this vicious pattern: a session on a most user-seductive web site often leads to masturbation, which almost always fosters guilt and frustration, and which ends for some seminarians in an almost frantic race to the confessional.

A discussion concerning the meaning and use of sacramental reconciliation, especially as it relates to difficulties with the practice of chastity, would benefit many seminarians. Such a discussion should certainly be part of the seminarian's pastoral formation, because, as a future minister of the sacrament himself, he must understand and appreciate the sacrament as one of the regular means of conversion in the Christian life, and not only, or primarily, as an eschatological fire extinguisher.

Pope Paul VI referred to priestly celibacy as a "motive for pastoral charity,"[4] and for some seminarians their struggles with chastity might also present them with a motive to develop a greater pastoral charity in their dealings with others. A habit of masturbation is a ready reminder of one's weakness, and so is also a constant counterpoint to one's pride and self-righteousness. Saint Paul himself suggests as much by his comment that the thorn in his flesh was given precisely so that he would not become too elated. For some, the thorn of masturbation will be a frequent reminder of their need for God's grace, and that we all seek—and benefit from—another's compassion more than their judgment. Such reflection can broaden one's conscience to include sins against charity, particularly, and perhaps also sins of omission against charity.

Confession involves more than our expression of regret for our past. It calls us to express our hope for the future.

Concluding Remarks

In *A Confessor's Handbook*, I offer many practical suggestions as to skills and techniques (Things to Do, Things to Avoid), and discuss a dozen particular scenarios or situations that priests will encounter in the confessional (penitents returning after a long absence, those who disagree with church teaching, the scrupulous, children and so forth). The book, as is the case with the practicum I teach, devotes considerable time to suggesting things we can do in our effort to be effective confessors.

However, I begin the book by offering five basic principles that deal, not with techniques, but with attitudes. I conclude my reflections here by referring to a fundamental attitude of the confessor: an attitude toward himself, toward the penitent and toward the sacrament. It is the last of the five principles in my first chapter, but the first one I had to learn—and the one I have to continue to learn—in my efforts to be an effective confessor.

I find the scriptural basis of this attitude in chapter three of the First Letter to the Corinthians, in which Saint Paul reminds his readers that while he may have

planted, and Saint Apollos may have watered, it is God who gives the growth. In our discussion here, it might be stated like this: it is God's grace that calls us, priest and penitent alike, to conversion. And it is not our task to micromanage the power, the operation or the timing of that grace. As the *Catechism* reminds us, "the confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant."[5]

I heard my first confessions over thirty years ago. While I remember nothing of the specifics of those confessions, I do remember my attitude. I was determined I was going to be the best confessor any penitent ever had. There is nothing wrong with that desire, to be sure, but while my intention was on target those many years ago, what was off track was the approach I took. I confess to a repeated mistake I made in those early days of my priesthood: I was determined I was going to solve the penitent's problem right then and there. No matter that she had gone to confession before, had confessed these same sins before, had received advice and counsel from priests far more experienced and competent than I. This time I was going to make a difference—*the* difference.

I am sure I was not guilty of massive malpractice in those early confessions, but I was guilty of excessive expectations. My expectations of what I could do and what my penitent might be able to do were too high. If she confessed anger towards her husband, I would feel obliged to offer her half a dozen suggestions that would surely improve their relationship. If the young man confessed looking at XXX-rated films, I would proceed with a discourse on the value of sexuality in a way that would rival our late Pope's *Theology of the Body* (in length, though certainly not in quality.). No matter what the sin, the issue or the problem, I was determined I would find the definitive solution this time, once and for all. My goal: after this confession, this penitent would never sin again.

God's grace can have an effect over time that we cannot schedule, manage or force—or even imagine.

Probably the only real damage I caused back then was that I kept my penitents in the confessional too long. There is no set time for a confession, of course,

but I am sure that more than once I added a few minutes—and a few degrees of intensity—that were neither needed nor welcomed.

Although it can be, and sometimes is, the sacrament of reconciliation is ordinarily not a dramatic turning point in a person's life. More often, it is one of the many steps a person takes in order to grow closer to God. The example of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is admirable but it is not typical. Spiritual growth usually takes place much as physical and intellectual growth do: slowly, with false starts and frequent returns but, ultimately, with hope in the God who is at the beginning and end of all we do and are. Confession is not only about the forgiveness of sins. It is about conversion of life. Confession involves more than our expression of regret for our past. It calls us to express our hope for the future.

For both priest and penitent the sacrament is an encounter with Christ. Both approach the sacrament to accept the offer of God's grace as he gives it, and not to determine the final disposition or regulate the timing of that grace.

Traditional moral theology knows of the "law of growth" or, as one Vatican document has referred to it, the "law of gradualness."[6] This law reminds us that we ordinarily grow not by leaping from floor to floor, but by walking up steps, and those steps often take the form of a narrow, winding staircase. People need time to grow, just as the seed of God's word takes time to take root in a heart and produce a harvest. While we can absolve sins, we may not be able to solve many problems. In many confessions the only thing that might be accomplished is assuring that our penitents know the sacrament as an occasion of grace, peace and hope—no small accomplishment there.

A confession is not a failure if a solution to a problem eludes confessor and penitent. A confession is not worthless if stunning insights are not offered (or understood.). But a confession can be significant and meaningful to the penitent even if it is simple, brief and without much drama. Many times, probably more than we realize, our ministry is to plant seeds with hope and trust that God will give the growth in his own time and according to his plan. God's grace can have an effect over time that we cannot schedule, manage or force—or even imagine.

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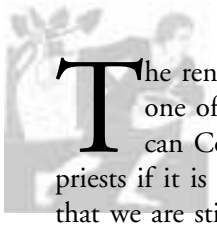
Endnotes

1. Kurt Stasiak, OSB, *A Confessor's Handbook* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999). A revised and expanded version appeared in late 2010. For that edition, I added some ten thousand words (about a forty percent addition to the original text), reflecting ten more years of seminary teaching, presenting workshops and days of recollection to a number of presbyterates and, of course, reflection upon my continuing ministry as confessor. I thank Paulist Press for their permission to use material from *A Confessor's Handbook* in this article.
2. Two works predating my ordination that served as fine guides for previous generations of priests were: *The Good Confessor* by Fr. Gerald Kelly, SJ (New York: Sentinel Press, 1951), and Fr. Bernard Häring's *Shalom: Peace; the sacrament of reconciliation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968). Both books have been out of print for some time, but are certainly worth a search on the Internet or eBay.
3. Karl Rahner, SJ, "Problems Concerning Confession" in *Theological Investigations III,* ed by Karl Rahner, trans. ?? (Seabury, STATE: Publisher, 1967), 205.
4. Pope Paul VI, Of the Celibate Priesthood *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* (24 June 1967), § 24.
5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 1466.
6. Pontifical Council for the Family *Vademecum for Confessors Concerning Some Aspects of the Morality of Conjugal Life* (12 February 1997). (Included as Appendix I of *A Confessor's Handbook*.)

Forming Confessors with Grateful and Compassionate Hearts: Seminary Formation and the Renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Msgr. Jerry McCarthy, Ph.D., S.T.L.



The renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, one of the fine initiatives of the Second Vatican Council, requires the ongoing formation of priests if it is to be effectively implemented. I believe that we are still in transition as a faith community in our grasp of a more authentic and vibrant embrace of the sacrament. Of critical importance, of course, is the role of the priest as the minister of this great sign of peace and reconciliation. While skill in administering the sacrament is important, far more important, I believe, is the wisdom beyond skills that is the gift of a solid, well-grounded confessor. A priest with a grateful and compassionate heart is essential. The example of St. John Vianney, the Curé d'Ars, is the prime exhibit of this irreplaceable capacity. How can seminary formation programs facilitate the cultivation of such exemplary confessors? In addition to the essential task of forming priests to be excellent confessors, there is also a great need for preaching and catechesis about the importance of the sacrament of penance if the renewal of the sacrament, envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, is to flourish.

The seminary formation program contributes to this process in many ways. Certainly, the seminary curriculum attends to the preparation that students need by its explicit courses that provide instruction on the theological, spiritual and practical administration of the sacraments. However, the immense contribution that is made by the implicit curriculum of the seminary is often overlooked; expressed in its practices of prayer, its community life and the manifold ways in which faculty, students and staff interact and communicate. If, as I contend in this essay, the priest must have—as a constitutive dimension of his identity—a grateful and compassionate heart in order to be an effective confessor, how can this capacity be developed and recognized during the program of formation? My suggestion is that the human, pastoral, and spiritual formation programs in the seminary are particularly rich resources for discerning the interpersonal skills and affective maturity that are

[T]he human formation program in the seminary is a particularly rich resource for discerning the interpersonal skills and affective maturity that are essential for effective pastoral care in administering the sacrament of penance.

essential for effective pastoral care in administering the sacrament of penance. While one is ever mindful of the salutary principle, *ex opere operato*, whereby the efficacy of the sacraments is not conditioned by the personal sanctity (or lack thereof) in the minister of the sacrament, this principle functions as a "sacramental safety net" for the people of God. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient, expectation of an ordained priest. Personal holiness, arising from the personal dispositions and actions of the priest (i.e., *ex opere operantis*) should not be optional if the faithful are truly to be cared for and loved, and if they are to experience the sacrament as a vibrant, life-giving encounter with grace.

The liturgical significance of the sacrament as an action of praise and thanksgiving requires greater emphasis in order to balance appraisals that rely far too heavily on traditional categories of sin and grace gleaned from the tradition of moral theology and canon law.

It is my hope that the reflections in this essay suggest ways in which not only explicit training by way of courses and studies can contribute to this process, but also how field education and the experience and sharing of a way of life in the seminary (in other words, the pastoral, spiritual, and human formation components of the seminary program) can equip our future priests to be Christ-like confessors. To that end, my remarks are drawn from my teaching of moral theology and personal experience as a confessor. The renewal in moral theology requested by the Second Vatican Council (*Optatam Totius*, paragraph 16) specifically encouraged stronger emphasis on sacred scripture. One of the important developments that emerged from this conciliar mandate is that the moral life is viewed, biblically, as a response to the call of God. Pope John Paul II commends this vision of the moral life in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor: "The moral life presents itself as the response* due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man" (§ 10).

The late Fr. Bernard Haring eloquently elaborates on this theme of "call and response" in his magisterial work, *Free and Faithful in Christ* (note, of course, that it is not entitled *Free and Easy in Christ*).[1] Learning how to be a faithful disciple is the work of a lifetime, and requires not one conversion, but many conversions along the way. In an earlier work on the sacrament of reconciliation entitled *Shalom*, Haring anticipated this theme of faithful discipleship. If grace is understood as the participation in a loving relationship with God, then the notion of sinfulness can also be understood, in a much more powerful way, as the departure from a relationship of love.[2] A clear implication of this perspective is that issues of character and virtue become much more prominent in our understanding of sin. As Fr. Kenneth Himes has noted, the biblical description of sin includes not only the Hebrew word *hattah*, which emphasizes "missing the mark" in our dealings with God and one another, but also the notion of *awon*, which emphasizes "rebellion" against the trajectory of grace and goodness that God has planted within us.[3]

These more dynamic portrayals suggest that the process of conversion from sin requires a reorientation of our minds and hearts. Such conversion occurs not merely at the level of repentance from wrong actions, but also in the depths of our being where our character, or our deepest self, is engaged. Our individual choices and actions are important because they are expressions of our moral character, that essential core of self, captured by the biblical image of the "heart." The eminent psychiatrist and deeply religious thinker, Robert Coles writes in his lovely set of essays, *A Harvard Diary,* "Character is what you're like when no one is looking."[4] The recovery of character and virtue in the Catholic moral tradition is also echoed in a profound recovery of the importance of this tradition in Protestant ethical reflections. Accordingly, a more relational understanding of sin and grace can strengthen our grasp of the power of the sacrament of reconciliation.

In his immensely wise book entitled *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement*, distinguished Protestant ethicist James Gustafson notes that both the Roman Catholic and Jewish moral traditions have emphasized the particularity and granularity of the notion of sinfulness as embodied in concrete acts rather than the more cosmic, global concept of sinfulness that has shaped the historic communities of faith that emerged from the Reformation.[5] In order to equip priests to administer the sacrament of penance and to discern appropriate penances or penalties, the notion of sinfulness was interpreted through legal categories and the development of analogies based on case studies, the root meaning of casuistry in both moral theology and canon law.

Attending to the serious implications of one's concrete behaviors and actions is a witness to the incarnational principle that our choices, for good or for ill, are embodied expressions of our character. However, an excessive focus on the "fine-tuning" of our moral choices, along with a detailed inspection of the various contingencies of our actions, can minimize the importance of the dispositions and root attitudes that inform, shape

and guide those actions. As the expression goes, "character counts." The recovery of the tradition of the virtues in recent moral theology has been a much-needed counterbalance to an ethics focused almost exclusively on quandaries, moral dilemmas and correct action. As the Irish writer, Fr. Edward Leen, mentions *In the Likeness of Christ,* the purpose of life is "not to gratify us, but to purify us."[6]

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The late James Wm. McClendon (one of my mentors as a young doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union, and a revered and much admired Baptist professor of ethics who taught at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California) described this singular focus on moral problem-solving as "decisionism."[7] His indictment is far reaching: it extends to the relativism famously articulated in the notion of "Situation Ethics" (also the title of the important and controversial book by Joseph Fletcher that set off the situation ethics debate in the late 1960's); to the principled forms of ethics that are expressed in the Catholic natural law tradition; and also to the covenantal ethics (deontological or duty-based ethics) that are dear to the Calvinist, Reformed wing of the 16th century Reformers.

McClendon's point is that moral contextualists (including Fletcher and colleagues who argue that moral norms are at best mere guidelines, and are not ultimately decisive in moral analysis), as well as principle-based thinkers (such as Catholic natural lawyers and those committed to moral universals and moral absolutes, a good example of which is Kant's famous categorical imperative: "always treat persons as ends never as means to an end"), suffer from a shared and problematic notion, namely that ethics is essentially about "decisions" or solving moral quandaries.

Some of our most important moral choices, however, do not fit neatly into the problem-solving box. When we can no longer provide medical relief for a critically ill patient, how can we endure suffering and care for her when we have run out of options? What about the deeply personal choice of vocation in life that each of us must make as we shape our future? How do we deal with the family member whose irascible and aggravating behavior is a source of alienation and consternation, an individual with whom we find ourselves "stuck" and cannot otherwise dismiss? Stanley Hauerwas, in his short, pungent and whimsical essay, "Must a patient be a person to be a patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie isn't much of a person, but he is still my Uncle Charlie" deals specifically with this issue.[8] The recovery of the virtue tradition trains us to focus on the dispositions and attitudes that shape our character in profound and lasting ways. For the person with a chaste heart, decisions or choices about adultery and sexual misconduct, while they may be alluring temptations, are simply not on the table.

The words of absolution proclaimed by the priest remind us of the critical importance of attending to this larger context of character that is expressed in the narrative of the paschal mystery, which shapes this formal declaration of forgiveness:

> God the Father of mercies,
> through the death and resurrection of his Son
> has reconciled the world to himself
> and sent the Holy Spirit among us
> for the forgiveness of sins;
> through the ministry of the Church
> may God give you pardon and peace,
> and I absolve you from your sins
> in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
> and of the Holy Spirit.

The formula of absolution highlights the role of the Trinity in reestablishing full communion of the penitent with the Church. The prayer invites us to an attitude of thanksgiving and praise of God for unending mercy and grace. Experiencing the "touch" of this mercy in the healing proclamation of absolution by the priests, as well as the declaration of need by the penitent, are essential to the sacramental action of reconciliation. Not only is pardon and wholeness restored to the individual, but the individual is also restored to full communion with the Church. Penance is a sacrament, a liturgical action of the entire church, and the recovery of the com-

munal forms of penance are to be celebrated rather than perceived as a threat to the historical experience of individual, auricular, confession and absolution. Throughout its history, various forms of the sacrament have developed, along with different perspectives on the confessor's role in the sacrament.

As Bernard Haring notes in his book *Shalom,* various models of the confessor's role in the sacrament are present in the tradition, including the forensic and legal model of a judge, and the medicinal, healing model of a physician. The forensic model has emphasized the judicial function of the confessor, highlighting the confessor's responsibility to make a judgment about the matter of the sacrament, namely the self-avowal of the penitent with respect to sinfulness. However, I think that the legal metaphor of this role should be carefully interpreted along the lines of discernment. The nuance is important because the confessor is not so much a judge in a court of law as he is a pastor.

If the forensic model is not carefully modulated, it runs the risk of turning the sacramental experience into an inquisition, and overemphasizes the role of the confessor as a guarantor of sacramental integrity. In this appraisal, it is tempting for the confessor to think that the sacrament is all "about him."

The medicinal model avoids the limitations and distortions of the penal model, but it also, too, has its shadow side, namely, a tendency to turn the sacrament into a quasi-therapy session, or a truncated, spiritual-direction encounter.

Both models suffer from a common affliction; namely, a tendency to reinforce a narrow focus on individualism to the detriment of the communal, liturgical and ecclesial nature of the sacrament. Forgiveness of individual sins reconnects us with the community of faith. In the gospel accounts of Jesus' actions of forgiveness, not only is the individual healed, but the individual is then sent on a mission as a servant of the community. The seminary formator should endeavor to ensure that students exercise the kind of selflessness captured by the kenosis of Jesus that is critical to being a good confessor. The confessor serves not so much as a gatekeeper of grace, but as an instrument of grace. The healing narratives in Mark's gospel are stirring reminders of this blessing—consider the healing of the paralytic and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Both of these persons are healed and then sent on missions of service. In fact, Mark's gospel explicitly uses the word *diakonia* (service) to capture this command.

The confessor should avoid both of these role distortions in the penal and medicinal models. Acting *in persona Christi*, the confessor should emulate the role of a compassionate listener who mediates the encounter with Christ, who is the true center of the sacramental event. Of the two models, the medicinal is clearly preferable, provided that the emphasis is on the medicine of absolution and not on the healing ministrations of the confessor. Persistent questioning of the penitent, no matter how well-intentioned, can imply a conditional acceptance of the penitent that ill-suits the magnanimous profligacy of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels: dining with sinners and tax collectors; the parable of the prodigal son; the woman caught in adultery; and forgiving one another "seventy-times seven times." Inviting seminarians to reflect on the various models that have been influential in shaping and developing the confessor's role in the sacrament, particularly their strengths and limitations, is, consequently, an important first step in their understanding.

Refocusing the sacrament on the penitent and the penitent's encounter with Christ . . . changes the dynamic. The experience and discernment of the penitent are valued. Penitents are there because, in their experience and judgment, they have offended God, not the confessor.

Refocusing the sacrament on the penitent and the penitent's encounter with Christ, moreover, changes the dynamic. The experience and discernment of the penitent are valued. Penitents are there because, in their experience and judgment, they have offended God, not the confessor. A more humble role as listener and companion, rather than judge and jury, more fittingly describes the confessor's duties and responsibilities vis-à-vis the penitent. The confessor, acting *in persona Christi*, is the sign of the ecclesial community, and the absolution both renews and celebrates the healing of brokenness

that has been occasioned by the sin of the penitent. The revised rite for the sacrament of penance makes provision for communal celebrations of the sacrament, but, I also think that it is worth emphasizing that even the traditional practice of individual, auricular confession is a communal expression of the sacrament.

The emphasis on penance as a sacrament reminds us that, as an expression of the Divine Liturgy, the sacrament is ultimately an expression of praise, gratitude and thanksgiving to the Father of mercies.

Hearing confessions is one of the most humbling and sacred moments afforded to any priest. We truly are on sacred ground. The willingness to be the instrument of grace, to receive the self-avowal and agency of the penitent, is an essential quality of a good confessor. Jesus, as the gospel portrait convincingly demonstrates, dined with tax collectors and sinners and was quite comfortable in their company. According to Bonnie Bowman Thurston in her beautiful commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Jesus worked in them and works in us "until grace is complete."[9] Confessors who emulate this patience of the Savior are rightly and truly loved by the people of God. A scrupulous over-concern for the integrity and "matter" of the sacrament is, therefore, not required for the confessor to discharge his duties faithfully. The parable of the prodigal son can release confessors from an unwarranted fear of excessive leniency or from minimizing the dangers of sin. In this vein, Bishop Fulton Sheen's advice to confessors stipulates that the three most important qualities of a good confessor are the following: Kindness, Kindness, Kindness. This threefold mantra is essential if we are serious about creating a climate of kindness and hospitality that will transform the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The emphasis on penance as a sacrament reminds us that, as an expression of the Divine Liturgy, the sacrament is ultimately an expression of praise, gratitude and thanksgiving to the Father of mercies. Thanksgiving, not punishment, should characterize this encounter with the Lord. The penance that is administered should lead to thanksgiving. Rather than attempting to assign or apportion the penance along the lines of a criminal penalty, akin to the guidelines reflected in the Irish Penitential Books of the early Christian centuries, the penance should be an opportunity for expressing thanks, and does not need to be calibrated according to some sliding scale of justice. Mathematical precision ill-suits the dispensation of grace. Why not ask the penitent to offer a personal prayer of thanks, or to spend a quiet moment before the Blessed Sacrament? Are not such invitations specific and sufficient? The penance is not a judicial "sentence" but rather an invitation to move from sinfulness to new life. Perhaps, penitents can be encouraged to pray for persons they may have harmed by their sins as a positive action to mark a new direction in their lives.

The sacrament should not be seen as a form of spiritual direction, unless, of course, it occurs within the context of a stable spiritual-direction relationship. Priests should therefore refrain from intrusive, invasive interrogation of the penitent. Suggesting follow-up strategies for more problematic issues (such as possible alcoholism for the penitent who confesses to overindulgence or counseling for psycho-sexual issues, and so forth) should be done with exquisite care and sensitivity, and with utmost respect for the freedom of the penitent. While there may elements of counseling and spiritual direction in the comments a confessor makes, the focus should remain on the confession of sin and the celebration of God's mercy. Confessors should not presume to know, or worse yet guess, at the status of the penitent's emotional, physical or psychological condition. If anything, a gentle question is sufficient. Perhaps, "Have you considered the possibility that the issue may be worth a conversation in more depth with a counselor or pastor outside the confessional?" At all costs, the dignity and freedom of the penitent should never be compromised.

Perhaps one reason why people stay away from confession may be that priests are trying to do too much and are getting in the way. In this area, "less is more." The fact that the person is there trumps all other considerations. When we come to the sacrament, we expose our wounds. What we seek is a healing touch or a comforting word, not judgment or condemnation, lecturing or, God forbid, hectoring. Priests mean well, but sometimes, well-intended interventions may come across as prying or intrusive, hence the need for thoughtful listening and posing questions that invite clarification,

such as "Can you help me understand more clearly when you feel powerless about this temptation?" When we fall, when we fail or when we are ashamed, we all need to be uplifted, to be reminded of our dignity and to be ennobled. Questions that lack tact and discretion are not helpful and do not advance sacramental healing.

The *Vademecum for Confessors* from the Holy See has wisely admonished confessors not to disturb a weak conscience, nor to tread heavily in matters of the sixth and ninth commandments (concerning adultery and coveting a married person). Confessors, accordingly, must be ever mindful that they are "treading on sacred ground" and must take off their shoes when in the company of a penitent.[10] It is refreshing to read this document and its stirring affirmation of the dignity of the penitent's conscience. It goes so far as to admonish confessors not to disturb the good faith of the penitent by overly zealous concerns with securing compliance with ecclesial teaching in the area of human sexuality. The document clearly affirms the importance of compliance with magisterial teaching, but it recognizes that truth takes time and the process of conversion is also a process of growth. Our relationship with God, not to mention our relationships with others, is a dynamic process.

In terms of seminary formation, there is a need for solid grounding in sacramental theology and well-designed practica so that seminarians can develop skills for good sacramental administration (see Fr. Kurt Stasiak's excellent article in this issue of *SJ* for an exemplary discussion of good formation). However, I also think that attention needs to be given to the cultivation of attributes or virtues that become internalized in the character of the seminarian. These qualities can be made the focus for intentional reflection and development in the spiritual, pastoral, and human formation programs. Feedback from those who work with students in these arenas can affirm the presence or lack of key interpersonal skills. While the confidential nature of the spiritual direction relationship must always be maintained, evidence of an integrated spiritual life can be discerned by attending to the ways that the seminarian treats others. These public manifestations provide useful indicators that he possesses the emotional intelligence or "affective maturity" called for in *The Program of Priestly Formation.*

What are some of these dispositions that are essential character traits for an effective confessor? May I suggest the following: gentleness, compassion, patience, hope-filled bearer of comfort, welcoming spirit, hospitality, kindness, and being knowledgeable. Such knowledge encompasses familiarity with the whole moral tradition of the church and its teachings so that the confessor has the ability to analyze and to assist the penitent in sorting things out, or discerning how to grow in holiness. Clearly, the intellectual formation of seminarians is crucial in developing this capacity and complements the human, pastoral, and spiritual components of the seminary program. Qualities that are off-putting to penitents that should be confronted if they appear in the seminarian's formation experience include the following: judgmental, accusatory attitude, anxious preoccupation with theological rectitude, lack of empathy, harshness, lack of patience, lack of emotional intelligence (affective maturity), poor listening skills, haste and dismissiveness or intolerance of divergent viewpoints. We bring these personal qualities and gifts, as well as our moral limitations, to the sacramental encounter and they are, perhaps, far more important than purely technical skill or expertise.

Thanksgiving, not punishment, should characterize this encounter with the Lord.

With respect to the forensic model of the confessor's role that is clearly part of the Church's tradition, I suggested that the role of the priest as judge must be divested of prosecutorial overtones. Clearly, the confessor has a solemn responsibility to maintain the integrity of the sacrament. This legitimate concern for the integrity of the sacrament-that sins be assessed according to sufficient matter, frequency of commission and level of lethality (mortal or venial)-requires wisdom and sound judgment from the confessor. May I suggest that the notion of judgment be reframed so that the priest does not function like an Inspector Javert, the relentless and merciless policeman in Victor Hugo's classic novel *Les Miserables,* but as a minister of discernment? The examination of conscience by the penitent should be an experience of reflection, of noticing or attending to patterns of behavior and of adopting strategies for growth and improvement rather than an obsessive preoccupation with mathematical indicators of sinful activity. In my view, the penitent's expression of agency and responsibility is the most important issue. As long as the confessor discerns this honesty and personal ownership, a scrupu-

lous preoccupation with determining the species and frequency of sinful acts (which is, of course, an obligation for confessors) can easily devolve into a clerical game of Trivial Pursuit, and should be appropriately modulated.

Rather than worry about providing the right answer or administering the right penance, perhaps the most important qualities of the confessor reside in his ability to be a compassionate listener, a companion in faith, in touch with his own humanity, and therefore, sensitive to the wounds and sufferings of the faithful who seek, through his words, the compassion and mercy of Christ.

Frequent confession should be encouraged rather than discouraged. Why? Because the acknowledgement of one's weaknesses and failings is a statement that one is denying the power of evil to have control over one's life. To use Archbishop George Niederauer's wonderful image of the spiritual life, we are all a work in progress, a "construction zone," and none of us is perfect. Frequent confession is a surrender to grace, allowing ourselves to fall into the hands of God, a practice that delivers us from the ever-dangerous illusion that we are the masters of our fate. As C.S. Lewis shrewdly notes in his classic parable *The Screwtape Letters,* one of the Evil One's greatest tactics is discouragement, which seduces us into wallowing in our powerlessness and abandoning the strength of God's grace in our lives.[11] If God is so magnanimous in extending forgiveness, we confessors must emulate that same magnanimity. Why scold those who confess venial sins? For the saints of the church, their deep love of God sensitizes them to even the slightest of infractions.

The "matter" of the sacrament is what the penitent presents to us. As confessors, we should take that presentation as a good faith statement of intention, and should be chaste in offering advice, ever mindful of the dignity of the penitent. After all, how much information do we need in order to grant absolution? In the beautiful account of Jesus with the woman caught in adultery in the 8th chapter of John, perhaps the most endearing scene is the moment when she and Jesus are alone, when her accusers have vanished. St. Augustine's wonderful commentary on this scene is both elegant and eloquent. *Relicti sunt duo, miseria et Misericordia.* Two were left, she who was "in misery" (*miseria*) and He who is "mercy incarnate" (*misericordia*).[12] Jesus is revealed here as the compassionate face of God. We priests have the same privilege of displaying God's compassionate face by graciously receiving our parishioners and fellow Catholics, and in proclaiming the words of absolution, to allow Jesus to speak through us His divine mercy, "Go, and sin no more."

After 40 years of hearing confessions, I have come to learn that presumption is a besetting temptation; that is, the temptation of "presuming" to know the penitent's state of mind, or to presume that I have a solution or answer for the penitent. I have also come to learn to trust the penitent. If penitents want more, they have the liberty to ask. If anything, I thank the penitent for coming and mention that we are celebrating God's mercy and we give praise to God for granting us never ending mercy. I suggest a possible penance (or ask the penitent if they have a favorite prayer or practice they would prefer), and then I proclaim the words of absolution, which close with the powerful words, "go in peace."

As a moral theologian, I believe we confessors have been given a gift in the articulation of the principle of gradualness by Pope John Paul II in his masterful reflection on the Synod on the Family, *Familiaris Consortio*.[13] Gradualness, a strategy whereby we recognize that the process of conversion is indeed a process, is not to be confused with a counterfeit notion, namely, a strategy of laxism, or an elastic approach to moral teaching. Gradualness, as the Pope acknowledges, is derived from the Latin word *gradus* meaning a "step." Gradualness reminds us that we must be patient with the process of growth into a closer configuration with Christ. For penitents who may be discouraged by our repeated failures, gradualness is a counsel of hope and trust that our stumbling steps on the way to holiness are not to be discounted.

For those penitents caught in a web of addiction

Do seminarians manifest a secure sense of selfhood? Are they comfortable in their own skins? Do they have a sense of humor and patience with their own weaknesses and limitations? Can they listen attentively, or are they so anxious that they are uncomfortable with silence?

and habitual failure, I try to help them avoid discouragement over seeming lack of progress by reminding them that the very act of confession is a bold declaration that the "thorn in the flesh" is not their master, but that they are surrendering it to a fresh encounter with God's mercy. Their enduring tribulation is not cause for despair, but cause for gratitude as we acknowledge that while the affliction is stubbornly persistent, it is not ultimate and will not have the final word. Rather, in the sacrament we encounter the Word, Who is indeed the final Word who claims us as his beloved and his very own. As John Paul II indicates in *Dives et Misericordia*, God is rich in mercy.[14] Mercy is a "superabundance of justice" as St. Thomas Aquinas has taught us. Pope John Paul goes further with his fine insight that mercy seeks not simply to rebalance the scales of justice, but rather the creation of fresh personal dignity and worth.

Fr. Charles Miller, C.M., the much-revered rector and professor of liturgy and homiletics at St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, California, who died in 2005, often reminded the seminarians he taught that "a priest is nothing more than an ordained seminarian." For those of us who were anxious about our future roles as ordained priests, his common sense admonition went a long way towards reassuring us about the future that awaited us. In other words, our present behavior is the best indicator of future performance. Building on this insight, in terms of preparing seminarians to be good confessors, Pope John Paul II emphasized human formation as the critical foundation for priestly training. Human formation, as articulated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, highlights the indispensable capacity for affective, emotional maturity. It requires solid interpersonal skills that must be present in a candidate for the priesthood so that his humanity is "a bridge and not an obstacle" to his ministry.[15] If the priest is to be "a man of communion," the Pope accentuates the critical importance of his ability to relate to others.

When we think about the attributes of a good confessor, it is tempting to focus on how the confessor presides in the confessional. However, long before setting foot in the confessional, the candidate has already demonstrated, in abundant ways, whether or not he is to be trusted with this sacred task. If he is anxious, judgmental, angry or afraid, he will bring those personal qualities to every encounter, including the sacramental event. Rather than worry about providing the right answer or administering the right penance, perhaps the most important qualities of the confessor reside in his ability to be a compassionate listener, a companion in faith, in touch with his own humanity, and therefore, sensitive to the wounds and sufferings of the faithful who seek, through his words, the compassion and mercy of Christ. In other words, does the seminarian's own humanity, the evidence of human formation that he demonstrates in his ordinary life and the way he treats others, men and women alike, serve as a 'bridge" to peace, or, tragically, as an "obstacle" to the gospel of mercy and pardon? The confessional should be a place of reconciliation and not shame. Shame attacks the dignity and self-esteem of the penitent. What is needed is not more guilt and accusation, but assurance that nothing we humans can do is beyond the grace of forgiveness. There is a real difference, I believe, between "good guilt" and "bad guilt." Good guilt arises from our inner core, our deepest sense of self, which motivates us to seek to behave in ways that are congruent with this sacred center within us. Bad guilt, on the other hand, mires us in self-reproach and shame, which paralyzes us and prevents us from taking the corrective action we need.

> *Do seminarians manifest a secure sense of selfhood? Are they comfortable in their own skins? Do they have a sense of humor and patience with their own weaknesses and limitations? Can they listen attentively, or are they so anxious that they are uncomfortable with silence?*

These kinds of questions are far more important in the discernment process than we often acknowledge. A confessor reveals his humanity in his tone of voice and his availability to the penitent. All of us, I think,

men and women alike, know what genuine kindness and gentleness feel like. We believe in a God of second chances. The experience of the sacrament should lead us to a restored sense of hope and renewal, not despair and reinforcement of our weaknesses. Penitents come to priests with dark and heavy burdens—the returning soldier who confesses killing two men in battle, the spouse overwhelmed by guilt over an adulterous affair, the anguished person trapped in Internet pornography, the distraught parent unable to reach a withdrawn and angry child—the list is endless. Can all of these persons leave the confessional with a sense of dignity and hope, or do they depart depressed over seemingly endless failure?

Seminary educators have abundant opportunities to discern the necessary human capacities for administering the sacrament by simply observing and attending to the ways students interact with one another, with faculty and staff and with those who work with them in field education and parish settings. The formation of holy and wise confessors in the seminary is a process that integrates the four pillars in the *Program of Priestly Formation*, and the formation of good confessors may be less intimidating than we think.

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Appreciating the Communal Dimensions of Sin and the Sacrament of Penance

Rev. Gregory M. Faulhaber, S.T.D.

When I was ordained a priest in 1979, implementation of the new *Rite of Penance* was still in its infancy. The new rite had been approved less than six years previously, and many were still sorting out how to go about employing the three different forms to celebrate the sacrament of penance. I was in a large parish with more than 1,500 students in our religious education program, and much effort was put into conducting semiannual communal penance services with individual confession for all of our students. During my first year of priesthood, I personally presided over more than fifty such penance services. There were three priests stationed full time at the parish, and each of us was also in the confessional for individual confessions each week for an hour before the first Saturday evening Mass, and as long as people kept coming following the second Mass. Celebration of the sacrament of penance was a priority and a meaningful experience for many in that parish and numerous other parishes where the sacramental ministers seriously worked to implement the new rite.

