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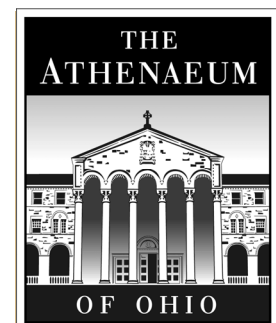
YEAR FOR PRIESTS

JUNE, 2009 - JUNE, 2010

*ESSAYS BY THE FACULTY OF
THE ATHENAEUM OF OHIO*

*Mount St. Mary's Seminary
Lay Pastoral Ministry Program
Special Studies*

ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI



Year for Priests:

June, 2009 - June, 2010

Essays by the Faculty of The Athenaeum of Ohio

Editor: Terrance Callan

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Preface

Rev. Edward P. Smith

Several months ago, in a meeting in my office, the Executive Committee of the Athenaeum was discussing the then recent announcement by Pope Benedict XVI that 2009-2010 would be designated as the Year for Priests. It was exciting for us as the nation's third oldest Roman Catholic Seminary to explore how we might highlight this important celebration for our community. Early on, the suggestion was made to publish a book of essays written by members of the faculty on various topics concerned with the priesthood. You are holding the result of this suggestion in your hands.

It is with great pride and gratitude that I invite you to share in the wisdom of these pages. You have the opportunity to read about selfless priestly service from the time of Moses until now; you can penetrate the deepening understanding of deacon, priest and bishop in the theology of St. Paul; you will be able to explore the theology of Christ the High Priest and the life of priestly ministry; you can examine the great responsibility of being true shepherds of Christ's flock, as taught in the wisdom of the Church from Vatican I to Vatican II.

This is quite an offering, and I am happy that the teachers and scholars on our faculty have made this available to you. This is, in fact, the seventh book of essays on important theological/pastoral topics that The Athenaeum of Ohio/Mount St. Mary's Seminary has presented in the last ten years, and I am grateful to the faculty members who have contributed to this fine work. I hope that you find this book an inspiration for your own faith, and a help in understanding a bit more the beautiful mystery of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Foreword*

Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk

This year we have an abundant harvest of priestly ordinations. It's been a while since we have ordained seven candidates. We have invested a lot of care and time and money in these men, and today we see it coming to fruition.

One might ask, of course, what we are going to get back from the investment we have made. What can we expect from these seven new priests in whom we have invested so much?

There are two levels of appropriate expectation, I think. The first is what we might call proper professionalism. We have the right to expect that these priests will be available to the people they are sent to serve, that they will be understanding and compassionate, that they will be punctual, that they will be respectful of the gifts and charisms of those with whom they serve God's people, that they will be pleasant in their dealings with their people, that they will be in regular contact with the Lord in prayer. All this is what we might call priestly professionalism, and we have a right to expect that of our priests.

But there is another level, a deeper level of professional expertise that we can look for from the ministry of these priests. For one thing, they will be agents of the holiness of God, instruments of the salvation that God has promised to His people. In their celebration of the sacraments of the Church they will make present the power and the sanctity of the Lord.

They will also be teachers. In their preaching and in their contact with the faithful they will announce the good news of the Lord. They will lead people to a deeper understanding of the teaching of the Church. It will not be their doctrine that they proclaim, but the doctrine of Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, they will be leaders in the community of the Church. Note that leader is not the same as boss. The boss is somebody who makes people do what he wants. The leader is one who helps people move ahead toward shared goals on the basis of common principles.

All this is standard equipment for priestly ministry: appropriate professionalism plus the deeply theological elements of sanctifying, teaching, and leading in the Church. This is what the people of God have a right to look for from them.

After many years of study and training and formation these candidates are now ready for ordination. They are well equipped to provide what the people of God has the right to expect from them.

But there's more. Just as God's people can rightly expect certain qualities in their priests, so also priests have the right to look for certain qualities in the people they serve.

* This was Archbishop Pilarczyk's homily for priesthood ordination May 23, 2009.

Foreword

They have the right to look for kindness and respect. They have the right to look for politeness. (You'd be surprised what people will say and write to their bishops and priests!) Priests have the right to look for a degree of patience and understanding from their people. Priests are not perfect. They are not theological whiz kids. They are not gifted with the gift of inerrancy. Priests make mistakes sometimes, and the atmosphere of the community is healthier if people are willing to acknowledge that reality and move forward together in spite of the limitations of their pastors. Most of all, priests have the right to look for cooperation from the people they serve. No priest can do single-handedly everything that needs to be done to carry out the mission of the Church on the local scene. We all need help.

So today I think it's appropriate for us to give thanks. We give thanks to the Lord for this fine harvest of well equipped and well trained priests that He is sending to our local church. We give thanks for the people of God whose prayers and support brought these candidates to this point and whose cooperation will make their ministry ever more fruitful. Most of all, we give thanks to the Lord for His generosity and His care for His people. Thank you, Lord. Help us all to contribute to the coming of Your kingdom.

Service to God - Lessons from the Wilderness

Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

The wilderness is a place for spiritual lessons. The prophet Hosea knew this; in one of his oracles God leads a wayward nation into the wilderness to speak tenderly to her heart (Hos 2:14). John the Baptist knew this; it was from the wilderness that he cried out urging people to prepare the way of the Lord. The Israelites also knew this; for them the wilderness was a place for many spiritual lessons as they made their way to the Promised Land.

Such lessons are to be found in Numbers 16, one of the most unsettling scenes from the forty-year wilderness journey. Before chapter's end readers "see" a host of people swallowed up in the earth and another two hundred and fifty reduced to ashes before the tent of meeting. This account is definitely in a league of its own, far removed from the gentler world of the New Testament. The Lord's cleansing of the temple – with its whip of cords and overturned tables – is calm by comparison. Safe to say, Numbers 16 is not likely to find a place in the Sunday readings any time soon.

On the other hand Numbers 16 does belong to that body of literature which generations of believers have cherished as the Word of God and held aloft as Holy Scripture. And so we may legitimately probe the distressing details of this chapter to discover what contributions they make to the Bible's saving message.

The whole account is set in motion by a false claim to priesthood launched by a member of the tribe of Levi. It is this claim of course that suggests Numbers 16 as a topic in this booklet on priesthood. Since Numbers 16 is probably not familiar to readers we will break it down into manageable segments and discuss them as we go along. The translation is taken from the New Revised Standard Version available on-line.

Now Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth – descendants of Reuben – took ²two hundred and fifty Israelite men, leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men, and they confronted Moses. ³They assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone too far! All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?'

The narrative begins with a confrontation initiated by a Levite named Korah. Like Moses, Korah was a grandson of Kohath, one of three sons born to Levi. The fact that Korah and Moses were first cousins seems to be one basis on which Korah finds the courage to confront Moses and make his astounding claim.

According to the legislative material in Numbers 3, the sons of Kohath were privileged to care for the ark of the covenant, the table, the lamp stand, the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary, and the screen (Num 3:31). These privileges did not extend to actually seeing or touching the holy objects of the tent of meeting (Num 4:15 and 20). That privilege was reserved for Aaron and his sons. The sons of Kohath were permitted to carry these objects only after Aaron and his sons

had finished covering all the furnishings of the sanctuary for transport as the people progressed towards the Promised Land (Num 4:15).

This protocol remained undisturbed until the dramatic turn of events brought on by the return of the twelve scouts sent to explore the land of Canaan. These scouts returned with clear evidence of the land's bounty and goodness. But they also returned with what turned out to be completely unfounded fears. Caleb and Joshua tried to set these fears aside by expressing their trust in God's promise. But the damage was done. As a result of the fear instilled in them by the other ten scouts the people planned to choose leaders to take them back to Egypt. Such willful refusal to trust in God had dire consequences. God declared that none of those who "have seen my glory and my signs which I wrought in Egypt shall see the land which I swore to give to their fathers..." (14:22-23). So begins the forty years of wandering in the desert.

That entire generation barred from entering Canaan is prone to desperate measures to gain the land on its own terms. One such desperate measure was a failed attempt to force their way into the land. Korah's confrontation seems to be yet another desperate measure. It is remarkable that during all those forty years this generation chose to go about things their own way rather than seeking forgiveness from God with the possibility of regaining access to the Promised Land.

Korah is not alone; he has quite a following by the time he confronts Moses and Aaron. It is Korah's influence over others that is of special concern. And their influence has the potential to reach so many more. These followers are themselves men of influence within the congregation.

Korah accuses Moses of overstepping his bounds. In Korah's own words, Moses has "gone too far." From Korah's point of view Moses is no different from anyone else in the congregation. He argues that God is present in the midst of the people making all the people holy. We readers have plenty of reason to suspect Korah's claim. The narrative has made it quite clear that Moses has the unique privilege of speaking to God face to face. It is a gift granted him by God and not a privilege he dare claim for himself. Korah is promoting a very distorted view of things. The motivation for this distortion will become more clear as the narrative proceeds.

⁴When Moses heard it, he fell on his face. ⁵Then he said to Korah and all his company, 'In the morning the LORD will make known who is his, and who is holy, and who will be allowed to approach him; the one whom he will choose he will allow to approach him. ⁶Do this: take censers, Korah and all your company, ⁷and tomorrow put fire in them, and lay incense on them before the LORD; and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You Levites have gone too far!' ⁸Then Moses said to Korah, 'Hear now, you Levites! ⁹Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to allow you to approach him in order to perform the duties of the LORD's tabernacle, and to stand before the congregation and serve them? ¹⁰He has allowed you to approach him, and all your brother Levites with you; yet you seek the priesthood as well! ¹¹Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against the LORD. What is Aaron that you rail against him?'

Moses' response to Korah's word is surprisingly selfless. He does not claim any special privilege for himself. Nor does he take Korah's words as a personal insult. Instead Moses reminds

Korah and the Levites who follow him that they already have a wonderful gift from God: they serve the congregation by carrying out special duties before the Lord's tabernacle. Moses believes they should be honored to approach God in the capacity they already enjoy. Moses cautions them from overstepping their bounds by claiming the right to draw even closer to God. They are the ones who have gone too far. But at this point Moses seems conciliatory. He proposes that they present themselves before God and see if God confirms the claims they are making. At this point Moses seems to regard Korah's claim as coming from a personal desire to have a share in the priesthood. He will soon discover its more sinister ramifications.

¹²Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab; but they said, 'We will not come! ¹³Is it too little that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also lord it over us? ¹⁴It is clear you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come!'

Still seeking reconciliation, Moses calls Dathan and Abiram, but they will not listen. Twice they announce they will not "come up" thereby taking a deliberate stand against Moses. They make several accusations against him. First of all, they accuse him of leading them out of a land of milk and honey. Especially striking here is the fact that they apply to Egypt qualities unique to the Promised Land. It is apparently their conviction that Egypt was a land comparable to the Promised Land. They also accuse Moses of jeopardizing their lives by taking them into the wilderness. They accuse Moses of failing to lead them into a land "flowing with milk and honey" by which they must mean he has not led them to a suitable substitute for Egypt, at least Egypt as they see it. Finally they accuse Moses of not giving them fields and vineyards to inherit.

This list of accusations exhibits a very distorted view of the deliverance from Egypt. This distorted view may be their own fabrication. But since Dathan and Abiram are introduced to us as associates with Korah it may be that this skewed view of things has its origin from Korah. If this is so, Korah is using to his own advantage the disappointment of an entire generation of Israelites who cannot enter Canaan. God has blocked them from the Promised Land. But Korah may be offering a substitute Promised Land to any Israelite who chooses to shift loyalty to him. Desperate as they are to inherit something, they are willing to accept whatever Korah and his 250 Levite followers promise them. Korah and the rest have presumably convinced Dathan and Abiram that it is all a matter of how they look at things. Even Egypt can be a Promised Land if you are willing to see it so. So why remain loyal to Moses? Switch to Korah's side and he will fulfill your dreams of an inheritance.

Dathan and Abiram are apparently ready to follow Korah's lead. It is noteworthy that they make no mention of God at all. They boldly ask Moses if he presumes to put out the eyes "of these men" whom they have chosen to follow. In other words Korah and his crowd have a vision which Dathan and the rest are willing to invest in. Furthermore Dathan and the rest will not be persuaded otherwise by Moses. They will not "come up" to speak with him. But it seems one leader has gone up to Moses. On the son of Peleth, though listed as a follower of Korah, makes no further appearance in the account. It may be that he withdrew his allegiance to Korah and did come up to listen to Moses once again.

¹⁵ Moses was very angry and said to the LORD, 'Pay no attention to their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed any one of them.' ¹⁶And Moses said to Korah, 'As for you and all your company, be present tomorrow before the LORD, you and they and Aaron; ¹⁷and let each one of you take his censer, and put incense on it, and each one of you present his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer.'

Here we find a dramatic change in Moses' attitude. The protests of Dathan and Abiram have moved him to anger. His anger is not directed at them but at Korah and his Levite followers who are preparing to make an offering of incense before the Lord. Initially Moses was ready to let God choose between Aaron and Korah. Now he pleads that God will not accept their offering. What has caused him to change his position? He sees the harm Korah doing to the congregation. He now realizes that Korah's interests go way beyond claiming priesthood for himself and his followers.

Moses declares he has not taken one ass from the people. Has Korah, on the other hand, been accepting such gifts from Dathan and the others? If so, his vision is much more injurious to the Israelite community than Moses at first realized. Korah is in effect distorting the entire meaning of the Promised Land, making it something the Israelites can claim on their own terms. They no longer need to follow Moses. The Promised Land can be whatever they want it to be.

To accept Korah's viewpoint is to water down the whole meaning of the journey. It is no longer a spiritual journey of trust in God but instead a very material one trusting in mere mortals. It seems Korah seeks full priestly status to legitimize the claims he has been making to Dathan and Abiram and their followers. Korah is not seeking personal advancement only but even divine sanction to provide a substitute Promised Land for a generation of Israelites now barred from entering the land of Canaan. Rather than approaching God in a spirit of repentance, Korah and the rest seek confirmation of their version of the Promised Land.