Pope Paul VI approved of the *Rite of Penance* (*Ordo paenitentiae*), and it was issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship on the First Sunday of Advent, 1973. The rite was revised under the mandate of *Sacrosanctum concilium* 72, which stated: "The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they give more luminous expression to both the nature and effect of the sacrament." In his proclamation of the new rite, Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship, relayed that in addition to the Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, there was also a Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents, "drawn up to emphasize the relation of the sacrament to the community. This rite places individual confession and absolution in the context of a celebration of the word of God." Additionally, there was a Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution composed for special occasions in accordance with the Pastoral Norms on General Sacramental Absolution, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith the previous year.[1] The Introduction to the *Rite of Penance* stated specifically that "individual, complete confession and the receiving of absolution constitute the sole, ordinary means for a member of the faithful who is conscious of serious sin to be reconciled with God and the Church."[2]

Sin, John Paul II taught, is the root cause of the many divisions existing in the world, but often the modern world fails to recognize its existence.

Yet the number of the faithful who availed themselves of regular individual confession seemed to decline rather steadily throughout the 1970s and 80s. For instance, when a new church was constructed in my own diocese in 1979, the pastor decided not to include confessionals or any kind of reconciliation room. When asked why these were omitted in the design, he replied that he believed that the practice of individual confessions was "going out of style." In many ways he was correct. People were not going to individual confession

as regularly as they had in the 1950s and 60s. Celebration of the sacrament of penance seemed to be growing in some dioceses that offered a more liberal interpretation of the "particular, occasional circumstances," where the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution was considered to be "lawful and even necessary."[3] This Rite C or Chapter III of the *Rite of Penance* was practiced quite commonly in Australia, Canada, and several dioceses in the United States during the 1980s, and the faithful seemed to flock to these communal penance services. Many found them to be powerful experiences of God's mercy and grace, and some saw this as the new wave of the future celebration of the sacrament.[4]

Social sin is correctly seen as the result of many personal sins, and the responsibility for those injustices is found in individuals who cause, support or exploit the social evils present in the world. One cannot just blame the system or structure.

Meanwhile, the subject for the sixth general assembly of the Synod of Bishops was "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church," and the bishops of the world gathered in Rome for four weeks in October of 1983 to discuss the issues involved. The Synod passed onto Pope John Paul II sixty-three propositions summarizing the bishops' concerns. Thirteen of those propositions concerned a detailed examination of the celebration of the sacrament of penance,[5] and John Paul II hoped to gather together these concerns and deepen the concepts in a post-synodal document.[6] That document was released on the First Sunday of Advent of 1984 in the form of an apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* which drew on the Synod's propositions and month-long reflections to put forth a doctrinal and pastoral message on the subject of penance and reconciliation. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* recognized the great need for reconciliation in the world and stressed the importance of the church's mission to help bring it about. This called for conversion of hearts to bring about a renewed relationship of people with God, other human beings, and all creation. The mystery of sin was examined as being "the radical cause of all wounds and divisions between people, and in the first place between people and God."[7] Sin, John Paul II taught, is the root cause of the many divisions existing in the world, but often the modern world fails to recognize its existence. "The restoration of a *proper sense of* sin is the first way of facing the grave spiritual crisis looming over man today. But the sense of sin can only be restored through a *clear reminder of the unchangeable principles of reason and faith* which the moral teaching of the Church has always upheld."[8] There is hope for a restoration of a healthy sense of sin in the world, and this renewal could be aided by good catechesis, attentive listening to the Magisterium, and "an ever more careful practice of the Sacrament of Penance."[9] The final part of the apostolic exhortation concerns itself with the pastoral ministry of penance and reconciliation and deals specifically with the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.[10]

In its discussion of the mystery of sin, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* notes: "The mystery of sin is composed of this two-fold wound which the sinner opens in himself and in his relationship with his neighbor. Therefore one can speak of *personal* and *social* sin: from one point of view, every sin is *personal*; from another point of view every sin is *social*, insofar as and because it also has social repercussions."[11] In the apostolic exhortation John Paul II stresses that sin is always a personal act. He recognizes that the person may be influenced by numerous factors around him or her, but warns that one cannot "place the blame for individuals' sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people." The pope goes on to examine various meanings of social sin, acknowledging that each individual's sin affects others. No sin is ever strictly individual. John Paul II views social sin as a broad label given to every sin against the common good and the love owed to one's neighbor. It is present in various relationships between human communities that reflect injustice and the presence of social evil in the world. However, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* warns that some interpretations of social sin are not acceptable. These concepts hold that practically every sin is a "social sin, in the sense that blame for it is to be placed not so much on the moral conscience of an individual but rather on some vague entity or anonymous collectivity, such as the situation, the system, society, structures, or institutions." Social sin is correctly seen as the result

of many personal sins, and the responsibility for those injustices is found in individuals who cause, support or exploit the social evils present in the world. One cannot just blame the system or structure. At the heart of every situation of sin are to be found sinful people, and the only way that true change will come about is if the people responsible for those sinful situations experience a sincere conversion of heart.[12]

In its discussion of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* emphasizes that certain realities or parts make up the sacramental sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Some of these realities are on the part of the penitent, and they call for a clear examination of one's conscience and a sincere act of contrition for the sins committed. These sins are to be acknowledged and confessed to the minister of penance, who acts as both judge and healer in the name of God and the church. Recognizing the deeply personal nature of sin, John Paul II states that "the confession of sins must ordinarily be individual and not collective." He continues: "at the same time this confession in a way forces sin out of the secret of the heart and thus out of the area of pure individuality, emphasizing its social character as well, for through the minister of Penance it is the ecclesial community, which has been wounded by sin, that welcomes anew the repentant and forgiven sinner." The other essential part of the sacrament is absolution, where the contrite and penitent sinner is forgiven by the power and mercy of God through the words and actions of the church's minister. The final act of the sacrament is the satisfaction or act of penance performed as a sign of the personal commitment that the penitent has made to begin a new life. Having described these realities of the sacrament of penance, John Paul II goes on to relate that "nothing is more personal and intimate than this Sacrament, in which the sinner stands alone before God with his sin, repentance and trust."[13] Yet, he also notes:

> *[A]t the same time one cannot deny the social nature of this sacrament, in which the whole church – militant, suffering and glorious in heaven – comes to the aid of the penitent and welcomes him again into her bosom, especially as it was the whole church which had been offended and wounded by his sin. As minister of penance, the priest, by virtue of his sacred office, appears as the witness and representative of this ecclesial nature of the sacrament. The individual nature and ecclesial nature are two complementary aspects of the Sacrament which the progressive reform of the Rite of Penance, especially that contained in the Ordo Paenitentiae promulgated by Paul VI, has sought to emphasize and to make more meaningful in its celebration.*[14]

The most precious result of the sacrament of penance is found in reconciliation with God, and this leads to other reconciliations with oneself, other people, the church and all creation.

Reconciliatio et paenitentia remarks that the three forms of the sacrament of penance in the *Ordo paenitentiae* make it possible to adapt the celebration of the sacrament to particular pastoral circumstances. The first form highlights the more personal aspects and is the "only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament." The second form emphasizes the communal listening to the word of God and the ecclesial character of conversion and reconciliation. Since it incorporates the first form, it is to be considered as equal to the first form in regard to its normality and ordinary character. The third form is considered "exceptional in character,"[15] and "this form cannot become an ordinary one." Canons 961 to 963 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* specify the conditions under which this third form may be employed, and only the bishop is viewed as competent to assess whether the conditions actually exist in his own diocese. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* clearly states: "The exceptional use of the third form of celebration must never lead to a lesser regard for, still less an abandonment of, the ordinary forms, nor must it lead to this form being considered as alternative to the other two forms. It is not in fact left to the freedom of pastors and the faithful to choose from among these forms the one considered most suitable."[16]

John Paul II elaborates further on his notion of social sin in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Speaking of a world divided into blocs sustained by rigid ideologies and marked by imperialism, he refers to "a world subject to structures of sin." He affirms the strong link between these structures of sin and personal sin that he made in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, seeing social sin as "always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior."[17] Many attitudes present in society oppose God's will and strengthen these sinful structures. The all-consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power are two such attitudes

named in the encyclical, and these are seen as affecting individuals, nations and blocs of nations. It is "the fruit of many sins which led to the 'structures of sin.'"[18] In order to overcome these structures of sin, John Paul II proposes a new path to be followed. This path includes a change of behavior, a new mentality, a real conversion. This entails growth in virtue personally and communally. It requires the development of what John Paul II calls "solidarity," which he describes as:

> *a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. This determination is based on the solid conviction that what is hindering full development is that desire for profit and that thirst for power already mentioned. These attitudes and 'structures of sin' are only conquered – presupposing the help of divine grace – by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage.*[19]

The virtue of solidarity is essential to combat social sin in the world and to lead to a path of peace and true development.[20]

Less than five years after *Sollicitudo rei socialis* was issued, John Paul II affirmed the importance of recognizing the reality of the social dimension of sin during a general audience on 15 April 1992. Here, the pope acknowledged that there is "a crisis in many places regarding the reception of the sacrament of Penance by the faithful." He sees this crisis as having come about due to the weakening of the sense of sin in the consciences of the faithful, who experience difficulty in recognizing the reality of sin and their own guilt before God, and the failure of many to see the necessity and benefit of receiving the sacrament. Such people prefer to seek forgiveness directly from God and do not appreciate the church's mediating role in being reconciled to God. To combat these views, John Paul II stresses that every sin harms the unity and holiness of the Christian community.

> *Since all the faithful are in solidarity in the Christian community, there can never be a sin which does not have an effect on the whole community. If it is true that the good done by one person is a benefit and help to all the others, unfortunately it is equally true that the evil committed by one obstructs the perfection to which all are tending.… Reconciliation with God is also reconciliation with the Church, and in a certain sense with all of creation, whose harmony is violated by sin. The Church is the mediatrix of this reconciliation. Her Founder assigned this role to her and gave her the mission and power of 'forgiveness of sins.' Every instance of reconciliation with God thus takes place in an explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious relationship with the Church.… Forgiveness is asked of God and granted by God, but not independently of the Church founded by Jesus Christ for the salvation of all.*[21]

The Christian is never alone, even in the state of sin. The Christian is always a part of the ecclesial community, God's priestly people which supports him or her in the solidarity of charity and prayer.

Ten years after this general audience, in 2002, John Paul II issued the Apostolic Letter On Certain Aspects of the Celebration of Penance *Misericordia Dei* in the form of a *motu proprio*. In it he recalls the 1983 synod of bishops and *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* and states that the causes of the crisis of the sacrament of penance are still present in the world, although he is encouraged by the fact that many had returned to the sacrament during the Jubilee Year in 2000. The pope calls for bishops and priests to "undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation," and he reminds them of the necessary elements to be found in the celebration of the sacrament. The apostolic letter stresses that "the integral confession of serious sins is by divine decree a constitutive part of the Sacrament" and recalls many of the canonical laws regarding the sacrament of penance, particularly in regard to the celebration of form three of the rite.[22] *Misericordia Dei* states:

> *This seems especially necessary, given that in some places there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to 'general' or 'communal' absolution. In this case general absolution is no longer seen as an extraordinary means to be used in wholly exceptional situations. On the basis of an arbitrary extension of the conditions required for grave necessity, in practice there is a lessening of fidelity to the divine configuration of the Sacrament, and specifically regarding the need for individual confession, with consequent se-*

rious harm to the spiritual life of the faithful and to the holiness of the Church.[23]

The *motu proprio* reminds bishops and priests of their important duty to provide opportunities for the faithful to confess their sins, and it reiterates that "individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways." Judgment regarding whether or not there was a situation of grave necessity where the absolution of a number of penitents at once would be allowed was not to be considered a "matter for the confessor but for 'the diocesan Bishop who can determine cases of such necessity in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the Episcopal Conference.'"[24]

As *Misericordia Dei* was being unveiled, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then-head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued an intervention further explaining the purpose of the *motu proprio*. The intervention states that the *motu proprio* was written to concretize a few important aspects of the sacrament of penance.

> *Above all, the Motu Proprio emphasizes the personalist nature of the Sacrament of Penance; as the sin, despite all our bonds with the human community, is ultimately something totally personal, so also our healing with forgiveness has to be something that is totally personal. God does not treat us as part of a collectivity. He knows each one by name, he calls him/her personally and saves him if he has fallen into sin.*

Although historically there have been different forms of the sacrament, Ratzinger notes that the "personalist component was always essential." It remains necessary for the penitent to confess each and every mortal sin in the sacrament, and the church does not have the power to replace personal confession with general absolution.[25]

Miseriscoria Dei clearly emphasizes the importance of the Rite of Reconciliation for Individual Penitents, that is, Rite A or Chapter I of the *Rite of Penance*, but this was nothing new in magisterial documents on the sacrament. The 1973 *Rite of Penance* already specifies that "Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church."[26] Every pontifical statement on the sacrament of penance since then has affirmed this, drawing from teaching that can be traced through the Council of Trent and even earlier.

Sin isolates the sinner from the community, and reconciliation should encourage fuller engagement with the neighbors from whom one has become separated.

Personally, I have experienced some of the most profound moments of my priesthood hearing confessions, and the celebration of the sacrament of penance for individual penitents often is a celebration of deep conversion and reconciliation. It is most personal, and this is an essential aspect of the sacrament. However, I also would caution that there can be a danger in overemphasizing the individual and personal aspect of the sacrament, when appreciation of the communal and social nature of sin and reconciliation is lost. Sin isolates the sinner from the community, and reconciliation should encourage fuller engagement with the neighbors from whom one has become separated. All sin has social implications to it, and losing that recognition can desensitize one to its existence, firming up the walls of individualism and isolationism. Yes, sin and reconciliation are very personal, but these realities are not just about "me and Jesus."

In recent years, I have been present at a number of communal penance services following Rite B or Chapter II of the *Rite of Penance*, the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution. During these recent celebrations, priests and penitents rushed through the communal portion of the rite in order to come more quickly to what they seemed to think was the essential part of the celebration – the individual confessions. As a matter of fact, many penitents appeared to avoid the service entirely, arriving late simply to go to confession. Speaking with other priests, this is not an isolated event limited to my own personal experience. I am more than happy that people come for any part of the service and that they go to confession. Yet it seems that many if not most miss the whole point of celebrating the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Peni-

tents, which in 1973 was "drawn up to emphasize the relation of the sacrament to the community." Certainly it is crucial that each person has the opportunity for individual and integral confession and absolution. Yet, the sacrament of penance is not just about individual confession. It brings people back to God and the church. It calls for conversion of heart, reformation of one's life and believing in the good news.

Good priestly modeling is essential in seminaries, and liturgical celebrations are to be well prepared and executed.

The call for conversion of hearts was certainly one of the basic concerns of the 1983 Synod of Bishops, and it was foundational to the various papal messages of John Paul II on the sacrament of penance. It is an essential aspect of the gospel message proclaimed by Jesus. Conversion, however, does not happen when one remains tied up in self, failing to recognize personal responsibilities to others and to God. Turning into oneself alone and shutting out others can lead only to the hardening of heart spoken of by the prophets (Ezek 11:14-21) and the insensitivity of the priest and the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). Conversion is a deeply personal experience, but insights gained from philosophers such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas help us understand that conversion is not brought about through an isolated individualistic event. The human person is a communal being, and conversion and the awakening of feelings of moral responsibility come from what Levinas calls an encounter with the human Face. This encounter with the Face of the Other traumatizes the egocentric self and awakens within it a feeling of responsibility. It draws the self-centered person out of self and toward the Other, helping the person to recognize an obligation to turn from self-centeredness and sin and enter into the lot of one's neighbor. Conversion comes from within the person, but the encounter with the Face of the Other makes conversion possible. A communal event opens one up to the recognition of sin and calls one to true conversion, reformation, and reconciliation.[27]

The Sacred Scriptures provide further insights into God's call to conversion. While we will never fully comprehend the mystery of God's grace and the gift of his love that comes to us through the sacrament of penance, the Scriptures help us to understand the mystery of sin and reconciliation more completely. Even in the Rite of Reconciliation for Individual Penitents the reading of the word of God is recommended to help the penitent receive light to recognize sins and to be "called to conversion and to confidence in God's mercy."[28] Notions of covenant and heart are primary in the Scriptures, and one cannot properly understand conversion, sin, and reconciliation without an understanding of these scriptural metaphors. Both metaphors involve a deeply personal relationship with God, but they are also highly communal. God established a covenant with Abraham and his people. Through this covenant God formed a family, and the actions of each person influenced the communal bond between God and all the people. When the prophets spoke of the removal of the hardness of heart of the people and a restoration of God's promise, they called for a communal return affecting all who were open to conversion. The new covenant formed by Jesus is modeled upon charity. Love is the bond which establishes and keeps that covenant together. The great commandment of love of God is intimately connected to the love of one's neighbor. The covenant is not just a relationship between "me and Jesus," but involves a community. What one does is very much influenced by the community, and one's actions have an effect within that group of people. Sin has a "ripple effect," whereby it influences many others, either directly or indirectly.

Jesus conquered sin and death through his own death and resurrection. Yet we still sin. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go forth to all nations, preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sin in his name (Lk 24:47). He empowered the church to forgive sins (Jn 20:19-23), and priests are privileged to exercise that authority in the sacrament of penance. This ministry of reconciliation, however, is not carried out in isolation. It is accomplished only in the context of community. In the sacrament of penance the priest represents not only God but also the community with whom the penitent needs to be reconciled. In his Apostolic Exhortation On the Formation of Priests *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II stresses that the priest is a "man of communion," and this is intimately linked with the identity of the priest.

> *The nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this multi-*

ple and rich interconnection of relationships which arise from the Blessed Trinity and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as a sign and instrument of Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity. In this context the ecclesiology of communion becomes decisive for understanding the identity of the priest, his essential dignity, and his vocation and mission among the People of God and in the world.[29]

Priesthood would not exist without a community of believers. "The ordained ministry has a radical 'communitarian form' and can only be carried out as 'a collective work.'" This is accomplished in cooperation with the bishop's ministry and in concert with the universal church. All priests share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ.[30]

The purpose of the *Program for Priestly Formation* is to train such men of communion, who will work together with the church's hierarchy in service to all of God's people. Priestly formation occurs in the context of a community and "the seminary community is the essential formational matrix for those preparing for ordained ministry." The community plays an important role in all aspects of priestly formation, and the interplay between the individual seminarian and the community is at its heart.[31] Conversion is a process that calls one outside of oneself and cannot be just an individual experience between God and the penitent. As a church we have become more aware of the existence of social sin and the interconnectedness of our lives with the whole world. A true appreciation of solidarity helps us understand that all our actions affect others and that we are joined together in a world community where we cannot afford to ignore injustice anywhere in the world. Harm to any human being hurts the human community as a whole. We all move and grow together as part of one human family. As men of communion priests cannot act as Lone Rangers who do their own thing. This holds true for faculty as well as seminarians. Good priestly modeling is essential in seminaries, and liturgical celebrations are to be well prepared and executed. This is necessary for the celebration of Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, but also for the sacrament of penance. Frequent opportunities for the individual celebration of the sacrament are to be provided and encouraged in seminaries, but we need to provide good models of communal celebrations of reconciliation as well.

It has been almost forty years since the new *Rite of Penance* was issued, and in many ways we are still sorting out how to implement it better. The bishops of the church have continually called for the revitalization of the sacrament, and we have a long way to go in accomplishing that goal. Recent surveys of Catholics in the United States have indicated that only one in four Catholic adults participate in the sacrament of reconciliation once a year or more.[32] *Misericordia Dei* stresses the importance of making the sacrament available to the faithful and particularly emphasizes the Rite of Reconciliation for Individual Penitents. This is certainly an important component in the hoped for revitalization of the sacrament.

Sensitizing people to the existence of social sin and the communal dimensions of the sacrament of penance will encourage further participation in the sacrament.

Sin and reconciliation are very personal, but they always have communal dimensions which cannot be ignored. "Penance always therefore entails reconciliation with our brethren and sisters who remain harmed by our sins."[33] It is my belief that sensitizing people to the existence of social sin and the communal dimensions of the sacrament of penance will encourage further participation in the sacrament.[34] I have witnessed this awareness enable people to recognize the presence of sin around them and call them to take responsibility for their own actions. Communal penance services can greatly help in promoting this sensitivity, and I encourage a renewed emphasis of The Rite of Reconciliation for Several Penitents (Form B) in our parishes and seminaries. In the Sacrament of Penance, the communal role of the priest seems often to be forgotten. The priest is not just representing God in the sacrament, but he is also there on behalf of the community with whom the penitent needs to be reconciled as well. Too many individuals have the idea that sin is only between "me and God," forgetting the communal dimension of sin. Our fractured and contentious world is in great need of ministers of reconciliation who can lead others to closer unity with God and their fellow human beings. As members of formation faculties in seminaries we are responsible for training men to exercise this special priestly ministry well. Providing a

balanced approach to both the communal and personal dimensions of the sacrament of penance is essential.

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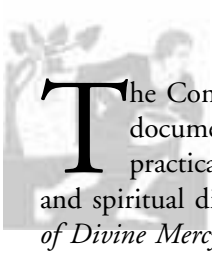
Endnotes

1. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Decree On the Rite of Penance *Reconciliationem inter Deum* (2 December 1973) in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo, 1990), pp. 523-524.
2. Introduction, *Rite of Penance*, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, §31, p. 539.
3. This passage in Introduction, *Rite of Penance*, §31, is not found in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, although it is translated in the Study Text that is published, for example, as Introduction, *Rite of Penance* (Hales Corners, WI: Sacred Heart Monastery, c. 1975), §31, p. 21.
4. There have been numerous articles documenting the experiences of priests who have participated in communal penance services with general absolution being granted. Some examples of these are: William Stenzil, "It Would Be a Sin to Lose General Absolution," *U.S. Catholic* 68, no. 1 (2003), 24-28; Robert McClory, "Cardinal, Pastors Discuss General Absolution," *National Catholic Reporter* 37, no. 35 (27 July 2001), 6; and Robert Garafalo, "Reconciliation and Celebration: A Pastoral Case for General Absolution," *Worship* 63, no. 5 (1985), 447-456. Here, I am only observing what I experienced as a trend during the 1980s. I am not advocating for the widespread granting of general absolution.
5. 1983 Synod of Bishops, "Report on the 63 Propositions Given the Pope," *Origins* 13, no. 22 (10 November 1983), 372.
6. John Paul II, "Closing Address to Synod," *Origins* 13, no. 22 (10 November 1983), 378.
7. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (2 December 1984), §4.
8. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §18.
9. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §18.
10. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §§23-34.
11. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §15.
12. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §16.
13. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §31.
14. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §31
15. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §32.
16. *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §33.
17. John Paul II, Encyclical On the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum progressio *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, in *Catholic Social Thought – The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien & Thomas Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992) §36, pp. 395-436
18. *Sollicitudo rei socialis,* §37.
19. *Sollicitudo rei socialis,* §38; emphasis mine.
20. *Sollicitudo rei socialis,* §39.
21. John Paul II, General Audience on Penance in the Ecclesial Community (15 April 1992), at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.
22. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter/*Motu proprio* On Certain Aspects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance *Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002), *Origins* 32, no. 1 (16 May 2002), p. 14.
23. *Misericordia Dei*, p. 14.
24. *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 14-15.
25. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Presentation of the Apostolic Letter in the Form of *Motu proprio Misericordia Dei*, Intervention by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (2 May 2002), at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.
26. *Rite of Penance*, §31
27. Martin Buber's thought was groundbreaking in understanding that the human person only came to know his or her self-identity through his or her relationships with others. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 1958). Emmanuel Levinas's work was foundational in the analysis of the knowledge of moral obligation and how it might arise: see Emmanuel Levinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav, Columbia University Press, New York, N.Y., 1998.
28. *Rite of Penance*, §17.
29. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992), §12, *Origins*, vol. 21, no..45 (16 April 1992).
30. *Pastores dabo vobis*, §§16-17.
31. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation: Fifth Edition* (Washington, DC: USCCB, , 2006), 259-262.
32. Surveys by CARA in 2005 and 2008 indicated that 26% of adult Catholics participate in the sacrament of penance once a year or more often. For a full report of the surveys see the CARA website at http://cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html.
33. *Rite of Penance*, §5, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, p. 528..
34. Bishop Gianfranco Girotti, an official in the Vatican's Apostolic Penitentiary, stressed the importance of recognizing the social dimensions of sin, stating: "If in the past sin had a somewhat individualistic dimension, today it has an importance, a resonance, that is not only individual but above all social because of the great phenomenon of globalization. In fact, attention to sin is more urgent today than it was yesterday, precisely because of its repercussions that are more extensive and more destructive." See "Interview With Vatican Official on the Social Effects of Sin," *Origins* 37, no. 41 (27 March 2008), 661-663.

The Priest as Confessor in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*

Daniel G. Van Slyke, S.T.L., Ph.D.



The Congregation for the Clergy has issued a document providing theological principles and practical guidelines to assist priests as confessors and spiritual directors under the title *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*.[1] The Year for Priests (2009 to 2010) immediately occasions this document, which draws from addresses and documents the Holy See has issued during the past half century. The *Aid* opens with an introduction that places the sacrament of penance and spiritual direction within the larger context of the Christian path to holiness. Then, in two roughly equal sections, the *Aid* considers the priest's roles as minister of the sacrament of penance and as spiritual director.

This article focuses on the *Aid*'s treatment of the relationship between the sacrament of penance and the priest's ministry. The article's twofold purpose is: (1) to highlight the value of the *Aid* for the ongoing formation of seminarians and those already ordained to the sacred priesthood; and (2) to provide an overview and commentary on the document in order to facilitate its use in such formation. The first section sets forth several doctrinal considerations that the *Aid* presupposes without explicitly articulating, thereby placing the document in its larger historical context. The second and longest section offers an overview of the contents of the *Aid* in the order that they appear. The third section highlights four recurring themes in the *Aid*, and draws out its genius and its major contributions. Finally, the fourth section lists the sources that the Congregation cites, which taken together constitute an excellent course of study on the relation between the priest and the sacrament of penance.

This article focuses on the *Aid*'s treatment of the relationship between the sacrament of penance and the priest's ministry.

Presuppositions Regarding the Priest and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy presupposes, rather than systematically articulates, a thorough catechesis on the sacrament of penance, including doctrines touching upon the minister. This section returns to the Council of Trent in order to briefly review these doctrines, and thereby to place the *Aid* in its broader historical context.

The Council of Trent specifically pinpoints the institution of the sacrament of penance in two dominical utterances. In the first of these, the Lord says to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 18:18). The second statement is accompanied by the breathing gesture (insufflation) with which the risen Lord imparts the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23). The Council of Trent explains the traditional understanding of this event:

> *The universal consent of the fathers has always understood that by this remarkable act and by these clear words the power to forgive and retain sins, and so to reconcile those who had fallen after baptism, was communicated to the apostles and to their lawful successors.*[2]

Writing in the early twenty-first century, the Congregation assumes the doctrinal developments of centuries past and builds upon them in order to address the particular needs of the present-day faithful.

The Council further insists that these words of the Lord and Savior are "to be understood to refer to the power of forgiving and retaining sins in the sacrament of penance."[3] In these moments of institution, the Lord imparts "the ministry of the keys" to bishops and priests (*episcopos et sacerdotes*), and not "to all persons indiscriminately."[4] Bishops and priests serve as the ministers who express the form of the sacrament of penance with the words "I absolve you…" (*Ego te absolvo*…). The remaining "parts" of the sacrament—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—are supplied by the penitent, and together with absolution they constitute "as it were the matter (*quasi materia*) of this sacrament."[5]

The Congregation for the Clergy's *Aid* is far removed both in time and in method from the clear definitions of doctrine articulated at Trent in the face of the initial sixteenth-century Protestant revolt against the Catholic sacramental system. Writing in the early twenty-first century, the Congregation assumes the doctrinal developments of centuries past and builds upon them in order to address the particular needs of the present-day faithful. In particular, the *Aid* builds upon and surpasses the Council of Trent in three ways. First, in addition to considering the priest as the minister of the sacrament of penance, the *Aid* considers him as a recipient and promoter of the sacrament. Second, the *Aid* places the sacrament of penance within the context of the growth in holiness of the faithful—both priests and laity—and renewal of the Church that the magisterium has been heralding since the Second Vatican Council. Third, the *Aid* addresses the sacramental crisis that afflicts the Church today. Each of these three topics will be discussed in the section on the *Aid*'s themes and contributions below.

The Congregation for the Clergy's *Aid* is removed from the Council of Trent insofar as the recent document concerns itself with the contemporary needs and aspirations of the Church more than with the unchanging elements of sacred doctrine. Keeping in mind the particular needs of the Church in the contemporary world, the *Aid* draws almost entirely from magisterial documents of the past five decades. Largely flowing from the Second Vatican Council, these documents especially address the *munus*, or office, of the priest and the sacrament of penance. The fourth and final section of this article lists these recent magisterial contributions.

Overview

The first of the two parts of *The Priest: Minister of Divine Mercy* is titled "The Ministry of Penance and Reconciliation with a View to Christian Holiness." Three chapters comprise this first part: "Contemporary Importance, Moment of Grace"; "Fundamental Approach"; and "Some Practical Guidelines." Each of these is in turn divided into subsections with titles of their own.[6]

The loaded title of chapter one, "Contemporary Importance, Moment of Grace," only hints at the wealth of reflections that it contains. The section begins by renewing the "urgent invitation" issued by Pope John Paul II for "a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation."[7] The *Aid* then places the sacrament of penance in the context of the Church's mission, which is understood as "a harmonious process of proclamation, celebration and of communicating forgiveness" (PMDM, §9). Because experiencing forgiveness leads to generosity in the Church's mission of communicating forgiveness, the *Aid* issues, for the first time, a recommendation that it will repeat throughout—that the ministers of the sacrament of penance should participate regularly in the same sacrament:

> *The joy of forgiveness leads to an attitude of gratitude and generosity in the journey towards sanctification and in the mission. Those who have experienced forgiveness want others to experience this encounter with Christ the Good Shepherd. Thus, the ministers of the Sacrament of Penance who themselves experience the beauty of this sacramental encounter are always more disposed to offer this humble, arduous, patient and joyous service. (PMDM, §9)*

The necessity for the minister of reconciliation to be also a recipient of the sacrament lies in the direction

and inseparable connection between reconciliation with God and reconciliation among human beings: "When we are forgiven by God, we learn better to forgive our neighbor and be reconciled with him" (PMDM, §11).

Having established the connection between the Church's mission of receiving divine forgiveness and communicating divine forgiveness, the *Aid* issues one of its most beautiful and thought-provoking assertions: "The concrete, joyful, trustworthy and committed practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a clear indicator of the level of evangelization reached by the individual believer and by a particular community" (PMDM, §10). This standard for self-examination may be applied to any Catholic community, including seminaries, parishes, and monasteries, as well as Christian families.

The *Aid* next considers "opening ourselves to love and reconciliation" (PMDM, §§12-13). Under this heading, the text addresses the ongoing "penitential journey" of the Christian life, which demands continuous conversion and growth in love to the point of putting on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). "It is a journey of purification of sins and a journey of identification with Christ" (PMDM, §13). This journey, in turn, forms "a cornerstone and foundation for a society which lives communion" (PMDM, §13). This easy transition from personal journey to societal communion, expressed elsewhere in terms of a personal experience of mercy enabling the Christian to extend mercy to others, is characteristic of the *Aid*. The document splendidly integrates the private with the public and ecclesial ramifications of forgiveness, reconciliation and the pursuit of sanctity, thereby entirely avoiding a false dichotomy that is widespread in academic discourse concerning this sacrament.[8]

Under the heading "the witness and commitment of pastors," the *Aid* sets forth the example of several model confessors: St. John Nepomucene, St. John Mary Vianney, St. Joseph Cafasso, St. Leopold of Castelnuovo, and St. Pio of Pietrelcina (PMDM, §14). The text then cites John Paul II's beautiful words of homage "to the innumerable host of holy and almost always anonymous confessors to whom is owed the salvation of so many souls who have been helped by them in conversion, in the struggle against sin and temptation, in spiritual progress and, in a word, in achieving holiness."[9] The *Aid* notes that the faithful frequently respond to the efforts of such pastors to provide opportunities for receiving the sacrament of penance (PMDM, §14).

This leads to a crucial discussion of the priestly *munera* (duties or offices), which include acting as "a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ" by "authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and offer of salvation" especially in baptism, penance and the Eucharist (PMDM, §16). Following this, the Congregation for Clergy again invites priests to regularly avail themselves of the sacrament of penance, which is posited as a condition of the priest's fruitful spiritual and pastoral life (PMDM, §17). Moreover, the Congregation insists that pastoral planning must not neglect sacramental confession (PMDM, §18).

The document splendidly integrates the private with the public and ecclesial ramifications of forgiveness, reconciliation and the pursuit of sanctity, thereby entirely avoiding a false dichotomy that is widespread in academic discourse concerning this sacrament.

The *Aid* then focuses on "the example of the Curé of Ars" (PMDM, §§19-20). In the words of Pope John Paul II, St. John Vianney's "principal charism" was "his untiring devotion to the Sacrament of Reconciliation."[10] Again quoting the words of Pope John Paul II, the *Aid* expresses the need for renewing the sacrament of penance on the pastoral level in view of a present neglect of the sacrament among the faithful. The Church must develop a "pastoral strategy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation" (PMDM, §20).

The final subheading of chapter one designates "the ministry of mercy" as the topic of consideration. Here the *Aid* discusses the "ministry" and "service of reconciliation" as a pastoral priority of the Church, whereby the love of God, peace and paschal joy are communicated. This service or ministry of the Church entails an invitation "to acknowledge their own sins" and to enter upon the process of conversion, in which the sacrament of reconciliation plays an important role (PMDM, §21-23). The need for reconciliation, penance, and renewal impacts not only society as a whole, but

also the "pilgrim Church," which is, in the words of *Lumen gentium*, "at the same time holy and always in need of being purified."[11]

Those entrusted with the care of souls must make provisions so that the sacrament of penance is frequently offered to the faithful and is available at convenient times—including during Mass.

As in chapter one, chapter two boasts a broad and not particularly descriptive title: "Fundamental Approach." Under this heading, the chapter provides several basic catechetical considerations regarding the sacrament of penance while placing the sacrament within the context of the ongoing call to conversion and holiness.

Chapter two begins by characterizing penance as the "Sacrament of Forgiveness" through which "Christ prolongs his words of forgiveness in the words of the priest while, at the same time, transforming the attitude of the penitent who recognises that he is a sinner and asks forgiveness with the intent of expiation and a purpose of amendment" (PMDM, §24). The *Aid* portrays the priest as a type of Christ, and the penitent in terms of the prodigal son, who is surprised at the forgiveness of his father and, even more, at the feast offered to celebrate his return (PMDM, §24). In an insightful and refreshing turn of thought, the *Aid* then portrays the sacrament of penance as a festive and joyful liturgical "celebration" marking forgiveness and the reencounter with God and the Good Shepherd (PMDM, §25). After an aside that briefly discusses the various names of the sacrament—penance, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation (PMDM, §26)—the *Aid* emphasizes, in the words of the *Catechism*, that conversion is "an essential component of the proclamation of the Kingdom," and the necessary response to the merciful love of God.[12]

The Congregation for Clergy next turns its attention to the role of forgiveness and reconciliation within the "journey towards holiness which is called for and made possible by Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation and the Word of God" (PMDM, §28). On this dynamic evangelical journey, the confession of venial sins and imperfections contributes to the Christian's progress in the spiritual life and personal desire to transform his or her life "into an expression of divine mercy for others."[13] This dynamic is true for all of the faithful, and especially for the priest: "Once the priest is conscious of this reality of grace he cannot but encourage the faithful to approach the Sacrament of Penance" (PMDM, §31). In the celebration of the sacrament of penance, the priest serves as the Good Shepherd, the Good Samaritan, the Father of the prodigal son, the just and impartial judge and "the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner."[14]

Under the final subheading of chapter two, "a mystery of grace," the *Aid* touches upon several topics: the seal of confession; how reconciliation manifests the dignity of the penitent; the effects of the sacrament of penance; and the relation of the Lord's Prayer to the experience of reconciliation (PMDM, §§32-35). The effects of the sacrament—reconciliation and reintegration with God, the Church and self—manifest the dignity of the penitent, who "experiences the mercy of God in his life and proclaims it" (PMDM §33).

The third and longest chapter devoted to the sacrament of penance is titled "Some Practical Guidelines." This chapter establishes the priest's responsibility and privilege as minister of the sacrament of penance.

Chapter three begins with "the ministry of awakening proper dispositions in the penitent" (PMDM, §§36-40). The celebration of the sacrament of penance, the *Aid* notes, is "the really privileged moment for reconciliation and penance or conversion" (PMDM, §35). The conversion that takes place in integral confession constitutes "a return to following God's will," whereby "one's life is reoriented on the journey of love towards God and one's neighbor" (PMDM, §37). The grace of the sacrament is forgiveness and the healing of imperfections and deviations through the imparting of strength "to be more open to the perfection of love" (PMDM, §38). Moreover, the penitent gives expression to "an interior penitential disposition" through various external gestures, including prayer, almsgiving, sacrifice, the sanctification of certain times and days, and participation in the Eucharist (PMDM, §39). The penitent can fulfill these external gestures only by the grace of God, which informs the examination of conscience. "Therefore, the acknowledgement and integral confession of sins before the priest forms part of the action of the Spirit of love, which goes well beyond the pain of contrition (out

of love) or of attrition (out of fear of God's justice)" (PMDM, § 40).

Under the heading "the liturgical celebration," the *Aid* discusses the three distinct rites or liturgical celebrations provided in the *Rite of Penance* (PMDM, §§41-43). These rites can be designated as Rite 1, Rite 2, or Rite 3 according to the corresponding chapter of the *Rite of Penance* in which they appear: Chapter 1, "Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents"; Chapter 2, "Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution"; and Chapter 3, "Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution."[15] Here "individual confession" (in the context of either Rite 1 or Rite 2) is described as the "ordinary form of confession" and "an excellent opportunity to call people to a life of holiness and, consequently, for spiritual direction."[16] Thus, the *Aid* quotes Pope John Paul II's pastoral admonition that the forms of penance, including individual and integral confession of sins, make it possible to straightforwardly connect the sacrament with spiritual direction.[17] This link is impossible with Rite 3, because of its general confession and general absolution. Therefore the *Aid* contents itself with reiterating the canonical requirements for "grave necessity" that must be met for the celebration of the third rite of penance.[18]

Turning to "Practical norms established by the Church: an expression of pastoral charity" (PMDM, §§44-47), the *Aid* draws heavily from the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Rite of Penance*, and ends with a reference to Pope John Pau II's 2002 apostolic letter *Misericordia Dei*. Confessors are exhorted to "always behave as just and merciful servants so that they may have 'regard for the divine honor and [for] the salvation of souls.'"[19] These concerns reflect, in spirit, the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, which similarly insists that individual liturgical "norms are bound up with the supreme norm of all ecclesiastical law, namely concern for the salvation of souls."[20]

Having restated the importance of following already-existing norms regarding the sacrament of penance, the *Aid* advises confessors that "the most important thing is to assist the penitent in conforming himself to Christ" (PMDM, §48). "At every instant," the *Aid* continues,

> *attention must be paid to the process followed by the penitent. Sometimes, it may be necessary to help him arrive at a more radical conversion so that he can recover or re-enliven his fundamental option for the faith. At other times, the priest may have to assist the penitent in the normal process of sanctification which is one of integrated purification, illumination and union. (PMDM, §49)*

This sage admonition of pastoral sensitivity to the spiritual and moral state of the penitent is followed by yet another call to frequent confession "of venial sins or imperfection," which is portrayed as "a consequence of fidelity to Baptism and Confirmation" and an expression of "sincere desire for perfection" (PMDM, §50).

In other words, the *Aid* subtly recommends one particular formula ("May the Passion…") from among several options, and strongly encourages that it always be said.

The pastor of souls, then, must do his best both to make himself available as a confessor and to prepare himself to fulfill fruitfully the task of confessor. In this regard, the *Aid* calls the confessor to "prayer and penance" in order to form a disposition of "genuine ministerial readiness and paternal acceptance" (PMDM, §51). "An ever increasing ministerial readiness" to celebrate this sacrament "arouses the desire for Christian perfection" both on the part of the penitent and the priest, who serves as confessor (PMDM, §53). As Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, writes in the Presentation of the *Aid*: "Whenever a confessor is available, sooner or later a penitent will arrive. And if the confessor continues to make himself available, even stubbornly so, sooner or later many penitents will arrive." On the other hand, a lack of willingness to serve in this capacity "would be a sad sign of a lack of pastoral sensibility."[21] By way of preparation for ministering this sacrament, among other prerequisites, the pastor should learn "the spiritual maladies of his flock and … be close to the penitent" and faithful to the Church's teachings on morality and perfection (PMDM, §55).

Those entrusted with the care of souls must make

"Do I really take holiness seriously in my priesthood?"

provisions so that the sacrament of penance is frequently offered to the faithful and is available at convenient times—including during Mass.[22] In this regard, the *Aid* cites a little-known 2001 decision by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments regarding the propriety of offering sacramental confession during the celebration of Mass. The section cited in the *Aid* "warmly" recommends "that some priests refrain from concelebrating so as to hear the confessions of the faithful."[23] The Congregation for Divine Worship's decision merits further citation:

> *[T]he faithful … ought to be encouraged and helped to seek health of soul in the sacrament of Penance, and have recourse to it, as far as possible outside the place and time of the celebration of Mass. On the other hand, this does not in any way prohibit priests, except the one who is celebrating Mass, from hearing confessions of the faithful who so desire, including during the celebration of Mass. Above all nowadays, when the ecclesial significance of sin and the sacrament of Penance is obscured in many people, and the desire to receive the sacrament of Penance has diminished markedly, pastors ought to do all in their power to foster frequent participation by the faithful in this sacrament.… Consequently, it is clearly lawful, even during the celebration of Mass, to hear confessions when one foresees that the faithful are going to ask for this ministry.*[24]

The Congregation for Divine Worship's decision was clearly repeated by Pope John Paul II in *Misericordia Dei*:

> *It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertized times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful.*[25]

Redemptionis Sacramentum again admitted the same possibility: "Priests other than those celebrating or concelebrating the Mass might hear the confessions of the faithful who so desire, even in the same place where Mass is being celebrated, in order to meet the needs of those faithful. This should nevertheless be done in an appropriate manner."[26] A pastoral imperative underlies the Holy See's repeated insistence that the sacrament of penance can, and at times should, be offered during the celebration of Mass: "Local Ordinaries, and parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their sins."[27]

Turning to the topic of how penance is celebrated, in a noteworthy and curiously phrased piece of practical advice, the *Aid* insists that "the commendation" immediately following absolution in the celebration of penance, which "contains a great wealth of spiritual and pastoral treasure," "should always be said" (PMDM, §54). The final part in the *Rite of Penance* to which the *Aid* refers is titled "Proclamation of Praise of God and Dismissal" (*Proclamatio laudis Dei et paenitentis dimissio*).[28] The first formula for this commendation constitutes a dialogue between confessor and recipient: "'Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.' The penitent concludes: 'His mercy endures for ever.' Then the priest dismisses the penitent who has been reconciled, saying: 'The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.'"[29] The first alternate version of the formula from which the priest may choose follows: "May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the saints, whatever good you do and suffering you endure, heal your sins, help you to grow in holiness, and reward you with eternal life. Go in peace."[30] The *Aid* describes this commendation as follows: "It directs the heart of the penitent towards the passion of Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints, and towards cooperation through subsequent good works" (PMDM, §54). Given this description, the authors of the *Aid* must have in mind the first alternate version of the final praise and dismissal; the subsequent alternative versions[31] (in Latin as well as the English translation) would not fit this description any more than the first formula given. In other words, the *Aid* subtly recommends one particular formula ("May the Passion…") from among several options, and strongly encourages that it always be said.

Drawing once again from the example of the Curé of Ars, the *Aid* transitions to a subsection titled "A renewed and up to date training for priests so as to

be able to guide the faithful in different circumstances" (PMDM, §§58-60). Despite its title, this subsection does not explicitly address priestly formation. Instead, it reiterates the various types of the priest as confessor: pastor, father, master, teacher, spiritual judge and physician (PMDM, §59). Then the *Aid* points to Mary as "Mother of Mercy," and a necessary "Marian spirituality of each priest," which "will allow his activities to be influenced by the maternal heart of Mary which is a reflection of the divine mercy" (PMDM, §60).

The final subsection of the *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy* devoted to the sacrament of penance highlights "New circumstances, new graces, new fervor of priests" (PMDM, §§61-63). Difficulties such as "a certain loss of the sense of sin" and "the exhaustion suffered by many priests because of their manifold duties" mark the new circumstances. Yet new graces of spiritual rebirth through confession offer "a well-spring of joy for those who are servants of the Good Shepherd (PMDM, §61). Moreover, celebration of penance itself heightens the dignity of the priest and elevates his experience of divine love and mercy:

> *When the priest exercises this mystery, in a special way he enkindles his role as an instrument of a tremendous event of grace. In the light of faith, he can experience the actualisation of the loving mercy of the Father. The words and gestures of the priest are a means of realizing the real miracle of grace. While there are other ecclesial instruments which communicate the mercy of God (the Eucharist which is the greatest sign of his mercy), the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance accomplishes this in the most complete and eminent way. (PMDM §61)*

Thus, confession once again appears as a preeminent communication of the loving mercy of God and a high point of the priestly ministry. The *Aid* concludes its treatment of penance with a call for "ongoing formation of clergy" in the broad fields they should know in order to effectively serve as ministers of divine mercy (PMDM, §62).

Two appendices close *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*. The first assists priests in their role as recipients of the sacrament of penance by offering a twenty-point "Examination of Conscience for Priests." The first question of the first point aptly illustrates one theme of the examination, as well as the entire *Aid*: "Do I really take holiness seriously in my priesthood?" In keeping with another ongoing theme of the *Aid*, point 15 includes the questions, "Do I regularly go to Confession?" and "Do I generously celebrate the Sacrament of Penance?" The second appendix is comprised of two prayers: one for the priest before hearing confessions, and the other for the priest after hearing confessions. Both appendices will be gratefully received and employed by priests who are seeking holiness and diligently striving to fulfill their role as ministers of the sacraments.

"By letting myself be forgiven, I learn to forgive others. In recognizing my own weakness, I grow more tolerant and understanding of the failings of my neighbour."

Themes and Contributions

Several themes have emerged from the foregoing overview of the treatment of reconciliation in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, and will therefore only be briefly highlighted here. First, in addition to considering the priest as the minister of the sacrament of penance, the *Aid* also considers him to be, specifically, a promoter and recipient of the sacrament. Second, the *Aid* places the sacrament of penance within the context of the growth in holiness of the faithful—both priests and laity—and the renewal of the Church that the magisterium has been heralding since the Second Vatican Council. Third, the *Aid* addresses the sacramental crisis that afflicts the Church today. Finally, the *Aid* repeatedly draws from St. John Vianney as a model and teacher of confessors.

Within the first repeated theme, the Congregation for Clergy's document insists that the priest, in order to fulfill fruitfully his role as minister of divine mercy, must frequently avail himself as a recipient of the sacrament of penance, and must actively promote and facilitate the laity's desire for the sacrament and their access to it.

The priest is to promote a desire for the sacrament of penance not only through catechesis and teaching, but also by ensuring that occasions on which the sacrament is offered are plentiful and convenient. "Pastoral

planning would hardly be efficacious were it to underestimate the importance of sacramental confession" (PMDM, §18). In connection with this assertion, the *Aid* explicitly mentions the duty of the bishop and those "charged with the care of souls … to provide the faithful with the opportunity of making an individual confession" (PMDM, §18).

The *Aid* also draws this lesson from the Curé of Ars: "to put our unfailing trust in the Sacrament of Penance, to set it once more at the centre of our pastoral concerns, and to take up the 'dialogue of salvation' which it entails'" (PMDM, §58).

In order to be a worthy and fruitful minister of the sacrament of penance, the priest must also frequently and devoutly fulfill the role of the penitent. In order to be a minister of divine mercy and forgiveness, the priest must also receive mercy and forgiveness. As Pope Benedict XVI recently taught, "By letting myself be forgiven, I learn to forgive others. In recognizing my own weakness, I grow more tolerant and understanding of the failings of my neighbour."[32]

The priest, however, does not receive the sacrament of penance solely for the utilitarian purpose of being a better minister of the sacrament; it is, in fact, part of his path to holiness. This leads to the second noteworthy theme of *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*; the centrality of sacramental confession on the path of conversion, renewal and perfection, which all Christians are called to walk. Although the theme of confession as an aid in the pursuit of sanctity is obvious enough to those familiar with magisterial documents and traditional spiritual practices, to others it appears as foreign or even mistaken.[33] The *Aid*'s Introduction, subtitled "Towards Holiness," sets this topic within the context of the call to holiness:

> *The ministry of reconciliation and the service of spiritual counsel and direction are contextualized by the universal call to holiness which is the perfection of Christian life and "the perfection of charity." Pastoral charity in the truth of priestly identity should cause the priest to direct all of his ministry and ministrations towards holiness thereby harmonizing the prophetic, liturgical and diaconal aspects of his ministry.*[34]

This perfection of charity refers, of course, not only to the faithful whom the priest serves as the minister of the sacrament of reconciliation, but also to the priest himself who, in his own turn, is to be a beneficiary or recipient of the sacrament of reconciliation. The priest walks with the lay faithful on "the journey of holiness to which the Lord calls each one of us," or "on the demanding path of holiness." [35] On this journey priests have an "apostolic urgency of rediscovering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, both from their viewpoint of penitents as well as that of ministers" (PMDM, §1).

The theme of crisis is considered third here because the *Aid* is predominantly positive or constructive with regard to the Christian spiritual life, rather than reactive or restricted to dealing with destructive trends. Nonetheless, real crises on the sense of sin and the celebration of the sacrament of penance do indeed loom in the background of the document. The bishops at the Sixth General Assembly of the Bishops in 1983 noted, along with Pope John Paul II, that "the sacrament of penance is in crisis."[36] The *Aid* repeats a concern John Paul II expressed three years later:

> *The fact that great numbers of people "seem to stay away from confession completely, for various reasons, is a sign of the urgent need to develop a whole pastoral strategy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will be done by constantly reminding Christians of the need to have a real relationship with God, to have a sense of sin when one is closed to God and to others, the need to be converted and, through the Church, to receive forgiveness as a free gift of God. They also need to be reminded of the conditions that enable the sacrament to be celebrated well, and in this regard to overcome prejudices, baseless fears and routine. Such a situation, at the same time, requires that we ourselves should remain greatly available for this ministry of forgiveness; ready to devote to it the necessary time and care, and I would even say giving it priority over other activities."*[37]

John Paul II connects the decrease in recourse to sacramental confession with a loss of the sense of sin. The *Aid* repeats this connection and adds other aggravating factors: "We have to recognize the present difficulties facing the ministry of penance due to a certain loss of the sense of sin, a certain disaffection towards this sacrament, a certain blindness to the usefulness of the confession of sins and also the exhaustion suffered by many priests because of their manifold duties" (PMDM §61).[38]

This author posits that the crisis in the sacrament of confession is twofold: on the one level, it is popular; on the other level, it is academic. On the popular level, the second half of the twentieth century suffered a dramatic decline in the number of Catholics who sought the sacrament of confession, from which it has yet to recover.[39] On the academic level, the very need for the sacrament of confession has been attacked from some quarters,[40] while others would shun the practice of private or individual confession and absolution in favor of communal celebrations, and especially of Rite 3.[41] By contrast, the *Aid* reflects a recurring concern of the Holy See by repeating the requirements for "grave necessity" that must be met for the celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution.[42] As has already been seen, the *Aid* also notes, as a particular advantage of the "ordinary form of confession," the prime opportunity it provides for exhortations to holiness and spiritual direction (PMDM, §42).

The example of St. John Vianney as a model confessor arises in several different sections of the *Aid*. In fact, the holy parish priest appears in the very first section: "Any year dedicated to the memory of the Curé of Ars should leave an indelible mark on the life and ministry of priests. This is especially true of this year which recalls the 150th anniversary of his death (1859- 2009)" (PMDM, §1). The Curé of Ars arises again in the list of model confessors (PMDM, §18) provided above, and two sections are subsequently devoted to him. Ordained in 1815, John Vianney was sent to serve as pastor of the tiny church in Ars in 1818. Beginning around 1830, thousands of people visited Ars for confession with him on a yearly basis, and he spent untold hours in the confessional. In the words of Pope John Paul II, the holy Curé of Ars lived a "martyrdom" in the confessional.

> *So he did not wish to get rid of the penitents who came from all parts and to whom he often devoted ten hours a day, sometimes fifteen or more. For him this was undoubtedly the greatest of his mortifications, a form of martyrdom. In the first place it was a martyrdom in the physical sense from the heat, the cold or the suffocating atmosphere. Secondly in the moral sense, for he himself suffered from the sins confessed and even more the lack of repentance: "I weep because you do not weep." In the face of these indifferent people, whom he welcomed as best he could and tried to awaken in them the love of God, the Lord enabled him to reconcile great sinners who were repentant and also to guide to perfection souls thirsting for it. It was here above all that God asked him to share in the Redemption.*[43]

Pope St. Pius X beatified John Vianney in 1905, and declared him the patron saint of the priests of France. At his canonization in 1925, Pope Pius XI expanded that patronage, naming St. John Vianney "patron saint of the priests of the whole world."

In addition to being an inspiration and an intercessor, St. John Vianney offers practical norms for the priest as minister of the sacrament of penance.

> *One can learn from the Curé of Ars how to distinguish types of penitents in order to be able to assist them better in accordance to their dispositions. Although offering models of holiness to the more fervent, he exhorted all to steep themselves in the "torrent of divine mercy" thereby engendering the hope of amendment of life: "The good Lord knows everything. Even before you confess, he already knows that you will sin again, yet he still forgives you. How great is the love of our God: he even forces himself to forget the future, so that he can grant us his forgiveness!" (PMDM, §58)*

The *Aid* also draws this lesson from the Curé of Ars: "to put our unfailing trust in the Sacrament of Penance, to set it once more at the centre of our pastoral concerns, and to take up the 'dialogue of salvation' which it entails'" (PMDM, §58).

Among the many recurring themes addressed in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, this section highlighted four: the priest's role as recipient of the sacrament of penance; the importance of that sacrament in the pursuit of holiness; the contemporary crisis in sacramental reception; and St. John Vianney as a model confessor. The document's contribution is bringing all of these themes together within one overarching presentation of the sacrament of penance in the positive context

of the Christian journey, or pilgrimage of conversion and growth in holiness, and the privileged role that the ordained priest plays in this journey as a minister and recipient of mercy and forgiveness. None of these themes are unique to this document. In fact, they are all found in documents produced by the Holy See during roughly the past half-century. The final section of this article draws attention to those documents.

Sources: A Course of Study on the Sacrament of Penance and the Priest's Ministry

The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy explicitly points to its sources: "This present Aid hopes to afford a number of simple, factual, and inspiring examples drawn from numerous ecclesial documents (cited throughout) which may eventually be directly consulted" (PMDM, §6). In fact, the document is little more than a synthesis or catena of pertinent passages drawn from scattered magisterial documents of the past half-century. It also constitutes an invitation to further explore these rich teachings of the magisterium. With that invitation in mind, this section lists, in chronological order, the more influential or easier to find sources cited by the *Aid*.

Pope John XXIII's encyclical of 1959 on St. John Vianney is cited in a discussion of St. John Vianney.[44] As seen above, this holy French parish priest, the Curé of Ars, has been frequently proposed as a model for confessors,[45] and the *Aid* devotes a brief section entirely to him (PMDM, §§19-20). Pope Benedict XVI and the *Aid* both draw all the more attention to St. John Vianney, because the opening of the Year of Priests coincided with the 150th anniversary of his death.[46]

The *Aid* frequently cites documents of the Second Vatican Council.[47] First and foremost, major themes of the *Aid* come from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*. The dogmatic constitution provides the *Aid* with significant thematic teachings, including the call to holiness that pertains to all the faithful[48] and the fact that the Church must constantly undergo penance and purification: "While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin, but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal."[49] The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, also features prominently in the *Aid*.[50] This latter decree directly provides some of the main themes in the *Aid*, including the exhortation to "all priests that they strive always for that growth in holiness by which they will become consistently better instruments in the service of the whole People of God."[51] One means of striving for holiness, the Council points out, is recourse to the sacraments:

> *The importance of frequent use of these for the sanctification of priests is obvious to all. The ministers of sacramental grace are intimately united to Christ our Savior and Pastor through the fruitful reception of the sacraments, especially sacramental Penance, in which, prepared by the daily examination of conscience, the necessary conversion of heart and love for the Father of Mercy is greatly deepened…*[52]

Pursuing holiness enables the priest to better and more fruitfully fulfill his *munus sanctificandi* or office of sanctifying. Sacramental ministry, or the work of sanctification as part of the priestly *munus*,[53] includes the sacraments, the divine office, and fostering knowledge of—and facility in—the liturgy on the part of the laity.[54] Jumping from the Second Vatican Council to the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, the latter delivered three general audiences, each of which covered one part of the threefold *munus* of the priest: the *munus docendi* (of teaching), *sanctificandi* (of sanctifying) and *regendi* (of ruling or pastoring).[55] In the general audience on the *munus sanctificandi*, Benedict XVI mentioned the sacrament of penance, inviting priests "to dwell" in the confessional.

The sources cited in the *Aid* that remain to be mentioned include the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, 1997) and the *Code of Canon Law* (1983). The *Aid* itself only directly cites *The Rite of Penance,* or *Ordo paenitentiae* (1973), on one occasion;[56] the paucity of references suggests that the Congregation for the Clergy presupposes working knowledge of the rite itself. The bulk of documents cited or referenced in the *Aid*'s consideration of penance come from the teachings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Here follows a list of those documents. Footnotes provide references to publication venues only for those documents or addresses that are not readily available online:

- John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Dives in misericordia* (30 November 1980).
- John Paul II. Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee for the 1950th anniversary of the Redemption *Aperite portas redemptori* (6 January 1983).
- John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December

1984).

- John Paul II. Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 1986 (16 March 1986).
- John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992).
- John Paul II. Discourse to the Apostolic Penitentiary (12 March 1994).[57]
- John Paul II. Apostolic Letter At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 *Novo millennio ineunte* (6 January 2001).
- John Paul II. Apostolic Letter/*Motu proprio* On Certain Aspects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance *Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002).
- Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Reply On Norms Relating to the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance *Quenam sunt dispositiones* (31 July 2001).[58]
- John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World *Pastores gregis* (16 October 2003).
- Benedict XVI. Discourse to the Confessors Who Serve in the Four Papal Basilicas of Rome (19 February 2007).[59]
- Benedict XVI. Message to His Eminence Cardinal James Stafford, Major Penitentiary, and to the Participants of the XX Course on the Internal Forum Promoted by the Apostolic Penitentiary (14 March 2009).
- Benedict XVI. Address to the Participants in the Course on the Internal Forum Organized by the Tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary (11 March 2010).
- Benedict XVI. Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the *Dies natalis* of the Curé of Ars (16 June 2009).
- Benedict XVI. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010).

In some cases, only brief sections of these documents and addresses discuss the sacrament of penance in relation to the priestly ministry. Nonetheless, taken together, these teachings provide a thorough course of study and a rich source for reflection on the topic that would benefit any priest or seminarian.

The *Aid*'s holistic approach to the sacrament of reconciliation as a significant part of the priest's spiritual journey toward holiness, ministry of mercy and reconciliation to the Church is entirely positive.

Conclusion and Final Evaluation

The second section of this article offers help in navigating or reviewing the contents of *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*. Organization is not the document's strength. The headings of chapters and subsections reveal little about their contents, and the topics sometimes jump from paragraph to paragraph and from sentence to sentence. In this, the *Aid* reflects characteristics of a committee document. One must read the document reflectively or in a prayerful manner in order to appreciate it. Despite the lack of a concrete organization principal, the *Aid* consistently edifies and ennobles the priestly ministry of reconciliation. A reading of the *Aid* in conjunction with its sources, outlined in the fourth part of this article, yields a thorough and refreshing course of prayerful study for any seminarian or priest.

A number of outstanding strengths of *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy* merit mention. These strengths provided topics of discussion in the third part of this article, which was devoted to the *Aid*'s themes and contribution. The *Aid* grounds the sacrament of penance in the Christian path to holiness and sanctification, a path for both the individual Christian and the community as a whole. It also insists that the priest must receive the sacrament as penitent in order to communicate most effectively the mercy of God as confessor. These considerations point to the interconnection of individual conversion and communal conversion; to the link between divine mercy experienced by the individual Christian and the mercy that a Christian shows to his or her neighbor. The *Aid* easily, and without any trace of artificiality, blends the private with the communal import of the sacrament of reconciliation; in fact, in good Catholic fashion, it so blends the two that it scarcely admits any

distinction between them.

As a final note of appreciation, The Congregation for the Clergy can in nowise be accused of treating confession "as an objectively mechanical process … the main thing in it being that there is the actual absolution." [60] The *Aid* evinces nothing of the magical, legalistic or mechanical approaches to confession that modern commentators often find in medieval and post-Tridentine treatments of the sacrament. The *Aid*'s holistic approach to the sacrament of reconciliation as a significant part of the priest's spiritual journey toward holiness, ministry of mercy and reconciliation to the Church is entirely positive. In this, it is true to the spirit of the many recent magisterial documents from which it draws.

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Endnotes

1. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011).
2. Council of Trent, Session 14, Teaching Concerning the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Last Anointing, 3 (25 November 1551), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 704.
3. Council of Trent, Session 14, Canons Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of Penance, 3, ed. Tanner, 711.
4. Council of Trent, Session 14, Teaching Concerning the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Last Anointing, 6, ed. Tanner, 707.
5. Council of Trent, Session 14, Teaching Concerning the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Last Anointing, 3, ed. Tanner, 704.
6. The subsection titles are not necessarily helpful in determining the content of each section; they tend to indicate only one point made therein. Some sections and some paragraphs exhibit shifts in topic.
7. *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §7, citing John Paul II, Apostolic Letter/*Motu proprio,* On Certain Aspects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance *Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002); and John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millenio nneunte* (6 January 2001), §37.
8. For an expression of the false dichotomy consider, for example, James Dallen, "Reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance," *Worship* 64 (1990) 386: "The personal sense of sin and repentance is also admittedly at risk, but more importantly, the character of ecclesial identity and mission is endangered by our failure to appreciate the true nature of this sacrament as communal reconciliation rather than individual forgiveness." This line of thought finds its origins in the commonly accepted historical narrative (overly simplistic and outdated as it is) according to which public forms of penance were replaced by the private version that originated in Irish monasteries by the year 800. As Tad Guzie, an influential theologian from the 1970s, wrote in *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Confession* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1974), 36: "if the new practice was more practical and humane, it also involved some serious losses. Penance became a purely private matter…. These were the centuries when the church more and more lost consciousness of itself as a *faith community* formed around the Lord's table…."
9. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §14, citing John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (2 December 1984), §29.
10. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §20, citing John Paul II, Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 1986 (16 March 1986), §7.
11. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §23, citing Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), §8.
12. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §27, citing *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), §1427.
13. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §30; see also §18: "Frequent confession, even for those who are not in grave sin, has constantly been recommended by the Church as a means of progress in the Christian life."
14. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy,* §31, citing *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* §1465.
15. *Rite of Penance*, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), Rite 1 occupies §§41-47, pp. 545-548; Rite 2 occupies §§48-59, pp. 549-559; Rite 3 occupies §§60-66, pp. 560-563. For a balanced commentary on the second and third rites (those including communal celebrations), see Edward Foley, "Communal Rites of Penance: Insights and Options," in *Reconciliation: The Continuing Agenda*, ed. Robert J. Kennedy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 143-159.
16. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §42; see also §46: "the communal celebration of the Rite of Penance, with individual absolution, is also a great help for individual confession, which is always the ordinary form of the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance."
17. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §42, citing *Reconciliatio et paenitentia,* §32.
18. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §42 and again at §47. Section 42 cites *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1483; *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 961-962; and the legislation for

the Eastern Churches in *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, cc. 720-721. A fuller study of the development of legislation governing a rite for general absolution, and general absolution and the history of magisterial pronouncements also must take into account the following documents: Apostolic Penitentiary, Instruction on General Sacramental Absolution (25 March 1944); Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pastoral Norms on General Absolution *Sacramentum paenitentiae* (16 June 1972); Paul VI, General Audience on the Sacrament of Reconciliation (19 July 1972); Introduction, *Rite of Penance*, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), §§31-35, pp. 539-541; Paul VI, General Audience on the New Rite of Penance (3 April 1974); Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter Commenting on the Pastoral Norms for General Absolution (14 January 1977); Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Reply to a Query on General Absolution (20 January 1978); and, above all, *Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002).

19. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §44, citing *Code of Canon Law*, c. 978 §1.
20. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (25 March 2004), §13.
21. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §56, citing *Misericordia Dei*.
22. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §§52, 56, citing *Misericordia Dei*.
23. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §56, citing Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments Response to *Dubium* On Norms Relating to the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance *Quaenam sunt dispositiones* (31 July 2001), *Notitiae* 37 (2001), 259-260.

24 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Quaenam sunt dispositiones.*

25 *Misericordia Dei*, Norm 2.

26 *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, §76.

27 *Misericordia Dei*, §2.

28 Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, *Rite of Penance*, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), §47, p. 547; *Ordo paenitentiae*, editio typica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1974), §47, p. 28.

29 Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, *The Rites,* §47, p. 547.

30 Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, *The Rites,* §47[93], p. 547.

31 Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, in *The Rites,* vol. 1, §47[93], pp. 547-548: The subsequent three alternative versions follow: "The Lord has freed you from sin. May he bring you safely to his kingdom in heaven. Glory to him for ever." "Blessed are those whose sins have been forgiven, whose evil deeds have been forgotten. Rejoice in the Lord, and go in peace." "God in peace, and proclaim to the world the wonderful works of God who has brought you salvation."

32 Benedict XVI, Letter to Seminarians (18 October 2010), §3; the first part of this passage is quoted in *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §17.

33 Consider, for example, a recent reflection by Paul Lakeland, the Aloysius P. Kelley S.J. Professor of Catholic Studies and director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Fairfield University in Connecticut, who writes in "The Lost Art of Confession: A Catholic Reflection," *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 125.2 (Spring 2010) 22: "In confession I am not here to placate God and I am certainly not here to take a small step towards sanctity. I am here to recognize my sinfulness in the confidence that I am already forgiven and, indeed, already holy." The constraints of space do not allow an analysis of the complex of theological presuppositions underlying this position on (sacramental?) confession. It is sufficient to state that: they logically follow from Rahner's sacramental theology; they reflect a soteriological view that is widespread in Catholic academia; and they undermine the theme of the *Aid* under discussion here.

34 *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §1, quoting Benedict XVI, Message to His Eminence Cardinal James Stafford, Major Penitentiary, and to the Participants of the XX Course on the Internal Forum Promoted by the Apostolic Penitentiary (14 March 2009).

35 *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §4; the quotation comes from *Lumen gentium*, §40; see also *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §17.

36 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (2 December 1984), §28.

37 ,*Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy,* §20, citing John Paul II, Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 1986, §7.

38 *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §21: "Loss of a sense of sin disrupts the inner balance of our hearts and generates contradiction and conflict in human society."

39 For reflections on the various causes of the decline, see chapter 1, "Why Have So Many Catholics Stopped Going to Confession," in George A. Maloney, *Your Sins Are Forgiven You: Rediscovering the Sacrament of Reconciliation* (New York: Alba House, 1994), 1-13.

40 Karl Rahner, "Problems Concerning Confession," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 190-206, sets the stage for a sophisticated rejection of the sacrament of penance with comments such as these: "Let us not forget that, especially in the case of confession of devotion, no sin is forgiven in the concrete by such a confession unless it is already blotted out *ex opera operantis*" (197). This strange statement suggests that sin is remitted outside of the

context of the sacrament of confession and not inside the context of confession. Consider also David M. Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), which contains some helpful observations, and orients one to the theological and pastoral discussions; however, it is marred in part by a commitment to the fundamental option theory in moral theology that, in fact, undermines the sacrament. For a sketch of the impact of new moral theories regarding sin on confession, see the cursory reflections of Margaret Hebblethwaite and Kevin Donovan, *The Theology of Penance*, Theology Today 20 (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1979), 75-86.

41 As one example among many, Ladislas Orsy, *The Evolving Church and the Sacrament of Penance* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1978), 154-155, criticizes "the rigid theological stance on the individual reception of the sacrament" that he claims remains in the *Rite of Penance*, revised after the Second Vatican Council. For another example, see Alexander Schmemann, *Confession and Communion: Report to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America* (Syosset, NY: Orthodox Church in America, 1972), who recommends the introduction of general confession, albeit as a supplement to individual and integral confession, in order to encourage more frequent reception of Holy Communion among Orthodox believers. For an argument in favor of more frequent use of general absolution, see Robert C. Garafalo, "Reconciliation and Celebration: A Pastoral Case for General Absolution," *Worship* 63.5 (1989), 447-456.

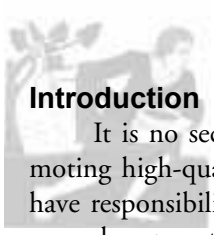
42 *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §42, cites *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1483; *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 961-962; and The Legislation for the Eastern Churches, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, cc. 720-721.

43. John Paul II, Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 1986, §7; part of this passage is cited in *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §58.
44. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter on St. John Vianney *Sacerdotii nostri primordia* (1 August 1959).
45. For example, John Paul II's Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 1986 is entirely devoted to the example of St. John Vianney.
46. *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, §1; Benedict XVI, Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the *Dies natalis* of the Curé of Ars (16 June 2009).
47. It is worth noting that *Sacrosanctum concilium* does not appear in *Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, since it scarcely mentions the sacrament of penance at all, save in a single section: Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (4 December 1963), §72: "The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament."
48. See *Lumen gentium*, §11.
49. *Lumen gentium*, §8; see also §§9 and 40.
50. Second Vatican Council, Decree On the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis* (7 December 1965), §5.
51. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §12.
52. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §18.
53. The Latin word *munus* (plural: *munera*) carries such meanings as gift, bounty, present, offering, duty, office, employment, responsibility and service. *Munus* "has powerful force in Church documents. It is a word not easily translatable into English for it conveys a concept foreign to us. Often it is translated 'role,' as in the role of the bishops, or of spouses. *Lumen Gentium* is structured around the concept that Christ had a three-fold *munus* of being priest, prophet, and King. A *munus* is a task delegated by someone superior in power to another whose assistance he needs, and whom he wishes to honor by having him share in his work." Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love* (New Hope, KY: New Hope Publications N.D.), 20.
54. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, §5.
55. Benedict XVI, General Audience (5 May 2010) on the *munus sanctificandi*; General Audience (14 April 2010) on the *munus docendi*; General Audience (26 May 2010) on the *munus regendi*.
56. *Ordo paenitentiae* (2 December 1973); the English translation by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, titled *Rite of Penance*, was published in 1974.
57. In *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995), 76.
58. In *Notitiae* 37 (2001), 259-260. Quoted in *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, section 76, as indicating that "Priests other than those celebrating or concelebrating the Mass might hear the confessions of the faithful who so desire, even in the same place where Mass is being celebrated, in order to meet the needs of those faithful."
59. In *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007), 252.
60. Rahner, "Problems concerning Confession," 194-196; here 196.