In his first response to Korah's claims, Moses made no mention of Aaron's being present at the tent of meeting when Korah and his followers approach with burning incense. Now Moses insists that Aaron likewise be present. In light of his new understanding of Korah's purpose Moses is absolutely confident that Aaron will be vindicated and Korah rejected by the Lord.

¹⁸So each man took his censer, and they put fire in the censers and laid incense on them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹Then Korah assembled the whole congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to the whole congregation. ²⁰ Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: ²¹Separate yourselves from this congregation, so that I may consume them in a moment. ²²They fell on their faces, and said, 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?'

Korah remains adamant. He does not back down from his claim to priesthood even though he now knows God's chosen priest Aaron will also be present. The tension builds as each

claimant takes a censer, fills it with burning coals, places incense on the coals, and takes a stand at the entrance of the tent of meeting. They all see the glory of the Lord. But the Lord speaks only to Moses and Aaron.

All doubt over who is has a legitimate claim to priesthood is removed when God speaks declaring the divine intention to consume the entire congregation. At that news Moses and Aaron intercede for the congregation since they hold only Korah responsible for the rebellion. It is worth noting that here we see Aaron along with Moses acting as true servants of God and interceding for the people. Their urgent plea stands in stark contrast to Korah's self-interest and apparent greed. And now follows God's judgment against Korah and his followers. But as always the door is open for repentance.

²³ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²⁴Say to the congregation: Get away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. ²⁵So Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram; the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶He said to the congregation, 'Turn away from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, or you will be swept away for all their sins.' ²⁷So they got away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrance of their tents, together with their wives, their children, and their little ones. ²⁸And Moses said, 'This is how you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: ²⁹If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD.' ³¹ As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. ³²The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households – everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³So they with all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴All Israel around them fled at their outcry, for they said, 'The earth will swallow us too!' ³⁵And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.

Moses and Aaron are ideal models for those in God's service. They make an urgent plea for the people. God listens to their plea and sends Moses to warn the people to step away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Aaron remains before the Lord at the tent of meeting. When they hear the warning from Moses, the people make the right choice and step away from the dwellings of the leaders. Perhaps even at this point Dathan and Abiram could join their fellow Israelites. But both men are resolved to choose Korah over Aaron and Moses. To display their resolve they even take their stand at the door of their tents, in apparent open defiance of Moses.

Because he has heard God's stated intention to consume the guilty, Moses confidently announces that the fate of the guilty will be beyond the ordinary. His remarks about the ground swallowing them up may have been intended only as a metaphor, but in fact that is what happens to Dathan, Abiram and all their followers. At the same time fire consumed Korah and all those Levites standing with him around the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was.

The removal of both groups leaves readers breathless. This is understandably a very disturbing scene for many. It seems to portray God as jealously guarding some divine prerogative. But another way to read the account is to focus instead on the absolute refusal of Korah and his followers to listen to God and to God's chosen servants. Korah and the rest turn down every opportunity extended to them to change their ways, even when the lives of family members are at risk.

The manner in which each group is removed from Israel is appropriate to their particular claims. Dathan and Abiram sought earthly gain from association with Korah and so they disappeared into the earth. Korah and the Levites with him presumed to have special access to the divine and so they were consumed by divine fire.

God is consistently portrayed in the Bible as protective, guiding people towards the path of life, giving them every advantage to make the right choices in life. God's anger flares up when those who should know better willfully disregard God's word thereby distorting for others God's saving message. The harshest divine response is reserved for those who would mislead the innocent. In a later passage very similar to Numbers 16, God removes Achan and his followers from the Israelite community (Joshua 7). In the gospels, our Lord's strongest words were directed at those who would mislead the innocent. Better, he says, that such people be thrown into the sea with a millstone around the neck (Matt 18:6).

This account in Numbers concludes with directives from God intended to make it less likely that anyone would ever again misled the people as Korah did.

³⁶ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ³⁷ Tell Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to take the censers out of the blaze; then scatter the fire far and wide. ³⁸ For the censers of these sinners have become holy at the cost of their lives. Make them into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they presented them before the LORD and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the Israelites. ³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers that had been presented by those who were burned; and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar – ⁴⁰ a reminder to the Israelites that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, shall approach to offer incense before the LORD, so as not to become like Korah and his company – just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.

Only the censers remain where Korah and the Levites in his company stood before the tent of meeting. Made holy by close association with the God of Israel, these censers are to be refashioned into a covering for the altar. Korah and his followers claimed for themselves privileges only God could grant them. Carried aloft by their pretensions, they deliberately misled the people promising what they could never give. God removed Korah and his kind from the people, thus protecting the people from their harmful influence. To further protect the people God directs that the censers be fashioned into a covering for the altar that stood outside the tent of meeting and was thus visible to the people. The sight of this covering would remind the people that Aaron and his family alone are privileged to offer incense before the Lord.

At the end of the account God has removed from the people the harmful influence of Korah and his kind. It reinforces the truth that the Promised Land is something God alone can provide for the people. It is a gift to those who are faithful to the Lord. No variant on this truth, no matter how skillfully argued, has any validity. God seeks to protect the people from any variation of the truth.

Spiritual lessons abound in this dramatic account. Among them we can list the following:

- Service to God is selfless – Korah was not satisfied with the privileges he already enjoyed from God. From Dathan’s response to Moses it seems Korah was gaining materially from his claim to priesthood.
- God’s servants intercede for others – Moses and Aaron plead for the people. They do not allow personal interests to distract them from seeking mercy even for a people who seem to have gone astray.
- God’s servants promote what is spiritual – From Dathan’s response to Moses it seems Korah was promising a substitute Promised Land. He may have sought the priesthood to give legitimacy to his promise. In so doing he reduced God’s gifts to the mundane and the temporal.
- God’s servants seek what is best for the community – Moses and Aaron did so; Korah did not.
- God’s servants teach others to value what is unseen – Moses and Aaron remain loyal to God and the promises only God can give. Such spiritual values always take precedence over self and over material interests.
- God’s servants awaken others to God’s gifts – Moses and Aaron were faithful to this mission; Korah and his followers were not.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Is there any aspect of your own service to God that takes away from its selfless character?
2. Is the promotion of things spiritual always uppermost in your work for God?
3. How do we help others value the realm that is unseen?

The Priest in the New Testament

Terrance Callan

Priest

The Greek word for priest (ἱερεὺς *hierēus*) is used 153 times in the New Testament. 119 of these uses are found in the four gospels and Acts, and all but one refer to Jewish priests; 105 of these uses specify the high priest (ἀρχιερεὺς *archiereus*). The only one of these uses that refers to a non-Jewish priest is in Acts 14:13 which refers to a priest of Zeus in Lystra whom Paul and Barnabas encountered on their first missionary journey.

In addition to these uses in the gospels and Acts, the letter to the Hebrews uses the word for priest 31 times; 17 of these uses specify the high priest. Like the gospels and Acts, Hebrews often uses the word priest refer to Jewish priests (5:1; 7:11, 14, 20, 23, 27, 28; 8:3, 4; 9:6, 7, 25; 10:11; 13:11). However, Hebrews also mentions the non-Jewish priest Melchizedek (7:1, 3). And all of this discussion of priests serves the purpose of presenting Jesus as a priest (2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 6, 10; 6:20; 7:15, 17, 21, 26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21). Jesus is a priest comparable to ordinary Jewish priests, but he surpasses them. He does not qualify to be a priest in Jewish terms since he is from the tribe of Judah, not that of Levi (7:13-14; 8:4); he is a new kind of priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The only other New Testament text that uses the word priest is the Book of Revelation. In Rev 1:6 and 5:10 Jesus is praised for having made his followers a kingdom and priests in fulfillment of Exodus 19:6. In Rev 20:6 those who will reign with Christ for 1000 years are said to be priests. In 1 Peter 2:5 and 9 Christians are described as a priesthood (ἱεράτευμα *hierateuma*); the latter text is another reference to Exodus 19:6.

Thus the New Testament does not use the word priest, as we do, to designate certain members of the Christian community that are distinguished from the rest of the community. The New Testament seldom uses the word to refer to Christians at all. Acts 6:7 refers to Jewish priests who became members of the Christian community, but being Jewish priests did not give them any special position among Christians. Hebrews refers to Jesus himself as a priest, but says nothing about priests among Jesus' followers. Only the Book of Revelation and, using a different term, 1 Peter refer to Jesus' followers as priests. But these refer to all of his followers as priests; priests are not a group distinct from other Christians. This is what we today call the priesthood of all believers.

Elders

So why do we today speak of priests as a distinct group within the Church? The origin of this way of speaking lies in another New Testament term, i.e., elder or presbyter (πρεσβύτερος *presbyteros*). This word is used 67 times in the New Testament, 43 of these times in the gospels and Acts. The word is the comparative form of the adjective "old" and sometimes it is simply used to say that someone is older than another. Thus Luke 15:25 speaks of the older son in the parable of the prodigal son; John 8:9 speaks of the older members of a crowd (this is the only time the word is used by John); and Acts 2:17 quotes Joel as speaking about younger and older men. Elsewhere in the synoptic gospels and often in Acts, "elders" designates a group of leaders among the Jewish

people; they are frequently mentioned along with high priests and scribes (e.g., Mark 8:31 and parallels).

Acts also uses “elders” to designate a group of leaders among Jesus’ followers (11:30; 15:2, 4, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18); Acts 14:23 says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for each church they established on their first missionary journey. In Acts the elders are frequently mentioned along with the apostles (see 15:2, 4, 22, 23; 16:4).

Elders are not mentioned in the letters of Paul except for 1 Timothy and Titus, whose authenticity is seriously doubted. These letters present a picture similar to the one seen in Acts. In 1 Tim 5:1-2 the term is used to designate older men and women by contrast with younger ones. However, in 1 Tim 5:17 and 19 “elder” refers to those who lead the Christian community, at least some of whom engage in preaching and teaching. Titus 1:5 speaks of Titus’ task as that of appointing elders in every town and goes on to describe the kind of people who should be appointed. 1 Tim 4:14 refers to the council of elders (*πρεσβυτερίου presbyterion*).

Hebrews 11:2 uses “elders” to designate the ancestors of the Jewish people as older than the people to whom it is addressed. 1 Peter 5:1 and 5 compare older and younger people. At the same time it is clear that the older people exercise leadership in the Christian community, tending the flock that is in their charge (v 2); the writer of the letter describes himself as an elder (v 1). James 5:14 speaks of calling the elders of the church to anoint the sick. The sender of 2 and 3 John calls himself the elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1) and the letters presume his leadership role. Twelve times the Book of Revelation mentions a group of 24 elders gathered around the throne of God in heaven (4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4).

All of this makes it clear that by the time Acts, 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, James, 2 and 3 John were written, i.e., no later than 100, there were leaders of many early Christian communities who were called elders. Despite Acts’ references to elders in the churches of Paul (Acts 14:23 and 20:17), the absence of any reference to elders in the letters of Paul other than 1 Timothy and Titus makes it uncertain that there were elders in the churches Paul established. Perhaps there were, and Paul simply had no occasion to mention them in his letters. Or, perhaps the leadership of elders was a later development.

Leadership in Paul’s Churches

Some have thought that Paul’s churches were so spirit-filled that they needed no leadership structure. That seems unlikely to me. Paul occasionally refers rather vaguely to leaders in his churches. In 1 Thess 5:12 Paul urges the Thessalonians to acknowledge those who labor among them and have charge of them. He expresses the idea of their having charge of the Thessalonians by using the same verb found in 1 Tim 5:17 to describe the duties of elders (i.e., *προισταμένους proistamenous*). In 1 Cor 16:15-16 Paul similarly exhorts the Corinthians to be subject to the household of Stephanas and everyone who works and labors with them; here, however, he does not use the verb found in 1 Thess 5:12 and 1 Tim 5:17 (i.e., *προίστημι proistēmi*). Paul does use this verb in Rom 12:8 to designate the leader as one of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives to the church (cf. also the reference to the gift of forms of leadership [*κυβερνήσεις kybernēseis*] in 1 Cor 12:28).

In Phil 1:1 Paul addresses his letter to the saints in Philippi with bishops (*ἐπισκοποις episkopois*) i.e., overseers, and deacons (*διακόνους diakonois*) i.e., servants. Especially in light of later

usage it seems as if Paul is referring to leaders of the church. He makes no other reference to bishops in Philippians or in any other of his letters except 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:7. In these latter passages the bishop is clearly a leader of the church. There are two other references to bishops in the New Testament. In Acts 20:28 Paul, speaking to the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus, says that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd the church of God. 1 Peter 2:25 refers to God as the shepherd and overseer of the addressees' souls.

Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon in Rom 16:1. He also describes her as a benefactor (*προστάτις* *prostatis*) of himself and others (v 2). Use of a word related to the one Paul uses elsewhere to speak of leadership (i.e., *προΐστημι* *proistēmi*) to refer to Phoebe as a benefactor reminds us that in the ancient world leaders were expected to be benefactors. Cf. use of the word in this sense in Titus 3:8, 14.

It is not completely clear that by calling her a deacon Paul designates Phoebe as a leader of the church. Paul uses the word “deacon” rather frequently, and ordinarily it does not seem to be a technical term for a leader of the church. He uses it to describe civil authority as a servant of God in Rom 13:4; to describe Christ as a servant of circumcision in Rom 15:8; to describe himself and Apollos as servants in 1 Cor 3:5; to describe himself and others as servants of a new covenant in 2 Cor 3:6, of God in 2 Cor 6:4, and of Christ in 2 Cor 11:23; to describe his opponents as servants of Satan who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness in 2 Cor 11:15; to deny that Christ is a servant of sin in Gal 2:17; to describe himself as a servant of the gospel in Eph 3:7; Col 1:23; to describe Tychicus as a faithful servant in Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; to describe Epaphras as a servant of Christ in Col 1:7; to describe himself as a servant of the church in Col 1:25. “Deacon” clearly designates leaders of the church in 1 Tim 3:8 and 12. But when it is used to describe Timothy as a good servant of Christ Jesus in 1 Tim 4:6, it may not have this technical meaning.