Liturgical Formation with Zeal and Patience

Sister Katarina Schuth, O.S.F.

"Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, a movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Today it is a distinguishing mark of the Church's life, indeed of the whole tenor of contemporary religious thought and action" (SC 43).



Introduction

It is no secret that the work of continually promoting high-quality liturgy is a central task of all who have responsibility for the life of the Church. Those of you who are gathered at this annual Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) meeting have a special role in helping the Church realize a goal of enormous importance – making available excellent liturgical celebrations. Through the years, much has been asked of you as directors of liturgy and worship as you have overseen the implementation of new directives and guidelines. You have been on the front lines of working through the joys and tensions that accompany this task. Thank you for your faithful service.

If the title of this study day presentation "Where We Are: We Praise You with Greater Joy than Ever" is to come to pass more fully, your efforts must be combined with those of everyone in the Church – parishioners and staff, pastors and bishops. The liturgy is highly valued and appreciated, but that high value can bring with it complexity and tension. Perhaps that is why I thought of you who work in diocesan liturgy offices when recently I came upon this Scripture passage from Ephesians: "I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3).

The gifts and qualities mentioned in this passage – humility, gentleness, patience – are surely necessary to the ministry you have chosen, which strengthens the bonds of unity in love and peace. In light of this great mission, I will attempt today to add to your store of knowledge some information about formation in the area of liturgy provided in seminaries and schools of theology (hereafter referred to as schools or seminaries). I will begin with a few words about my research methodology and resources. I will then identify several major themes and principles that have shaped decisions about the curriculum and liturgical practices in seminaries. The third section provides detailed information about the liturgical curriculum, including supplementary data about sacramental and pastoral preparation in seminaries. At the heart of the presentation is a survey of seminary liturgy professors (including some who teach music) about liturgical preparation in their schools. The report includes their responses to questions about their relationship with their diocesan liturgical offices and how that relationship could be strengthened. Finally, I will provide examples of practical ways to make connections between formation and effective liturgical ministry, in particular as priests adjust to serving multiple parishes and mega-parishes, as parishes are welcoming new pas-

From the research I did for a book on *Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes,* one of the unmistakable findings was the tremendous value and importance placed on the liturgy, especially the Sunday Eucharist.

tors and lay ministers, and as all involved in Church ministry are adapting to multicultural parishes.

The task for seminaries and schools of theology in preparing its priests and lay ministers for their appropriate roles in what *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC) calls "the reform and promotion of the liturgy" is a serious responsibility, one directed by the bishops and supported by many groups and organizations, important among them the FDLC. The Paschal Mystery is made present in the lives of the faithful through the Church's liturgical and sacramental life. The attention we give to this essential part of our religious life is a small return for the resultant gift that distinguishes the communal life of our Catholic faith.

The ultimate goal of this presentation and of my participation in any public forum is to provide as accurate a picture as I can of the topic I am asked to address. Sometimes – very often in fact – there is good news, but usually situations become apparent that we find less than desirable. By identifying these areas for possible improvement we have an opportunity to build up and enhance the life of the Church, which is exactly what I hope my findings will make possible for you in your ministry.

Research Methods and Resources

Several approaches are required to understand the complex task of preparing liturgical leaders. Two sources of data were especially important in addressing the fundamental question of how this mission is accomplished: analysis of all academic catalogs of the forty-five major seminaries and schools of theology in the U.S.; and responses to a survey sent to the liturgy and music faculty of those schools. Contributing to the general understanding of the question were also my numerous visits (at least 300) to seminaries and schools of theology over a period of twenty-six years.

For background, I reviewed relevant Church documents and recent literature, drawing from them the basic principles that guide efforts to educate future liturgical leaders. Literature on various aspects of the liturgy has flowed from the pens of several recent popes, many cardinals and bishops, and even more priests and lay people. Common to the literature is the conviction of the central position liturgy holds in the life of the Church. Early in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the view that has been has been elaborated and probed more than others is summarized as follows: "For the liturgy, through which 'the work of redemption takes place,' especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is supremely effective in enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church" (SC 2).

Major Liturgical Themes and Principles

Four major themes and principles have shaped decisions about the curriculum and liturgical practices in seminaries. Found in all major Church documents and many other writings, these themes are repeatedly discussed, taught, and implemented in seminaries:

- liturgy is the action of Christ and the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed;
- "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy is of great importance;
- music forms a necessary and integral part of the liturgy; and
- the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations must be reflected in our actions.

We can draw from *Sacrosanctum concilium* the most important truth that the liturgy is the action of Christ, the liturgy belongs to Christ. It is an expression of Jesus Christ's total self-offering to the Father in love and fidelity. "To accomplish so great a work Christ is always present in his Church, especially in liturgical celebrations" (SC 7). And, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows" (SC 10). Cardinal Danneels puts it this way: "Both individually and collectively our fundamental orientation should be toward God, an attitude of grateful reception, wonder, adoration and praise – in short, an attitude of prayer, of handing ourselves over to God and letting his will be done in us."[1]

A second principle focuses on the importance of "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy (SC 14), including both internal attitudes and external actions. It is the "primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC 14), which will lead to participation in the Church's mission. These passages imply that all members of the Body of Christ perform various ministries according to the roles assigned: ordained members in their role as presiders and baptized members in their roles in the assembly. Cardinal Danneels believes that to participate we must understand, which requires catechesis and initiation. "Profound realities only gradually yield their full significance … understanding is a lengthy and progressive process of becoming familiar with a particular

reality."[2] Initial and ongoing formation for seminarians, priests, and the faithful is essential if the Church is to sustain its commitment to full participation.

Flowing from this belief is a third theme: the expectation that music will enhance participation. Music contributes to the expressiveness and solemnity of the rites and engages and enlivens the spirits of those present. "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy" (SC 112). Seminary faculty certainly adhere to this notion, but formation programs do not necessarily reflect the conviction for reasons as varied as the places and situations where Catholics worship.

The fourth principle derives from many sources and is clearly expressed in Pope John Paul II's 2004 Apostolic Letter *Mane nobiscum, Domine*. He made the authentic living of the Gospel a measure of the effectiveness of our liturgy. "By our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ…. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged." [3] We are called upon to go out to the world so in need of our love, care, and concern. The liturgy should impel us outward even as we are strengthened inwardly by the celebration of the mysteries of Christ.

These four principles, I believe, have guided the construction of the liturgical curriculum in important ways. Next we look at the requirements of the programs and how faculty evaluate their effectiveness.

Curriculum for Liturgical , Sacramental, and Pastoral Preparation in Seminaries and Schools of Theology

General Description of the Curriculum

In 2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published the fifth edition of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF) as a guide for seminaries and schools of theology. It coveres all aspects of preparation for priesthood. The document expresses the importance of liturgy in the life of seminaries and outlines the curricular requirements. It states:

> *The careful preparation and execution of liturgical celebrations should be supervised by the seminary director of liturgy. Because the liturgical life of the seminary shapes the sensitivities and attitudes of seminarians for future ministry, an authentic sense of the holy mysteries should be carefully preserved in all liturgical celebrations along with a care for their beauty and dignity (see Ecclesia de Eucharistia, no. 5). The laws and prescriptions of approved liturgical books are normative. Priest faculty should be particularly observant of the liturgical rubrics and avoid the insertion of any personal liturgical adaptations, unless they are authorized by the liturgical books. The seminary liturgy should also promote in seminarians a respect for legitimate, rubrically approved liturgical expressions of cultural diversity as well as the Church's ancient liturgical patrimony.*[4]

In a later comment, the Program for Priestly Formation encourages faculty to think of the liturgy as the source of integration and focus: "In a particular way, the theology studied in preparation for priestly ministry must find integration and focus in the liturgy, the celebration of the Mystery of Christ" (PPF 163). The *Program* offers little direction, however, on specific requirements. In one note it reads: "In liturgy, the core should include studies in the theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects of liturgy" (PPF 213). And in the next note, it advises:

> *Seminarians must learn to celebrate all of the Church's sacred rites according to the mind of the Church, without addition or subtraction. Liturgical practica should include the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, with particular attention given to the practicum for the Sacrament of Penance. Seminarians should be introduced to the official liturgical books used by the clergy and to the Church's directives for music, art, and architecture. (PPF 214)*

The *Program for Priestly Formation* adds several thoughts on related requirements. A general course on the sacraments is listed as mandatory, as is a separate course on Holy Orders (PPF 202). Dealing with Canon Law, it states that the core should include a general introduction and the Canon Law of individual sacraments, including but not limited to the sacrament of matrimony (PPF 211). More is said about homiletics:

> *Homiletics should occupy a prominent place in the core curriculum and be integrated into the entire*

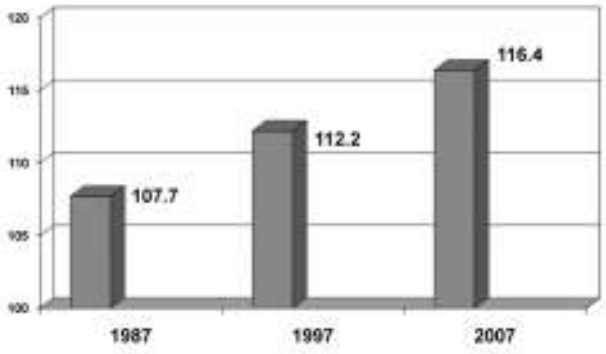
course of studies. In addition to the principles of biblical interpretation, catechesis, and communications theory, seminarians should also learn the practical skills needed to communicate the Gospel as proclaimed by the Church in an effective and appropriate manner. Seminarians should be taught that "through the course of the liturgical year, the homily sets forth the mysteries of faith and the standards of the Christian life on the basis of the sacred text. Seminarians should also be afforded opportunities to preach outside of Eucharistic celebrations and receive proper assessment. Where appropriate, seminarians should be able to demonstrate a capacity for bilingual preaching. (PPF 315)

To provide a context of the relative importance assigned to these areas of the curriculum, it is necessary to look at the overall requirements for a Masters of Divinity degree, and then at some of the specific areas. It is notable that, on average, about nine credits (three courses) have been added in the past twenty years, increasing total the number of required semester credit hours from 107.7 to 116.4.

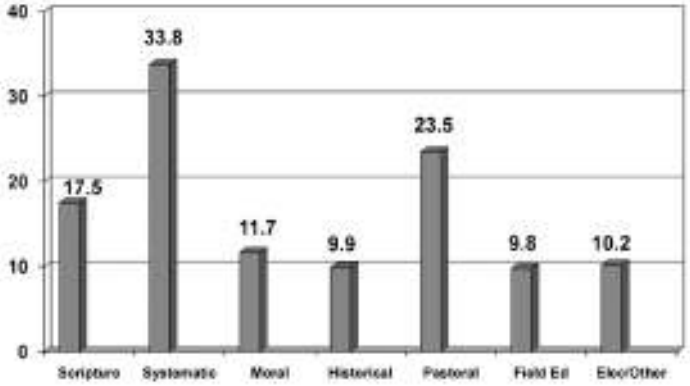
The distribution of these credits is shown in the graph below.

Examining the Liturgical and Sacramental courses, which are embedded within the areas of Systematic and Pastoral Theology, in the tables below it is evident that limited credits on liturgy are required – a total of 18 in 2007. This number has increased only marginally since 1997. The second chart shows the requirements in sacraments at only ten credits, and the third chart shows liturgy, which has even fewer credits at only eight.

1987 to 2007:
Ordination Credit Requirements



2007 Average Total Credit Distribution:
116.4 credits



Liturgical/Sacramental Requirements

	1997	2007
Courses	12	13
Practica	4	5
	16	18
Proportion of Curriculum:	14.3%	15.5%

Requirements in Sacraments (10 cr.)

- Sacraments of Initiation 3 cr.
- Eucharist 3 cr.
- Sacraments of Healing 2 or 3 cr.
- Holy Orders 2 or 3 cr.

Proportion of Curriculum: 8.6%

Requirements in Liturgy (8 cr.)

- Introduction to Liturgy 3 cr.
- Liturgical Practica 5 cr.
  - Liturgical Presiding 2-3 cr.
  - Sacrament of Reconciliation/ Penance/Confession 2 cr.

Proportion of Curriculum: 6.9%

By adding related pastoral courses, the number of credits increases considerably. Though not all are directly liturgical or sacramental in nature, they do influence the way the liturgical life of the Church is taught and even-

tually implemented. Seminarians are usually required to take about six credits in homiletics, five in Canon Law, eight in other areas of pastoral theology, and about 10 in field education. These courses enhance their ability to preach more effectively and minister in a variety of circumstances. Overall, about 46 credits (40%) are required in all areas of ministerial practice, and nearly half of these are dedicated to liturgy and sacraments. Generally students can take about three or four electives, so among them they may choose additional liturgical courses.

2007 Average Requirements in Pastoral/Liturgical Courses

Sacramental/Liturgical Courses	13.0
Sacramental/Liturgical Practica	5.0
Pastoral Theology/Skills	8.2
Homiletics	5.6
Canon Law	4.8
Field Education	9.8
	46.4 cr.
Proportion of Curriculum:	40%

Liturgical and Sacramental Course Descriptions

Within the broad areas of study identified above, specific information about liturgical and sacramental courses, especially those in liturgy, are given here. An introductory course and liturgical practica are almost universally required. Other mandatory courses are variously titled and are generally found in one of three areas of study: "Pastoral Liturgy and Celebration," "Liturgical Music and Arts," and "Theology of the Sacraments."

Introduction to the Liturgy. A basic survey course on the liturgy is part of almost every seminary's curriculum. The course usually is three credit hours, but occasionally only two are required. Essentially it covers the Church's public worship practices, taught from scriptural, historical, and theological perspectives. The course is variously named: most common is simply "Introduction to the Liturgy," but also it is called "Liturgical Theology," "Liturgical Studies," "Fundamental Liturgy," "Foundations of Liturgy," or "Theology of Worship." A few schools include an introduction to the sacraments as part of the initial course and label the course as such, with treatment of the foundations of both worship and sacrament.

The major elements of Roman Catholic liturgy and its foundation form the core of this course. Since it is intended to be introductory, many faculty begin with terminology, basic components, structure and dynamics, fundamental concepts and sources, principles and norms of liturgy, and the nature and purpose of liturgical rites in Christian worship. Within that broad framework, faculty provide some understanding of the historical development of the liturgy, including reforms and renewal, particularly those accomplished by Vatican II and presented in *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Other significant ecclesial documents mentioned in course descriptions were the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Liturgiam authenticam, Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*, and the Roman liturgical books. Some schools emphasize recent post-conciliar developments and current normative documents that yield pastoral principles, but many others focus more on documents of the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical revisions that followed.

The history of the liturgy is broadly described as an overview of the development of liturgical practice. It is concerned with origins of the liturgy as represented in the spirit of the New Testament, especially the Last Supper, and early celebrations of Eucharist on Sundays and Easter. Several schools emphasize early Christian history, but most cover historical changes spanning the centuries from scriptural foundations to the post-conciliar reform.

Beyond these common elements in the introductory course, the descriptions encompass a remarkable variety of topics, with the overall goal of giving insight and understanding to liturgical reforms and current practices. Two contemporary issues are well represented in the course descriptions: liturgical spirituality and liturgy and culture. Concerning the latter, several schools explore the interrelationship of liturgy and culture, with attention given to inculturation of worship and the implications for pastoral practice in a multicultural Church.

Liturgical spirituality is linked to pastoral practice and shows how the liturgy functions in the life and mission of the Church. It is viewed as a starting point and greatest teacher of the mysteries of the Catholic faith and as the summit and fount of Christian identity. Course descriptions refer to the central place of liturgy in Christian life and name the major components, beginning with the eucharistic celebration, the lacraments, the liturgy of the hours, the liturgical year, and popular practices of Christian spirituality. Current pastoral prac-

tice, including the RCIA, ecumenical dialogue, relationship of private prayer and liturgical prayer, and reflection on liturgical practices linked to the liturgical tradition and Christian spirituality, are identified as elements of liturgical spirituality.

Other common themes include the theology of ritual and celebration, the liturgical sign, the meaning of the symbolic acts, and the current liturgical discipline of the Church regarding implementation of documents. A few descriptions include canonical, cultural, anthropological, and doctrinal issues and perspectives. Background on the liturgical year – also called the liturgical calendar – is explicitly integrated into a few introductory courses, but it also is taken up in specific courses with similar titles.

Among the outcomes sought in this first-level course are:

- knowledge of liturgy within a consistent and systematic theological construct;
- a basic understanding of the historical development of the liturgy;
- insight into the meaning of sign, symbol, and ritual;
- underpinnings for common liturgical/sacramental practice
- appreciation of the theological principles undergirding sound liturgical preparation

Liturgy Practica: Liturgical Leadership, Presiding at the Eucharist, Sacraments of Reconciliation and Healing, Anointing. The overall outcome of liturgical practica is for seminarians to demonstrate that they have integrated theological, spiritual, historical and liturgical dimensions of each rite. A relatively short amount of time is designated in the curriculum for absorbing all the practical dimensions of celebrating the liturgical rituals. On average students take only five semester credits in this area, during which they learn to articulate and rehearse necessary skills for leading worship. About ten schools separate the practica into preparatory experiences for transitional deacons and for priests, but most focus the material in general practica for liturgical presiding, with emphasis on the Eucharist. Others offer a shorter general course in liturgical leadership, followed by two other practica: one on presiding at the Eucharist and another on penance and anointing. In only three schools are practica required in a second language, namely, Spanish.

The broad category of "Liturgical Presiding," usually offered for two or three credits, is required by almost every school in one form or another. Two different approaches are common. Most programs focus closely on preparing for leadership roles in worship, especially in celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments. About a fourth of the schools expand the content to include a wide range of practical experiences, such as leading various devotions and bestowing blessings, as well as suggestions for pastoral interaction and lifestyles.

About a dozen schools offer "Eucharistic Celebration" as a separate practicum, which follows the general liturgical presiding practicum. It is described as practical preparation to preside at the Eucharist with pastoral competence and to lead the assembly in the worship of God. Several of the descriptions emphasize the study of the rubrics associated with the Roman Rite with particular attention to the theological principles and rubrical norms and practices contained in the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*.

Many of the same twelve schools require an additional practicum centered on one or more of the sacraments, usually the "Rites of Penance and Anointing of the Sick," but also offering other combinations of sacraments. If these sacramental rites are not covered in separate practica, the material is included with Liturgical Presiding. Typically these courses are divided between the two sacraments mentioned above. The titles used for the practicum vary and include "Penance" (four times), "Reconciliation" (three times), and "Confession" (two times), as indicated by the numbers.

Of the ten schools requiring a liturgical practicum for transitional deacons, one credit hour is almost always allotted. Some begin with a theological understanding, brief history, and familiarity with the norms that govern the role of deacon. The practical experiences common to all are designed to help the deacon celebrate the rituals and ceremonies associated with diaconal ministry in a prayerful and respectful manner. The focus is on the particular role of deacons in public liturgies, such as liturgy of the hours, Eucharist, communion to the sick, rites of baptism, marriage, and funerals, benediction, and other para-liturgical services. Several schools center diaconal practica on supervised preaching and celebration of the sacraments in a parish setting.

Additional Requirements and Electives. In nine schools one additional course in liturgy is required, and in one other school two more courses are required. The topics vary considerably, among them "The Liturgical Year," "Liturgical Documents," "Liturgy and Culture," "Liturgy of the Hours," and "The Environment of Worship." These same courses serve as electives in many of the schools, particularly the first two topics. Courses and

practica in Music are also commonly available as electives.

Liturgical Music, Liturgy and the Arts. The liturgical arts, whether in the form of courses or practica, are relatively neglected areas of study. Fourteen schools require some sort of experience in music, and these are usually valued at one credit or less. A few schools include a small unit on music in the general liturgical practicum. The few required courses often include a practicum experience as well as an introduction to theological and pastoral dimensions of music in the liturgy. Typical themes in courses include: the role of music in sacramental celebrations, the use of musical instruments at liturgy, and models for addressing local parish concerns around worship. Some few study papal and other ecclesiastical documents on sacred music, as well as provide a survey of the history of liturgical music from ancient to recent times. Only one school requires a course that touches on other sacred arts, though several discuss the liturgical environment or offer elective courses on these topics.

The practica in music usually focus on preparing priests for singing and chanting during liturgical celebrations. For some, the experience consists in preparing to become a presider by first learning basic music skills necessary to read a musical score to be able to sing and chant sacred texts. Other practica are more advanced and include vocal training in hymnody, psalmody, and song and expanded knowledge of the effective selection of music for particular celebrations. Integration of music planning into liturgical planning is an important goal of these experiences in several schools.

Sacramental Courses: Sacramental Theology, Theology of Eucharist, Sacraments of Initiation, Sacraments of Healing. Seminaries require an average of ten credits in sacramental courses. These are divided in a variety of ways, but virtually all require a separate course on the "Sacraments of Initiation (RCIA)," "Eucharist," "Sacraments of Healing," and "Holy Orders."ß Typically the first two are three credit courses, and the last two require two or three credits. A dozen schools require a course on sacraments in general, and most offer a variety of electives as well.

Liturgical Preparation: Views of Liturgy Professors

At the heart of my presentation are the results of a September 2009, survey of liturgy and music professors concerning liturgical preparation in their schools. A description of their backgrounds and the sources of their degrees follow. The survey itself covers the liturgical curricula and liturgical practices in the schools and also the relationship of schools and Diocesan Liturgical Offices.

Backgrounds of Liturgy and Music Faculty

Type of Seminary/School of Theology where respondents teach:
37 mainly for Diocesan seminarians (some religious order and lay students)
3 diocesan sponsored (diocesan and religious seminarians and lay students)
10 mainly for Religious Order seminarians (lay students and a few diocesan students)

Based on 50 respondents of 74 fulltime faculty (68%) (3 responses were submitted too late to be included in the charts, but their comments are incorporated)
Average length of service of respondents: 17.3 years; only 6 of 50 have taught five years or fewer

From information available in catalogs, it is possible to determine the source of degrees of those teaching liturgy and music in seminaries. Including all 95 full and part time faculty, their highest degrees were from the following graduate programs:

University of Notre Dame – 18 (19%)
Catholic University of America – 12 (13%)
Sant'Anselmo, Rome – 10 (11%)
Other Roman Schools – 7 (7%)
Other European Schools – 10 (11%), including 2 each from the Catholic University of Louvain and the Institut Catholique de Paris
Other U.S. Catholic Schools – 15 (16%)
U.S. Non-Catholic Schools – 20 (21%)
Canadian Catholic Schools – 2 (2%)

The 50 surveys returned by the liturgy and music faculty represent at least 35 seminaries and schools of theology. In a few cases, the return was anonymous, and in a few other cases more than one person responded from the same school, so the exact number of seminaries represented is not absolute, but at least 75 percent are included. About 27 of 32 diocesan major seminaries responded (including one that is operated by a diocese but which identifies itself as serving both religious and diocesan students), and 7 of 10 religious order schools of theology responded. The three areas of inquiry on the survey were "Liturgical Curriculum," "Liturgical Practices," and "Relationship with Diocesan Liturgical Offices."

Liturgical Curriculum Commonly in Effect in Seminaries

Basis for and content of liturgical studies in the seminary curriculum. Ten questions concerned the liturgical curriculum. Faculty identified their level of agreement from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) for eight of the questions. Two questions called for a narrative response: "What do you consider the most outstanding features of you liturgy program?" and "What do you think is missing or inadequately covered in your liturgy program, or what concerns do you have about your program?"

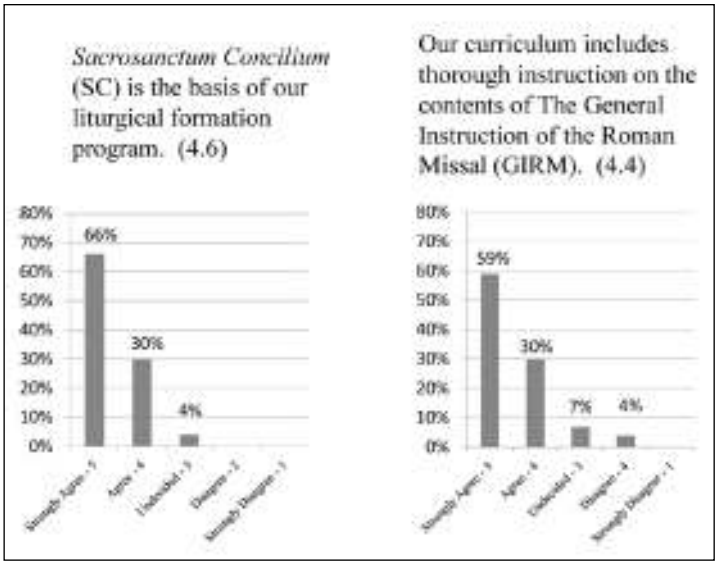
The first two statements asked for the faculty's level of agreement on two documents that form the foundation of programs:

"*Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC) is the basis of our liturgical formation program."

45 agreed (96%) – 31strongly agreed (66%) and 14 agreed (30%); 2 were undecided (4%); none disagreed, for an average of 4.6, a high level of agreement.

> "Our curriculum includes thorough instruction on the contents of The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)."

41 agreed (89%) – 27 strongly agreed (59%) and 14 agreed (30%); 3 were undecided (7%); 2 disagreed (4%), for an average of 4.4, also a high level of agreement.



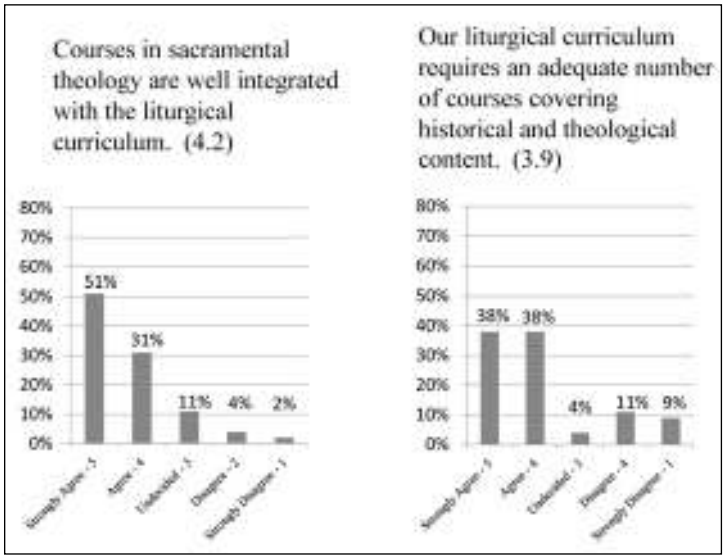
The next two statements asked for level of agreement about the adequacy of the content of the liturgical curriculum:

> "Courses in sacramental theology are well integrated with the liturgical curriculum."

37 agreed (82%) – 23 strongly agreed (51%) and 14 agreed (31%); 5 were undecided (11%);
3 disagreed (7%) – 2 disagreed (4%) and 1 strongly disagreed (2%), for an average of 4.2.

> "Our liturgical curriculum requires an adequate number of courses covering historical and theological content."

36 agreed (76%%) – 18 strongly agreed (38%) and 18 agreed (38%); 2 were undecided (4%);
9 disagreed (20%) – 5 disagreed (11%) and 4 strongly disagree (9%), for an average of 3.9.



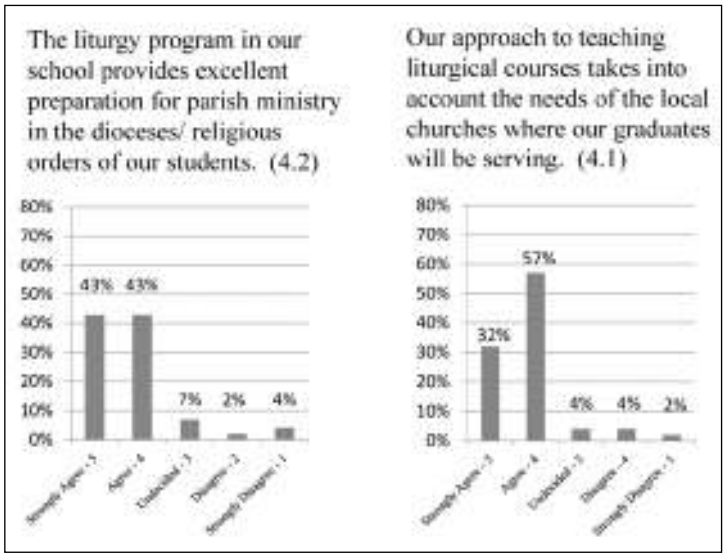
The next four statements asked for level of agreement on how well the curriculum prepares people for liturgical ministry in a variety of parish circumstances, including the diversity of parishioners:

> "The liturgy program in our school provides excellent preparation for parish ministry in the dioceses/ religious orders of our students."

40 agreed (86%) – 20 strongly agreed (43%) and 20 agreed (43%); 3 were undecided (7%);
3 disagreed (7%) – 1 disagreed (2%) and 2 strongly disagreed (4%), for an average of 4.2.

"Our approach to teaching liturgical courses takes into account the needs of the local churches where our graduates will be serving."

42 agreed (89%) – 15 strongly agreed (34%) and 27 agree (57%); 2 were undecided (4%);
3 disagreed (6%) – 2 disagreed (4%) and 1 strongly disagree (2%), for an average of 4.1.



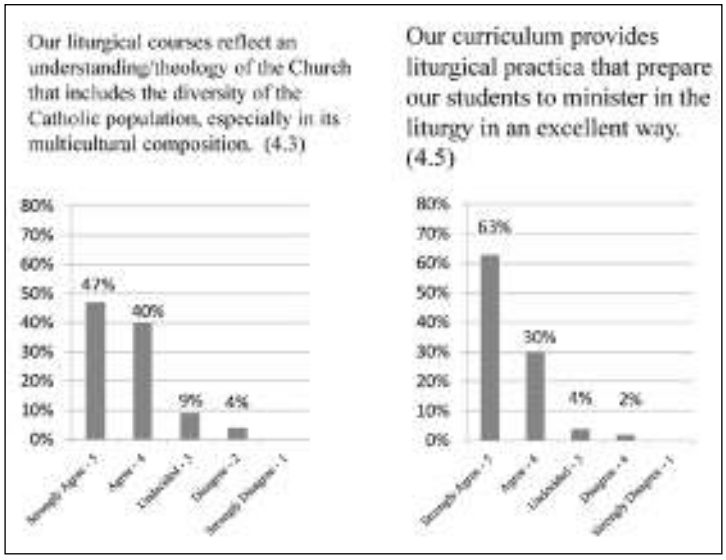
"Our liturgical courses reflect an understanding/ theology of the Church that includes the diversity of the Catholic population, especially in its multicultural composition."

41 agreed (87%) – 22 strongly agreed (47%) and 19 agreed (40%); 4 were undecided (9%);
2 disagreed (4%), for an average of 4.3

"Our curriculum provides liturgical practica that prepare our students to minister in the liturgy in an excellent way."

43 agreed (93%) – 29 strongly agreed (63%) and 14 agreed (30%); 2 were undecided (4%);
1 disagreed (2%), for an average of 4.5.

The narrative responses concerning the curriculum were more nuanced and varied. The first question was: "What do you consider the most outstanding features of your liturgy program?" Of the 47 respondents, 20 of them commented on integration. Most (13) focused on integrating theological, historical, and pastoral perspectives in liturgical courses – meaning, effectively, they



appreciated their seminary's multidisciplinary approach. The other seven referenced integration of liturgical courses with other aspects of the curriculum, for example, with sacramental theology courses, liturgical practica, and other pastoral courses, including homiletics. Nine mentioned multicultural aspects of their curriculum as outstanding, almost always relating to Hispanic pastoral concerns. A total of 13 said they were pleased with the practical dimensions of their programs: seven of them talked about the quality of the practica experiences and their usefulness in preparing seminarians for carrying out the rituals in a correct way; six mentioned aspects of the practical pastoral opportunities available for their students. The topic of music surfaces in other parts of the survey, but here seven faculty labeled the music content of the program as outstanding.

The other comments concerning outstanding features of the curriculum were of a different nature, dealing with the status of liturgy in their schools, the faculty, and the seminarians. Eight faculty mentioned the overall high value placed on liturgy, allowing for a breadth of offerings and a significant number of courses. The same number named faculty as an outstanding feature – their high level of credentials, their pastoral experience, and their ability to provide practical guidance as well as intellectually vigorous courses. Five mentioned the seminarians as admirable in their participation, planning, and being committed to the study of liturgy. Their diversity also added to the richness and breadth of liturgical experiences.

The second narrative question was as follows: "What do you think is missing or inadequately covered in your liturgy program, or what concerns do you have about your program?" The majority of comments, 23,

were concerned with aspects of the curriculum that need additional attention, improvement, or integration; additionally, 4 respondents indicated that the overall curriculum is too crowded and the liturgy program does not require enough courses. Among the areas that need more attention or improvement, several mentioned each of the following: historical background on the sacraments, the liturgical year, the liturgy of the hours (including a course on the Psalter), RCIA, and pastoral care of the sick and dying. Three respondents would like to add more offerings that cover multicultural issues. These lacunae could be overcome by adding a new course or a section to an already existing course. Three also mentioned the lack of integration of course material with other areas of the curriculum.

A total of fifteen faculty named two related areas of concern. Respondents identified first the need for more practical dimensions, including three who would like students to learn how to preside using the extraordinary form. Others mentioned strengthening practica related to funerals and marriages, confession, the RCIA, and Eastern rites. An interesting departure from most of the responses was the need to apply practica to large parish situations, for example, performing multiple baptisms in one rite.

Several other topics were raised by a few. The need for more faculty or faculty with improved credentials was a concern of five respondents. Concerns about students were mentioned by four others. Among the latter, respondents voiced views that the personal preferences and piety of some students hinders their pastoral perspective, and that they view the liturgy as a rubrical rather than a mystagogical experience. The faculty expressed concern that once ordained, the former seminarians revert to their own way of presiding, adding gestures and personal pious interventions that are not part of the GIRM. Two opposite positions about the GIRM were mentioned. One respondent would like to see more emphasis on the document as well as on the upcoming changes in the liturgy. The other believes that some faculty members misinterpret GIRM by imposing their own piety and by adding gestures, which some students then imitate.

Liturgical Practices Commonly in Effect in Seminaries

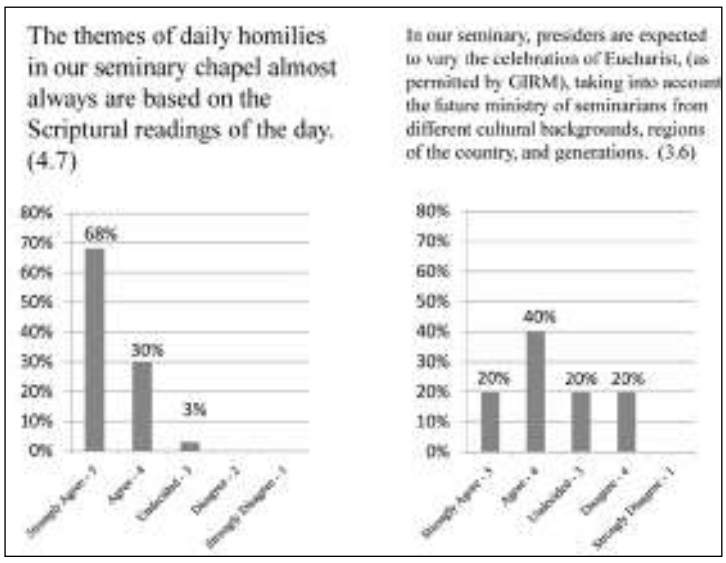
The second area of inquiry in the survey dealt with the views of faculty about seminary celebrations of the liturgy and attitudes of students toward liturgy and future ministerial practice. The first four questions concerned preaching and presiding at school liturgies.

> "The themes of daily homilies in our seminary chapel almost always are based on the Scriptural readings of the day."

39 agreed (97.5%) – 27 strongly agreed (68%) and 12 agreed (30%); 1 was undecided (3%); none disagreed, for an average of 4.7, the highest level of agreement in the survey.

> "In our seminary, presiders are expected to vary the celebration of the Eucharist (as permitted by GIRM), taking into account the future ministry of seminarians from different cultural backgrounds, regions of the country, and generations."

24 agreed (60%) – 8 strongly agreed (20%) and 16 agreed (40%); 8 were undecided (20%);
8 disagreed (20%), for an average of 3.6, one of the lower levels of agreement.



The following six questions covered several topics, including how well the liturgy reflects the Catholic population, the practice and experience of students during liturgy, and the adequacy of time set aside for silence during celebrations.

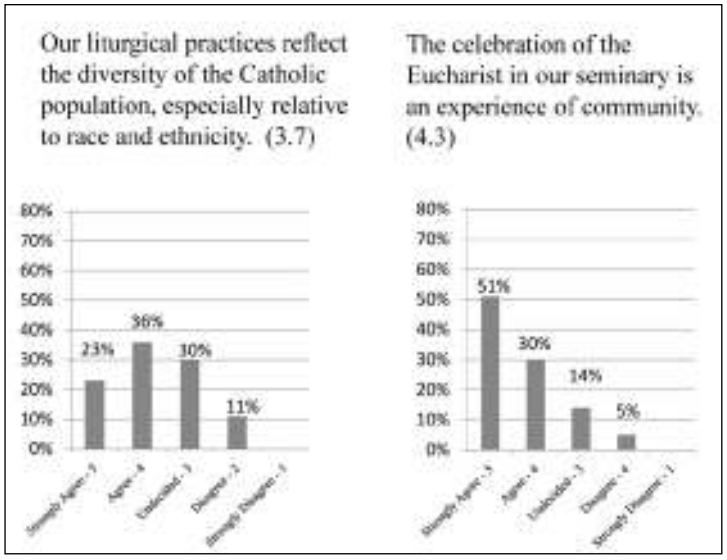
> "Our liturgical practices reflect the diversity of the Catholic population, especially relative to race and ethnicity."

26 agreed (59%) – 10 strongly agreed (23%) and 16

agreed (36%); 13 were undecided (30%); 5 disagreed (11%), for an average of 3.7.

> "The celebration of the Eucharist in our seminary is an experience of community."

35 agreed (81%) – 22 strongly agreed (51%) and 13 agreed (30%); 6 were undecided (14%);
2 disagreed (5%), for an average of 4.3.



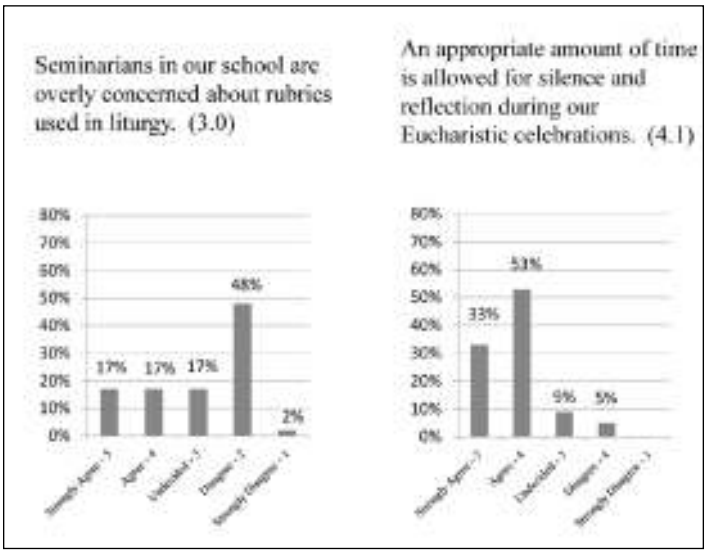
> "The celebration of the Eucharist in our seminary reveals division among students based on ecclesiological differences."

13 agreed (31%) – 2 strongly agreed (5%) and 11 agreed (26%); 6 were undecided (14%);
23 disagreed (55%) – 15 disagreed (36%) and 8 strongly disagreed (19%), for an average of 2.6, reflecting differences among the schools in how the celebration of the Eucharist is perceived.

> "Seminarians participate in liturgical celebrations 'fully, actively, and as befits a community' (SC#48), conscious of what they are doing and outwardly expressing their devotion and involvement."

36 agreed (84%) – 20 strongly agreed (47%) and 16 agreed (37%); 6 were undecided (14%);
1 disagreed (2%), for an average of 4.3.

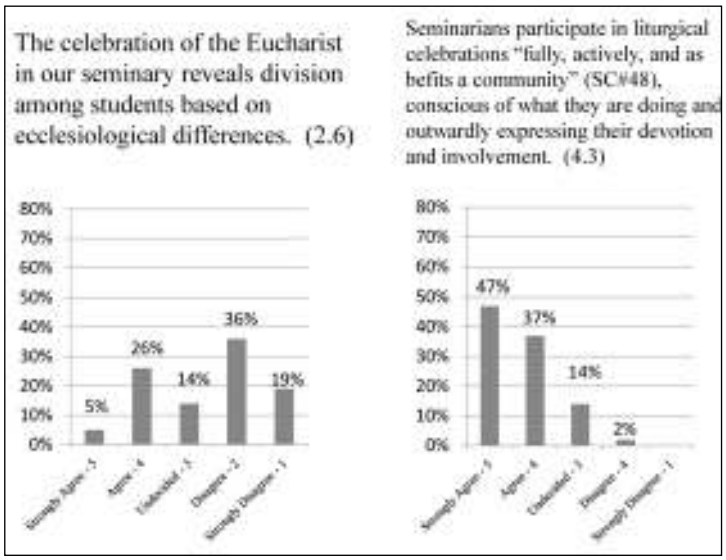
> "Seminarians in our school are overly concerned about rubrics used in liturgy."



14 agreed (34%) – 7 strongly agreed (17%) and 7 agreed (17%); 7 were undecided (17%);
21 disagreed (50%) – 20 disagreed (48%) and 1 strongly disagreed (2%), for an average of 3.0. Faculty perceptions of this reality are quite mixed.

> "An appropriate amount of time is allowed for silence and reflection during our Eucharistic celebrations."

37 agreed (86%) – 14 strongly agreed (33%) and 23 agreed (53%); 4 were undecided (9%);
2 disagreed (5%), for an average of 4.1.



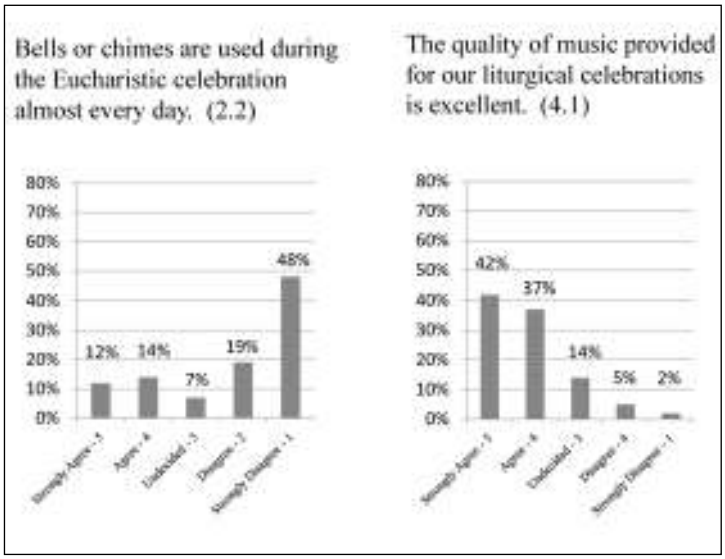
The four final questions concerning liturgical practices in the seminaries focused on music.

"Bells or chimes are used during the Eucharistic celebration almost every day."

11 agreed (26%) – 5 strongly agreed (12%) and 6 agreed (14%); 3 were undecided (7%);
28 disagreed (67%) – 8 strongly disagreed (19%) and 20 disagreed (48%), for an average of 2.2. The 11 who agreed represented five or six different schools of the 35 schools, about 15%.

"The quality of music provided for our liturgical celebrations is excellent."

34 agreed (79%) – 18 strongly agreed (42%) and 16 agreed (37%); 6 were undecided (14%);
3 disagreed (7%) – 2 disagreed (5%) and 1 strongly disagreed (2%), for an average of 4.1.

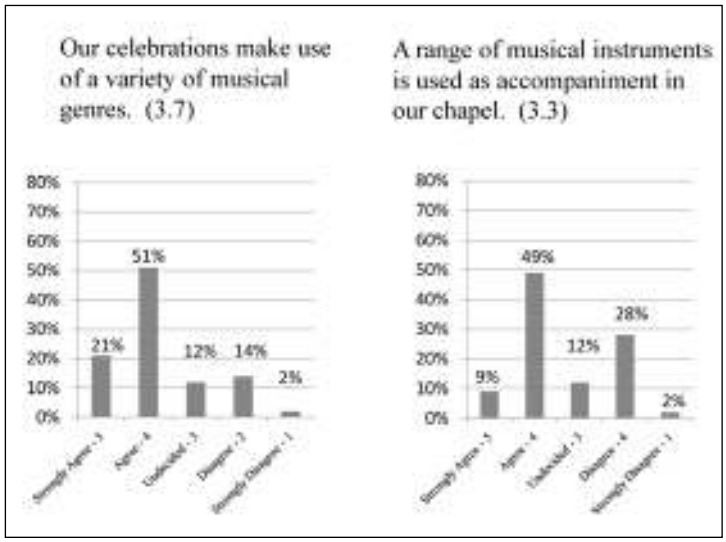


"Our celebrations make use of a variety of musical genres."

31 agreed (72%) – 9 strongly agreed (21%) and 22 agreed (51%); 5 were undecided (12%);
7 disagreed (16%) – 6 disagreed (14%) and 1 strongly disagreed (2%), for an average of 3.7.

"A range of musical instruments is used as accompaniment in our chapel."

25 agreed (58%) – 4 strongly agreed (9%) and 21 agreed (49%0; 5 were undecided, 12%;
13 disagreed (30%) – 12 disagreed (28%) and 1 strongly disagreed (2%), for an average of 3.3



Three narrative questions were asked about liturgical practice in seminaries. The first was as follows: "What do you consider the three or four greatest strengths in the way the liturgy is celebrated in your school?" Four responses were given by more than a few each. Twenty-two mentioned the high regard for the liturgy made manifest in quality celebrations in their seminary; 18 lauded the high quality of music; 12 identified the willing and active verbal/vocal participation of the assembly, exhibiting the generosity of students; and 7 identified excellent preaching as among the greatest strengths.

Concerning the high regard for the liturgy made manifest in wonderful celebrations, the common theme was that the liturgy is celebrated reverently, reflecting the sacredness of the occasion. The role of presiders was highlighted as prayerful and reverent, with careful attention to rubrics without lapsing into rubricism. Where the liturgy is highly valued, the schools generally allot appropriate resources to the endeavor. Coming from diverse backgrounds, well-prepared faculty model good teaching and preaching that adds to the formation of students. One person commented, "The liturgy is an experience that takes one beyond the limits of the immediate, to a sacred place beyond time and space and culture."

The second most frequently mentioned strength was the high quality of music. The musical training of students was seen as a major contributing factor. They contribute now by being well-prepared for liturgies, and in the future they will be able to preside well in situations that require singing. The selection of a variety of genres of music was also considered important to the celebrations. One respondent comment, "We are blessed with outstanding music that releases the community's

prayer and praise; ours are truly vibrant communal celebrations."

The twelve faculty who identified the willing and active verbal/vocal participation by the assembly attributed this strength to the generosity of students who not only prepare well, but who also participate wholeheartedly without lapsing into pious practices such as reciting the rosary or praying their devotional prayers during liturgical celebrations. Seven respondents brought out the fact that excellent preaching both enriched the communal celebrations and served as excellent examples for seminarians who will be preaching in a few years. Related strengths contributing to the quality of the liturgy included differentiating liturgical celebrations that model the difference between Sunday and weekday services, especially reflected in homilies and in the level of solemnity. Two other strengths were specified: attentiveness to the multicultural dimension of liturgy (6) and a superb liturgical environment (5), including outstanding architecture and proper liturgical ornamentation.

The second question was as follows: "What do you consider the three or four major weaknesses in the way the liturgy is celebrated in your school?" The most commonly mentioned major weaknesses were poor quality of music (16), excessive attention given to rubrics (14), liturgical preparation in the seminary that is not cognizant of parish needs (9), and lack of attention to multicultural dimensions of liturgy (7).

Concerning the quality of music, the most common complaint was about the choice of music. Respondents criticized their seminaries for a lack of variety in songs and in instruments, repetition of the same genres, and limited repertoires. Similarly, others added there was not enough openness to popular hymns or contemporary music that will be used in parishes. Several complained that music was too staid, stiff, and difficult. A few wanted less Gregorian chant, and two wanted more; one thought there were too many Protestant hymns and another too many hymns in Latin. For others, music was a weakness because of the lack of formation in music performance resulting in poor cantoring or students who cannot learn what is necessary to be a good presider – that is, to sing or chant or match a pitch. One respondent acknowledged that though in the short run poor singing can be painful, in the long run the practice of having students try out their skills pays off. In several cases, poor results are caused by lack of time to teach singing and the basics of music to individuals. Some said the problem was with the music director: there was no musical director on staff or no stable music ministry; or a music director was too dominating or played the organ too loudly.

Besides its intrinsic value of moving the congregation closer to Christ, the liturgy is crucial to parish life because of its intended consequences, namely, building up the community and involving parishioners in good works beyond the parish.

The next major concern, mentioned by 14 faculty, revolved around excessive emphasis on rubrics. Those commenting said that students give too much attention to or are obsessed with rubrics, viewing liturgy as an intellectual or rubrical exercise rather than a formative or mystagogical experience. Several said that students do too much post-celebration critiquing and express the suspicion that faculty members are lax in rubrical observance, without consideration of the variations allowed by the GIRM. Other respondents believe the practices of their schools contribute to the too-rigidly enforced practices, sometimes representing retrenchment to an older, pre-Vatican II theology and ecclesiology with everything done "as in the book" without consideration of permitted alternatives. One mentioned that their graduates, once ordained, introduce "strange" eccentric practices in their parish liturgies that they are not taught in the seminary.

Faculty members identified two other related concerns more than a few times: the disconnect between seminary liturgy and parish liturgical practices and needs (9); and the lack of attention given to needs of multicultural parishes (7). On the first count, comments centered on the fact that seminary liturgical practices do not reflect the practices of most parishes in the diocese, or in other words, the seminary atmosphere and style are too stilted, there is too much sameness, not enough variety, and practices are more conservative than most parishes. This lack of correspondence to what is done or will be done in parishes is related to the fact that litur-

gies are planned almost exclusively around the seminary reality and not necessarily around the diversity of the situations seminarians will find in the parish. They are not exposed enough to parochial liturgies, so they have an incomplete understanding of involving the laity in liturgical roles and celebrating for the sake of their participation and not the priest's private devotion.

Another indication of the lack of connection with parishes concerns inadequate attention given to multicultural dimensions of liturgy in light of the cultural diversity in parishes (7). Several respondents identified the need to pay more attention to the ethnic and racial diversity of parishes in the dioceses where seminarians will be ministering. Several would like to provide more Masses in Spanish and to see to it that students are better prepared to participate in them and eventually preside competently. One person commented that "Masses in languages other than English limp along since we have too little diversity among our seminarians to foster multiculturalism. They lack exposure to multicultural liturgical experiences."

Other topics were mentioned by at least four or five respondents each: poor role modeling by some priests on the faculty or in the administration who impose their own pieties and eccentricities; poorly trained faculty; and increasing devotionalism among students during Mass. One person commented that considerable emphasis on eucharistic devotion outside of Mass seems to have a deleterious effect on external full and active participation of students during Mass. A few respondents mentioned as deterrents to good liturgy the failure to involve students in planning liturgies, tight schedules that do not allow time for entering properly into the celebration of Eucharist, and inadequate chapel space.

The third question about seminary liturgies was as follows: "What words or phrases would you use to describe the majority of liturgical celebrations in your school?" A total of 116 descriptors were used, with the vast majority of them being positive (68, 58.6%). Another 25 (21.5%) were neutral, and 23 (19.8%) were negative.

On the positive side, the word used most frequently was reverent (12), with a similar sentiment expressed by words like prayerful, reflective, and contemplative (24 total). Many words (19) were used to describe the liturgy as uplifting, inspirational, and celebratory, as well as glorious, beautiful, rich in sight and sound, spirited, living and active. Closely related words (13) included simple, faithful, dignified, and solemn. Another 16 identified the active participation and openness of the community as important. Several other positive features were unique, for example: well-integrated into the life of the school, attentive to a diverse community, prayerful intercessions that engage current needs, and excellent preparation for parish work.

On the negative side, only 23 comments were made, the majority (13) centering on rigidity and stiffness. Other words used were stilted, wooden, uninspiring, lifeless, and fussy ritualism. Seven others mentioned undue attention given to those ministering, expressed by their dress, actions, and superfluous pious gestures. Individual comments were just the opposite of some of the positive observations: lack of a sense of welcome and warmth, less community, more division, disconnect with liturgy in the parishes where these men will work, and refusal of seminarians to sing.

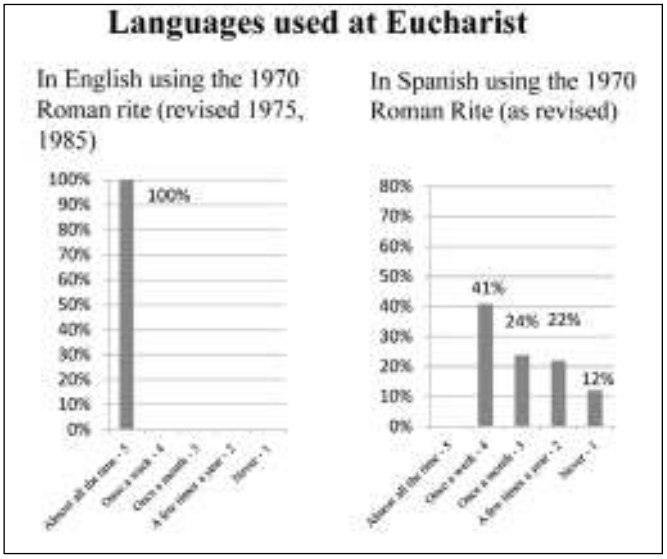
In the neutral category (21 in total) were words that could be taken as positive by some and negative by others. They related mainly to the implementation of the liturgy. These were words and phrases were inflexibly well-ordered, strictly paced, attentiveness to every detail, and precise, careful, deliberately measured and tempered, moderate, and inflexibly consistent, simply competent.

The Languages and Rites of the Eucharist

How often is the Eucharist celebrated in each form in your seminary/school chapel?

a. Almost all the time (5) b. Once a week (4)
c. Once a month (3)
d. A few times a year (2) e. Never (1)

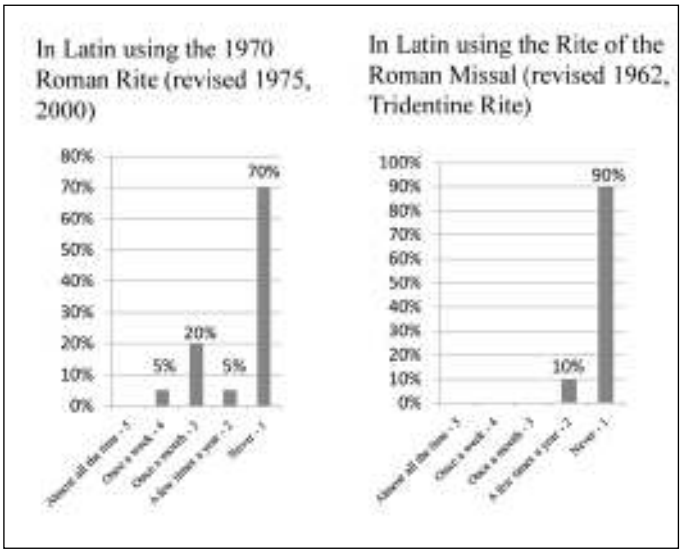
Several questions were asked about the language and the rite used for Eucharistic celebrations.



In English using the 1970 Roman Rite (revised 1975, 1985): Those who responded said almost all the time, for an average score of 5.0.

In Spanish using the 1970 Roman Rite (as revised): 16 said once a week (44%); 9 said once a month (25%); 8 said a few times a year (16%); and 3 said never (8%), for an average of 3.1.
In Latin using the 1970 Roman Rite (revised 1975, 2000): 2 said once a week (6%); 8 said once a month (24%); 2 said a few times a year (6%); and 22 said never (65%), for an average of 1.7.

In Latin using the Roman Missal (revised 1962 Tridentine Rite): 4 said a few times a year (9%); 30 said never (88%) for an average of 1.2.



Other languages were used by 8 schools and only on rare occasions, that is, a few times a year. The languages were as follows: three used Vietnamese and one each used Tagalog, Korean, Polish, Creole, and Greek (Byzantine).

Relationship of Schools to Diocesan Liturgical Offices

The last part of the survey covered topics related to connections between seminaries and diocesan offices. The first question was:

> Do you work with and exchange ideas and concerns with Diocesan Liturgical Offices? If yes, in what ways?

Of those who responded, 26 said they cooperate, 18 said they have no relationship, and 3 did not respond. Among the Joint Endeavors between seminaries and Diocesan Liturgical Offices, they work together and exchange ideas mainly in three ways:

- 14 share educational endeavors;
- 10 share staff; and
- 8 assist each other with liturgies on special occasions.

Four other respondents mentioned a good working relationship without specific examples.

Shared educational endeavors include faculty teaching workshops for the diocese and diocesan staff giving lectures or presentations for the seminary. Faculty handle liturgical questions and dioceses keep faculty and students informed about policies of the diocese. They also provide feedback to the seminaries on the type of liturgical preparation needed in the diocese and offer assistance with liturgical practica.

The faculty and diocesan offices share staff in several ways. The diocesan staff members teach courses and serve as guest speakers. Several faculty work in diocesan offices – in four cases as Directors of the Office of Worship, Prayer, and Music. Some music faculty assist with diocesan functions on a regular basis, other faculty assist periodically in diocesan offices. Four faculty serve on Diocesan Liturgical Commissions.

The faculty and diocesan offices assist each other with liturgies on special occasions. Primarily, they share resources for large liturgies and major functions in the diocese, for example, by helping prepare special ministers for these celebrations, by providing seminarians to serve in various capacities, and helping coordinate these events.

Those who responded "no" generally made no comment. Among those who did make a statement, they said that the diocesan office solicits no input on diocesan policy and that they have no influence or advisory role. One indicated that the previous bishop disbanded the diocesan office of liturgy and the new bishop has not yet had time to reinstate the office.

The second area of questioning concerned ways the diocesan office could be of assistance:

> How could Diocesan Liturgical Offices be helpful to seminaries? and
>
> How could Diocesan Liturgical Offices be helpful to you as faculty as you prepare students for liturgical ministries?

The main theme of most of the responses is the desire for more interaction and collaboration. One respondent put it this way: "There is need for a structure for dialogue and exchange on worship – for mutual support of formation, intellectual (classroom), spiritual (liturgical ministries), and pastoral." Suggestions toward that end come in several forms:

10 share information
8 work with pastors and parishes to update
7 let us know the needs of the diocese
4 help with education

The main focus concerning the sharing of information (10) was to provide updates about policies and norms, supplying explicit directives and suggestions regarding diocesan expectations. Several mentioned the need for workshops or programs on liturgical changes as they develop, as well as clear communications about the changes.

The second set of comments (8) concerned the importance of working with pastors and parishes. Providing good leadership and formation in the diocese would enhance the importance of the liturgy in the minds of students. Several noted how desirable it would be to encourage pastors to implement recent liturgical changes to avoid the divide between the seminary and parishes. Another idea was to have the diocesan staff be more connected with seminarians so that a sense of collaboration would develop with the office of worship once they are ordained. Two complaints were stated as follows: the diocesan office has no interaction with parishes, and the office of liturgy undermines the Catholic faith and worship.

In an effort to assist the diocese, some respondents (7) were interested in knowing its needs. This idea was expressed in different forms: make us aware of the needs for liturgical and pastoral formation; ask how the seminary might help the diocesan offices and vice versa; communicate what it is that the diocese wants the new priests to know; and notify seminary personnel of problem areas around the liturgy, especially with the newly ordained.

Several comments (4) touched on specific assistance with education of seminarians, such as giving a presentation to seminarians about the world in which they will serve, familiarizing them with the resources of the diocesan offices of worship or liturgy and being more visible to the seminary community so that future priests would feel comfortable seeking help from them.

One or two each commented on having a better link with the FDLC and the information provided by the organization; the lack of sufficient education of diocesan staff; recognition of the limited resources of the diocese and difficulties because students from so many different dioceses are represented in some seminaries. Several (4) mentioned that the relationships are fine as they now stand.

The importance of assisting a person adapting to a new situation is crucial, be they a recently ordained priest or a pastor new to a situation, or an experienced lay person in a new location. For those who remain in place, welcoming and orienting them is essential to a smooth transition that will lead to effective pastoral ministry in general and liturgical ministry in particular.

Connecting Liturgical Formation with Effective Liturgical Ministry in Parishes

The final section of this presentation provides examples of beneficial ways of making connections between formation and effective liturgical ministry. Three scenarios are presented: when priests are serving multiple parishes and mega-parishes, when parishes are welcoming new pastors and lay ministers and when all involved are adapting to multicultural parishes. Before taking up the three examples, I will describe some types of parishes found in the U.S. in the 21st century.

If an experienced priest or pastoral minister were asked to describe to a newly ordained priest what would be the shape of his future ministry, it would take a while to set forth the possibilities. Perhaps his first parish will be as an associate in a declining urban setting, or in a sprawling suburb, or in a rural area where two priests are responsible for a half dozen parishes. Diverse

circumstances contribute to the complexity of preparing people for effective liturgical ministry in parishes and other places of worship. Whether celebrating in rural, urban or suburban parishes, on campus or in nursing homes, careful attention to the spiritual needs of the congregation is of great consequence. Imagine how differently one must prepare for liturgical celebrations in each of the situations mentioned. The following descriptions are given by pastors who minister in these situations.

- The boundaries of my three thousand-family congregation are circumscribed by eight square blocks of high-rise apartments cut off on one side by a noisy freeway and on the other by a sprawling strip mall. Members of the congregation include a mix of the poor elderly and new immigrants from several African countries.
- My parishioners come from as far away as thirty miles and the whole territory includes no more than 250 farm families and a few local townspeople. The old-timers are all of German and Irish heritage, but recently a group of Mexican field workers has taken up permanent residence just outside of town. Besides the main parish, I am responsible for Sunday Mass and other pastoral care in two small missions more than twenty miles away.
- The university campus where I minister is set on the edge of a growing metropolitan area, right next to a new suburb with hundreds of families and seemingly thousands of young children. The parish church serves a thousand suburban families and at least that many students from campus.
- Besides my parish of 700 families, a retirement settlement complete with nursing home and assisted living facilities, constitutes my congregation. The parish is demanding, but the chaplaincy adds another dimension as family members, who appreciate taking their loved ones to weekend Mass when they visit, come to depend on the service. They often seek pastoral advice for those they are visiting about how to cope with their spiritual needs and growing dependence brought about by physical and mental diminishment.

The point of identifying the tremendous diversity is to understand the challenge of providing liturgies for congregations that have such varied expectations and needs – appropriate homilies, the right style of music and different capabilities for participating in and contributing to the celebrations. The three sections that follow offer some observations and considerations about liturgy for parishes of different sizes, especially small ones served by a pastor with more than one parish, and then suggestions pertaining to parishes experiencing transitions of pastor and other ministers and multicultural parishes.

Adjusting to multiple parish ministry/mega-parish ministry by priests

Effects of parish size on liturgical ministries are significant. According to the National Parish Inventory of 2000 (CARA data), parish sizes were as follows:

- 31 percent of parishes are "mega" parishes, with more than 3,000 registered parishioners and more than 1,200 registered households
- 28 percent are "corporate" parishes, with 1,200 to 3,000 registered parishioners and 550 to 1,200 registered households
- 25 percent are "community" parishes, with 450 to 1,199 registered parishioners and 201 to 549 registered households
- 16 percent are "family" parishes, with fewer than 450 registered parishioners and 200 or fewer registered households

From the research I did for a book on *Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes,* one of the unmistakable findings was the tremendous value and importance placed on the liturgy, especially the Sunday Eucharist. From doing the study, I learned a great deal about the practices and significance of the liturgy for these priests and parishioners. Some information is also available about the advantages and disadvantages of very large parishes, but let me begin with some thoughts from the 1000+ priests surveyed or interviewed for the multiple parish ministry study.

What they hold in common. The responses of priests in studies of parishes of various sizes demonstrate the centrality of liturgy and prayer in a vital parish. About 63 percent of respondents in my research mentioned prayer in one form or another, especially Eucharistic liturgy, as most important in fostering life and growth in their parishes. When speaking of the liturgy, priests typically called attention to the importance of scheduling regular weekend or Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist that are well-planned and executed, vibrant and meaningful, faith-filled and spirit-filled. Often they made a

connection between dynamic liturgies and relevant homilies, where "scriptural application is made to life situations." The celebration, they believed, should reflect the faith life of the community and demonstrate the pastor's understanding of the people in a particular parish.

Besides its intrinsic value of moving the congregation closer to Christ, the liturgy is crucial to parish life because of its intended consequences, namely, building up the community and involving parishioners in good works beyond the parish. "The Eucharist and the activities of service that spring from the community because of the Eucharist" are most important, said one of the priests, and "without it [the Eucharist] there is no life." Toward that end, another priest expressed clearly what others intimate—that it is necessary to have "instruction so they [the parishioners] understand Eucharist and live it."

Priests recognize the homily not only as an integral part of the Eucharistic liturgy, but when well-prepared, an essential element in giving life to parishes.

Liturgy in Clustered Parishes

Presiding well at liturgies, priests said, is of great consequence because it touches every active parishioner. For some this means prayerful, spiritual celebrations or "Mass offered in a holy way that gives honest witness to a deep-rooted prayer life." A long-time pastor emphasized, "One's own personal relationship with Jesus must be conveyed through the celebration of the Eucharist and through charity towards all." Others focused on a welcoming liturgical presence and a warm acceptance of the people. For a man ordained just two years, it was most important "to be relaxed in interactions one has in liturgy, sacramental preparation, and gatherings so everyone feels comfortable being together." Another added, "be personal because what matters is the welcoming and social connectedness which emerges from the liturgical life of the parishes." Collecting the beliefs and feelings of many respondents, a pastor of nearly twenty years from the Mountain States region provided this thoughtful reflection:

> *The liturgy must be celebrated well! The gathering must reflect the hopes and desires of the people in bringing life and goodness. The liturgy must give the people hope! Not just rubrics, but a deep-seated concern for the life-giving worship that proclaims the truth of Christ's love for them. Good music, well-trained ministers and the sense of dignity by everyone present brought together in prayer before God—worship that deepens our sense of worth and enriches our devotion to the Gospel of Christ—truly a transforming experience of worship that proclaims the value of true human dignity and empowers the faithful to share that truth in the world. The Byzantine church proclaims, 'All of life is liturgy and all of liturgy is life.' I find great truth in this.*

Priests in clustered parishes, as well as those assigned to a single parish, have a wide range of responsibilities. In response to several questions throughout the survey, priests indicated just how central to the life of parishes are liturgical and sacramental celebrations, especially the Eucharistic liturgy. When asked how effective they are in performing the many tasks associated with their ministry, the highest rating by far was given to celebrating the liturgy and sacraments. Almost everyone (99 percent) believes he performs this service well: 62 percent indicated they are very effective and 37 percent said they were effective. They put most of their energy into preparing for these celebrations, and it is what they believe is most important in giving life to their parishes.

A priest serving four parishes expressed his goal as providing "liturgies that touch lives; know the meaning of the liturgical rubrics; know what the community needs. Sometimes you will need to innovate in order to teach what the Eucharist is truly all about." Depending on the nature of the community, priests described the type of liturgy that best suits their parishes in different words: some said respectful, dignified, proper, and devout, while others chose inspiring, lively, moving, engaging, pertinent and alive liturgies. To ensure "full, active, conscious participation," pastors called attention to the necessity of providing good music to complement careful preparation and excellent homilies. If these qualities are present, a priest noted, "Sunday worship—Mass—really draws us together whether we want to or not!"

Over 80 percent of priests celebrate the Eucharist three or four times each weekend, with 46 percent presiding at three and 35 percent at four. Another 12 percent of priests are responsible for five or six Masses each

weekend in addition to funerals and weddings. Fewer than 7 percent have only two Masses on weekends. Besides the Eucharist, other sacraments, including baptism, the sacrament of reconciliation and marriage are celebrated frequently on weekends. The concentration of effort in a short period of time takes extraordinary planning and abundant energy. Especially for the one-fourth of priests doing this work who are sixty-five or older, the intense nature of this ministry is extremely demanding.

Several major components comprise an effective liturgy, important among them the homily. Priests recognize the homily not only as an integral part of the Eucharistic liturgy, but when well-prepared, an essential element in giving life to parishes. Almost a hundred priests commented specifically on the role of the homily, focusing on one of three concerns. First, if homilies are to have maximum effectiveness, one must invest the time to prepare them well. Priests acknowledge the importance of research and careful exegesis so that they are able to communicate the full meaning of the Word. Thinking through the proper approach, reflecting on the readings and praying with them must follow the more scholarly dimension of preparation if the homily is ultimately to touch people's hearts. A fifty-two-year-old pastor from the West North Central region ordained twenty-five years embraced the thinking of many respondents, "First you must have life for yourself and then translate that life into your parishes through your homilies with as much energy as you can."