The word “deacon” occurs infrequently in the rest of the New Testament. In Mark 9:35 Jesus says that one who wants to be first must be the servant of all. In Mark 10:43/Matt 20:26; cf. 23:11, Jesus says that one who wants to be great among his followers must be their servant. Jesus uses the word in a parable in Matt 22:13. There are two references to servants at the wedding feast in Cana in John 2:5, 9. And in John 12:26 Jesus refers to one who follows him as his servant.

Paul may not need to say much about church leadership because initially such leadership may have been provided by the heads of the households where the early Christians congregated. Paul makes references to such house churches in Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; and Phm 2. Over time this leadership may have become the more formal leadership by elders, bishops and deacons that is visible in 1 Timothy and Titus. 1 Timothy manifests a clear relationship between leadership of a household and leadership of the church, which is understood as the household of God. In 1 Timothy success in leading one's own household qualifies one for leadership of the church as a bishop (3:4-5) or deacon (3:12). The verb used to express leadership (i.e., *προΐστημι* *proistēmi*) is the same verb used in Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12 and 1 Tim 5:17.

Elder, Bishop and Deacon

Some think the terms “elder,” “bishop” and “deacon” derive from two different, originally separate, systems of leadership - leadership by elders on one hand and leadership by bishops and deacons on the other. One thing suggestive of this is that many texts mention one or the other,

but not both. Thus the letters of Paul (apart from 1 Timothy and Titus) mention bishops and deacons, but not elders. This is also true of the *Didache* (written about 100?). On the other hand 1 Peter and 2-3 John mention only elders and not bishops or deacons.

Where all three terms are used, it seems possible that elder is another name for bishop and perhaps deacon. This is strongly suggested by Titus 1:5-9 which speaks first about elders (v 5) and continues by speaking about the bishop (v 7) with no indication that these terms refer to different groups. It is compatible with 1 Timothy's discussion of elders as leaders of the church in 5:17-22 and bishops and deacons as leaders of the church in 3:1-13; there is no explicit discussion of the relationship between the two, and they could be alternate names for the same group of leaders. The use of elder and bishop as alternative names for the same person is also suggested by Acts 20:28 where a group of elders is said to be bishops. This usage is also found in *1 Clement* 44.4-5; 47.6 (written about 100?).

The three terms clearly refer to distinct offices in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (written about 110?). In almost every one of his seven letters Ignatius argues for recognition of the leadership of the bishop (*Ephesians* 1.3; *Magnesians* 3; *Trallians* 2; *Philadelphians* 3.2; *Smyrnaeans* 8; *Polycarp* 4). There is a church only where there is a bishop (*Smyrnaeans* 8.1), and apart from him there is none (*Trallians* 3.1). Nothing must be done without him (*Magnesians* 4; 7.1; *Trallians* 2.2; *Philadelphians* 7.2) including celebration of Eucharist and baptism (*Smyrnaeans* 8) and solemnization of marriage (*Polycarp* 5.2). The elders share in the bishop's leadership (*Ephesians* 2.2; 4.1; 20.2; *Magnesians* 7.1; *Trallians* 2.2; 13.2). Deacons are subject to the bishop and elders (*Magnesians* 2).

In the letters of Ignatius we see an understanding of the elder quite similar to our understanding of the priest today. The bishop is the key leader of the church; he is assisted by the elders; and both bishop and elders are assisted by deacons. However, we do not yet see in Ignatius' portrayal of the elder all that we presently affirm about the priest.

From the Early Church to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has much to say about the priest as this office is understood by the Church today. Some of its main points are:

1. Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church.... It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate (1536).
2. The priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis* [in the person of Christ the Head] (1548).
3. It is in the Eucharistic cult or in the *Eucharistic assembly* of the faithful (*synaxis*) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred office; there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the New Testament... (1566).

4. The *essential rite* of the sacrament of Holy Orders for all three degrees consists in the bishop's imposition of hands on the head of the ordinand and in the bishop's specific consecratory prayer... (1573).
5. The sacrament of Holy Orders, like the other two [i.e., Baptism and Confirmation], confers an *indelible spiritual character* and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily (1581).

The New Testament does not speak explicitly about a sacrament of Holy Orders, or obviously, about its conferring an indelible spiritual character. It does speak of bishops, elders and deacons; however, the New Testament does not clearly understand them as three degrees of church leadership. Such an understanding is found in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch.

The New Testament does not speak of elders as acting in the person of Christ, nor does it speak of them in the context of the Eucharist. *1 Clement* 44.4-5 speaks of bishops who are also elders as having offered the gifts blamelessly and in holiness; this may be a reference to presiding at Eucharist. Ignatius of Antioch refers to the Eucharist as under the bishop or the one he delegates (*Smyrnaeans* 8), perhaps meaning an elder.

The New Testament does not speak explicitly about Mass as a sacrifice. Such an understanding does appear in the *Didache* which speaks of the Eucharist as a pure sacrifice (14.1). (The *Didache* also speaks of the prophets who, among others, preside at the Eucharist [10.7] as high priests [13.3]). The New Testament does not mention imposition of hands on elders. The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* 7 (written about 215?) says that when an elder is ordained, the bishop and the other elders impose hands on him.

If one were to take the view that all Christian beliefs and practices must be found explicitly in the New Testament, as some Protestants do, it might be difficult to defend the contemporary Catholic understanding of the priest. However, the Catholic Church does not believe that all proper beliefs and practices must be found explicitly in the New Testament. Rather, the Catholic Church believes that in the time since the New Testament was written, the Holy Spirit has led the Church into a progressively deeper understanding of its life and faith (see *Catechism* 94; *Dei verbum* 8). This development of understanding affects all aspects of Catholic life and thought, including its understanding of priesthood.

The Catholic Church believes that throughout its history, it has grown in understanding the implications of Jesus' commissioning of apostles to proclaim the good news of salvation through his death and resurrection. These implications include the ordering of the Church's leadership as outlined in the catechism. As we look at the New Testament and the other early Christian writings mentioned above, we see the beginnings of this growth. It has continued into our own time, as can be seen most clearly in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which is summarized conveniently in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. In what sense can we say that the Catholic understanding of the priest is found in the New Testament?

Priest in the New Testament

2. How can we account for differences between the New Testament and the Catholic understanding of the priest?
3. What is the New Testament understanding of elder, bishop and deacon?

“We Have Such a High Priest” (Heb 8:1): The Priesthood of Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews as a Model for our Own

Rev. Kenneth G. Morman

The Letter to the Hebrews and the Year for Priests

The Letter to the Hebrews makes for highly rewarding reading any time but especially during this Year for Priests established by Pope Benedict – every chapter, virtually every line, holds rewarding insights for those who allow themselves to enter into and reflect deeply on its richly evocative prose. It’s not for nothing that its author is widely conceded to be the most masterful rhetorician in the New Testament.

But it’s not for its style that we would be rewarded for re-reading this too-often neglected treasure hidden in the New Testament field, but for what it has to teach us about Christ our Great High Priest. There is no space here to do a line-by-line appreciation of the author’s opus (recent commentaries have been running in the 400-600 page range, I notice). Rather, what strikes me as especially valuable relative to this year’s observance is the very image itself, so close to the core of the letter as a whole, the proclamation that Christ is our high priest. Men who aspire to, or already have been granted, the privilege of being constituted an *alter Christus*, a priest of the new covenant, have much to learn from this letter.

Change within Continuity

What strikes one first of all is how different the role of the priest in Catholic Christianity today is from the priesthood that the author and all his contemporaries in those early generations knew from their religious experience (he describes himself in Heb 2:3 as belonging to the second generation of Christians, evangelized by those who heard the Lord first hand, and persuaded to accept the good news the preachers brought by the “signs, wonders, various acts of power and distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit” [Heb 2:4] by which God confirmed their message). In contrast to the ancient priests, both Jewish and pagan, whose role consisted primarily of spending hour after hour sacrificing animals for long lines of worshipers, splashing their blood on the altar, and burning various parts of their carcasses on a smoking altar, the Catholic priest of today has a ministry that is far more complex and varied. He of course offers the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, but his ministry includes far more than that single ritual; he is ordained to be truly a “pastor” (shepherd) whose care for his flock embraces every dimension. (It is interesting that Education Development Center researchers, who work up sets of job skills needed for various occupations, discovered that priests today need a wider array than any other occupation they studied!)

But for all this surface difference, the constant between then and now and ever, as the author points out in Heb 5:1-4, is that the priest is quintessentially the man in the middle, taken from among his fellow human beings and made their representative before God. As mediator between them and God he is a living bridge, with a foot in both camps, offering the gifts of his brothers and sisters to God and communicating God’s blessings in turn to them.

As just mentioned, not just in Judaism but in every other religion that the early Christians would have been aware of, that function took place pre-eminently through that process of sacrific-

ing animals on behalf of the human worshipers. In Heb 10:4 the author dismisses the efficacy of such actions – how can the blood of animals like bulls and goats possibly take away sins of a human being?, he notes dismissively – but we recognize that this is to be understood rhetorically, not only because the living God himself ordained the system but also because we notice that the author himself takes it for granted in passages such as 9:13-14 and 22-23. As Catholics comfortable with a sacramental system, we can easily understand the inner dynamic reflected in these rituals: by the worshiper’s imposing hands on the animal’s head he expressed symbolically / ritually that that animal’s life now represented *his* life. And then he handed the animal over to the priest who by killing the animal and splashing its life on the altar (for in their conception life was identified with the blood – Lev 17:11) ritually gave that life to God. Speaking of the ancient priests as religious butchers does not do justice to their role because little or nothing is made of the killing and death of the animal at all – it’s simply the requisite preliminary step; the focus is ever on the action which that death makes possible: the offering of a life to God – actually the life of the animal, but symbolically the life of the worshiper: Lord, however much I may have strayed before, I now give myself totally, entirely to you!

The Superiority of Christ, Priest and Victim

But the author’s real aim in dismissing the old sacrifices does not lie in them at all but is for the purpose of showing the superiority of the fulfillment of these shadows in Christ, the perfect priest, who did not offer the blood of mere animals but his own blood (Heb 9:12) in an act of perfect and definitive obedience to God (for until the last breath is breathed it is still possible to retract one’s commitment; only death makes the dedication fixed and perfect). This perfect obedience thus undoes the primal act of disobedience of the first Adam in which we all have participated, a point Paul makes in Rom 5:14ff.

While other Christians before him had reflected on the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death (we notice the sacrificial language in the Words of Institution, and even earlier than the written gospels in such simple but moving words as those of Paul in Gal 2:20 – “he loved me and gave himself up for me”), the Letter to the Hebrews is the first and in fact only book of the New Testament to actually call Christ explicitly a priest. For it is a mark of the author’s genius that he was able to work out the implications of this bedrock insight that Christ’s death was sacrificial in nature not only in terms of Christ the victim sacrificed, but also in terms of the one who does the offering up of the life, Christ the priest.

He uses to great effect the wording of the line from Exod 25:40, “See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain,” plugging into the philosophical assumptions widely current in his day to assert that this instruction in Exodus betrays the fact that the entire earthly worship in the tabernacle is just a shadow of the really real that exists on a heavenly plane. As on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest passes through the outer courts of the temple laid out on a horizontal plane to enter more and more deeply into the temple building until finally he stands in the very Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God on earth, bringing with him via the sacrificial blood, the contrite, obedient lives of the people for whom he is mediator and in this way makes atonement for their sin, so Jesus our great high priest, from Calvary onward exercises the *reality* of which this earlier ritual could be only the shadow. He re-visions the temple effectively upended to a vertical plane – by his death on the cross, Jesus passes through the courts of this earthly, shadowy, symbolic level of reality to enter into the real,

true Holy of Holies, Heaven, where God actually dwells, not just figuratively as in the earthly temple. And he brings with him not merely the *symbol* of the worshipers’ life, the blood of animals, but his own life/his own blood that expresses his own definitive unending act of obedience to God. And unlike the mortal priests ministering in the shadow temple on earth below, Jesus does not have to leave the presence of God. By virtue of a life undying, he remains forever at the right hand of God, ceaselessly making intercession for the human beings of whom he is mediator (Heb 7:23-25; 10:11-12). The priestly sacrifice of Christ thus not only fulfills, but surpasses and is by every measure superior to what prepared for it.

The Priest Must Be Like Those He Represents

And yet the essential characteristic he shares with all priests remains – to be an authentic priest Christ must have a foot in both camps – as priest, he must be the representative of human beings as well as have access to God. The latter requirement is easily enough confirmed by the kerygma from the beginning – Jesus is the Son, who, raised from the dead, sits at the right hand of God. As the author deftly but powerfully limns it in the opening verses of the letter, Jesus is God’s own Son, “the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, ...who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

That being the case, the author expends considerable ink making the correlative point, that Jesus was no ET, Bethlehem no Area 51. As he explains in Heb 2:14-17, “Since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life. Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people.”

His becoming like his brothers and sisters in every way encompassed not only the ontological but also the existential and experiential: made for a little while lower than the angels (Heb 2:9) God chose to make “the leader to [his brothers and sisters] salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb 2:10). He does not downplay what this *kenosis* cost: “In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:7-10). It was thus not just in our flesh and blood that he had a full share, but also in our human experience of being subject to suffering, frustration, pain, and futility. As Cardinal Vanhoye pointed out in his classic 1977 study of the teaching of this letter, *Christ is Our Priest*, in Jesus’ case these were not just preconditions for the exercising of his priesthood but they were themselves the actual exercise of it – “Not only is it because of ‘*having suffered death*’ that Jesus is now ‘*crowned with glory and honor*’ (2:9), it is ‘*through*’ these very ‘*sufferings*’ that he has ‘*been made perfect*’ (2:10, 5:8-9)” (p.77). What Jesus did on the cross on Good Friday was in fact just the final climactic definitive act of a whole life lived in humble obedient service of God: “For this reason, when he came into the world he said... ‘Behold, I come to do your will, O God’” (Heb 10:5,7).

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And so the author urges his congregation to have full confidence in Jesus because we have such a mediator, a high priest who is merciful and compassionate, one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, for he has been similarly tested in every way that we are, yet remained faithful regardless (Heb 4:14-15).

Application

When Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples in the upper room at the Last Supper, offering this magnificent prophetic sign as the key for understanding both the Eucharist and Calvary, he memorably told us who are his disciples – we who *learn* from him – “Do you understand what I have done for you?... I have given you a model, that as I have done, so you are to do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn 13:12-17).

The complex of actions to which Jesus referred through that prophetic sign is of course the very ones that the Letter to the Hebrews holds up to us as comprising his high priestly action. What this suggests for us who aspire to or have received the gift of a vocation to that priesthood is that the profound meditation that the Letter to the Hebrews offers on what Jesus did that Sacred Triduum illumines the significance and nature of the “model” that he offered us for our participation in his priesthood today. Specifically, it encourages us to look beyond all the multitudinous individual aspects of our priestly ministry to see them unified in the core reality we recognize in Christ the high priest, and measure our fulfillment of our role, not mechanically or sociologically, but by the degree we are able to embrace in our own lives the love that motivated Jesus to become like his brothers and sisters in every way (Heb 2:17), and rather than evade the cross, to learn obedience precisely through the suffering our mission entails (2Tim 1:8), becoming in this way compassionate and merciful priests like him, faithful to the one who has appointed us (Heb 3:2), willing to offer our own lives in turn for those who are entrusted to our care. We who offer the sacrifice of Christ first for our own sins and then for those of the people (Heb 7:27) are challenged to leave those sins behind and to enter with Christ into the presence of God with our own blood, i.e., our own lives offered completely and unreservedly to him. If we understand these things, blessed shall we be if we do them.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. The Letter to the Hebrews employs many adjectives and descriptive characterizations of Christ the high priest – merciful, compassionate, faithful, holy, innocent, reverent – to mention but a few. As you read through the Letter, which of the descriptions the author employs of Christ do you think people would spontaneously use to characterize you as a priest?
2. Who have been your models in the priesthood? Who captured your ideals as a priest? To what degree are they reminiscent of Christ the priest described in this Letter?
3. The author credits the “signs, wonders, various acts of power, and distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit” that accompanied the preachers of the gospel for bringing him and his contemporaries to accept their message (Heb 2:4). What moved you to believe in the Gospel?
4. The author says of Jesus, “In the days when he was in the flesh he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was

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heard because of his reverence” (Heb 5:7). This appears to be a rather different picture from the Jesus we meet in John’s Gospel who comes across as always unflappable and in control, even in the Garden. Which image plays the greater role in your own spiritual life?

5. Has the development of the priesthood in the Church to encompass many more forms of service than the ritual/liturgical been a good thing?
6. The experience of the Church over the ages regarding priests seems to oscillate between the necessity felt for the priest to “become like his brothers and sisters in every way” (Heb 2:17) and to be a priest who is “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:26). Granting that the two are not contradictory (both are predicated of Christ in this Letter), in which direction should we be moving today?

The Office of Pastor as Shepherd in the Local Church

Rev. Benedict O’Cinnsealaigh

Apostolic Ministry According to the First Vatican Council

As the First Vatican Council came to a precipitous end, only the nature and prerogatives of papal ministry were clearly annunciated and defined in the *First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, promulgated July 18, 1870. It was not the intention of the Council to isolate its teaching on the role of the papacy from the more general role of bishops. Nevertheless, one of the perceptions that gained ground between the end of Vatican I and the promulgation of *Lumen Gentium* on November 21, 1964 was a sense that the role of the local bishops as true shepherds in their own right was neglected. Some bishops and members of local Churches experienced a tension between the legitimate prerogatives of the local bishop and a centralizing tendency strengthened by the manner in which the Roman Curia operated in the name of the Supreme Pontiff.

Following Vatican I it didn’t take long for questions about the dominance of the papal ministry to be raised by bishops. Already in 1875, a collective Statement of the German Bishops, and another by the English Bishops, both receiving “express and unqualified endorsement of Pope Pius IX,” called into question the interpretation of the Council’s decrees that sought to promote the papacy as an absolute monarchy and, therefore, override the rights of the bishops (cf. Rahner/Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, [New York: Herder, 1962]). While there was a general interest in defining the proper ministry of bishops in the inter-Conciliar period, reflection on the question of the relationship between episcopal and papal ministries became more intense in the period immediately before the calling of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council by Pope John XXIII on January 25, 1959.

It should be clearly stated that the Second Vatican Council accepted, proposed, and annunciated all the papal prerogatives outlined by Vatican I (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 18). Yet, it was felt, by many, that the First Vatican Council’s teaching on the papacy undermined the role of the local bishop. At Vatican II it was possible to correct the imbalance created by the circumstances of history, between the strong theology of the Papal ministry and a weaker theological understanding of the true apostolic character, authority, and ministry of local bishops. The role of the bishops as true shepherds of the local Church, as well as the collegial responsibility of all bishops for the welfare and mission of the universal Church, not treated in the *First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*, was presented in *Lumen Gentium*. The same Constitution also defined the nature of the collegial relationship between the ministry of the Universal Shepherd and the local bishops.

Inter-Conciliar Period

In the period between the two Councils, reflection concerning the proper nature of the Episcopal office led to some pointed questioning: What does it mean to be a successor of the apostles and true shepherd of the flock? Are there limits to the “immediate, universal, ordinary, and supreme authority” of the Pope? In what sense, is the bishop a true shepherd of the local Church? If the bishop shares in the universal magisterium, how does he participate in the governance of the universal Church? How are the local bishop’s proper rights, responsibilities, authority, and power related to the proper authority of the successor of Peter, Papal magisterium, and governance?

These are key questions in any discussion of Episcopal ministry. Fundamentally, they are questions about the nature of the office of bishop. It is no surprise that a number of bishops in the inter-Conciliar period felt that a strong papal office could, and at times did, undermine the genuine character and prerogatives of the Episcopal order in the local church context.

Apostolic Ministry According to the Second Vatican Council

By the time of the Second Vatican Council, these questions already were exposed to considerable theological reflection. The Council fathers, the bishops in particular, were anxious for Conciliar direction and authoritative teaching on these matters. *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus* are the products of this reflection and represent the highest level of magisterial teaching on the order of bishops. There are a number of important elements that are worth noting. First, Vatican II does not withdraw from any of the doctrinal teaching elucidated by Vatican I concerning papal ministry (LG 18). Second, Vatican II clearly states that the bishop is a successor of the apostles, and as such, in a certain way, is the ‘vicar of Christ’ in his own diocese where he governs with apostolic authority. The bishop is not merely a vicar of the pope (LG 27). Third, with the pope and other bishops, each bishop is a member of the apostolic college. It is this college, always and only in communion with Peter that is the supreme authority in the Church (LG 22). Fourth, Vatican II does not fully resolve the resultant tensions that exist within its teaching between the legitimate and universal authority of the “chief shepherd of the entire Church,” and the legitimate governance and authority of the local shepherds. And, fifth, the most innovative and far reaching of the Council’s teaching on the episcopacy was its return to the Patristic concept of the fullness of orders residing in the apostolic order of the bishop; and the fact that this order was truly sacramental and not merely a designation of greater governance (LG 22).

The crux of the bishops’ concern, and the eventual theological consensus, is that they are true shepherds of their flock. The reality of the bishop’s apostolic and ecclesial authority and right to preside is clearly stated by the conciliar documents. Probably, the most pointed statement of Episcopal authority and ministry comes when the Council quotes St. Ignatius of Antioch on the place of the bishop in the community, saying that he [the bishop] “presides in the place of God over the flock” (LG 20; S. Ignatius M., *Philad.*, 1.1; *Magn.*, 6.1). At the same time, the Council clearly uses the image of the shepherd to gather together the essential elements of the apostolic ministry.

Bishops as Shepherds

The Council draws deeply from the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church in which the image of shepherd depicts strongly and describes beautifully the life and ministry of the bishop. Joseph Ratzinger notes that the bishop’s identity as a successor of the apostles is defined by what the Scriptures say is Jesus’ will: “They are ‘made’ that they ‘might be with him,’ ‘that He might send them,’ and that they ‘might have authority’” (Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996] 95). The basic prerequisite for Episcopal ministry is intimate communion with Jesus, being with him. The bishop is to be inwardly “with” Christ so that the Lord’s mission might be particularized in a dynamic way through him. The Son is an emissary whose mission was to make his existence with the Father, an existence with men. The bishop finds his mission by his insertion into the mission of Christ, as “the bishop’s activity is above all to convey to men existence with Christ and; thus, existence with God” (Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 95-96). Only in such a dy-

amic relationship is true Episcopal ministry realized. Apart from this internalization, the bishop becomes a mere ecclesiastical functionary.

The Council delineates what the bishop's functions as shepherd are:

The Bishop is called to a ministry of diakonia, a ministry of service (LG 24).

He is endowed with sacred powers in order to make present salvation in, and through, Christ (LG 27).

Together with all the bishops of the Church, and always in communion with Peter, the Bishop has a concern for the universal church and for all people.

He is *the* shepherd of the particular "flock committed to his care" (CD 11).

The bishop's first duty is that of teacher called to evangelize all people by witnessing to Christ in his own life and by preaching the Gospel.

He is the authentic teacher endowed by Christ with authority (LG 25).

As the principal teacher in faith, he should clearly expound and defend the doctrine of faith providing for doctrinal instruction in schools, universities, through catechetical instruction, pastoral letters, conferences, and in his own writings and preaching.

The bishop is to form the hearts and minds of his people who are to be enlightened by faith and truth.

As priest, prophet, and shepherd, he stands for, and with, Christ.

The bishop is called to strengthen and enliven the faith of others; dialogue with men of good will; in partnership with secular and civil powers, he is to encourage the building of a just society; one that is imbued with sacred values, while proclaiming the dignity and value of every human person;

He should be especially solicitous for the poor, the alienated, the weak, migrants, exiles, refugees, itinerants, those persecuted for justice, and the outcast.

Consecrated by the Lord as his priest, the bishop has the duty and the privilege to mediate on behalf of his flock before God and before his flock on behalf of God.

He is to lead his people into a greater, deeper, Eucharistic communion so they may grow in charity.

As spiritual guide, the bishop is to form his people, clergy, religious, and laity in sanctity, humility, simplicity of life, and most of all in charity.

Lumen Gentium emphasizes a somewhat strict and specific obligation on the part of bishops to have a collegial relationship with presbyters and speaks of a grave obligation of solicitude towards them and for them, otherwise priests become mere functionaries operating merely at the bishop's will...and under his Curia – as some bishops claimed they operated merely under the Pope's Curia as his functionaries!

In all things, a wholehearted, passionate, and absolute response to God and an equally passionate commitment to God's people, is expected of the bishop, who as a good shepherd is called to search for the lost, protect the flock, and even, if necessary, lay down his life for the sheep. The bishop's character and personal ministerial approach should be marked by a deep and sincere holiness, charity, humility, courtesy, faithfulness, and friendship. The magisterial documents emphasize a truly personalistic and familiar character for the bishop, who is to be truly the *pater familias*, a brother, a pastor, and father to his people and his priests (Matt 15:24; 10:6; CD 16; *The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* 2).

Pastoral Duties of the Bishop are a Paradigm for the Pastor

While the parish priest is not a pastor or shepherd in the same sense as the bishop, he is, nevertheless, ordained and commissioned as a ‘real shepherd’ and delegated as a ‘proper pastor,’ with the rights and responsibility to sanctify, teach, and govern. We have already seen what is understood when we say that the bishop is a priest, prophet, and shepherd. The pastor receives the same commission but is also mandated to serve a particular parish/community by the delegation of the bishop who has the right of governance. *Lumen Gentium* 28 affirms that:

Priests, although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, and although they are dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power, nevertheless they are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity. By the power of the Sacrament of Orders, in the image of Christ the eternal high Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship, so that they are true priests of the New Testament.

The same paragraph outlines the duties of the pastor in the parish. These duties form a remarkable parallel with the responsibilities of the bishop as pastor of the local church:

Partakers of the function of Christ, the sole Mediator, on their level of ministry they announce the Divine Word to all.

They exercise their sacred function, especially in the Eucharistic worship by which acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His Mystery, they unite the prayers of the faithful with the sacrifice of their Head and renew and apply in the sacrifice of the Mass until the coming of the Lord.

For the sick and the sinners among the faithful, they exercise the ministry of alleviation and reconciliation and they present the needs and the prayers of the faithful to God the Father.

Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head, they gather together God's family as a brotherhood all of one mind, and lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, to God the Father.

In the midst of the flock they adore Him in spirit and in truth.

Finally, they labor in word and doctrine, believing what they have read and meditated upon in the law of God, teaching what they have believed, and putting in practice in their own lives what they have taught.

Pastors Conformed to Christ

It is the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the fullness of orders residing in the office of bishop that raises some real theological and pastoral questions about the nature and meaning of the office of pastor (*parochus*). While bishops hold orders in their own right, and are not simply delegates of the pope; the same is not true of the parish priest. The parish priest, like all priests, shares in the mission and ministry of the bishop, but to a lesser degree. The presbyters share in the ministry of the bishop and according to the Council, in some sense make the bishop present in the parish community.