Second, content and style of preaching makes a difference in the life of a parish. As for the content, priests spoke about preaching the Gospel as authentically as possible. They called it solid teaching or sound preaching, and some mentioned spiritual content. Others addressed content by saying it must be connected to parishioners' lives, which means knowing them well. A priest ordained for fifty years said he spends a significant amount of time to "effectively prepare and deliver homilies that deal with the issues of my parishioners." It is important to know the histories of parishes and tell it back to the people in a way that catches their attention, seems relevant to them, and gives them hope for the future. Finally, being an effective preacher requires a positive attitude. Priests mentioned the necessity of giving encouraging homilies within the context of a vibrant liturgy; one respondent said that priests need to "preach Christ's gospel with joy, relevance, and conviction!" Others expressed the notion that homilies must demonstrate not only God's love, but the pastor's love for his people.

Also important in giving life to parishes is celebrating the sacraments in a way that helps to develop the prayer life of parishioners. For many people, receiving the sacraments constitutes some of their most memorable connections with the Church. These moments may be singular as with Baptism, First Eucharist, Confirmation, and Marriage, or they may be repeated regularly as with reception of Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or occasionally as with anointing and funeral Masses. Priests noted that when special celebrations are connected with the sacraments, regular parishioners are often moved by the services; moreover, on these occasions some people who otherwise may not be actively practicing their faith attend and may be inspired once again to take up their faith.

Welcoming New Pastors and Lay Ministers to a Parish

The importance of assisting a person adapting to a new situation is crucial, be they a recently ordained priest or a pastor new to a situation, or an experienced lay person in a new location. For those who remain in place, welcoming and orienting them is essential to a smooth transition that will lead to effective pastoral ministry in general and liturgical ministry in particular. How can experienced pastors and other parish ministers help? We might consider six ways of ensuring a smooth transition to a new situation; these suggestions apply in different ways, depending on who is new to the parish, but the principle being articulated applies in all cases. (Adapted from Schuth article "Welcoming the Newly Ordained" in Celebration 31/7 (July 2002): 291-294.)

- First, the new person deserves a thorough orientation, including an introduction to the parish staff, an opportunity to introduce him or herself, an overview of the parishioners and a thorough accounting of the way various liturgies are celebrated. Some historical background about the evolution of the liturgy and the changes that have evolved would also be valuable.
- Second, if the pastor remains and a new associate is assigned, the pastor in particular, should discuss with the new priest the expectations and acceptable parameters for variation within approved liturgical norms and the established patterns of worship that prevail in the parish. A new person cannot be expected to guess at what is suitable and customary in a new situation. At the same time, he should

recognize that he is being admitted into patterns of worship that existed before he came and will continue beyond his generally brief transition through the parish.

- Third, for all new parish ministers, during at least the first several months the pastor should schedule regular sessions for clarification and evaluation of the each person's role in the liturgical life of the parish (among other topics). Staff input should be sought before the meetings. Many recently ordained priests and other new ministers are part of a generation who, above all, want their viewpoints to be heard and taken seriously. Ideally, the pastor will take time to understand their suggestions and observations and, when desirable, bring these ideas to the staff and incorporate them into future planning for the parish.
- Fourth, before serious disagreements emerge, the pastor and parish staff should have in place processes for handling divergent views. Using the "Principles of Dialogue" as defined by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Initiative would serve as a useful starting point. Silence and withdrawal from engagement among the staff can create tension and lack of engagement, which are destructive of community life and the ultimate purpose of a worshiping community. Open discussion and shared understanding of the goals of the liturgy can lead to continuous renewal of parish life.
- Fifth, hands-on experience with administration of the sacraments and celebration of the Eucharist is difficult to provide in the seminary, so the newly ordained need regular supervision when they encounter these experiences in their early ministry. Pastors need to discuss practices with new associate pastors and remind all staff of the resources available in diocesan liturgical offices.
- Finally, when possible, parishes and dioceses should establish and maintain contact with the seminary where their priests study and institutions where their lay ministers are educated so that the faculty keep a realistic perspective about the education they provide. Most schools are eager to know how to improve their liturgical programs relative to parish perspectives.

A mistaken view of seminarians as a group, and of the newly ordained, is that they are all extremely conservative and reactionary, especially in matters pertaining to liturgy. My research makes obvious that each seminarian has a unique profile, based extensively on his family and religious background and his previous experiences with the Church. Some are more open and amenable than others to learn new approaches and concepts during studies and then continue to expand their horizons after ordination. The challenge in parishes is to insist on engagement, to be willing to teach and also to learn from the new priest and finally to pray together that the source of our unity—our worship—not be the occasion for division. If these steps are taken, the prospects for inspiring and prayerful liturgical celebrations will be greatly enhanced.

Adapting to Multicultural Parishes

In his article entitled *Building Inclusive Communities* (adapted from an article in *America,* February 25, 2007, pp. 20-22), Daniel Mulhall, assistant secretary for catechesis and inculturation in the USCCB Office for Catechesis, offers a number of practical suggestions for unifying a diverse parish. The goal is to create dynamic communities of faith enriched by the grace of God as brought to life in a variety of cultures and voices. He has six practical suggestions that apply to those who are responsible for liturgy in parishes and dioceses:

- **Know your people.** Who are the people in your parish or diocese? What is the racial/ethnic composition? Their cultural backgrounds – first or second generation immigrants or long-standing Americans? What languages are spoken in the home and in the parishes? Are linguistic needs being met?
- **Set up a multicultural advisory committee.** Include a selection of committee members who reflect the diversity of the parish/diocese and are aware of cultural sensibilities on a wider scale. Consult the committee about your thoughts before you make important decisions and let them help shape the decision.
- **Work for the complementarity of cultures.** Policies and procedures should be structured so that all people are treated equally and fairly, with dignity and respect. For example, the Midnight Mass may not automatically be in English. Committees should reflect the make-up of the parish/diocese and include more than one minority voice. Parish prayers and social activities must also be influenced by the various cultures as well. Make sure all parishioners are invited to every celebration. Provide translators if needed.
- **Develop structures to deal with cultural tensions.** With the cultural advisory committee, evaluate current liturgical practices to see how sensitive the parish/diocese is to the needs of each community. What should be changed, added or dropped? Establish a process through which issues that cause tension can be aired and addressed, rather than merely giving to one side's giving in or the other side's taking most of the time.
- **Encourage conversation and interaction.** Encourage people to talk with each other and to work with each other in activities outside of liturgy. For example, sharing a meal together can help overcome cultural chasms and can prepare people to share the Eucharistic meal together with more understanding.
- **Listen.** Learning to listen without judging or comparing or offering solutions is an important skill. It is a way of building bridges across cultural chasms, to open doors to closed organizations and minds.

Conclusion

This presentation was designed with three purposes in mind. The first was to describe the circumstances behind the design of liturgy programs in seminaries. Of primary importance is the influence of Vatican II and secondarily the changes in Church membership since the 1960s that call for further adaptation in preparing liturgical ministers. These are outlined in the first section by identifying the major themes that have inspired the whole Church. The second is to learn from faculty who are teaching in seminaries and schools of theology. Their evaluation of the liturgical curriculum is decidedly positive, but they offer suggestions for improvement that include more integration of course material and better understanding of parish life. Concerning the celebration of liturgies in their schools, faculty are generally positive, but a significant number of them are concerned about the rigidity of students and their pious practices as they implement the liturgical norms while in the seminary and after ordination. Finally, the survey of faculty highlighted the positive relationships they experience with diocesan liturgical offices, but a significant number would like to see more connection with the diocese.

The challenge in parishes is to insist on engagement, to be willing to teach and also to learn from the new priest and finally to pray together that the source of our unity—our worship—not be the occasion for division.

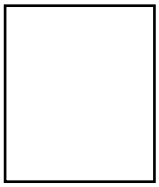
All in all, the overall assessment is more positive than negative.

Both faculty and staff of diocesan liturgical offices bear tremendous responsibility for implementation of liturgy that inspires and encourages the faithful. It requires moving beyond one's own personal preferences to the world awaiting the reconciling and healing presence of Christ in liturgical celebrations of Eucharist and other sacraments. The ministry deeply affects how people are able to live out their faith. In his article "A Rock to Build On" (*Review for Religious*, Sept./Oct. 1994), Vincent Hovley, SJ, says that what is at issue is whether we are willing to trust fully in God's work in our lives, to make a covenant of our lives in order:

To find a heart to face our future without fear and with great trust, to surrender our spirit into God's hands,

- to find a heart to call down the flow of God's holiness and to plunge ourselves into the Pascal mystery,
- to find a heart to pledge ourselves as bread and wine poured out for others—this is Christ again making his covenant, his Passover, in us (p. 776).

All the tensions that arise from our ministerial and religious and personal concerns require of us a reflective stance that leads to inclusion of others in our prayers, our thoughts and our actions. With the ministry you provide as leaders of liturgical offices and in parishes, surely you are among those who are in key positions to restore harmony as you renew the face of the earth one step at a time. May you resolve to be a reconciling messenger of peace to all you meet, bearing the good fruit that grows within you.



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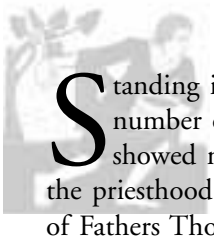
Endnotes

1. Cardinal Godfried Danneels, "Liturgy 40 Years after the Council," *America* 197, no. 5 (27 August – 3 September 2007). Available online at http://americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=10149
2. Danneels, "Liturgy 40 Years After the Council."
3. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist *Mane nobiscum Domine* (7 October 2004), §27.
4. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation*, 5th ed., §118 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 49.

The Life of Piety in the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel

Rev. Paul F. Peri, Ed.D.

This article was adapted from the Inaugural Address given at Mount Angel Seminary, St. Benedict, Oregon, on August 29, 2011.



Standing in this sanctuary, I feel the presence of a number of monks who, years ago by their lives—showed me and many other young aspirants to the priesthood what *piety* means. I think, for example, of Fathers Thomas, Luke, Ignatius and Bernard, Prior Martin, and, of course, Abbot Damian. These and others were strong and steadfast men, yet kind and patient with our unschooled ways. We came seeking to be made into priests. They opened for us, in their teaching and by their example, the life of piety. I want to acknowledge with gratitude the gifts that were given to my classmates and me by those men who began a good work in us.

I want to describe piety as it is understood in the writings of Abraham J. Heschel. But first, what does it mean to be pious? Is it an outdated or meaningless idea in our day? What was it that those monks, mentioned above, labored mightily, mostly without words, to instill in us many years ago? What might the notion of piety mean for us as a faculty and as students now?

By piety, I do not simply mean devotion, which I take to mean an act of private worship, a religious exercise or even religious fervor. By piety, I mean the human capacity to sense that reality, both nature and the self, contains an allusion to super-rational meaning.

I selected Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel for several reasons, not the least of which was his ability to give me a vocabulary for my own personal experiences of unworldliness, which in many singular ways began at Mount Angel Seminary. More importantly, I believe it is needful for us to understand the larger worlds of piety that exist outside of our own. In the words of the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate,* for example, there is a unique, spiritual patrimony that Christians and Jews share. Heschel gives us a look at that patrimony. As *Nostra Aetate* states:

> *The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles.*[1]

Heschel's approach to religion, then, is not to turn away from the world, but to take us more deeply into the complexity of human life.

I want to first introduce Rabbi Heschel with a biographic sketch, since I assume that he is not well known. Second, I want to lay out something of his religious philosophy, especially as it relates to our human orientation to the transcendent. Heschel's religious philosophy is based on the view of the world given in the Bible. Suffice it to say here that Heschel's underlying principle is that the Bible contains an implicit but coherent view of humankind and the world's ultimate

meaning. That religious philosophy is the key to Heschel's notion of piety. Finally, I hope to show that piety, as Heschel describes it, is not some arcane or antiquated notion but is indeed sustenance worthy of incorporation into the life of this academic community.

Heschel is telling us that the realness of God does not come as a result of logical premises. We do not go from an assumption to a fact. We go from awareness to assurance.

Biographic Sketch

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Warsaw on January 11, 1907. On both sides of his family, Heschel was related to a long line of Hasidic leaders. Hasidism is a movement of Jewish piety that arose in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century. It was, among other things, a counter to the influence of rationalism in Jewish faith and practice, and gave rise to a renewal in Jewish mysticism. This mysticism was built on knowledge of the Jewish religious heritage gained by the study of rabbinical literature, and on an understanding for the realness of the spirit and for the holy dimension of all existence. That understanding was not the result of books, but the cumulative effect of a life lived among people who were sure that everything hinted at something transcendent; that the presence of God was a daily experience and that the sanctification of life was a daily task.[2]

When Heschel was twenty, he entered the University of Berlin and studied Semitics and philosophy. In 1936, Heschel received his doctoral degree. His dissertation was entitled *Die Prophetie* and was a study of the consciousness of the Hebrew prophets.

Martin Buber, a great existentialist Jewish thinker in the fist half of the twentieth century, chose Heschel to be his successor at the Judisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt in 1937. The Nazis, who expelled Heschel back to Poland in 1938, ended his stay. From Warsaw, Heschel was able to go to London and then accepted a teaching position at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1940. In 1945, Heschel joined the faculty at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. In 1965, he was the first Jewish theologian to be appointed a Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Heschel was interested in interreligious dialogue and was highly influential in the Catholic Church's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) that came out of the Second Vatican Council. He was quite active in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s as well as the anti-war movement of the same period. He died at home in New York City on December 23, 1972.

Some of Heschel's publications include his philosophy of religion, *Man Is Not Alone*, and the companion work, *God in Search of Man*, both published in 1951. His work *The Prophets* came out in English in 1962. He wrote five other books and a number of other works on Jewish thought, poetry and prayer.

Meeting the Transcendent

I proposed above that *piety* means openness to the allusion of the transcendent in nature and the self. Here, I want to describe what the experience means from Heschel's perspective. Heschel's thought presents us with certain difficulties. As Maurice Friedman has stated: "The polarity of Heschel's thought, the mosaic of individual insights, and the tendency to stress now one point of view and now another—all make the task of the responsible interpreter and critic a difficult one." In other words, Heschel writes like a poet rather than a philosopher—more like the Book of Job as opposed to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.[3]

Though Heschel's works may be difficult because of their lack of systematic form, we do have some doorways into them. Heschel's work can be seen as an attempt to create a viable synthesis between the traditional piety and learning of Eastern European Jewry and the scholarship of Western civilization. This is not to say that philosophy and religion are identical. For Heschel, philosophy is the human attempt to attain a comprehensive view of things, to see the world and its parts together. Religion, on the other hand, is an answer to humanity's ultimate questions. The juxtaposition of the two create a kind of tension that is central to Heschel's thought.[4]

Heschel writes that modern people have, in many ways, lost touch with that dimension of reality which gives rise to their ultimate questions. The result of this

is a society that is caught up in manipulation and expediency and the loss of the transcendent. We now relate to the world in terms of forces to be controlled, objects for use and things to be made and consumed. This exploitation of nature leads to a mentality of manipulation. We have lost our appreciation for the mystery of the world and for the privilege of being part of something larger than we are. Reality is now equated with availability—for example, the need for immediate gratification.

Another consequence of the loss of contact with the transcendent dimension of life, says Heschel, is expediency. The self becomes the norm of right and wrong. Both manipulation and expediency surrender us to the earth, and in that surrender we destroy our humane self. We destroy our desire for what is more than nature. We are left with a sense of meaninglessness, loss of direction and despair.[5]

What is needful now, Heschel tells us, is to rediscover the questions religion deals with, the dimension of existence seemingly forgotten. We do this by what Heschel calls "situational thinking," the purpose of which is not to frame concepts of the objective world, but to understand the situation of persons as existent beings; what Heschel describes as "understanding issues on which we stake our very existence."[6]

Heschel's approach to religion, then, is not to turn away from the world, but to take us more deeply into the complexity of human life. There, in the human situation, he urges us to identify that which gives rise to religious faith. Further, if we examine the Scriptures on one level, we will find them responding to that same kind of prompting. We do have something in common with Biblical people. We can find meaning in Biblical insights. The times may have changed, but the essential reality of humanity has not. Each person is perennially capable of entering into a relationship with the Divine, but we must go beyond the small world most of us pay attention to.

If we are attentive, says Heschel, three aspects of nature command our attention: its power, its beauty and its grandeur. There are, correspondingly, three ways we can relate ourselves to the world: we may exploit it; we may enjoy it; or we may accept it with awe. What we need now is to regain our sense of wonder and awe in the face of the grandeur of the world.

Then, in the face of the world's grandeur, we sense the sublime. It is not an aesthetic category, for, as Heschel writes, the sublime is the "silent allusion of things to a meaning greater than themselves."[7] The response to this marvel of nature is an inkling of something beyond—the infinite, the transcendent. We are filled with wonder and radical amazement. The world speaks to us of more than what it is in itself. The world jolts us into seeing that it alludes to the Divine.

Piety is that which attunes us to the sublime, opens us to insight, gives strength to our pursuit of meaning and recognizes the voice of Divine concern. Piety is a mode of human living.

For Heschel, nature is not a reflection of God, but an allusion to God in grandeur and the sublime. Heschel says that we do not worship nature, because nature—for all its beauty, splendor, order and power—is not the sum and substance of all there is. Biblical people, says Heschel, are aware that the ultimate is God and God is beyond the created world. To the Biblical mind, the question to be asked is: Why is there any being at all? and not, What is the foundation of nature? The Biblical person sees nature and order as a question, not a solution.

Heschel's approach to the question of God and the transcendent is along the path of the ineffable, not through speculation. We do not set out with a preconceived idea of a supreme being, but we possess "an intuition of a divine presence."[8] It is useless to submit the question of the realness of God to scientific logic. Heschel writes that there are many ways to truth and science is only one: "God is not a scientific problem, and scientific methods are not capable of solving it." He continues:

> *The reason why scientific methods are often thought to be capable of solving it is the success of their application in positive science. The fallacy involved in this analogy is that of treating God as if He were a phenomenon within the order of nature. The truth, however, is that the problem of God is not related to phenomena within nature but to nature itself; not only to concepts within thinking but also to thinking itself. It is a problem that refers*

> *to what surpasses nature, to what lies beyond all things and all concepts.*[9]

Heschel taught that life is a perpetual quest for self-understanding; that to be what we are, we must become more than we are.

In other words, deep religious realities partake of the ineffable; and therefore, partake of a "hidden meaning" rather than standing for a lack of meaning as some have thought.

So we are confronted with a world that alludes to something beyond itself, a truth that is beyond experience. That allusiveness conveys to us awareness of the spiritual dimension of reality; that being is related to transcendent meaning. What we have is an awareness that intuits the Divine.

Our question remains: how to go from an allusion of the Divine, given the ineffability of grandeur and mystery, to the certainty of the realness of God? Heschel's answer is that certainty comes about "as a response of the whole person to the mystery and transcendence of living. As a response, it is an act of raising from the depths of the mind an ontological presupposition which makes that response intellectually understandable."[10] In terms of the ineffable, what Heschel is telling us is that we do not comprehend the transcendent; we are present at it, we witness to it. It is because we realize—in wonder and amazement—that there is meaning to life beyond our rational understanding of the world that we respond in faith. And faith, a sign of our greatness, is a response to the Divine who transcends the world. In faith, we do not attempt to put things in our own terms, but to think of the world in terms of God.

Again, Heschel is telling us that the realness of God does not come as a result of logical premises. We do not go from an assumption to a fact. We go from awareness to assurance. We go behind our self-consciousness and question the self and all of its cognitive pretensions. Our belief in transcendent reality, then, is not a leap; it is what Heschel calls an *ontological presupposition*.

> *In the depth of human thinking we all presuppose some ultimate reality which on the level of discursive thinking is crystallized into the concept of power, a principle or a structure. This, then, is the order in our thinking and existence: The ultimate of God comes first and reasoning about Him second.*[11]

What Heschel is getting at in this line of thinking is that faith is more than intellectual assent to a body of doctrine, but "an act of the whole person, of mind, will and heart. Faith is sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment, not something achieved once and for all, but an attitude one may gain and lose."[12] In this sense, then, faith for Heschel is faithfulness to spiritual insight.

There is more to spiritual insight than the certainty of the realness of transcendent reality and being faithful to that insight. At the same time, Heschel insists, we become aware that we ourselves are *objects of concern*; that is, that God is seeking us. Beautifully, he writes:

> *His is the call, ours the paraphrase; His is the creation, ours a reflection. He is not an object to be comprehended, a thesis to be endorsed; neither the sum of all that is (facts) nor a digest of all that ought to be (ideals). He is the ultimate subject. God-awareness is not an act of God being known to man; it is the awareness of man's being known by God. In thinking about Him we are thought by Him.*[13]

Heschel believes that when we penetrate beyond normal consciousness and investigate the self, we realize that the self did not originate in itself, and that the quintessential dimension of self is in being a non-self. That is to say; our will, our freedom, and our life are all gifts! In this line of thinking, we are objects, not subjects. With this insight, there is no mental power that can stand and judge God as *object*, or ask questions about the certainty of God's realness. We recognize, however faintly, that we are the objects of God's knowledge and not vice versa.

Far more could be said about Heschel's approach to God-awareness found within us, revelation, participation in community and making ethical choices. However, I believe I have summarized Heschel's thought sufficiently enough to allow me to draw out a few particulars about his notion of piety.

Heschel's Notion of Piety

One overarching concept emerges from our consideration of Heschel thus far: we humans are oriented to transcendence. As he would say, we are related to the vertical within the horizontal. For Heschel, there are certain "inner attitudes" that flow from this orientation, and they characterize the person of piety. I now turn to some of those attitudes.

Heschel states that, given our rationalistic and empirically oriented society, it is little wonder that we do not often hear about piety. Some see piety as abandonment of the world, or as the denial of human interests. Heschel insists that pious people are still to be found among us, though we may not recognize who they are.

Piety, for Heschel, is not a fanciful or frivolous pipedream. Piety is real power or inner strength. Piety is an attitude toward the basic forces of reality. It is an attitude toward the world, toward life, toward one's inner strengths and weaknesses, and even one's possessions.

Heschel insists that piety is not a psychological concept. This is not to suggest that piety is not involved with one's psychic makeup, or even that it is totally beyond the interests of psychology as a discipline. It is to say that piety cannot be totally explained in terms of mental life, because as an act, the spiritual content cannot be identified with the act itself. Piety, for Heschel, should be viewed in terms of what he calls "spiritual content," which manifests itself in relation to the main realities of common life.

Further, piety is not a mood, a state of emotion or some romantic feeling. Neither can it be limited to isolated acts. It is not a single dimension of the soul or spirit. Piety is, rather:

> *something unremitting, persistent, unchanging in the soul, a perpetual inner attitude of the whole person. Like a breeze in the atmosphere, it runs through all deeds, utterances and thoughts; it is a tenor of life betraying itself in each trait of character, each mode of action.*[14]

Describing piety in terms of the quotation above, we can say that piety is that which attunes us to the sublime, opens us to insight, gives strength to our pursuit of meaning and recognizes the voice of Divine concern. Piety is a mode of human living. It is a spirit enshrined in the person, which flows into every aspect of life. As Heschel stated, "If you want to know God, sharpen your sense of the human."[15]

For Heschel, piety is the opposite of selfishness; it is an "inner anonymity of service." There is no eye to a reward in piety. Service is motivated by love of the transcendent and not by material gain. Rather than being a habit, Heschel tells us, piety is more of an impulse, a certain stirring of the self or the power of spontaneous action.

God has brought you to the seminary to bring about something new in you. Not a "new" you, if you will, but a mature you.

To be pious does not require that one be intellectually gifted. Piety is marked more by a profundity of spirit than by mental acumen. It is more closely related to the qualities of wisdom or strength of will, for example, than to powers of mental dexterity.

The pious person accepts the mystery of life and strives to be attuned to the sublime and the sacred dimension of reality. Piety is appreciation of the polar, or paradoxical, quality of life. It is the recognition of transcendence and an openness to it. Thus piety is subjective insofar as it is a conscious mode of living, a choice of lifestyle. Coming to piety, we can say, is coming into a higher perspective, which holds the vertical and horizontal aspects of life in view at one time.

Putting more of Heschel's piety into a psalm-like iteration, we can say that for the pious person the beauty of the world seems more vivid; the presence of the transcendent is recognized everywhere, whether at work or play, eating or drinking or even in carrying on a conversation. All things have intrinsic worth and value to the pious. Injustice and the lack of compassion are hated because the pious one has reverence for all things, especially people. The pious person is at peace with life in spite of hardship, and is characterized by thankfulness and joy. The pious person has a responsibility for life as a partner in continuous creation, and is free to use and possess the things of the world. The pious one is free, and is not slavishly bound to possessions. Nor is the pious person unable to sacrifice or give to others of his own possessions, because giving is a way of returning to God what has been received as gift. For Heschel, piety is an expression of our kinship with God. It is our aspi-

ration to transcend ourselves, and as such, it is a sign of our maturity as human beings.

In sum, piety is the attitude of the person who has discovered the transcendent in all aspects of life. At one time, piety is displayed in service or spontaneous involvement with others; and at another time, it may be seen as a profound sense of gratitude, thanksgiving and reverence for the gift of life itself. It affects not just some realms of our existence, but all of them. It can be seen in the person's relationships to other people and things of nature, in our choices and even in our knowing. In achieving piety, we achieve the higher viewpoint, which holds God and humankind in the same thought.

Piety is for each of us to grasp, however tenuously, that the present holds within it the sum of our existence, and that sum is more than we can measure or fully explain.

The Significance of Heschel's Thought

I began by asking about the relevance of the notion of *piety*, particularly Heschel's notion, for us as a seminary community. I would like to state a few things about piety that could be helpful for us both as teachers and as students.

Someone once said that Abraham Heschel was a religious therapist treating the spiritual breakdown of our times. Heschel taught that life is a perpetual quest for self-understanding; that to be what we are, we must become more than we are. This can only be achieved in coexistence with God; moreover, Heschel insists that to exist is to assist God. Thus for Heschel, the imperative of religious existence is to adjust our understanding to God rather than to adjust God to our understanding; to make the world relevant to God's vision rather than to make faith relevant to our whims and desires.

Along those lines, I am struck by how much Heschel's thinking about piety and our *Program of Priestly Formation* are in sync with each other. As the *PPF* states:

> *The sections. . . on human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation are to be read in a unified and integrated sense. These are neither discrete nor layered dimensions of priestly existence, but they are. . . interrelated aspects of a human response to God's transforming grace.*[16]

Similarly, Heschel accepts human beings in both the common aspects of body and emotions, and in our exalted dimension of transcendent value. Heschel addresses the human in our wholeness as able to be transformed. This emphasizes the importance and value for students to take to heart seminary formation in all of its transformative aspects. God has brought you to the seminary to bring about something new in you. Not a "new" you, if you will, but a mature you. For your part, you need to "assist God" to bring it about in every aspect that the Four Pillars put forth. Only then, can one become the "more than we are" that Heschel talks about.

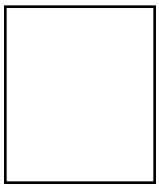
Another way of putting this is to say that the seminary forms you the way it does, because it opens you to divine grace through liturgy, the study of literature, music, history, philosophy and science. Along with theology, these subjects do not just build knowledge; they put us in touch with a myriad of experiences that not only relate to people and our relationships to nature and the self, but especially to God. We are not here to develop abstract piety, but to explore and be changed by the active engagement in the human struggle. This is precisely what the Four Pillars are about. The church offers us the liturgy and the sacraments so that we can embrace that struggle. We call that holiness. We see in Jesus the One who fully embodied the struggle, and shows us its completion and fullness in the Paschal Mystery.

Heschel's piety also affirms what James Heft, Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California, wrote last year: "The Catholic intellectual tradition seeks to integrate knowledge. There ought to be connections between all subjects studied because everything that is studied has its source in God."[17]

For our purposes, what is being said above is that education and formation in the seminary *is* piety! That is what those monks I mentioned at the start inherently understood. What goes on in the seminary community includes spiritual formation, schooling, learning various kinds of skills in pastoral formation, and the like, but it is also much more. What we do here, with humility, is to seek God's vision for ourselves and the world. It is

something of that vision that we, as priests, preach each time we go to the pulpit: being able to make connections is the key to being able to preach the Word effectively. We are to be prophetic; to speak to the meaning of the present as God would have it go, not to our whims and desires. This reiterates the importance of entering into the complete life of the seminary community as an act of faith and piety, and not simply as a matter of completing requirements.

Finally, it should be clear that piety for Heschel is not the result of time spent in the self-help section at Powell's Bookstore. Piety is for each of us to grasp, however tenuously, that the present holds within it the sum of our existence, and that sum is more than we can measure or fully explain. Or as Heschel puts it: "Loyal to the presence of the ultimate in the common, we may be able to make it clear that man is more than man, that in doing the finite, he may perceive the infinite."



Reverend Paul F. Peri, Ed.D., is (bio needed)

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1. *Nostra Aetate*, § 4.
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12. Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 154.
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Making Catholic Social Teaching Relevant to Students

Cynthia Toolin, Ph.D.

For fifteen years, I have taught *Catholic Social Teaching* to seminarians, religious and the lay faithful at Holy Apostles College and Seminary, both on campus and through our distance education program. The subject matter is one of my favorites.

Originally trained as a sociologist in the 1970s, I looked at social interaction analytically, as a scientist; now, I see these same interactions as a potential reflection of the interior life of the Trinity, a divine society of three distinct Persons in the one true God. I enjoy interpreting social interaction from the perspective of theological anthropology. The harmony of original justice became disharmony in original sin, through the sins of our common ancestors, Adam and Eve, and the restoration of harmony was made possible through grace in redemption. What great explanatory power for why people treat each other so poorly, and what hope to know the remedy! I am engaged when I read the principles of Catholic social teaching and their application to problems, such as labor unions, revolutions and environmental concerns. The development of the doctrine and its proclamation by the Magisterium thrills me. As a professor, I want to pass that love of, that passion for, this magisterial tradition on to my students as an integral part of their formation in the teachings of the church.

The first step in the process is to remove the students' ignorance. When I studied sociology, I was never exposed to Catholic social teaching. The voices of my professors never said the words *Rerum Novarum*, *Laborem Exercens*, *Populorum Progressio* or *Pacem in Terris*. This is not surprising as I was not Catholic, and I attended an excellent secular humanist university. The lack of teaching in this area persists to this day in our universities, and I find myself making this observation with each new cohort of seminarians or group of lay faithful who enter into my classes. They arrive as ignorant of Catholic social teaching as I did more than 40 years ago.

As a professor, I want to pass that love of, that passion for, this magisterial tradition on to my students as an integral part of their formation in the teachings of the church.

We spend many classes reading the primary sources and learning the language, principles and applications of this rich heritage. I find that though this is rewarding work for me, the study of official documents written over the span of 120 years does not necessarily inspire love, nor for that matter, more than an academic interest in students.

I have discovered that one way to rouse the interest of students is to use less formal, less verbally weighty, applications of the principles to current issues for the purpose of making Catholic social teaching relevant to their lived experience. To this end, I have recently made good use of two important sets of documents: the papal speeches given on the World Day for Peace, offered each January 1 since 1968, and the papal speeches to the General Assembly of the United Nations, offered in 1965, 1979, 1995 and 2008. Students understand the relevance of Catholic social teaching when they read these speeches, presented by recent popes and dealing with current issues. World Day for Peace speeches cover a wide variety of topics, such as reconciliation, human

rights, disarmament and defending life, far too many to master in less than a semester.

Papal speeches to the General Assembly of the United Nations cover fewer topics, and students can be exposed to them more quickly. Many are already interested in the United Nations given the use of its forces in war zones, its committees on addressing important issues and its overall attempts at humanitarian relief. Their attitudes, however, range the whole gamut from anti-United Nations to pro-United Nations. The goals in reading the four papal speeches are to expose the students to the topics the popes considered critical to address to that international body and students' evaluations of the United Nations.

I lead the students through the speeches by focusing on, and placing in theological context, five topics**:**

- the lack of adequate and effective secular leadership in addressing global issues,
- the role the church can play in remedying that problem,
- reading the signs of the times,
- the general principles the popes addressed in their four speeches, and
- the high esteem in which the popes regard the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

In these speeches, the hermeneutic of continuity, also called the hermeneutic of reform by Benedict XVI, is apparent. This is important for the students to understand. Although political, economic and social situations change over time, in the church continuity as renewal and deeper understanding is always present. Benedict XVI said the hermeneutic of continuity is one "of renewal in the continuity of the one subject—Church—which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God."[1]

Lack of Adequate and Effective Secular Leadership

In view of current global issues relating to war, terrorism, economic downturns, political upheaval and social unrest, one thing is clear–no one has readily available answers to restore world security. To date, no one political order, economic system or nation has produced the leadership necessary to improve the global situation. Instead, ineptitude, inability and inefficiency reign as attempts are made to ameliorate the world situation. All fail.

I have discovered that one way to rouse the interest of students is to use less formal, less verbally weighty, applications of the principles to current issues for the purpose of making Catholic social teaching relevant to their lived experience.

The sovereignty of Vatican City, a state with less than 1,000 full time residents, ensures the Pope can engage in the church's spiritual mission, independent from and uninfluenced by, other sovereign States. The mission includes bringing the Christian message to all the people of the earth and judging the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. John Paul II said the "nature and aims of the spiritual mission of the Apostolic See and the Church make their participation in the tasks and activities of the United Nations very different from that of the States, which are communities in the political and temporal sense."[2] Sixteen years later, John Paul returned to the same topic (1995, #1)[3]. The Holy See is interested in the integral good of every person; the goal it seeks is the spiritual and temporal fulfillment of each person. The goal of the United Nations is solely temporal. The church's mission and the United Nation's goal, thus, have much in common, namely the good of persons, but their perspectives and the methods they deem appropriate to fulfill the mission and attain the goal are different.

Paul VI spoke highly of those commonalities when he said,

> *We would be tempted to say that your chief characteristic is a reflection, as it were, in the temporal field of what Our Catholic Church aspires to be in the spiritual field: unique and universal. Among the ideals by which mankind is guided, one can conceive of nothing greater on the natural level . . . . Your vocation is to make brothers of all peoples.*[4]

Fulfilling the Mission

The church has a missionary heart. Following

the command of Jesus, she takes the Good News to the people of the earth by whatever means are available to her. Addressing the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations is one way. In speaking to the members, the popes were speaking not only to them as individuals, but through them to their respective populations; they were speaking literally to multitudes of people, each individual man and woman represented by a member of the General Assembly, to almost the whole family of humans. Paul VI spoke eloquently on this point when he said,[5]

> *Awareness of living through a privileged moment – brief though it be – when a wish borne in Our heart for almost twenty centuries is being accomplished . . . . Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage in search of an opportunity to speak heart to heart with the whole world. We were commanded: 'Go, bring the good news to all nations!' You are the ones who represent all nations.*

John Paul II made this clearer,

> *Each one of you . . . represents a particular State, system and political structure, but what you represent above all are individual human beings; you are all representatives of men and women, of practically all the people of the world, individual men and women, communities and peoples who are living the present phase of their own history and who are also part of the history of humanity as a whole, each of them a subject endowed with dignity as a human person, with his or her own culture, experiences and aspirations, tensions and sufferings, and legitimate expectations (emphasis his).*[6]

Benedict XVI succinctly emphasized this truth: "Through you, I greet the peoples who are represented here."[7]

These three popes, as messengers and witnesses of the universal church, successfully brought a good portion of the Christian message to most of the people of the world, most of the one human family and did so through a secular institution developing into, and attempting to become, truly universal. What a milestone in our 2,000 year history!