Priests, prudent cooperators with the Episcopal order, its aid and instrument, called to serve the people of God, constitute one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties. Associated with their bishop in a spirit of trust and generosity, they make him present in a certain sense in the individual local congregations, and take upon themselves, as far as they are able, his duties and the burden of his care, and discharge them with a daily interest. And as they sanctify and govern under the bishop's authority, that part of the Lord's flock entrusted to them they make the universal Church visible in their own locality and bring an efficacious assistance to the building up of the whole body of Christ (LG 28).

It is obvious that the priest's sacerdotal character may be complete because he has the power (*potestas*) to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice but his ministry is not *sui juris*. It is a sharing in the ministry of the bishop, dependent upon him, and under the bishop's direction.

At the same time, *Lumen Gentium* acknowledges that the presbyteral order "although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood," exercise their power in communion with the bishop and are dependent upon the bishop. Nevertheless, presbyters share, in a real way, in the priesthood of Christ by reception of the Sacrament of Orders and not simply by delegation. Presbyters are "true priests of the New Testament and act in the person of Christ" (LG 28, PO 2); and, "the priests...constitute, together with their bishop, one presbyterate..." (LG 28). *Christus Dominus* underlines the same point indicating that the pastor (any priest – even a Carthusian priest) represents Christ in his own name and not simply as an extension of the bishop. In *Christifideles Laici* 23, Pope John Paul insists that the sacrament of Holy Orders gives the priest a share in the "particular office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and in His eternal priesthood" (cf. PO 2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1563). It would be a mistake to think that the pastor is "simply a functional extension of the office and ministry of the bishop, a managerial figure who oversees the various aspects of parish life" (cf. Mark A. Pilon, "Pastors and Stability of Office," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, August/September, 2008).

Although ordained by the bishop to share and assist in his ministry, nevertheless, through ordination the priest shares in the priesthood of Christ as priest, prophet, and shepherd, because he is ontologically configured to Christ the High Priest and Good Shepherd. He exercises his pastoral care under the bishop's authority, as a cooperator with the bishop, but he is not simply a representative of the bishop in his pastoral office; rather, the pastor himself represents Christ. The description of the pastoral duties and functions of the bishop are equally true of the presbyter, not only by delegation, but intrinsically, through the reception of orders. The parish priest is a priest of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church incardinated into a diocese. He makes Christ and His Church present. He makes the bishop present in the sense of making the bishop's governance present.

Pastors as True Shepherds

Drawing on the documents of Vatican II, and the ancient liturgical tradition of the Church, the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop is replete with the concept of the bishop as a true shepherd. The same image of "true shepherd" used by the council for bishops is also apparent in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents to describe the role of the parish priest/pastor. Yet, in the light of the teaching that the Episcopal Order is the fullness of Holy Orders, that the priest shares in the

bishop's ministry, and the pastor makes the bishop present to the "local congregation" as pastor while remaining under the "authority" of the bishop, in what sense is the parish priest a true shepherd and proper pastor?

Just as there is a parallel between the mission of the bishop and the mission of the pastor, there is also a parallel between the ministerial territory of the diocese and the parish. While the bishop has the care of a particular church, a diocese; the pastor has the particular care of the parish. A parish is a specific community of the *Christifideles*, established on a stable basis within a particular Church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a parish priest as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop (*Priest, Pastor and Leader* 18; *Christus Dominus* 30; *CIC* 515.1). The pastor has the care of the *cura pastoralis* or *cura animarum*. The Code of Canon Law directly states: "the parish priest is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of that community under the authority of the diocesan bishop, with whom he has been called to share in the ministry of Christ so that, in the service of that community, he may discharge the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and the assistance of the lay members of the faithful and in accordance with the norms of the law" (*CIC* 519; cf. Council of Trent Session XXVI, can. 18; *Christus Dominus* 30).

Lest we think that the ministry of the pastor is simply functional, in his introductory statement to the Ecclesial Instruction, *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* (Congregation for Clergy, 2002), Pope John Paul II highlights the importance attached to the office of parish priest when he says that "the ecclesial community [of the parish] has an absolute need for the ministerial priesthood [if it is] to have Christ the Head and Shepherd present in her...without the presence of Christ represented by the priest, the sacramental guide of the community,[the parish] would not be an ecclesial community in its fullness." It is of fundamental importance for the parish to have a priest as pastor "who has the full care of souls" and while "other faithful can actively participate they cannot replace him as pastor" (*Priest, Pastor and Leader* 20).

The ecclesial centrality of the priest as leader of the parish community, John Paul II relates, stems from the "fundamental relation he has with Christ, Head and Pastor, as his sacramental representation." The character of pastor can never simply be reduced to that of a member of the "ordained parish staff," nor should his role be reduced to that of "sacramental minister" for he is "an icon of the presence of the historical Christ" (*Priest, Pastor and Leader* 19), the "sacramental representation" of Christ as head of the parish community. The Code of Canon Law clearly indicates that the status of the pastor is primarily one of holding office and not an employee.

The conciliar and post-conciliar documents on priesthood indicate that as the bishop is to be a true pastor of his diocesan church, the parish priest is to be a true pastor, or shepherd, to the parish community which has been entrusted to his pastoral care by the bishop. Although delegated, the pastor is a true shepherd. Once delegated, the pastor becomes the shepherd of a particular community with the rights and duties associated with that office. Commenting on the statement in *Christus Dominus* 30 that "the pastor is a pastor in his own name," Mark A. Pilon says: "He [the pastor] is a cooperator in a very special way, and he is so precisely because he represents Christ in his own name and not simply as an extension of the bishop. Even though he exercises his pastoral care under the authority of the bishop and as a cooperator with the bishop, nonetheless, he does not simply represent the bishop in his pastoral office but Christ himself" (Pilon, "Pastors and Stability of Office").

Concerning the nature of the ministry of the presbyter as a parish priest, which presupposes the designations of proper pastor and true shepherd, it may seem more appropriate to see the relationship between the bishop and the pastor as parallel to the relationship between the pope and the bishop. A bishop needs to be in communion with the pope, but he receives his apostolic delegation to ministry directly from Christ because he is ontologically conformed to Christ. The pastor delegated by the bishop and necessarily in communion with him, nevertheless receives his 'priestly' character and commission from Christ because he is ontologically conformed to Christ the priest. *Lumen Gentium* 22 points out that the bishop, in order for his ministry to be authentic and truly fruitful, must be in communion with the pope. The same sense of communion is a fruitful paradigm for understanding the relationship between the parish and the diocese and the pastor and the bishop.

What does it mean for a Pastor to be a True Shepherd? Concerns for the Office of Pastor

Anecdotal evidence suggests a number of factors have undermined the unique identity and vision of the pastor as a true shepherd and suffered this office to be re-evaluated and somewhat weakened. Scientific data, sociological or demographic, has not yet been accumulated to prove what is happening but some studies indicate that this may be a real issue for priests and bishops in the coming years (cf. Hoge; Schuth; Bohr).

Some factors that might indicate the undermining of the effective leadership of the pastor could include: the strong exclusive emphasis on the sacramentality and apostolicity of the Episcopal Order as the 'fullness of orders' in which the presbyteral order is understood merely as an incomplete sharing; the growing bureaucracy of diocesan administration with authority to insert themselves into parish affairs and move from being of assistance to the pastor/parish to have an imagined oversight of the pastor; the decline in the number of priests; the amalgamation and multiplication of parishes under one pastor; the flexible interpretation of Canon 517.2 and the advancement of laity, deacons, and religious as parish administrators or parish life directors responsible for aspects of governance and pastoral leadership traditionally considered the prerogative of the pastor, sometimes in spite of the availability of priests who are sometimes re-assigned as 'the sacramental minister' on the parish staff; the separation of the housing of the pastor from the parish boundaries; term limits which have a tendency to undermine the concept of the *pater familias* and prevent the development, implementation, and completion of pastoral visions for a particular community; a sense of being under-valued and unsupported by the bishop, diocesan administration, and parishioners. *Christifideles Laici* can be drawn on in a way that promotes what Pope John Paul II called the "clericalization of the laity" and "laicization of the clergy" so that priests lose the sense of a vocation to consecration and service for the things of God, and the laity lose the sense of their mission as called to sanctify the temporal order. Probably the most destructive of all to the pastors' role as "proper pastor" and true shepherd, is the tendency of some bishops to undermine the pastor by micro-managing the internal affairs of the parish directly or through policy implemented by an over-keen diocesan executive.

Many of these elements have the potential of preventing a positive stability in the relationship between the pastor and the parish community. The priest loses a sense of connectedness to a particular community and the community begins to see the priest as having no personal commitment or investment in the community, but simply someone passing through, a transient stranger.

Interestingly, Cardinal Ratzinger, following the lead of Cardinal Bernardin Gantin (Congregation for Bishops) and Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments), suggested that this model was inappropriate for bishops who he suggested should see themselves as married to their diocesan community – a life long commitment (cf. *30 Giorni*, April, 1999).

In the Church today there is a practical and theological divide taking place around the understanding of the role of the pastor. This is not a liberal-conservative, or traditional-progressive divide. Rather, it is a shift in vision concerning ecclesial governance and leadership derived from the Conciliar theology that established the Episcopal Order as the source and necessary bond of all other ecclesial governance. Without doubt, there is a growing sense that, at least practically, the once pivotal role of the pastor as shepherd is being so undermined that soon it may not have any real actual relevance. And yet, theologically, the Conciliar, canonical, as well as recent papal and magisterial documentation, continue to uphold the vision of the parish pastor as an intrinsic aspect of ecclesial life.

It is interesting that the questions bishops had concerning the nature of their character, authority, and apostolic ministries, as well as, their relationship with the supreme papal ministry and their collegial responsibilities, apparent after the First Vatican Council, are similar to the questions and concerns that arise when examining the relationship between the pastor and the bishop even now after the Second Vatican Council. It seems there are two divergent movements taking place. The first is practical, as a number of dioceses, some out of necessity and some by design, are choosing alternative models of pastoral and parochial leadership. The second is a movement that sees the Magisterium continuing to press a theological model of pastor as an essential Christological figure and shepherd present in the midst of the community. At this present time, the understanding of what it means when we say that the parish priest is an essential “proper pastor” or “true shepherd” has become a disputed question.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What are the characteristics and expectations you would have of a ‘true shepherd,’ whether Pope, Bishop, or Parish Priest?
2. There are two opinions with regard to the length of the appointment of pastors. The traditional custom was that pastors are appointed for life while a more contemporary approach is to term limit pastors. List the pros and cons associated with each approach.
3. What is the source of leadership in the Church and how is it diffused through the Body of Christ?

Dentur idonei confessarii; ecce omnium Christianorum plena reformatio: The Confessor and the Need for Ongoing Formation

Rev. Earl K. Fernandes

Introduction

A bishop is overheard saying: “If you want to know when a priest stopped reading, just look at his book shelves.” A pastor mentions, “I would have loved to have gone to that lecture, but there’s just no time.” A priest, pondering a sabbatical, says, “I would love to go on sabbatical, but I can’t take the time away from the parish.” The first time pastor relates, “I’m so overwhelmed. I’m trying to get my legs under me. How can they expect me to show up at one of these junior clergy sessions?” The recently ordained complains, “I just had five years of seminary. I don’t need any more training. I want to celebrate the sacraments and be with the people. These ongoing formation sessions are just a big waste of time.”

A common denominator in these comments is that ongoing formation is undervalued. The undervaluing of continuing education contradicts an ecclesial imperative present in the recommendations of the Council of Trent, Vatican II, and the popes since Vatican II. Father James Rafferty contends that a disposition “that fortifies a priest’s fidelity to the grace of ordination is a commitment to ongoing formation. The disposition interiorized through self-motivated, lifelong formation is the attitude of the pilgrim on the journey to the heavenly kingdom. The pilgrim rests but does not lose sight of the overall destination.”

It is not that priests do not place any value on ongoing formation. Many believe that given time constraints and workload in an age of fewer priests, ongoing formation is low priority. Nevertheless, continuing education, especially in the area of moral theology, remains essential to the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation and to giving pastoral guidance to parishioners. Saying “I didn’t have time to brush up on my moral theology” does not help the parishioner in need.

In this article, I hope to demonstrate the urgent need for ongoing formation in the area of moral theology. First, the article will present case scenarios that will show the practical value of ongoing formation. After considering concrete cases, the article will highlight the value of ongoing formation by examining models of the confessor proposed by Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori.

The Case for Ongoing Formation: Cases for Ongoing Formation

Some concrete cases demonstrate the urgent need for ongoing formation.

Case 1:

A woman walks into the confessional and says that she is very pro-life. She cannot stand abortion. There is a fertility clinic in town that was going to “dispose of frozen embryos.” She decided to “adopt” these embryos and have them implanted, so at least they would not be destroyed or experimented upon. She says, “The babies are growing fine, Father, but I started to wonder if I did the right thing, especially after that new Vatican document. Did I sin because the process wasn’t natural? Father, don’t the ends justify the means in this case? I mean, isn’t a lesser evil to choose this route than to have them destroyed? Did I sin, Father?”

Case 2:

A Catholic couple from your parish has two children. Their marriage is in trouble. In fact, they have separated. Early in their marriage, they were having trouble conceiving, so they attempted *in vitro* fertilization. Now that they are separating, they ask: “What should be done with the frozen embryos? Who gets them?”

Case 3:

A man comes for confession. He admits that in his youth, he was promiscuous. Finally, he settled down with a young Catholic woman. He and his wife have three children. He describes his marriage as healthy. Breaking into tears, he says: “Father, I hate to admit it but when I was on a business trip, I visited a prostitute. I don’t know how I got myself into that situation. How could I do that to my wife and kids? Father, after I got back, I went to see my doctor. My HIV test turned up positive. What do I tell my wife? Do I have to tell her? Could I use a condom so I don’t infect her?”

Case 4:

A woman comes to the parish office. If priests had favorite parishioners, she and her husband would be near the top of the list. They attend Mass daily, teach in the RCIA program, and have two small children who are polite and well-behaved. The wife begins, “Father, thanks for meeting with me.” Then she breaks down in tears. She continues: “Father, we’re in trouble in our marriage. We try to do what the Church asks of us. We practice NFP, but when they say we should ‘cuddle’, sometimes it’s just hard to stop there. It’s causing problems, Father. I’m so tense. I have lost all desire for sex, but my husband hasn’t. Sometimes I feel like I’m being used as a thing. Father, you probably don’t know this, but the past two years, I had two miscarriages. I just can’t get pregnant again, but I don’t want to go on the pill and my husband doesn’t want to use a condom. Father, can you help me?”

Is the priest prepared?

Do you know the principles involved in solving these cases? Are you familiar with recent theological opinion in medical-moral theology? Concretely, a person or a couple is looking for a word of advice, comfort, consolation, clarity, and direction. What words will come forth from the lips of the priest? Perhaps, a recently-ordained priest has tackled some of these bioethical issues, but the more distantly-ordained might never have studied them. Can the priest, whether in the office or confessional, say, “If only I had read that two page issue of *Ethics and Medics*!!!”?

Technological and biomedical advances are outpacing ethical reflection upon many pressing issues. The principles learned in moral theology in seminary may be just as valid today as they were five, ten, forty, or fifty years ago; however, the application of those principles to ever-more technical matters is becoming increasingly difficult. While ethical reflection may not keep pace with technological advancement, this does not dispense the priest from giving *some* ethical reflection to such issues, even if the most difficult cases are referred to experts. In many professions - law, medicine, nursing, education - it is expected that those in the particular field will participate in continuing education programs and acquire continuing education credits. There are consequences for those who do not - such as loss of licensure, demotion, reduction in pay - and rewards for those who meet the standards. These are standards of the “professional” community.

There are also standards for the Catholic community. Being theologically well-educated is important from a professional viewpoint, but it is also important from the vocational viewpoint. It is precisely because of the priest's identity that he should be held to a higher standard than other professions - for he represents Christ the Head of the Body. In *Pastores dabo vobis*, John Paul II described a vocation as a "gift whose purpose is to build up the Church and to increase the kingdom of God in the world." The well-formed and well-educated priest is positioned to assist families and penitents in their situation, which often appears to be a minefield. The manner in which he assists the family will reflect on the priesthood and the Church and will affect the lives of his flock. The *Program for Priestly Formation* reminds the Church's ministers:

The process and the journey of the ongoing formation of priests is both necessary and lifelong. Its purpose is not only the spiritual growth of the priest himself but also the continued growth of his mission and ministry.

Preparation for priestly ministry, especially for the sacrament of reconciliation, requires not only prayer and virtue, but also intellectual formation, which has a reciprocal relationship with spiritual formation. The question is: "Am I prepared?"

Furthermore, "Am I prepared?" should be considered from the point of view of human and pastoral formation. The resolution of cases or correct moral principles *alone* will not meet the needs of a parishioner who longs to hear the compassionate word or who needs to know that his or her priest can empathize. The priest exercises his ministry to help someone continue his walk with God. Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. Does Jesus tell the parable to teach his disciples how to resolve cases or to teach his disciples to act with compassion? Formation in ministry is much larger than mere intellectual formation.

The Case for Ongoing Formation: Saint Alphonsus de Liguori and the Models of the Confessor

The value of proper preparation for the exercise of the priestly office, especially in the confessional, is highlighted throughout the Catholic Tradition. An overlooked doctor of the Church who wrote about the necessity of ongoing formation is Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (1696-1787), patron of confessors and moralists. It was Alphonsus who influenced another great confessor - Saint John Vianney, patron of the parish priest. Abbé Francis Trochu writes:

Until 1840 he (St. John Vianney) followed the *rigorism* which at that time prevailed in most of the confessionals of France. From 1840 onward...thanks to a study of the theology of St. Alphonsus, which had just been published in French by Cardinal Gousset, the Curé d'Ars showed himself sensibly less strict.

The moral theology and confessional practice of Alphonsus must be placed within a historical context. During the 6th session of the Council of Trent (January 12, 1547), the Council Fathers affirmed the existence of the sacrament of penance and distinguished it from baptism. In the 14th session (November 25, 1551), the Fathers defined the essence of the sacrament; determined its form (absolution) and quasi-matter (contrition, satisfaction, and confession of sins). They required formal integrity of the confession of all mortal sins that could be recalled after a thorough and diligent examination and reiterated the precept of annual confession.

To carry out their program of reform, the Fathers knew that competent clerics were needed; therefore, the formation of priests was of great concern. Thus, the decree on the erection of seminaries occupies a prominent place. One of its principal goals in dealing with the formation of future priests was “the administration of the sacraments, above all that which seems opportune for the hearing of confessions.”

The Council mandated that seminaries offer studies in which practical questions were of principal importance. As a result, the study of moral theology was ordained toward preparing priests to hear confessions fruitfully. The practical and utilitarian character, almost “professional,” was imprinted on the teaching of moral theology. Little by little, manuals were developed to teach cases of conscience.

These manuals were limited in scope to the practical resolution of cases of conscience. They sought to help the priest determine whether a mortal sin had been committed and to help make determinations in the exercise of the priest’s judicial office - whether a sin was mortal; whether sufficient sorrow was present; whether absolution should be given; and what a suitable penance might be. Unfortunately, these manuals neglected key subjects such as the beatific vision and the central role of the virtues in the moral life. They tended to be concerned more with law than with growth in holiness.

The manuals remained the main way of teaching moral theology in the 18th century when Alphonsus exercised his pastoral ministry. In the changing world of his day, he invested a lot of intellectual energy into the preparation of instruments to help the confessor in the ministry of reconciliation. Alphonsus was well aware that the manuals of the previous eras were insufficient for priests as spiritual guides for their people. The world was changing, and priests with faculties for confessions needed to adapt to these changes.

His moral theology was the fruit of his mature thought. When he wrote his *Theologia Moralis* in 1748, he was more than fifty years old and had been ordained for twenty years, having previously worked in the “world,” hearing legal cases of people from all walks of life. He viewed his intellectual activity (writing and studying) as an extension of his pastoral activity. He always makes reference to experience and to concrete situations and conditions, weaving together pastoral and theological concerns. In 1755, he published a second edition of his *Theologia Moralis*, which contained his *Praxis Confessarii*. In this work, he describes the confessor as having four offices: father, physician, teacher, and judge. Each office shows the need for ongoing formation.

The Priest as Father

Alphonsus presents the priest as *father*. Alphonsus’ experience hearing confessions as a young priest led him to move away from the rigorism he had learned from François Genet’s manual of moral theology to a more moderate and compassionate stance. In this sense, his ongoing formation occurred through his pastoral ministry. He writes that to be a credible father, the priest must strive to show charity, must be a person of prayer and virtue, and must be patient. These are the characteristics of a good father. The priest is a father who welcomes the repentant son in Luke 15. The confessor, as father, should not immediately send the unprepared penitent away or try to frighten him; rather, he must encourage him through his words to true sorrow and repentance. Just as parents must listen to their children, so also the priest-father should listen to the penitent.

Too often confessors want to talk but do not listen. Listening helps to discern the work of the Spirit and helps the penitent to discern it too. To listen is a gesture of poverty; it is to look at the issue from the point of view of the “other.”

The Priest as Physician

The priest is a *physician*. When a physician conducts an examination, the patient’s medical history is critical. Attentive listening and dialogue are essential to discovering the root of the illness, whether physical or spiritual. The physician or priest acknowledges that there is a sick person in need of medical or spiritual attention. Sin is an illness that needs a cure – the *saving truth*. It is not enough to say the truth; one must articulate this *saving* truth in a way that pierces to the heart and is clear to the penitent, so that the patient may take the spiritual medicine. This highlights the need for ongoing formation in speech, rhetoric, and persuasion.

It is also useful to think of the standards set for physicians today. Keeping current with the latest medical literature and techniques is required of the doctor and expected by the patient. Which of us would make an appointment to see a physician who had done no further study since medical school? The priest-physician must have a regular *aggiornamento* or he might be guilty of spiritual malpractice.

The Priest as Teacher

The priest is a *teacher*. He must be learned, not only in theology, but also in other disciplines. If the priest is ignorant, he cannot teach a saving truth. He needs more than knowledge of principles; he has to address the concrete situations of daily life. In his *Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, Alphonsus explains why ongoing formation in moral theology is necessary:

The science of Moral Theology requires knowledge of many other sciences, and embraces an immense variety of matter. It is also most difficult, because different decisions must be given, according to the different circumstances of the cases that occur; for a principle by which a case involving a certain circumstance may be decided will not answer for the solution of another case containing different circumstances.

Some disdain to read the works of the moralists, saying that to hear confessions it is enough to know the general principles of Moral Theology, by which, they add, the particular cases may be resolved. I answer: It is certain that all cases must be decided by means of certain principles, but there is great difficulty in applying to particular cases just principles of solution. This the moralists have done. They have labored to explain the principles by which many particular cases may be resolved. Besides, at present there are a great number of positive laws contained in the bulls and decrees of Pontiffs, as well as in the ancient canons, and which a confessor is obliged to know. Of these laws he who neglects to read Moral Theology shall scarcely be able to acquire competent knowledge.

While he does not deny that one needs “less knowledge to hear the confessions of a simple person than of a curialist, shopkeeper, ecclesiastic and similar types of people; and less knowledge

to hear confessions in a village than in a city,” this does not exempt the confessor from proper preparation. Alphonsus holds as indispensable that the confessor know how far his jurisdiction extends; how to distinguish venial sins from mortal sins; and, which questions to ask; the circumstances of the sins at least those that change the species; what constitutes the proximate occasion of sin; what induces the obligation of restitution; what kind of sorrow and resolve are necessary; and finally which remedy should be given in order to help the penitent out of his sinful habit.

Continual study also helps the confessor (and his penitents) to avoid errors in practical living. Alphonsus warns that “any confessor who dares to hear confession without sufficient knowledge is certainly in a state of damnation. God Himself condemns him: *Since you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from my priesthood (Hosea 4, 6).*” Moreover, even if the confessor has studied something once, moral theology requires constant review and study. He writes:

The facets of this science are so many and so varied that even if he has studied much, he will easily forget them after a period of time because some things that he should know will happen so seldom. For this reason, he should review his moral theology over and over.

Ongoing formation of the confessor involves not only applying principles to new cases but also constant revision because of the vast subject area.

The Priest as Judge

Finally, the priest is *judge*. Interestingly, Alphonsus lists this last, though as a former lawyer, he would have been well-suited to emphasize the judicial office. The Council of Trent refers to the priest as judge and speaks of absolution as a judicial act. Alphonsus acknowledges the confessor as judge but cautions that “just as the judge is bound to hear the reasons of the parties and to examine the merits of the case and finally to give sentence, so the confessor must first inform himself of the conscience of the penitent; he must examine his dispositions, and finally give or deny absolution.” To make an informed judgment, the priest must be committed to studying moral theology, coming to a greater knowledge of the human condition and the conscience of the penitent. This does not happen simply in virtue of ordination; rather, it happens through study and praxis of the moral life and the sacrament. In making a judgment about the morality of an act, the confessor must consider the object of the act, the intention, and the circumstances, which vary from case to case. The confessor needs to make an informed judgment under the influence of prudence to help the penitent.

Conclusion

In the modern day, the priest must contend with a declining number of penitents in a post-modern society. The opportunities to exercise the office of confessor as father, physician, teacher, and even judge may be less frequent today than in Alphonsus’ era; nevertheless, the models of the confessor remain applicable to priestly ministry today. While the penitents may be fewer, the problems appear to be becoming more complex. To deal with this complexity, ongoing formation for priests, especially in moral theology, is essential. It is essential not only to make priests better confessors but to make God’s mercy, His saving Word, more present in the lives of the Christian faithful. To quote St. Pius V: “Give us fit confessors; behold, all of Christianity will be reformed.”

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How much ongoing formation do you believe priests need? In which areas do priests need the most formation?
2. What do you believe are the reasons why more priests do not take advantage of opportunities for ongoing formation?
3. If you are a priest, with which of the four models mentioned above do you most readily identify? Least readily identify? Why?
4. In your experience of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, how well do priests exercise these four offices? What model(s) would you like to see in your priest-confessor?

The Identity of the Priest as Preacher— Preacher, Who Do You Say that You Are?

Deacon David J. Shea

“Any way you look at it, *that* act is a foolhardy thing to do. Who will volunteer to conduct lightning from heaven to earth?” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God is Silent* [Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1998] 86). In her reflective work, *When God is Silent*, Barbara Brown Taylor uses the metaphor of a lightning rod to describe the preacher; it is not a matter of *whether* the lightning will strike, but *when* it will strike. To stand in the pulpit is to stand between God and humanity, and there are few less daunting responsibilities. Why, then, would anyone want to become a preacher? What type of individual is a preacher; what can be said of the preacher’s personality, attitudes, motivations, drives, self-understanding, and identity? Ask any preacher and he will tell you that somehow God has had a hand in his decision to become a preacher. It is described using words like “calling” and “God-directed” that clearly place this ministry in the realm of the sacred, something that goes beyond traditional measurements of qualifications, motivations, and rewards. No more suitable explanation exists as to why someone would want to preach, except to say, “It’s what God wants me to do.” Few responsibilities represent greater personal risk than that of ascending to the pulpit to assume the task of being the conductor of divine lightning.