An accurate definition of humankind, one that does not raise people to the divine level or diminish people to the level of the brute, is something sorely missing in modern culture.

The Signs of the Times

The popes read the signs of the times, as urged by the Council Fathers in *Gaudium et Spes*:[8]

> *[T]he Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.*

In evaluating the signs of the times,[9] from 1965 to 2008, the popes stated the importance of the leadership of the United Nations on the international scene. When looking at the international scene one thing was clear: for solidarity among peoples and subsidiarity among nations to develop, this global representative body was needed. It was also clear that individualization was increasing, with its resultant competitiveness. They suggested that following a familial operating model would be more holistic and healthy than an organizational or institutional one. This model would enable the members of the United Nations to combat radical individualism and to encourage attempts at solidarity and subsidiarity. Rather than focus on the individual person, group, country or continent, the relationships between them and the entire international scene would be considered.

Paul VI said he ratified the United Nations institution and suggested it as the way of the future. He added, "You mark a stage in the development of mankind; from now on retreat is impossible; you must go forward."[10] John Paul II called the United Nations the hope for the future, stating it had a "key function and

guiding role."[11] Benedict XVI also said positive things about the United Nations, although his address added a note of caution: "Through the United Nations, States have established universal objectives which, *even if they do not coincide with the total common good of the human family*, undoubtedly represent a fundamental part of that good" (emphasis mine).[12]

John Paul II argued that the United Nations must change its methods from an administrative model to a family model in order to

> rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a "family of nations". The idea of "family" immediately evokes something more than simple functional relations or a mere convergence of interests. The family is by nature a community based on mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect. In an authentic family the strong do not dominate; instead, the weaker members, because of their very weakness, are all the more welcomed and served.[13]

Expert in Humanity

All three popes articulated the principles that can lead to improvements in the world situation. These are what the church offers the world as an expert in humanity. Benedict XVI said,

The United Nations remains a privileged setting in which the Church is committed to contributing her experience "of humanity", developed over the centuries among peoples of every race and culture, and placing it at the disposal of all members of the international community.[14]

The sign of most interest here concerns the truth about humankind. As I often tell my students, an accurate definition of humankind, one that does not raise people to the divine level or diminish people to the level of the brute, is something sorely missing in modern culture. Human beings are persons, the only entity in material creation that has personhood; everything else is below humanity, sub-personal. The church explains that persons are matter and spirit, the only entity on earth that is both. As spirit, persons have intellect and will. They have inherent dignity just by being what they are, the image and likeness of God. Each person, though, has a damaged human nature due to original sin, tarnishing his or her reflection of God. Humankind also has freedom, rights and duties. Each person is a member of the one human race. Each is created by God and called to live with God in eternity. God wrote the moral law (i.e, natural law) on the human heart; if used as our grammar, moral law enables us to dialogue with everyone. Every one of these points is disputed by many in modern culture, to the point of even questioning whether human beings have a common nature, or for that matter, a personal nature that is qualitatively different from every other creature on earth.

To work for the fulfillment of each human to the greatest extent possible and to foster the common good is the way to peace and development.

A lengthy quotation from John Paul II summarizes this:

> *Man lives in the world of material and spiritual values. For the individual living and hoping man, his needs, freedoms and relationships with others never concern one sphere of values alone, but belong to both… it is the spiritual values that are pre-eminent, both on account of the nature of these values and also for reasons concerning the good of man… It is easy to see that material goods do not have unlimited capacity for satisfying the needs of man : they are not in themselves easily distributed and, in the relationship between those who possess and enjoy them and those who are without them, they give rise to tension, dissension and division that will often even turn into open conflict. Spiritual goods, on the other hand, are open to unlimited enjoyment by many at the same time, without diminution of the goods themselves.*[15]

And later, John Paul II said that the spiritual dimension, "does not divide people but puts them into communication with each other, associates them and unites them."[16]

Reading the signs of the times points to the importance of accurately defining humankind. When

Students are few and far between who have seen a lack of clean drinking water for the thirsty, lack of antibiotic drugs for the sick and the need for enforcement of laws against human trafficking. They are intellectually in favor of the application of Catholic social teachings to these situations, but students are not personally familiar with them.

humankind is not understood, when men and women's inalienable rights and corresponding duties are trampled upon, when their understanding of the natural moral law is diminished, when they do not realize they are members of one human race, then peace and development suffer. To work for the fulfillment of each human to the greatest extent possible and to foster the common good is the way to peace and development.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The popes value the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (and the following legislation) as the foundational document of the United Nations. It leads and inspires its members. It was designed as, and functions as, a standard of achievement that makes the members of the United Nations examine their consciences: are they serving the common good of all people to the best of their ability? Are they ensuring the proper treatment of individuals and nations, protecting inalienable rights? Are they seeing persons for what they are and trying to support their efforts to become fulfilled as human beings? John Paul II referred to the *Declaration* as focusing on

> *the rights of the human being as a concrete individual and of the human being in his universal value. This document is a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race. The progress of humanity must be measured not only by the progress of science and technology, which shows man's uniqueness with regard to nature, but also and chiefly by the primacy given to spiritual values and by the progress of moral life (emphasis his).*[17]

He warned that the United Nations could be threatened with destruction if its truths and principles were forgotten or ignored or were subjected to political interests.[18]

In reading the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, we understand why the popes held it in high regard and wanted to protect it. The points in the Preamble alone (e.g., the first, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.") should be supported by Catholics, assuming the words and phrases are defined and interpreted in an appropriate way. The same is true of many of the articles (e.g., Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood).[19]

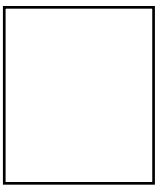
Conclusion

To inspire the love of Catholic Social Teaching, the doctrine has to be made relevant to the students. Students participate in the revised liturgy and see the impact it has on parishioners; they can receive the sacraments of reconciliation and penance and see the impact it has on their lives. These are relevant to their own lives and to those of the people around them. Students are few and far between who have seen a lack of clean drinking water for the thirsty, lack of antibiotic drugs for the sick and the need for enforcement of laws against human trafficking. They are intellectually in favor of the application of Catholic social teachings to these situations, but students are not personally familiar with them.

Papal addresses to the General Assembly of the United Nations touch students more closely. Students know that in modern society material values are sought after to the reduction of the spiritual ones, and they may even have been seduced by this perspective. They hear leaders' arguments to solve the global economic problem or to address the cry for democracy in the Muslim world, and they see these efforts fail. What the popes addressed were not these specific problems,

but the social principles along with the standards and reasoning behind them. The popes are role models, witnesses and messengers to what should be done.

These papal addresses can enliven students with a love of Catholic social teaching. The words are like a battle cry to the students and to the multitudes of people the popes addressed in these speeches. The popes call us to make social interaction at all levels a better reflection of the interior life of the Trinity, and this is what makes Catholic social teaching relevant to each student.



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Endnotes

1. Benedict XVI, "On the Hermeneutic of Continuity," *Adoremus Bulletin,* Online Edition, November 2007, Vol. 8, Number 8. http://www.adoremus.org/1107BXVI_122205.html
2. John Paul II, *Address to the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations, 1979*, #2 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1979/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19791002_general-assembly-onu_en.html. Henceforth, John Paul II, 1979.
3. John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations*, 1995, #1 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno_en.html. Henceforth, John Paul II, 1995.
4. Paul 6, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly*, 1965, #3 at http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pope/UN-1965.html. Henceforth, Paul VI, 1965. See Benedict XVI, *Meeting with Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 2008 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080418_un-visit_en.html. Henceforth, Benedict XVI, 2008. On the point of explaining the church's interest in the United Nations, see also John Paul II, 1979, #4. Benedict XVI said, "My presence at this Assembly is a sign of esteem for the United Nations, and it is intended to express the hope that the Organization will increasingly serve as a sign of unity between States and an instrument of service to the entire human family. It also demonstrates the willingness of the Catholic Church to offer her proper contribution to building international relations in a way that allows every person and every people to feel they can make a difference. In a manner that is consistent with her contribution in the ethical and moral sphere and the free activity of her faithful, the Church also works for the realization of these goals through the international activity of the Holy See." And later he said, "The founding principles of the Organization…express the just aspirations of the human spirit, and constitute the ideals which should underpin international relations. As my predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II have observed from this very podium, all this is something that the Catholic Church and the Holy See follow attentively and with interest, seeing in your activity an example of how issues and conflicts concerning the world community can be subject to common regulation."
5. Paul VI, 1965, "Introduction".
6. John Paul II, 1979, #6.
7. Benedict XVI, 2008.
8. *Gaudium et Spes*, #4 at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.
9. See http://www.fsmitha.com/t-index.html for a year by year timeline of events during this period.
10. Paul VI, 1965, #2.
11. John Paul II, 1979, #11.
12. Benedict XVI, 2008.
13. John Paul II, 1995, #14. Paul VI (1965, #6) largely focused on increasing cooperation between states and building solidarity. Benedict XVI (2008) said, "The United Nations embodies the aspiration for a "greater degree of international ordering" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #43), inspired and governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore capable of responding to the demands of the human family through binding international rules and through structures capable of harmonizing the day-to-day unfolding of the lives of peoples."
14. Benedict XVI (2008) said, as an expert in humanity, the Church "offers to everyone the teaching of the sacred Scripture on the truth about man and proclaims the Gospel of Love and Justice."
15. John Paul II, 1979, #14.
16. John Paul II, 1979, #16.
    See John Paul II (1995, #3). Benedict XVI (2008) said, "Now, as then, this principle has to invoke the idea of the person as image of the Creator, the desire for the absolute and the essence of freedom."
17. John Paul II, 1979, #7.
18. Benedict XVI (2008) said the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, "was the outcome of a convergence of different religious and cultural traditions, all of them motivated by the common desire to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of society, and to consider the human person essential for the world of culture, religion and science. Human rights are increasingly being presented as the common language and the ethical substratum of international relations. At the same time, the universality, indivisibility and interdepen-

dence of human rights all serve as guarantees safeguarding human dignity. It is evident, though, that the rights recognized and expounded in the *Declaration* apply to everyone by virtue of the common origin of the person, who remains the high-point of God's creative design for the world and for history. They are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different cultures and civilizations."

19. See http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml to read the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Locating Practical Theology in Catholic Theological Discourse and Practice

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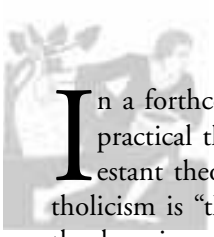

In a forthcoming book on Catholic pastoral and practical theology in Britain and Ireland, the Protestant theologian, Stephen Pattison, notes that Catholicism is "the sleeping giant of pastoral and practical theology in our midst."[1] As one of the editors of *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* a decade ago, he could not identify any British Catholic practical theologians to contribute to the volume. Pattison recognizes just ten years later that the scene has changed. In fact, there are Catholic theologians engaged in the practical theology enterprise, both in the United States and abroad, though a clearly Catholic approach to practical theology has been slow to awaken. Catholic theology's embrace of practical theology also has been slow. For Pattison, "Catholic practical theology in Britain in the new, overt form expounded and exemplified herein, is a somewhat tender plant. While there are shoots of real interest and methodological innovation, it would not take much for these to perish, as they have in the past, if a handful of institutions and people were to de-commit from the quest to make Catholic thinking and working part of mainstream practical theology."[2] Pattison's concern speaks frankly to the U.S. situation where Catholics are engaged in practical theology, but practical theology is not widely recognized or embraced by the field of Catholic theology.

In 2008, a group of U.S. Catholic theologians began exploring how they teach, write and think as practical theologians practicing practical theology.[3] The group explored who in Catholic theology identifies with practical theology, how it is carried forth, and where practical theology appears in the institutional and curricular landscape in the U.S. Catholic context. Interestingly, each of these theologians came to practical theology through a different route, identifying with it in some way, yet finding themselves not always at home in either Catholic theology or Protestant practical theology.

Despite the explosion of "pastoral" activity in the wake of Vatican II, pastoral theology never became a serious, well-developed academic discipline.

Issues of identity and vocation emerged as important points of conversation. Claiming a vocation and disciplinary identity as a practical theologian is not without its problems in the Catholic context. It can come at a cost. It can be a highly contested category, one that causes confusion and often times rejection. Because there are very few jobs listed in "practical theology" in Catholic theology departments, many colleagues do not know how to react to candidates that present themselves as practical theologians. Perhaps there is a slight or lingering prejudice that practical theology is Protestant and does not fit in the Catholic context. Many experience practical theology as a hindrance for some academic careers in certain Catholic institutions.

In this essay, I draw together some of the main issues about the location, practice and identity of Catholics doing practical theology, drawing from the group's

conversation as well as other sources. Where do we locate practical theology in Catholic theology today? What needs to happen in order for the contributions of practical theology to the larger Catholic theological enterprise to be critically engaged? How might practical theology serve as a helpful vantage point to think about Catholic thought and practice? What can practical theology gain by the awakening Catholic presence, and what can Catholic theology gain by awakening to practical theology?

If discipline and curricular categories are the sole focus for identifying practical or pastoral theology in Catholic contexts, we might too easily conclude that there is no practical theology among Catholics. But the fact is that Catholics practice it in every setting where theology is taught.

Curricular and Disciplinary Location

According to Bonnie Miller-McLemore, practical theology can be understood in four ways, depending on where it is done and by whom: "Practical theology refers to an *activity* of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday, a *method* or way of doing theology used by religious leaders and by teachers and students across the curriculum, a *curricular area* in theological education focused on ministerial practice, and, finally, an *academic discipline* pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain these first three enterprises."[4] I will begin my analysis at the end of Miller-McLemore's list, because clearly, if one looks for the fourth category of practical theology in the Catholic context, a well-defined academic discipline, they will be hard pressed to find it. The third feature—practical theology as a curricular area—is more possible to see, though Catholics have commonly referred to it as pastoral theology. It is important to note that, unlike Protestants, Catholics have rarely referred to ministry education curriculums as practical theology, though this is beginning to change. Pastoral theology exists primarily as a curricular heading, but not as a fully formed discipline of theology.[5] Many people continue to use the terms interchangeably, while at the same time recognizing a real difference between them.[6] There are several reasons for the seeming absence of practical and pastoral theology as well-defined and seriously crafted disciplines among Catholic thinkers, and I want to first explore why this is the case. But, as James Sweeney and others demonstrate, this does not mean that practical and pastoral foci are missing, but rather that the way "practical dimensions of theology are conceptualized tends to be different in Catholicism."[7]

First, there is a long-standing tradition about how theology has been organized as a body of knowledge in Catholicism, and issues of practice and pastoral ministry have been a significant part of that history. Prior to the 1960s, Catholic theology was produced primarily, though not exclusively, within and for seminary education, whose sole purpose was the education of priests. The seminary's pedagogy was reflected in the *Ratio studiorum*, an order of studies developed by the Jesuits that has its origins in the post-Tridentine development of seminaries in the sixteenth century. The *Ratio studiorum* was organized into three parts: doctrinal, moral and spiritual theology. Moral theology covered aspects of pastoral practice, because it was that part of theology that defined "the minimum requirements necessary for salvation" and these were largely determined through licit and valid administration and reception of the sacraments.[8] Pastoral practice was learned through the art of casuistry: applying canon law to particular cases in order to assist the student in determining the acceptable decision, even in the most wild of cases (for example, eating frog legs on Lenten Fridays). As T. Howland Sanks notes, "Prior to Vatican II, less emphasis was given to the pastoral skills needed for ministry. Courses in homiletics, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and liturgical practice were almost completely absent from the curriculum of most seminaries. There was no such thing as clinical pastoral education or field education."[9] Nevertheless, the "pastoral" and the "practical" were embedded within a particular Catholic curricular and institutional structure for at least 400 years.

The duties of the priest were taught as an aspect of moral theology because the purpose of moral theology was to guide priests in their sacramental ministry, particularly as confessors in the sacrament of penance. After the Council, moral theology retained its pastoral

focus in the seminary, though there was a decided shift away from the neo-Thomist manualists' approach. Outside the seminary, moral theology advanced quickly in the academy as it sought to address pressing social questions of bioethics, population and sexual ethics, but by and large it left the practice of ministry behind.

However, a new meaning of "pastoral" was emerging, one much broader in scope than the sacramental acts of the ordained. The category "pastoral" and "pastoral theology" shifted significantly at the Second Vatican Council, a council that Pope John XXIII called a "pastoral council." The Council was pivotal in claiming "pastoral" as an ecclesial discourse pertaining to the church's relationship to the world, most notably in *Gaudium et spes*, the only constitution given the title "pastoral."[10] As the document notes, "pastoral" means "resting on doctrinal principles" that "seeks to set forth the relation of the Church to the world and to the men of today"[11] in order to address social issues and "to enter into dialogue with [the world] about all these different problems."[12] Certainly, *Gaudium et spes* meant to broaden the idea of "pastoral" beyond its traditional association with ordained ministers in order to embrace the way in which the entire people of God witness and transform the world. All theology was charged with becoming more open and directed to social and cultural realities—more *pastoral*—rather than closed within traditional scholastic categories that are more essentialist and non-historical. The shift of focus in moral theology, then, must be seen in this light. Theology's embrace of biblical, historical and, especially, patristic studies, along with renewed liturgical theology and practice, and with new dialogue-partners in philosophy, makes the mid-twentieth century one of the most fruitful and productive periods of Catholic thought. Everything seemed possible in the advent of *ressourcement* (the embrace of the historical past, notably the patristic era), and *aggiornamento* (an opening to new ideas and sources in modernity).

The broader understanding of "pastoral" also impacted ministry studies by the mid-1960s in the U.S. Many seminary educators viewed the seminary as physically, socially and intellectually isolated from the university and the world, and were eager to embrace *aggiornamento*, the Council's call to bring the church up to date. Some seminaries operated by religious orders sought affiliations with universities to improve their academic quality and integrity. Catholic seminaries opened their curricula to new areas of study and began to seek membership in educational accrediting agencies such as the Association of Theological Schools, as well as adopting the Masters of Divinity degree in place of the *Ratio studiorum*.

Clarifying doctrine for systematic coherence is not the question animating practical theology. Rather, it is the intelligibility of practice and the ways in which beliefs, sacred narratives, ritual enactments, canons and authorities all cohere—or not—into a self understanding of one's religious identity-in-community.

Attention to new subject matter also began to change seminaries' curricula. The liturgical and religious education movements, both preceding the Second Vatican Council by several decades, were well on their way to being fully formed disciplines in the wake of the Council. Each area had an academic and pastoral dimension; scholars were concerned with identifying the biblical, historical and theological grounds for renewed practice, and they began to open up to the social sciences to explore effective descriptive and empirical methods. Liturgy and preaching slowly expanded in seminary education, and religious education was taking hold in colleges, universities, and summer programs geared toward women religious; diocesan programs in ministry training also expanded.[13] Since the Council, an explosion of information in these areas of ministry has taken place, including the development of professional organizations, conferences, journals and continuing education for ministers.[14] Furthermore, "pastoral theology" is a field that includes pastoral ministers, theologians and bishops' conferences, as well as Vatican and papal statements, all writing and speaking about issues of faith and ecclesial life. All understood themselves to be engaged in pastoral theology as called for by Gaudium et spes, the pastoral constitution. The expanding forms of ministry training, as well as the specialization and professionalization of

particular areas of ministry, were certainly unforeseen outcomes resulting from the Council, and yet these changes mark one of the most significant developments in post-conciliar theological education. "Pastoral" became the purpose and goal of all theology insofar as it claimed theology's role vis-à-vis the community's faith practice *within* modernity. Expansion in ministry education was deeply related to this worldview.

Catholic theology has largely been based on the assumption that getting the doctrines right will ensure right practice. . . . While they clearly believe that right thinking eventuates in right practice, church leaders are also aware that conformity to practice expresses right belief.

Despite the explosion of "pastoral" activity in the wake of Vatican II, pastoral theology never became a serious, well-developed academic discipline. As Peter Phan notes, "It is common knowledge that the nature and task of pastoral theology is highly controverted." [15] Phan argues that pastoral theology has too many meanings and associations, which confuses its scope and purpose, including: the shepherding role of the pastor; clinical pastoral education and pastoral care (the common way Protestants use the term); practical disciplines of ascetical and spiritual theology; and the method termed "theological reflection."

A second factor related to the lack of disciplinary activity was mentioned above: Catholic theology began to move away from the seminary and closer to the university in the 1960s. Pastoral theology became a category in seminary education, but did not develop as an area in university-based theology, which was growing and expanding in all other areas after the Council (for example, bible, history, systematic theology and ethics). According to Earl C. Muller, the collapse of neo-Thomism

> *left the seminaries somewhat adrift though their fundamental purpose, the training of priests and other pastoral ministers, precluded their ever moving in the direction of religious studies. This clear purpose combined with the tendency of seminary faculty to be overworked and under-published has led to a more recent stereotype of the seminaries as "pastoral shops" over and against the universities where "scientific" theology is done, a reversal from the pre-Vatican II situation.*[16]

In many ways pastoral theology was left behind because it had no real place in Catholic university-based theology. It was emerging as a curricular category in seminary education at the point when seminary education was no longer the determining factor of Catholic theology. Of course, the great irony is that Catholic theology was stepping into the modern world precisely at the point that modernity was under threat and the postmodern view was quickly gaining ground.

Pastoral theology has also suffered from a reputation problem, which seems to be a truly catholic (universal) problem.[17] As Katarina Schuth points out, pastoral theology is a relatively new discipline to theological education, and among seminary faculties it is the most controversial, the area about which there is the strongest disagreement and the greatest concern about what and how to teach.[18] Overall, the number of pastoral ministry courses taught since the Council has steadily increased: on average, twenty-four credit hours are given to pastoral ministry courses, with an additional twelve hours of field education.[19] Because of this dramatic change, pastoral theology is viewed as encroaching into the traditional curriculum, often reducing the number of courses taught in systematic or other areas of theology.[20] Schuth reports that twenty percent of the Catholic faculty referred to the regrettable "erosion of the academic" due to the increase in pastoral studies courses.[21] The attitude that pastoral theology has weakened the academic integrity of theology arises from the sense that pastoral theology is not "academic;" it is viewed as process-oriented, in opposition to the rigorous, scientific or theoretical forms of doctrinal theology. The perception is that pastoral theology contains little theological substance itself, but is an application of the ideas established in other areas. Robert Imbelli and Thomas Groome pointed out in 1992 that pastoral theology was deemed less demanding, rigorous and serious,

> *relegated to part-time personnel teaching at odd*

> *hours, consisted of various courses that lacked clear cogent integrated vision. One consequence was that the substantive fields were let off the hook from pastoral questions and could maintain an objective stance in relation to contemporary concerns. Pastoral theology has come to be an "administrative convenience" and a "delivery system for more prestigious theology."*[22]

Of course, there may be some truth to why pastoral theology has not been considered rigorous and intellectually sophisticated. The emergence of a curricular area called pastoral theology did not commence in a discipline called pastoral theology. The discipline of pastoral theology can be located in its parts: in liturgy, religious education, pastoral care or homiletics. However, each part operates independently from any common connection to a discipline called pastoral theology.[23] There is little evidence of pastoral theology as a theological discipline in Catholic discourse: there are no academic journals for pastoral theology, no professional organizations and no graduate programs for a doctorate in pastoral theology. Furthermore, few theologians would identify with pastoral theology. In terms of the practice of ministry, the pastoral as practice never became a respectable arena of scholarly inquiry.

Institutional Location

A critical factor, then, in practical or pastoral theology's recognition in Catholic theology since the Council is its institutional location. There has been a significant shift from theology taught and produced primarily in seminaries to departments of theology in colleges and universities. In the post-World War II American context, the growth in the number and size of Catholic colleges and universities is one of the direct factors leading to theology becoming primarily a university discipline.

Some universities began graduate-level ministry education for religious and laypeople after Vatican II, but, in general, a separate school or department, with a separate mission, was charged with ministry training.[24] Theology departments rarely took up the task, and in some places a dual department (or center or institute) persists today, with two separate faculties, one in "theology" and the other in "pastoral studies." In this way, professional education for ministry, either in seminaries or pastoral institutes, was never the main force or center of Catholic theology. In particular, systematic and moral theology in university theology departments has been the driving force of Catholic theology for most of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. This is much different than the production and location of Protestant theology, which has flourished in seminaries and divinity schools; colleges and universities, many of which lost their religious identity or missions in the twentieth century, have not been centers of theological thought.

It would be most helpful if practical theology were understood not as the opposite of systematic theology, or as the meta or fundamental approach to all theology, but as an approach that brings interesting insights to other approaches and can glean important insights from them.

For Protestants, pastoral and practical theology has largely been located in the seminary. In the past twenty-five years, the identity and practice of practical theology has shifted dramatically, breaking out of the "clerical paradigm"—that had sequestered it to a set of functional concerns about the practice of ministry—to embrace a wider interest and research agenda related to the lived practice of religious people and communities in a pluralistic society (not unlike the vision of *Gaudium et spes*). Catholics who identify with practical theology today do so largely in relationship to the development of practical theology advanced since the 1980s.[25]

If discipline and curricular categories are the sole focus for identifying practical or pastoral theology in Catholic contexts, we might too easily conclude that there is no practical theology among Catholics. But the fact is that Catholics practice it in every setting where theology is taught. For example, some who teach in seminaries and schools of ministry, where the primary concern is the formation and education of priesthood, diaconate or lay ecclesial ministry candidates, teach and engage the practical theology literature. Practical issues

and concerns are also taught in Catholic colleges and universities in undergraduate departments of theology where the postmodern condition for practicing *Catholic* faith is explored, contested and engaged with young adults.

In Catholic graduate theology departments, practical questions reside primarily in research on liturgy, spirituality and ethics, where often the work of practical theology goes on without any explicit identification. While few places use practical theology as a discipline or curricular heading, there are increasing numbers of people who either identify as practical theologians or are engaging research in lived religious practice with attention to research on practice, embodied knowing and performance. In addition, in Catholic Doctor of Ministry programs, practical theology is more likely to appear as a method or approach. One Catholic institution has a doctorate in practical theology (St. Thomas University School of Theology and Ministry in Miami Gardens, Florida).

In Protestant seminaries and nondenominational university divinity schools, Catholic theological perspectives inform questions of political agency, cultural and religious identity, spirituality, social ethics and postmodern constructs of self and world, as well as ministry training. The material and cultural artifacts of Catholic belief and practice are also examined and studied by sociologists, historians and anthropologists in order to understand how believers construct religious meaning and identity, often in more popular forms. Clearly, the categories of practice and interest in the practical are moving across theological and social scientific disciplines regardless of whether or not they intersect with the discipline or literature of practical theology.

Methodological Location

According to Miller-McLemore's categories, Catholics are more likely to associate practical theology with an activity or method. A significant aspect of practical theological thinking among Catholics has taken place at the local or grassroots level, stemming back at least a hundred years to the lay apostolic movements, which focused on both spiritual piety as well as works of mercy and justice in society. The laity grew more actively involved in pastoral outreach to the poor and marginalized as well as in parish ministries related to education and devotions. The wave of theological reflection that developed during the 1970s, and is still prominent in many places today, is a direct descendant from lay apostolic movements and the theology of the laity emerging from the Council. *Gaudium et spes*' pastoral focus on the church's mission in society, together with an emphasis on "full, active, and conscious" participation in the liturgy,[26] brought lay Catholics to a new involvement and responsibility with the church. This pastoral-social emphasis reached across numerous institutions including parishes, grade and high schools, campus ministries, service programs, hospitals and social service agencies—just about any institution owned and operated by religious communities or dioceses. Of course, the church's approach to engaging society culminated in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *pastoral* letters on nuclear war and the economy.[27]

Theological reflection, as a method for thinking critically about faith-in-action, grew out of this ecclesial atmosphere, drenched in the promise of change and transformation. Three main methods emerged at this time: theological reflection, the pastoral circle and praxis-based approaches. Theological reflection, first developed by Evelyn and James Whitehead in the late 1970s and further expanded by Patricia Killen and Robert Kinast, is a method with deep roots in mid-twentieth century Catholic thought.[28] Based largely on the turn to experience seen in the work of Karl Rahner and the correlation methods developed by Paul Tillich and David Tracy, theological reflection is understood as conversation and dialogue between experience and tradition. The pastoral circle, developed by Joseph Holland and Peter Henriot, refers to the method of "see, judge, act," emphasizing observation, interpretation and response. It developed largely out of the Latin American context in which Catholic social teachings on justice were being integrated into the practice of ministry and base Christian communities. Thomas Groome's *Sharing Faith*, the most comprehensive method in Catholic religious education, employs five movements of thought: naming present experience, critically reflecting on experience, engaging scripture and tradition, appropriating the faith through dialectical hermeneutics and deciding how to live.

Each of these approaches relies heavily on hermeneutical theories, drawing the focus on interpretation of texts to the interpretation of experience; their goal was largely fostering the dialogue between text and experience with the purpose of renewing faith-in-action. These methods followed theology's departure from purely theoretical, universal and often static categories in scholasticism, to the adoption of a more historical and practical focus to theology: that good theological thinking leads to faithful action. These methods begin with observing and attending to faith practice, engaging theological

content and drawing this "new" meaning and insight into renewed action. These methods have made a significant contribution to the church's practice of theology as a "practical" endeavor in which all the baptized participate. In turn, these methods shifted the practice of ministry toward enabling and empowering the laity to claim the faith as their own and take it out into the world as a leaven for change. The turn to the modern subject became the central *locus theologicus* and "theology's anthropological turn now caused it to rely heavily on the human and social sciences."[29]

These methods suffer from a critique commonly leveled against *Gaudium et spes*. The pastoral constitution embraced an optimistic view of social transformation, colored largely by the modern belief in social development and progress by people of good will for people of good will. These methods likewise adopted what many view as a naïve and rose-colored view of human persons and their capacity for change, transformation and conversion, toward a faith that can "build up" the reign of God on earth. Like *Gaudium et spes*, methods of theological reflection often lack a rigorous view of sin and the tragic, and they certainly lack the postmodern critique and skepticism about the modern project, especially the capacity of persons to remake society as just and peaceable. Furthermore, these methods trust interpretation as a pure and open process leading to greater insight and purpose, rather than recognizing the systematic distortions built into identity—personal and communal—throughout the theological reflection process.[30]

Models of theological reflection have made interpretation the central action and practice of theology and faith. What they lack is a robust theory of action or practice. This may largely be due to the fact that the "faith" being interpreted was largely intact at the time, and that methods of theological reflection appealed primarily to the generations of Catholics that lived through the changes of Vatican II. They experienced theological reflection as liberation from the rote forms of memorization employed by teachers of the catechism. In this sense, they were very much Roman Catholics, steeped deeply in the cultural faith practices of a community emerging from immigrant Catholicism. Clearly, these faith practices were undergoing change, such as the liturgy or forms of social engagement, but they were not up for grabs. And in that regard, theological reflection served a rightful place in Catholic theology and ministry in a time of great promise and hope, giving people new insight and a voice in relationship to faith practices.

Robert Schreiter identifies two approaches to "catholic," both of which have deep roots in the tradition, and today continue to shape approaches to theology and practice.[31] The first approach defines catholic as "universal" and worldwide, drawing from Ignatuis of Antioch and fully expressed in *Gaudium et spes*' call for the church to embrace the world as the place of theological engagement. The second approach defines catholic as the "fullness of faith, the depository and guarantor" of the faith. As the defender of the true deposit of faith, the second approach is concerned with the inner life of the church as it is expressed fully in liturgy and moral teachings. Its neo-Augustinian view of world sees the culture in crisis and decline and the church as the answer to the world's crisis.

The primary reason for Catholic theology to embrace those who work in the area of practical theology is to gain important insights into the nature of practice.

The first approach is clearly aligned with theological reflection methods, as well as praxis approaches in liberation, feminist and contextual theologies. Theologians working out of a "universal" approach to catholic thought view practices as social and cultural realities, embedded in a local context and culture. They embrace pluralism and difference as positive dimensions of modernity, view identity and culture in constructivist terms and see the world in need of transformation away from oppressive forces that hinder human development. Practices, in this context, are tied to the narrative of being a "pilgrim people," taking Jesus' mission to the people. Within this understanding of "catholic," practical theology finds many conversation partners.

The Dis*location* of the Practical

Given that Catholicism is a tradition filled with practice and practices, it is curious, and a bit ironic, that practical theology, with its primary focus on practice and action, has not found more of a home within Catholic theology. Attitudes toward practical theology

among Catholic theologians can range from indifference (it is Protestant), to a deep bias and suspicion, to some form of recognition. I can point to at least two factors. The first, mentioned earlier, is the way in which theological knowledge is constructed and what counts as theology. The second factor is the current ecclesial cultural setting in which theology is produced, which is characterized much more by Schreiter's second approach to "catholic."

What counts as Catholic theology, which is not dissimilar from Protestant theology, is largely defined within the categories of systematic theology: the major doctrines of the faith have been articulated in creeds, summas and manuals organized around claims about God. In modern Catholic theology, this organization was not replaced or lost in the modern turn to the subject, but continued precisely because of the Enlightenment challenges regarding the existence and legitimacy of claims about God and Christ. In the twentieth century, systematic theology expanded to include ecclesiology, pneumatology and the Trinity, keeping its primary focus on the doctrines of God. Examining the ways Catholic theology is organized in textbooks, departments and professional societies, such as the Catholic Theological Society of America, demonstrates the accepted way in which theological questions are raised, framed and pursued among Catholic theologians.[32] Even among many liberation, feminist and praxis theologians—who all have concerns arising from present-day conditions such as poverty, sexism, immigration and oppression—a primary task has been to raise this concern in relationship to a systematic category or doctrine, and to reframe the doctrine within that realm of experience.

One reason why practical theology makes for a hard fit in Catholic theology is not that it lacks interest in doctrine, but that doctrine is not necessarily where practical theology begins, ends or focuses. Clarifying doctrine for systematic coherence is not the question animating practical theology. Rather, it is the intelligibility of practice and the ways in which beliefs, sacred narratives, ritual enactments, canons and authorities all cohere—or not—into a self understanding of one's religious identity-in-community. It is the way in which doctrine and belief are embodied and enacted in a lived faith that most sparks the interest of the practical theologian, which does not always fit neatly and coherently into systematic categories.

As has often been assumed in practical theology, the place to begin is with experience or practice. However, where one begins is not as essential today as the realization that the two are intrinsically connected in multiple and complex ways. Practical theologians strive to engage concrete lived realities and the theories embedded in them, as well as theories outside them, in an effort to help understand the life lived in and through practice. What Catholic theology has failed to grasp is that people's lived faith does not conform to precise systematic categories, nor does lived religious practice derive from a logically coherent set of ideas. Practice (whether it is what ministers or people engage in as they live their faith in a postmodern pluralistic setting), is a much varied, complex, fragmented and incoherent set of constructions, and it probably always has been. Catholic theology has largely been based on the assumption that getting the doctrines right will ensure right practice.

In order to understand, analyze, critique and form this level of practice, practical theology has turned to the social sciences as a dialogue partner.[33] The construction of practical theological insight takes place within an interdisciplinary conversation that seeks to illuminate practice in all its complexity. These resources are seen as friend, not foe, and in this regard practical theology as it is practiced today finds a home within Schreiter's first approach to "catholic"—one that is open to the world of thought and action beyond religious thought. In turn, practical theology turns to multiple sources to critique practice, holding it up to critical scrutiny by a wide range of sources in philosophy and cultural studies.