Given the essential demands of the job – that of being a public speaker in a very public setting – you might think that the ministry of preaching would attract only the vocally gifted, the most eloquent, and the charismatic. While that may be true in certain cases, with certain men, we also know that preaching attracts a great diversity of personalities, from the soft-spoken introvert, who brings a hesitant and uneasy demeanor into the pulpit, to the over-the-top extrovert who brings great energy and drama to the homily; from the poet who skillfully weaves words together in vivid pictures, to the essayist who struggles for hours trying to find the right words to convey what is in his heart. “It is true, of course, that some preachers have a rare measure of talent and charisma and are readily identified as ‘naturally’ and extraordinarily gifted . . . but the church is nourished most of all by the kind of careful, responsible, and faithful preaching that falls within the range of most of us” (Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989] 21). Hope abounds for every preacher who realistically assesses and accepts who he is. The preacher who brings his authentic self to the pulpit, strives to do his very best day in and day out, and views preaching as an extension of his day-to-day ministry as a priest caring for God’s people in the local parish, is one who is openly received by those in the pews from Sunday-to-Sunday.

Research into Priestly Identity

Some of the initial fieldwork that was undertaken in a study about the identity of the priest as preacher consisted of focus groups that were conducted among cross sections of seminarians and priests in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The objective of the focus groups was to obtain answers to a number of preaching-related questions while gaining insights into the issues of self-awareness and identity. The primary intention of the focus groups was to obtain information to support the development of a comprehensive quantitative survey instrument.

The “Survey on Preaching,” conducted among the priests of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, was an in-depth examination of preaching practices, attitudes, self-awareness, and identity. The

survey consisted of 38 questions and took respondents approximately 35 minutes to complete. In the category of “Preaching Practices & Activities,” the survey examined the processes that are followed in preparing and writing homilies. Under the category of “Personality,” priests were asked to rate themselves in twenty-five pairs of traits and attributes. The survey also presented priests with six questions under the subject of “Attitudes” to gain insights into their feelings, personal attitudes, concerns, congregational expectations, and self-perceptions on the quality of their homilies and preaching. Seventy percent of the priests of the archdiocese participated in the survey.

One of the overriding objectives of this study was to define the identity (or identities) of the priests based upon their self-assessment; in other words: “Preacher, who do *you* say that you are?” Using various images and identities from the focus groups, priests were given sixteen different images (Teacher, Judge, Healer, Entertainer, Herald, Evangelist, Cheerleader, Witness, Disciple, Pastor, Human Being, Pilgrim, Theologian, Mouthpiece for God, Bearer of Good News, and One Who Brings Others Together) and asked to rate each as a way of describing their identities as preachers. The selection of preacher images was one important variable among several that were used in developing key identity segments. The analysis of the survey responses revealed that the sixteen images yielded three distinct preacher identity types: the *Disciple*, representing 42% of priests, the *Entertainer*, accounting for 37% of priests, and the *Teacher*, accounting for 21% of priests.

The Identity of the Priest

It is likely that most preachers have an understanding of how their preaching fits into the larger context of their ministry. In other words, preaching does not exist apart from the ministry that comprises the life of the priest. Thomas G. Long, in *The Witness of Preaching*, suggests that most people who enter the ministry of preaching do so with some concrete understanding of who they are, what they have been doing, and what they will do in their vocations as ministers: “In other words, we do not just go out and do ministry. We carry with us, as we go, pictures of what we think ministers ought to be and do, pictures of who we believe ourselves to be as ministers” (p. 23). These pictures play an important role in how priests and preachers flex their behavior to measure-up to people’s expectations and flex their mindset to adopt a corresponding identity or identities.

Interestingly, when the question of identity was raised among priests in focus groups, it was met with considerable head scratching and hesitation – priests were not sure about their identities as priests, let alone their identities as preachers. Their reaction seemed to suggest that identity was a foreign concept; it was not the way they had thought about their ministry or their preaching. Some priests even wondered out loud, “Is our identity as a preacher all that important?” However, when the discussion shifted to the perspective of their congregations – “How do you come across in the pulpit, how do people perceive you, in what way does your demeanor in the pulpit communicate who you are, and if your parishioners were asked to give a name for your identity as a preacher, what would it be?” – it was far easier for priests to talk about their identity as preachers. For certain, identity is a complex, multifaceted, and elusive concept. For the purposes of this essay, identity is based upon *how priests see themselves as preachers* – their core self-understanding of personality, behaviors, preaching practices, and expectations for their preaching.

Who, then, is the preacher? Who are the Disciples, Entertainers, and Teachers? What are the traits and behaviors of the priests/preachers who comprise each segment? Does the priest’s

identity as a preacher genuinely reflect who he is as a human being? To what extent does standing in the pulpit bring about a change in identity?

The Disciple

The Disciple is a “Bearer of Good News,” and “Herald” is one of the images that he chooses to describe himself. Empathy is one of the Disciple’s character traits, and this is manifested in his desire to seek input from others as the primary influencers for the content of his homilies. What people tell him is important. This attribute is also in evidence in his openness and willingness to receive feedback about his preaching. Assuming a humble posture towards preaching, he readily acknowledges: “I’m a good homilist, but I could be better.” He works hard at preaching and is committed to improving as a preacher. When he first started to preach, his identity of preference was that of Mouthpiece for God or Bearer of Good News. He now sees himself more as a Pilgrim and member of the congregation.

The Disciple, more than the other identity types, will make references to popular culture in his homilies. In terms of success, he uses an inductive style of preaching and prefers to leave his message open-ended, challenging the members of his congregation to come to their own conclusions. The priest who is a Disciple will draw energy from his preaching and as a result he feels hopeful as he preaches. His focus is that of striving to be inspirational and he has an open mind about investing time and effort in becoming a better preacher.

The Entertainer

The Entertainer is highly socially minded. He tends to be energized by interaction with people, and in that sense, he is very similar to an extrovert. He wants his preaching to make people feel like they are a part of the community. It is important for him to believe that he, just like his parishioners, is a part of the community, and he will strive to convey this in his preaching. The Entertainer has a strong preference for the use of stories about people in his homilies. He has a willingness to use humor to make connections with his congregations. This is a real distinguishing trait for the Entertainer vis-à-vis the Disciple and Teacher.

Simplicity is a word that describes his approach to organizing and planning a homily. He is generally to the point, and short and quick in delivering his homilies. The Entertainer is likely to preach without notes and this is sometimes used as a justification for not investing substantial effort and time into preparing his homilies. His attitude is one of, “There’s a message here in the scriptures, and I’m going to give it to you.” The Entertainer’s homilies can bear the earmarks of the deductive form, and the Entertainer does not generally believe in leaving his message open-ended.

The Teacher

The Teacher describes himself as intense, and although he is challenged by the demands of preparing a homily, it is a process that he finds exciting and exhilarating. The Teacher possesses an impressive work ethic that he applies to the process of preparing and preaching a homily, and he will work on a homily until it is his best possible effort. He is very much the educator and is principally influenced by books he reads and other preachers he has heard. In a true sense, the Teacher

is always attending class, even when he is a member of a congregation participating in a liturgy or worship service.

In terms of the objectives of his homilies, he wants to give his parishioners new information and education on Church teaching. He assumes that his congregation expects him to be an intellectual. Consequently, he can sometimes preach a message that can be “aimed too high,” and his homilies can be difficult to understand.

The Teacher is more reflective and deliberate in his approach to preparing a homily and likely invests the greatest amount of time in preparation while tending to also preach the longest homilies. Success as a preacher is measured by coming across as an intellectual (consistent with his identity as a teacher and theologian) and by delivering a homily that is open-ended. The Teacher is most likely to experience feelings of being excited and exhilarated as he preaches. Preaching is definitely an uplifting and positive involvement for the Teacher. It is important for him that his homilies are thought-provoking and interesting and that people learn something from them.

The Preacher’s Identity and Personality

One of the critical areas of inquiry was that of the relationship between self-perception and personality. The Disciple, the Entertainer, and the Teacher are significantly different from one another in the areas of perception of self as preacher, principal personality traits, and attitude toward self. When a priest preaches a homily, that task is part of his self-understanding as priest and minister. A homily is never developed apart from the preacher’s self-understanding.

The derivation of preacher identities was based upon the choices that priests made with regards to how they saw themselves as human beings, priests, and preachers. The identity of the priest as preacher is seamlessly integrated into the priest’s very being.

The Disciple is tolerant and empathetic. He genuinely cares about his preaching, and he gauges his success as a preacher by what people tell him about his homilies. He takes a rather humble approach to preparing his homilies and feels that he has to continue to work on his preaching skills and knowledge so that he can become a better preacher. The Disciple is more tolerant and relaxed in his orientation, and he takes an empathetic posture in his dealings with others. His overriding concern for his parishioners is that they grow closer to Christ; this tends to drive everything about his preaching ministry. His empathetic nature means that he is highly interested in contact and interaction with people, especially if he is going to preach to them effectively. He wants to make meaningful connections with people by discussing things in which they likely hold an interest.

The Entertainer is most likely viewed as having a high level of energy, and it is important that his homilies are interesting, well-delivered and fun. The Entertainer’s relationship with his parishioners is a significant driver in his ministry as a preacher. The Entertainer, who also sees himself as a cheerleader, is demanding and spirited. He is self-confident, driven, and highly energetic. His primary concern is that people like him and are entertained by his homilies. The Entertainer preaches, quite literally, by his own rules, using his own methodologies. He likely discloses who he is, what he likes to do, and what he believes, and tends to leave his message open-ended.

The Teacher is prone to worrying about his ministry and he strives to be a perfectionist. He brings this same orientation to his preaching and works on a homily until he is convinced that it is the best it can be. Not surprisingly, he finds the responsibility of writing a homily to be challenging and even difficult and this may account for the amount of time he invests in the process. He is one to acknowledge that he occasionally has not done as good a job as he is capable of in preparing a homily. As he worries about his ministry in general, the Teacher also worries about how well he preaches. The Teacher is concerned about giving his congregations new information and education on Church teaching in his homilies.

The Preacher's Relationship with His Congregation

Over and above any other influence, priests mentioned that the key influencers of their preaching were experiences, both their own and those of the individuals in their parishes – the most impactful events that were going on around them every day. Charles Miller addresses this issue of the every-day relationship between a priest and his congregation in his book, *Ordained to Preach*. He offers a reflection on Jesus in prayer as a way of underscoring the importance of the priest's connection to his congregation – “When Jesus spent whole nights in prayer . . . he reflected on the events of that day. He thought of the people whose needs he had met and whose stories continued to echo in his mind. He could wrap the message he preached in wonderful parables, metaphors, and analogies because he was always reflecting on the significance of human experience” (Charles E. Miller, *Ordained to Preach* [New York: Alba House, 1992] 16).

The preacher is one who moves to the pulpit from the congregation; he is first a member of that congregation before he becomes a preacher. Standing in the pulpit the preacher is now the one who brings the Word of God to his parishioners. In his book, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism: Sidelights on the “Catechism of the Catholic Church,”* the then Cardinal Ratzinger stressed that the words of the preacher are not simply words, but rather words that are “sacramental,” words that convey the presence of Christ within him (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism: Sidelights on the “Catechism of the Catholic Church”* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997] 50). A preacher's genuineness in witnessing to and conveying his love for God directly impacts on the congregation's ability to find and experience security in their own love for God: the more personally and the more authentically the priest presents himself in the pulpit the more likely he is going to be heard and the more likely he is going to be able to influence his congregation.

Importance of Self-Understanding

The preaching survey revealed that the personality, self-assessment and identity of the priest, as preacher, can be highly significant in determining his fundamental attitude regarding preaching. The survey also yielded insights into both the practices and needs for each of the three preacher identity-types. Identity is a derivative of a priest's self-image as a preacher, priest, and human being. An understanding of identity underscores the value and importance of self-awareness. Appreciation and acceptance of one's identity as a preacher should permit priests to work with their talents, to develop them into strengths, while working within their weaknesses, to become the best possible preachers they are capable of becoming.

Survey Available Online

The Survey on Preaching, which yielded great insights into priests' practices, hopes, expectations, and attitudes, from which the three identity types were derived, is available online for examination on the Preaching Resources section of the Athenaeum website: <http://www.mtsm.org/preaching>. A review of the questions can serve as a valuable opportunity for self-examination and self-reflection for the priest as preacher.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How do you see yourself as a preacher? In what ways do you strive to convey a particular identity to your congregation?
2. In your self-assessment, and based upon the descriptions of the three principal preacher identity types in this essay, are you a Teacher, a Disciple, or an Entertainer? How do your behaviors, attributes, and expectations for your preaching compare with those that were derived from the survey of the priests of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati?
3. How would your parishioners describe you as a preacher? How does their assessment of you compare with your own?
4. In what ways does your identity as a preacher compare with your identity as a priest?
5. In what ways could you change how you project yourself as a preacher? In your assessment, how are you living out your living encounter with Christ, in your preaching, to your parishioners? If the goal of every homily is to lead people to an encounter with Christ, how are you striving to be genuinely present to those in your parish who are trying to find their way to God's presence through you? In other words, how do those who regularly hear you preach encounter the person of Christ in the homilies that you preach?

A Contemporary Therapist Looks at the Curé of Ars

Kevin Prendergast

Introduction

One hundred fifty years after the death of St. John Baptiste Marie Vianney, Pope Benedict XVI has designated him the patron not only of parish priests, but of all priests. In doing so, the Pope is directing our attention during the Year for Priests to this poor, simple man and the ways in which his spiritual journey might have a message for those who minister in the new millennium.

Applying the example of John Vianney to our contemporary culture, however, encounters serious obstacles immediately. Are we to imitate his extreme ascetical practices, which strike our modern sensibilities as simply self-abusive? What are we to make today of his encounters with the Devil? And while he stands as the exemplary “saint of the confessional,” what relevance does this have at a time when 75% of U.S. Catholics say they participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation less than once a year or never? (CARA, 2008).

To re-evaluate the Curé of Ars honestly, we must take into account his cultural context in post-Revolutionary rural France. When John Vianney died, for example, Sigmund Freud was only 3 years old. Freud’s groundbreaking work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was still four decades from being published. How might the past century of psychological research and psychotherapeutic experience help us to appreciate the Curé of Ars in a fresh way?