Some Catholic pastoral theologians view practical theology as emerging in a particular historical context in relationship to changes in systematic theology and modern thought. The French pastoral theologian, Henri-Jérôme Gagey, points out that practical theology emerges from Catholic theology's embrace of history in place of scholasticism's metaphysics. Its focus on the practices of the church, analyzed by history and the social sciences and in conversation with philosophy, is "supported by the resources of, and responding to issues and questions in, systematic theology."[34] Practical theology emerges as a "project" in which "systematic theology had to discover its own fundamentally practical orientation." Protestant theologians have made a similar point about practical theology: it becomes a self-conscious approach to theology precisely when religious thought and practice are seriously threatened by the modern project, and as religious communities undergo radical change as Christendom fades into history. Communities under threat look more closely at what they are doing, and not just at what they are thinking.

Catholic theology differs from Protestant theology

in at least one important way: how ecclesial authority functions in the community of discourse and practice. The "Roman Catholic" tradition is defined, to a large extent, by claims to magisterial authority in the teaching offices of the papacy and episcopacy expressed through a wide range of papal and conciliar documents, the *Code of Canon Law*, and a history of moral and sacramental doctrines defined largely in juridical terms. Catholic belief, of course, asserts that the Roman tradition is more than the magisterium, its pronouncements, and laws; certainly the church is the whole people of God, the *Christifideles* and the priesthood of all believers. Yet, even shifts toward more expansive notions of the church have not changed the fundamental claims to authority and how it is exercised within the Catholic Church. In fact, in the face of numerous problems facing the Catholic Church today, most notably the decline in church attendance as well as belief in central teachings (most recently in the United States), the magisterial response has been to exercise a new wave of magisterial authority. As Catholic belief and practice has shifted away from "official" church teaching, church authorities have determined that it is necessary to enforce "correct" Catholic teaching and enforce faith as assent to belief.

Schreiter's description of the second approach to "catholic" theology and practice critiques the more progressive movement of theology since Vatican II. Schreiter points out that the second approach seeks to diagnose culture and context, critiquing what is not of the gospel; it embraces a unifying view of Christian life over modernity's naïve sense of progress and optimism; it seeks to form people by liturgical and spiritual practices into the form of Christ; it views practice as largely within Catholic resources for spiritual, liturgical and prayer practices; and it finds little need for the social sciences. In the past thirty years, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has exerted increasing pressure on theologians whose "critique" of the tradition is deemed false and dangerous. While they clearly believe that right thinking eventuates in right practice, church leaders are also aware that conformity to practice expresses right belief. Current debates in the United States over politicians receiving communion or the changes in the English translation of the liturgy can be viewed against this backdrop—practices that reflect certain beliefs regarded as immoral, improper and false must be brought in line with the true deposit of the faith.

Locating Practical Theology Today

Thus far, I have been describing and mapping where I see practical theology located on the landscape of Catholic theology. I would like to conclude by offering several areas where I think it can serve Catholic theology in the United States in a more creative way.

Practical theology is a way people think theologically within everyday life, a way for ministers to study and understand the practice of ministry in relationship to changing faith conditions and a disciplined method of inquiry by researchers in seminaries and universities.

First, I would like to see practical theology grow and mature as a *disciplined practice of intellectual and scholarly work* among Catholic theologians.[35] I am not advocating that practical theology be recognized as a "discipline" alongside bible, ethics or history (at least not at this point), but that it be recognized as a disciplined practice in theology that brings both rigorous methods and substantive content that can contribute to the larger theological enterprise.[36] In this way, practical theology is engaged as an exciting intellectual movement that can inform a wide range of intellectual work, regardless of the discipline to which one claims allegiance. For those who do claim an allegiance to a theological discipline because of vocational commitment, doctoral training or intellectual and personal friendships with other practical theologians, these commitments and identities should not, and need not, be penalized in Catholic settings. In other words, even though practical theology lacks a disciplinary and curricular location in many institutions, the first step is to recognize that practical theologians exist within the Catholic community. This is, of course, an issue of power and legitimacy.[37]

Catholic theology is characterized by many different approaches that emerged and developed over the last 40 years; in fact, there is a remarkably "catholic" approach to theology currently in place. Certainly, liberation, feminist, contextual, Asian, African and, more recently, communicative theologies are kin and cousins

to practical theology in important ways, especially their commitment to praxis and theology's role in a revitalized faith for the mission of the church. Even though these approaches to theology fall largely within the category of systematic theology, there is a greater capacity for them to embrace notions of practice and lived faith than before. It would be most helpful if practical theology were understood not as the opposite of systematic theology, or as the meta or fundamental approach to all theology, but as an approach that brings interesting insights to other approaches and can glean important insights from them. What we need is greater cross-fertilization between approaches, rather than creating silos of intellectual groups identified by like-minded interests, favorite philosophers or hermeneutical methods. What we need to embrace is a "catholic approach" to Catholic theology in which all approaches are offered at the table. Of course, it must be recognized that just as there are a plurality of approaches within Catholic theology today, there are also a plurality of approaches within practical theology, which is viewed by those within the discipline as a necessary and creative tension.

Until Catholics become more serious about doctoral-level training in the discipline of practical theology, it will not become a curricular category or discipline. This was certainly the case in "pastoral theology" as it related to ministry education. Even today, there is a surprising dearth of doctorates in pastoral theology (especially in homiletics and pastoral care), and one would think that Catholic theological educators would be more concerned about where they will find present and future hires.[38] A 2001 Auburn Center study reported that the practical curricular areas across Association of Theological Schools will experience the largest number of retirements in the next ten to fifteen years (60 percent of practical theology faculty members are over the age of 52).[39] In examining practical theology faculty hires from 1992 through 2000, the study revealed that Catholics are in an alarming situation:[40] Twenty-two Catholic schools hired new faculty in pastoral positions over the eight-year period whereas Protestant schools hire new practical theology faculty at a much higher rate. Catholics hire the largest number of part-time pastoral theologians (38 percent) as compared to Protestants (10 percent) and are less likely to hire pastoral theologians in tenure-track positions (85 percent were contract hires) or with doctorates (18 percent had doctorates).[41] Within the top suppliers of doctoral degrees in practical areas, only two Catholic schools are listed, accounting for 3.8 percent of the hires.[42] The numbers would suggest that Catholic theological education is in a crisis with regards to hiring in pastoral theology. In fact, though, the opposite is true: few schools experience the current situation as a crisis because this is the way pastoral theologians have always been hired in Catholic seminaries and theological schools. The development of strong doctoral programs in practical theology, or programs that are engaged with practical theology as it relates to the practices of ministry, is obviously needed.

What has more chance of changing Catholic practical theology are the numbers of Catholics currently enrolled in Protestant practical theology doctoral programs.[43] However, Catholic candidates trained in Protestant practical theology programs will not necessarily be formed in the ecclesial culture and pastoral thinking that shape Catholic ministry, and they may find the adjustment to Catholic theological education or undergraduate teaching quite difficult. On the other hand, if it is correct that many Catholic practical theologians will be educated in Protestant practical theology programs, they will most likely identify as practical theologians and perhaps find ways of introducing a newly conceived practical theology into Catholic theological education.

The primary reason for Catholic theology to embrace those who work in the area of practical theology is to gain important insights into the nature of practice. Don Browning has noted that practical theological thinking begins when practices break down, when people are forced to remake faith practices.[44] In the United States, Catholics are certainly facing a breakdown of practices, which is often mistaken as a rejection of doctrine and authority. There is a growing rift between highly idealized theological constructs and the actual lived reality of Catholics. The crisis in the United States Catholic Church is clearly one of practice, and yet the great irony is that Catholics continue to report high levels of identity. How is this possible? Is this a new historical phenomenon or not? How long can people tolerate the dissonance between identity and practice?

Perhaps the problem is that the practices themselves have lost their reasonableness—some things just do not practically make sense any more. It is not that people always assented to all the beliefs in the past and now they do not but that the reasonableness of the practices that constitute the moral and spiritual landscape of "everyday" Catholics is gone. Using Charles Taylor's terms, the Catholic "social imaginary" has disappeared, thereby leaving the practices without a religious imaginary to support them.

The separation of identity and practice is also

prominent in theologies of ordained and lay ministry. The church has long maintained a substance ontology to explain ordained ministry, forcing a separation between being (the essence of the person that is changed and is unchangeable), and the doing (the functions that constitute the work). One obvious crisis in ministry is incompetence, which a substance or relational ontology cannot address because incompetence stems from inadequate practice. An obvious dissonance persists when men claim a vocation to the priesthood or episcopacy without the requisite gifts that correspond to the ministerial practice. In a highly educated and professional society, people have low tolerance for incompetence, regardless of the claims to authority. If ministerial vocation was viewed as the integration of identity and practice, not the separation of the two, we would call forth and ordain a much different set of leaders.

Catholic theology does not need to embrace the practical theology enterprise in order to understand the importance of studying and understanding practice and practices. Certainly a tradition rich in liturgical, moral and spiritual practices could be leading the conversation about what is practice. One of the important identifying markers of practical theology is its interest and commitment to stand up-close and appreciate the faith as it is lived, the way in which people construct religious meaning and community regardless of the amount of dissonance in the environment.

Catholics engaged in practical theology bring to their work central theological commitments related to practice: a sense of the sacramental in relationship to creation, the incarnation and the Christian community; a social and communal theological anthropology; liturgical and spiritual practice as formations of the self; the witness of practice in intentional communities; the mystical tradition; and the communion of saints. The force of these ideas can be found throughout Catholic thought, including both Schreiter's first and second approaches, and they offer a particular vantage point that can often be missing in practical theology.

These suggestions only begin to identify what might happen if the "slumbering giant" that Stephen Pattison has noticed wakes up. In this regard, if Bonnie Miller-McLemore is right, practical theology is a way people think theologically within everyday life, a way for ministers to study and understand the practice of ministry in relationship to changing faith conditions and a disciplined method of inquiry by researchers in seminaries and universities. The interplay of theology across multiple contexts, identities and institutions is precisely what practical theology can attend to in a disciplined and creative way.

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Endnotes

1. Stephen Pattison, "Foreword," in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), ix.
2. Pattison, "Foreword," x.
3. The group included Susan Abraham, Thomas Beaudoin, Lynn Bridgers, Kathleen Cahalan, Edward Foley, Bryan Froehle, Ray Webb and Terry Veling, who currently teaches in Australia but was trained and taught practical theology in the United States.
4. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Practical Theology," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Dawn DeVries and Brian Gerrish (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, forthcoming).
5. Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Pastoral Theology or Practical Theology? Limits and Possibilities" in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), 99-116.
6. Sweeney, Simmonds, and Lonsdale (eds.), *Keeping Faith in Practice,* 2-3.
7. Sweeney, Simmonds, and Lonsdale (eds.), *Keeping Faith in Practice,* 3.
8. Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Formed in the Image of Christ: The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), 33-60.
9. T. Howland Sanks, "Education for Ministry Since Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984), 489.
10. The Second Vatican Council has two dogmatic constitutions (*Lumen gentium* and *Dei verbum*), one pastoral constitution (*Gaudium et spes*) and one constitution with no descriptor (*Sacrosanctum concilium*).
11. Austin Flannery (ed), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1987), 903. n.a. As one commentator notes, "If there was one sentence repeated more often than any other at the Second Vatican Council it was: 'This council is pastoral in its scope, objectives, and aims.'" John M. Fearns, "Pastoral Formation and Seminary Training," *NCEA Bulletin* (August 1968), 36.
12. Pope Paul VI, Promulgation on the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7

December 1965), 3.

13. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) studies Catholic ministry formation programs that prepare men and women for ministry as priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers. In 2009, CARA reported 46 theologates in the United States that have a combined enrollment of 3,357; 167 dioceses with formation programs for deacons, with a total enrollment of 2,319; 17,538 lay ecclesial ministry candidates were enrolled in 273 lay ecclesial ministry formation programs. Candidates for the priesthood generally receive the Masters of Divinity degree; deacons enrolled in diocesan formation programs receive a certificate; two-thirds (69%) of lay ecclesial ministers are enrolled in certificate programs, about 30% in degree programs. Mary L. Gautier, *Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollments: Statistical Overview for 2008-2009* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, April 2009), 1, 19-20, and 25.
14. Among Catholics, academic disciplines have risen in relation to catechesis and liturgy, but the disciplines of pastoral care and homiletics are not as developed as they are in Protestant theology. Along with disciplinary identity and expertise, ministry has witnessed the development of academic and professional organizations, each with their own national and regional conferences, academic and professional journals, and degree offerings at both the master and doctorate level, including doctor of ministry and philosophy degrees. Consider the "field" of catechesis: there exist journals for practitioners (*Catechist, Liturgical Catechesis)*, professional organizations (National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry), as well as journals and organizations for scholars (*Religious Education*, and the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education). Catechists and faith formation directors can be certified according to the national certification standards for lay ecclesial ministers, and may obtain advanced degrees at a number of Catholic universities. Specialization within religious education is also a feature of the field. Boston College offers a masters degree in religious education with a concentration in "total community catechesis" or "high school religion teaching" or a masters of education in educational administration. The school also offers a doctorate in theology and education.
15. Peter Phan, "Karl Rahner as Pastoral Theologian," *Living Light* 30 (Summer 1994), 5-6.
16. Earl C. Muller, "Afterword," in *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Patrick W. Carey and Earl C. Muller (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 368.
17. Scholars from Europe note the fledging, underdeveloped nature of Catholic pastoral theology. See Sweeney, Simmonds, and Lonsdale (eds.), *Keeping Faith in Practice,* 1-3.
18. Katarina Schuth, *Reason for the Hope: The Future of Roman Catholic Theologates* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 171-84. Schuth makes a similar observation about seminary faculty: "The question of precisely *what* should be taught is much debated….How important and central a pastoral emphasis should be in the curriculum is an area of strong disagreement. A significant minority of faculty perceives that greater demands for spiritual and pastoral training since Vatican II have eroded the academic program. These faculty believe that the essential task of theological education is to prepare seminarians intellectually and not to train them in ministerial skills." Katarina Schuth, "Theological Faculty and Programs in Seminaries," in *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Patrick W. Carey and Earl C. Muller (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 174.
19. Schuth notes that the increase in both moral and pastoral courses reflects "changes in what congregations are expecting of their priests and lay ministers." Schuth, *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition,* 171. For a summary of credit distribution in the Master of Divinity programs see: Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999)*,* 156.
20. The Auburn Center reports that theological faculty teaching in Practical Studies constitutes about 27% of faculties. Religious Education faculty members are listed separately, accounting for about 4% of faculty. Taken together, faculty in practical studies and religious education account for the largest number of faculty, though Bible and History taken together would exceed these areas. Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Katarina Schuth, "Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty," *Auburn Studies*, no. 10 (February 2005), 5.
21. Schuth, *Reason for the Hope*, 171. Interestingly, the same attitude is not attached to the growth of biblical studies in theological education, which has consumed considerable aspects of the curriculum as well as faculty teaching positions. Biblical studies are viewed as more objective and scientific due to the discipline's historical-critical commitments.
22. Imbelli and Groome argue that pastoral theology is a "self-conscious perspective on the contemporary life of the Church and the living out of Christian faith in today's world." Robert P. Imbelli and Thomas H. Groome, "Signposts towards a Pastoral Theology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992),133-34.
23. Edward Farley claims that specialization on theological faculties is the "most powerful structure at work in faculty life." Specialization determines faculty identity and loyalty to such a strong degree that faculty can be suspicious of the academic content and rigor of other disciplines. Such suspicion leads to the feeling that other faculty members do not appreciate or understand one's field. Edward Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change: A

Reflection on Faculty Specialization," *Christian Century* 114 (February 5, 1995), 133-43. The Dutch practical theologian, Gerben Heitink, argues that a "moderate differentiation" among the subdisciplines is necessary in practical theology, but that they must function with a "theoretical unity that gives way to a degree of differentiation." He advocates a theory of action as practical theology's theoretical unity. Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 244-48.

24. Three examples include Loyola University of Chicago's Institute of Pastoral Studies, Boston College's Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry and Fordham University's Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education.
25. Dana Wright, "The Contemporary Renaissance of Practical Theology in the United States: The Past, Present, and Future of a Discipline in Creative Ferment," *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Volume 6, Issue 2, (2002), 288-319.
26. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (4 December 1963), §14 in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1984).
27. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983) and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**,** *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy***,** (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, **1986).**
28. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); Patricia O'Connell Killen, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1994); Robert Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological Reflection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980); Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991).
29. James Sweeney, CP, "Catholic Theology and Practice Today," in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), 18.
30. Tom Beaudion, *Witness to Dispossession: The Vocation of a Postmodern Theologian* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).
31. Robert Schreiter, CPPS, "Pastoral Theology as Contextual: Forms of Catholic Pastoral Theology Today," in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), 64-79.
32. The shifting ground of Catholic theology was obvious in the 2006 reorganization of category slots at the Catholic Theological Society of America. In recognition of the growing areas of Catholic thought beyond the traditional systematic categories, conference organizers first removed practical theology as a group and then returned it to the conference.
33. See Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLeMore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon, and Robert M. Franklin, "Appendix: Hermeneutic Social Science and Practical Theology," in *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 335-383.
34. Henri-Jérôme Gagey, "Pastoral Theology as a Theological Project," in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), 87.
35. Bonne Miller-McLemore notes that several contemporary theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, make no mention of practical theology in their analyses of contemporary theology. She notes that Robert Schreiter in his important book, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997) appears "oblivious of practical theology. It appears nowhere in the index or text itself. When he lists and evaluates new kinds of local theologizing, such as indigenous and contextual theology, he does not mention it. As a Catholic theologian, practical theology likely has an unclear, perhaps even unwelcome connotation." Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Politics of Practical Theological Knowledge," unpublished paper, July 2009. Likewise, Terrance Tilley in his book *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) argues that tradition is a set of "enduring practices," but he makes little reference to the literature in practical theology.
36. Gagey makes a similar point, claiming practical theology as a "project" within theology. See Gagey, "Pastoral Theology as a Theological Project," in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, eds. James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), 82.
37. Sweeney, "Catholic Theology and Practice Today," 48.
38. Schuth states that more than half of seminary rectors and presidents reported concern about the capacity of seminary graduates to respond to the needs of the church today. "More than half of them pointed to the difficulty posed by the immense scope of ministry required by the more than sixty million Catholics,…'inadequate attention given to preparation for ministry in the Hispanic community,' 'an incapacity to train flexible, resilient spiritual leaders who call forth and empower the gifts of diverse leaders in a community,' and 'lack of attention to lay ministry and preaching.'" Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates,*

and the Future of Church Ministry, 65.

39. A 1992 National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) report states that between1990-1992 about one-third of new positions in seminaries were in pastoral areas (12 out of 39); about one-third of replacements were also in the pastoral areas (36 out of 103). National Catholic Educational Association, *The Recruitment and Retention of Faculty in Roman Catholic Theological Seminaries* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1992), 60.
40. Schuth notes that hiring in moral theology and pastoral theology, especially preaching, pastoral counseling and Hispanic ministry, are very difficult for seminaries. Schuth, *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition*, 172. For a discussion of field educators' qualifications, see Schuth, *Seminaries Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry*, 197ff.
41. In the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) study on theological faculty, seminary administrators had the most difficulty hiring in homiletics, resulting in either leaving the post open or using part-time faculty. In faculty searches, homiletics had the most applicants apply who lacked sufficient qualifications. *The Recruitment and Retention of Faculty in Roman Catholic Theological Seminaries,* 62-63.
42. "Hard to Find: Searching for Practical Faculty in the 1990s," *Auburn Center Background Report 8* (January 2002), 3-7.
43. In the past few years, doctoral programs have been started at University of St. Thomas, Miami Gardens, Florida; Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee; Boston School of Theology, Boston University, Boston, Massachussets; Duke Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, .
44. Don S. Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1991), 6.

The Implications of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue for Seminary Formation

Dr. Daniel A. Keating

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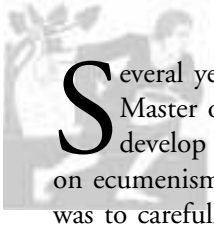

Several years ago, as our seminary was revising the Master of Divinity curriculum, I was asked to develop a syllabus and course proposal for a class on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. My first step was to carefully comb *The Program for Priestly Formation* (*PPF*), 5th edition, to see what the bishops were expecting from such a course. What I found, first of all, were three general statements that express the church's mind.

> *The Catholic Church in the United States continues to be firmly committed to and engaged in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. (§12)*
> *[Seminarians] also need to know, appreciate, and learn how to work within the ecumenical and interfaith context that forms a backdrop for life in the United States and for the Catholic Church in this nation. (§239)*
> *[Pastoral Formation should inculcate] a missionary spirit, zeal for evangelization, and ecumenical commitment. (§280)*

What these selections secure is the church's ongoing commitment to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, the need to teach seminarians to work in these contexts and the need to draw forth commitment to the cause of Christian unity.

In two places, the *PPF* offers a more developed instruction on formation specifically in the field of *ecumenism*. The first, under the heading "Graduate Theology," states the need for teaching sound principles of ecumenism and engaging seminarians in the ecumenical imperative:

What these selections [from the Program of Priestly Formation] secure is the church's ongoing commitment to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, the need to teach seminarians to work in these contexts and the need to draw forth commitment to the cause of Christian unity.

> *Theology studied in a seminary and destined to contribute to the mission of the Church through priestly ministry must necessarily be concerned about restoring Christian unity. Theological studies must impart an adequate grasp of the Catholic principles on ecumenism. The ecumenical imperative that flows from the prayer of Christ for his flock and the renewed vision of the Second Vatican Council demand this focus. (§163)*

The second, under the heading "Intellectual Formation for the Theologate," specifies the kinds of topics

that should be included in a course on ecumenism:

> *The core should include an introductory course in ecumenism that treats the Catholic Church's commitment to the principles of ecumenism, the fundamental role of ecumenical dialogue, and current ecumenical issues. In addition, ecumenism should be fully integrated into other courses, thus permeating the theological curriculum. Issues concerning interreligious dialogue also should be discussed. Particularly important is an awareness of the world religions and their relationship to Christianity. This is especially true of Judaism, Islam, and certain Asian religions. (§216)*

With these directives in view, I set out to develop a syllabus and a course schedule for a class entitled "Foundations in Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue." The course was accepted by the Theology Faculty (with helpful modifications), and I have now taught the class three times to third-year seminarians and graduate lay students. What I hope to offer here are the following:

- convictions about forming seminarians in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue
- a practical overview and evaluation of the class itself and
- reflections on the wider implications of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue for seminary formation.

The Need for a Class on Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

The need for a class specifically covering ecumenism and interreligious dialogue has become ever more clear to me. Each time I teach the class, I take a poll of the students: How many have ever read the Vatican Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*? How many have read the encyclical of John Paul II on Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*? On average, ten percent of the students have read the former and even fewer have read the latter. Simply put, apart from this class, seminarians would probably never have any direct access to the church's teachings on these important matters. It is most unlikely that they will take the time to work through these teachings once they are ordained and active in ministry.

This also means that there are probably many priests in active ministry who have never had any explicit formation or teaching in these areas. Where do they gain their views on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue? Very likely from personal experience (whatever this may have been), from impressions or from occasional comments and perspectives from those whom they look to as authorities. If the church is to engage the areas of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue with the zeal and understanding called for by the bishops, then seminarians are in need of a deep engagement with the foundational teaching of the magisterium on these subjects. This foundational course is not sufficient by itself, but it is a necessary step toward gaining the proper knowledge and attitudes that will shape the seminarians' engagement with other Christians and with members of other religions.

The aim is to present these topics not simply as subjects on their own, but in the context of the church's overall mission and commitment to the New Evangelization. . . . the course is especially concerned with magisterial teaching from the Second Vatican Council to the present.

Before we plunge into the course material on the first day of class, I speak to the students about the need many experience for a kind of "conversion" in the area of ecumenism. The need for such a conversion on the part of Catholics is embedded in the church's teaching (see *Ut Unum Sint*, 2). Just as Peter needed to be shown how to "see" things differently regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into the body of Christ (Acts 11), so today we often need a kind of conversion to see with different eyes those who have a real, but imperfect, communion with us. One of the chief vehicles I recommend for moving in this direction is prayer for other Christians and for other churches and ecclesial communities. I invite the students to take on the church's mind and (if need be) to see with new eyes.

Syllabus and Student Outcomes

The course description is as follows:

This course provides foundations for a Catholic understanding of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in the context of the Church's overall mission and commitment to the New Evangelization. It will focus on Catholic principles for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue as proposed by the Second Vatican Council and the Church's magisterial teaching. The course will cover the actual practice of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in the past century and will provide a basic knowledge of non-Catholic Christians and the major world religions, especially Judaism and Islam.

Several elements of the course description are worthy of note. First, the aim is to present these topics not simply as subjects on their own, but in the context of the church's overall mission and commitment to the New Evangelization. Questions on how ecumenism and interreligious dialogue can be reconciled with mission will inevitably arise, and it is best to deal with these challenging questions in a straightforward manner. Second, the course is especially concerned with magisterial teaching from the Second Vatican Council to the present—this is the core of the class. Third, historical context and historical knowledge play an important role. We need to know where we have been and how we got here if we are to contribute to greater unity and common activity going forwards.

The student outcomes listed below specify the general goals for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and are aimed to aid in the process of assessment:

1. To understand, be able to explain and be committed to Catholic principles concerning ecumenism. (How the church regards and relates to non-Catholic Christians.)
2. To understand, be able to explain and be committed to Catholic principles concerning interreligious dialogue. (How the church regards and relates to other major religions, especially Judaism and Islam.)
3. To gain a basic knowledge of the history of Christian division and the views of other churches and ecclesial communities.
4. To develop a conviction of the value of working for Christian unity.
5. To understand the essential elements of the major world religions (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and to be aware of key issues in contemporary interreligious dialogue.
6. To be able to integrate Catholic principles for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue with the church's understanding of mission and the task of the New Evangelization.

On the final day of the term, I review the student outcomes with the class in order to show how we have pursued these outcomes and to ask the students if they think we have in fact achieved them.

[H]aving a course dedicated to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is a great step forward. It sharpens and focuses these areas, puts the students in direct touch with the church's teaching and it achieves . . . genuine growth in knowledge of other Christians and other religions, and real change in attitude toward the importance of working in these fields.

Course Content and Outline

The course is roughly divided into two parts, with ecumenism taking up just over half of the class schedule (which reflects the accent that the *PPF* puts on ecumenism). First, we do some historical work, working through a schema that shows the history of Christian division—when did the divisions occur, what were the main causes, and what are the specific groups that emerged? This covers both the divisions in the East in the first millennium and the divisions in the West in the second.

Next, we tread a path through the main magisterial documents, beginning with *Unitatis Redintegratio*. We briefly touch upon the *Ecumenical Directory* and the

Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Those Engaged in Pastoral Work. And finally, with some care, we work through the encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*. The aim is to both teach the students how to read magisterial documents and to ensure that they grasp in some depth the striking claims that the church makes about the task of ecumenism. In particular, it is crucial to show how the church confidently confesses her own self-understanding and at the same time generously engages with other Christians in what Pope John Paul II calls "the ecumenical venture" (*Ut Unum Sint*, 3).

[T]here is a tendency to consider theology, mission, spirituality, and so forth, solely within a Catholic context. The church's perspective on ecumenism, however, requires that we begin to think of other Christians as—in some important sense—"inside" the reality of the church, even if this communion is imperfect.

The second part of the class, on interreligious dialogue, begins with two short Vatican II documents; one on other religions (*Nostra Aetate*), and the other on religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*). These texts provide the basic foundation for what follows. Special emphasis is placed on the church's relationship to Judaism as we review the basic teaching on how the church both understands and speaks about Judaism in the present time. Following this, we consider Islam and then more briefly the Eastern religions. The class cannot pretend to furnish a full study of any of these great traditions; the goal is to gain a basic knowledge so that as Catholics we can begin to engage people of other religions wisely with the church's mind.

To close the section on Interreligious Dialogue, we examine the relationship between dialogue and mission using the text *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) and consider the nest of theological issues that attends this area. The main questions I ask are: What are sound theological principles for interreligious dialogue? How do genuine dialogue and mission go together? This is the point where the greatest integration must take place, when the student must labor to put together, theologically, the various truths that are often held to be in contradiction.

Assessment

The crucial question of assessment is still in embryonic form—there is a great deal of ground to be gained. For assessment *within the class itself*, I use three means. For the historical sections and the parts dealing with comparative studies, I employ three quizzes to assess whether the students have mastered the basic information. The quizzes have been very helpful both in showing me (and them) what the students have understood and where the main points of confusion remain. We review the quizzes together and go back over any material with which the students have struggled.

For assessing the students' grasp of the main documents, I make use of three short position papers. In these, the student must mark out a key topic from the document, describe it and raise some important issue concerning it. This is not just descriptive, but requires that the student think about the area and attempt to penetrate it to some degree. This is meant to assess whether students can explain the church's teaching and raise issues and questions surrounding it.

A third form of assessment is more indirect: I run the classes on the main texts in a seminar format, where I invite the students to lead the discussion by stating what the main points of each section are. On the one hand, I am attempting to get them more active; on the other, I want to see if they can read magisterial texts with understanding and explain them with skill. Most of the students are not proficient at this, but they make noteworthy progress during the course of the class.

In order to see if the students are in fact grasping the foundations of the church's teaching, I will occasionally interrupt the normal flow of class and present the students with a short excerpt from a contemporary ecumenical writing (for example, the addresses of Pope Benedict XVI to the Lutherans and Orthodox during his visit to Germany). I ask the students to locate examples of the church's ecumenical principles and practices in the given text.

Finally, I will periodically invite any students who so desire to offer testimony about the impact the course

is having on the way that they are thinking or acting toward other Christians and toward members of other religions. Aside from often being inspirational, these testimonies give voice to what the students are experiencing and allow other students to benefit from the experience of others. These short personal reflections display the fact that ecumenism is a real life activity that must find expression outside the classroom.

Wider Implications

In closing, I would like to offer several comments on some wider implications for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in seminary formation.

First, having a course dedicated to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is a great step forward. It sharpens and focuses these areas, puts the students in direct touch with the church's teaching and it achieves some or all of the goals of the course: genuine growth in knowledge of other Christians and other religions, and real change in attitude toward the importance of working in these fields.

Second, in Catholic seminaries, and more widely in Catholic culture, there is a significant need for true knowledge of other Christians and other religions. Too often, even in the seminary context, we live with easy generalizations and caricatures. I have often heard a line like, "Protestants believe X," when normally different Protestants believe very different things about "X" and some of them often agree with Catholics. A specific course on ecumenism can be a great aid toward achieving ecumenical and interfaith knowledge, but broader occasional events for the entire seminary population will also contribute importantly to genuine knowledge.

Third, there is a natural tendency within the seminary to see the world bounded by the visible church and to consider everyone else to be generically "outside" of us. In other words, there is a tendency to consider theology, mission, spirituality, and so forth, solely within a Catholic context. The church's perspective on ecumenism, however, requires that we begin to think of other Christians as—in some important sense—"inside" the reality of the church, even if this communion is imperfect. Further, the bishops have instructed that "ecumenism should be fully integrated into other courses, thus permeating the theological curriculum" (*PPF* §216). If the various subject areas could be opened up—even a little—to display how they can be informed and strengthened by ecumenical interaction with others, this would paradoxically strengthen the students' grasp on a specifically Catholic approach to ecumenical and interfaith dialog, while also showing how the Catholic approach is related to other approaches.

To push this last point a bit further, I believe we have not yet wrestled with how the "ecumenical venture" is meant to shape and form the Catholic Church's own life and pilgrimage. Pope John Paul II strikingly rejected the idea that ecumenism is a kind of "appendix" to the church's activity, or a side-alley for the specialist. Rather, he called the whole church and all its members to embrace the quest of unity and to participate in it as fully as possible according to one's station and ability.

> *Ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of "appendix" which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does (Ut Unum Sint, 20).*

How do we begin to move toward this reality in the context of seminary formation? My own experience is that when we begin to take on the church's recommended posture toward other Christians and members of other religions, when we set out on the path of deeper conversion and repentance and when we adopt the posture of "confident humility" that emerges from the church's teaching, our very grasp of Catholic theology as a whole is affected and enriched. True ecumenism is not a matter of compromise, negotiation or simple diplomacy. It is engaging together the concern for truth and striving toward the final goal of full visible unity among those who call on the name of Christ. As we do this well, led by the Spirit and following the foundations wisely given by the church, the result is not the diminishment or narrowing of Catholic faith, but great enrichment in what we already know, and progress—however slight—toward that full unity for which Jesus prayed.

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BOOK REVIEW

Liturgy 101: Sacraments and Sacramentals

Daniel G. Van Slyke, STL, STD
Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 2010
Reviewed by Roger W. Nutt, STL, STD

Students and professors in the area of sacramental theology suffer from an unfortunate lack of recent books that treat liturgical topics and all seven sacraments in a single volume. There is no shortage of tomes on the liturgy in general or a specific liturgical topic, and there are many fine volumes on individual sacraments. To the great detriment of the church's liturgy and sacramental practice, however, sacramental and liturgical theology have become, for the most, disembodied. *Liturgy 101*: *Sacraments and Sacramentals* by Dr. Daniel Van Slyke of the University of Dallas makes a needed contribution towards the reunification of liturgical and sacramental theology.

The book is divided into eight helpful chapters: there is an introductory chapter on the nature and principles of the liturgy and seven subsequent chapters devoted to each of the seven sacraments respectively. *Liturgy 101* draws heavily on primary theological sources including Sacred Scripture, the major documents of the pre- and post-conciliar pontificates on the liturgy and the sacraments, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Code of Canon Law*, the decrees of the Council of Trent and the documents of Vatican II.

The chapters on the individual sacraments are divided logically into sections that move from the basic biblical foundation of the sacrament under consideration to the essential rite of each sacrament, the effects specific to each sacrament and the diverse contexts and disputes associated with each of the sacraments. For example, the chapter on Baptism includes a brief but insightful discussion of the theological principles underlying the Catholic Church's position on infant Baptism, which includes pointed biblical, magisterial and patristic material. Moreover, the chapter on the Eucharist, in addition to offering a helpful exposition of basic Eucharistic doctrine, provides a detailed section on the Eucharistic sacrifice that clarifies common confusions over the church's teaching on this matter.

Liturgy 101 is written at a level that makes it applicable to a wide range of theological instruction. This book will serve well in a general doctrinal course in which the liturgy and the sacraments make up just one part of the course. It will also be of value in a semester-long course on the sacraments in which the chapters of the book can serve as an overarching foundation that will hold together supplemental readings from ancient and modern authors. The book is well integrated with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other magisterial documents, and can be used as a foundational point of reference from which more speculative works on the sacraments can be considered.

Liturgy 101 is a clear and concise introductory volume, but it is by no means superficial. This well-researched volume manifests indeed Dr. Van Slyke's vast knowledge of patristic, liturgical and sacramental theology. In this volume Dr. Van Slyke's integrated approach to the liturgy and sacraments addresses an unfortunate void in the Catholic theological literature and in so doing the author has performed a significant service to teachers and students of the sacraments, as well as future authors who now have a living and vibrant example of the proper theological unity that exists within the church's sacramental liturgy.

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