Catholic pastoral counseling attempts to integrate psychology with the wisdom of our faith tradition. I recall first hearing the story of John Vianney when I was but six years old and I was completely taken by his long hours in the confessional and his ability to “read souls.” His example played a key role, among other influences, in leading me to become a professional clinical counselor. In twenty years of clinical practice, as I have sat for long hours with clients in the “modern confessional” of the therapy office, I have come to value the intrinsic psychological wisdom of this poor parish priest.

I suggest that, through a respectful dialogue today, psychotherapists with an openness to the spiritual dimension of the human person could learn important lessons from a cleric who lived before the birth of modern psychology. Priests themselves, however, might also benefit in their ministry from a meditation on the Curé of Ars that is influenced by sound psychological insights. It is my belief that John Vianney came to understand the human person in a way that not all therapists or priests perhaps grasp as fully.

These reflections center on a few key themes: a) sin and therapy; b) asceticism, faith development, and wholeness; c) individual pastoral care and social justice; d) continuing formation of the minister; and e) meditation, prayer, and self-renewal..

Sin and Therapy

My good friend and colleague, Rev. Simon Kofi Appiah of the Diocese of Jasikan in Ghana, while visiting the U.S. and giving a guest lecture in one of my classes, was asked this ques-

tion by a young seminarian: “Isn’t it true that the popularity of therapy is one of the main reasons why Catholics no longer go to Confession?” Fr. Kofi answered with a vigorous, “No!” and went on to tell a story of a British psychiatrist under whom he had studied in graduate school. Although the psychiatrist was a self-proclaimed atheist, said Fr. Kofi, he was widely known for actively and consistently encouraging his Catholic clients to use the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

What is going on here? Fr. Kofi was making the point that Confession and counseling, properly understood, are complementary experiences that address two distinct realities within the human person – on the one hand, the existence of sin and personal accountability for harm done to others; and, on the other, the degree to which human freedom is circumscribed by heredity, biochemical processes, early environmental influences, unconscious dynamics, and trauma. As the Protestant theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noted: “The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is.... In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother, I can dare to be a sinner.”

The psychiatrist in Fr. Kofi’s story offers by his example a wise critique of the reductionistic tendency in much contemporary therapy. As a profession, we mental health practitioners show considerable skill in identifying factors that mitigate personal responsibility. For example, therapy with a middle-aged man who has had an extramarital affair might uncover legitimate influences that helped give rise to this behavior – perhaps being raised in an alcoholic family with a father who was unfaithful, perhaps disrupted early attachments or the wound of a parental divorce and subsequent parental remarriages. Making these unconscious historical dynamics conscious can often help liberate an individual from a compulsive dysfunctional pattern such as infidelity. Does such an analysis, however, fully capture what is going on?

An example may illustrate what’s missing. Some time ago, a couple near 60, who had been married nearly 30 years, came to me for counseling. A crisis had occurred when the wife discovered her husband, a successful businessman and decorated military veteran, had been having an affair with his secretary. The first several sessions were acrimonious and angry, with the husband taking an aggressive blaming stance toward his wife. I had nearly given up hope on their marriage when the husband came in one day and said: “I’ve been thinking about what you said and doing a lot of soul-searching. I have had to get honest with myself. I’m the one who brought this about – not my wife. I have betrayed my own principles and my own integrity. I’ve always preached those principles to people who worked for me, but I haven’t lived up to them myself.” He started crying, this strong man whom his wife had never seen cry in their entire life together.

This story is so unusual in therapy that it stands out. Therapy can be reduced to an arena where clients “ventilate,” discover elegant rationalizations for acting badly, and find creative ways to blame others (parents, spouses, authority figures). The clients in my experience who most consistently accept personal responsibility are the alcoholics and addicts in 12-Step programs who are willing to do a “searching and fearless moral inventory of themselves” as the only way out of a self-destructive addictive lifestyle. The godless psychiatrist and St. John Vianney, therefore, find common ground in their insistence that self-knowledge and psychological insight alone cannot totally heal the damage we cause others through our selfishness, betrayal, cruelty, and affronts to their human dignity. We also need forgiveness and reconciliation with God and with the community, realities beyond the scope of therapy alone. This is the arena of grace.

The corollary also needs attention. In the time of the Curé of Ars, no comprehensive system existed for differentiating between sin and psychological disorders. Traditional Catholic moral teaching always stated, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states today, that “mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent.... It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice” (1859). Our understanding of “deliberate consent,” however, has deepened since the 19th century and we recognize that the “degrees of freedom” operative in an individual may be severely limited by factors such as addiction, past sexual abuse and trauma, or significant emotional disorders such as Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, PTSD, or Personality Disorders. Just as an agnostic or atheistic therapist might direct a client to Confession to address issues of authentic existential guilt and responsibility, so might a priest suggest to a penitent that, while the Sacrament brings God’s forgiveness for sins, the penitent may need to seek psychotherapy for emotional issues better addressed outside the Confessional. This option for priests was not available to John Vianney – for instance, when he sought to console the widow of a man who had committed suicide by jumping off a bridge. Fr. Vianney could offer spiritual comfort (his vision that the man had repented before he died), but the priest could not refer to a grief support group nor direct the bereaved woman to a therapist trained in dealing with survivors of suicide.

When priests take psychology seriously, they seek good up-to-date knowledge about human problems that may appear in the confessional but that may contain something that is “sin, but more than sin.” Priests who so educate themselves would then also be better equipped to provide substantial and well-grounded catechesis about what the Sacrament of Reconciliation can do and what it cannot. Has anyone recently heard a sermon on “the differences between therapy and Confession,” or even a homily explaining why sin and emotional “issues” are complementary, not mutually exclusive? Could such a catechesis inspire more Catholics today to recover a “sense of sin” and to appreciate a value in the Sacrament that has been obscured for two generations? The Curé of Ars was passionate about Confession, about helping persons feel a deep sorrow for their own sinfulness and turning, through grace, toward a merciful and loving God who then empowered them to embark on genuine behavioral change and the making of amends. “Do we accord the same importance to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Are we ready to consecrate time to it?” (John Paul II, 1986).

Asceticism, Faith Development, and Wholeness

Even though the heresy of Jansenism had been condemned and had lost strength by the early 18th century, French Catholicism at the time of John Vianney still contained stubborn elements of this harsh spirituality. We cannot reduce the saint’s attitude to this heresy, but neither can we ignore fundamental attitudes, especially early in his priestly career, that reflected a distorted sense of sin and an image of God that needed maturing. As Pope John Paul II said: “It may be that some expressions and a severe tone were inspired in him by Jansenism. Yet he was able to overcome this rigorism” (1986).

From a developmental psychological perspective, John Vianney seems to have struggled with a profound sense of personal inadequacy and an exaggerated belief in his own moral failings and sinfulness. The young priest would have been characterized by Freud as having an “unforgiving, punitive Superego.” This emerged, through the mechanism of projection, in Fr. Vianney’s early homilies, in one of which he declares that his parishioners are committing “dozens of mortal sins” by their inattention during Sunday Mass (Vianney, 1995, 146). Likewise, he is said to

have withheld absolution from a young teenage girl for six years until she stopped attending the village dances (Trochu, 1927/1977, 159).

No aspect of John Vianney's life is more troubling for a psychotherapist than his austere asceticism and extreme penances. Imagine that a 35-year old man were brought to the local emergency room in restraints by the police. The attending psychiatrist pieces together a case history: the man lives alone and works 20-hour days; he deliberately restricts his daily food intake to under 1,000 calories, sometimes living for days on a rotten potato and a glass of milk; he sleeps but two hours a night; and he came to the emergency room only after his housekeeper called 911 upon finding the man slumped on the floor against a wall, blood all over the room because he had been beating himself with a leather thong into which he had tied sharp bits of metal and glass. The psychiatrist further discovers that, at night, the patient has been having conversations with what he believes to be a devil and that he hears the demon taunting him and saying hateful things about him. A contemporary clinician would certainly place such an individual on a 72-hour psychiatric hold to assess suicidal lethality; and likely would render a diagnosis such as "Major Depression, severe, with psychotic features."

Obviously, such a diagnosis misses the central truth about John Vianney, that he was passionately consumed with a desire to serve God with his entire self, even if he temporarily turned down blind alleys on the journey of faith. To discuss the Curé of Ars in these psychological terms is not at all meant to detract from his sanctity. But we must look squarely at aspects of the still-immature John Vianney and discern the distorted thinking and attitudes that were transformed by God's grace as Vianney grew toward greater integration and wholeness in Christ. A plausible perspective is to view the Curé of Ars as being gradually healed, in the course of his life journey, from his Jansenistic self-abasement and his unrealistically negative self-concept. Our contemporary culture cries out for a renewed asceticism, but it must be a mode of self-denial and penance free from psychological dysfunction and an unhealthy image of God. It would be a mistake simply to imitate the external mortifications of the younger John Vianney.

The Curé of Ars also spent himself in the "penance of the confessional." He who vigorously admonished his parishioners to set aside the Sabbath for rest did not himself take time off for walks in nature or recreation, much less for a vacation. He even had difficulty making time for an annual retreat. Would he have been less of a saint had he taken a sabbatical at some time during his 41 years at Ars? What is the cumulative negative impact on one's ministry of a "24/7" model of availability? On the other hand, neither priests nor therapists can effectively be of service with a 9-to-5 mentality. We can look around at the example of many single mothers who never have the luxury of a regular day off from parenting responsibilities. What is the proper balance between a healthy self-care and the call to spend ourselves in service of others?

At age 54, Fr. Vianney was exhausted by his schedule and the constant stream of pilgrims to Ars. He only wanted to go off to a monastery, to have solitude and "weep for my poor life." At the developmental stage of midlife, a life-altering event occurred that radically transformed his manner of doing ministry. Fr. Vianney came into possession of Alphonsus Liguori's *Moral Theology* and *Guide for Confessors*. These texts systematically outlined a more compassionate approach to human sinfulness and encouraged confessors to move away from an excessive rigorism influenced by Jansenism. From this point onwards, notes Vianney's biographer (Trochu, 1927/1977, 314), his message focused more and more, as Pope John Paul II noted, "on the attractive side of virtue and on the mercy [and tenderness] of God" (1986).

Another indication of spiritual transformation at midlife emerged in this time period. Within five years of reading and absorbing St. Alphonsus' book, John Vianney rarely experienced the nighttime demonic "infestations" which had troubled him for more than 20 years. Is it a coincidence that the emergence of a more merciful and compassionate image of God also had the result of banishing the power of evil? If these infestations were at least in part, from a psychological perspective, harsh and negative introjects directly correlated with John Vianney's sense of inadequacy and failure, can we not see God's grace in the transformation of this inner darkness into a greater trust in God's redemptive love?

Individual Pastoral Care & Social Justice

Fr. Vianney vigorously addressed sin in the confessional, and for this he is justly famous. This fact could overshadow an equally important commitment on his part to fighting what today we call "social" or "systemic" sin. In this context, even his ascetical practices and self-mortification can be seen in a new light.

What are we to make today of the Curé's fierce opposition to dancing and taverns? In 1818, when Fr. Vianney arrived in Ars, there were 40 households – and 4 taverns. The young priest identified these drinking establishments as a fundamental source of poverty in the village. He condemned dances because of the associated sexual activity and because of the way in which these events dominated the consciousness of young people. In today's culture, we might make associations to internet pornography, popular music charged with explicit sexual content, and both online and casino gambling. The Curé of Ars took a prophetic stance toward these cultural forces that did not respect the integrity and freedom of the human person. He was ridiculed for this position and his enemies tried to bring him down with false accusations of sexual misconduct.

On another front, John Vianney recognized another pressing social problem. In post-Revolutionary France, a time of social disintegration, thousands of young girls were homeless, orphaned, abandoned. With his own funds, Vianney sent two young women from his parish to be trained as teachers and then established a boarding school, La Providence, which literally took homeless girls off the streets. Those of us who have clinical experience with such children today know that most young women on the streets have been sexually victimized and traumatized, frequently developing drug addictions as well, along with depression and various behavioral problems. This is not an easy population with which to work

In all these social justice projects, the Curé of Ars made a point of recruiting laypeople to be his co-workers – the lady of the manor, Mlle. Des Garets, and Catherine Lassagne, his longtime associate and schoolteacher. This example of solidarity and partnership spoke powerfully to our late Pope: "What I wish to emphasize is the ever-more-intense collaboration between priests and laity in the ministry" and the good priest "knows how to trust the laity in their own initiatives" (John Paul II, 1986).

Within the context of the Gospel as fundamentally countercultural, the ascetical practices of the Curé of Ars can be viewed not as remnants of a medieval spirituality but as constitutive elements of the call to "act justly." "Give everything away;" said the Curé, "keep nothing for yourself." Self-denial as a means of breaking psychological attachments and addictions has great value

for our modern world. Asceticism here, then, would not mean self-annihilation or a self-abasement bordering on the masochistic. Asceticism would mean instead a radical freedom from any material good that might become a “god,” a “higher power.” From today’s psychological understanding, we can view the Curé’s passionate efforts at self-denial as sometimes misdirected, but as fundamentally oriented toward a freer and deeper love of God and other human beings. The Curé of Ars tackled personal sin and led sinners to conversion, but he also challenged his society to address systemic evil and sin, the structures and neglect that kept God’s little ones poor and vulnerable.

Contemporary therapists can reflect on Fr. Vianney’s example and honestly examine their consciences. To what extent do we mental health professionals address the root social causes of the dysfunction and distress that we see in our offices? Do we blend individual psychotherapy in our careers with a commitment to changing social structures and conditions that create and perpetuate individual dysfunction?

Continuing Formation of the Minister

John Vianney’s academic shortcomings may have been exaggerated, but it did take him three tries to complete seminary training. It would be a mistake, however, to label Fr. Vianney an anti-intellectual. When he died, his library held 300-400 books on theology, preaching, and the spiritual life. Every indication is that he had actually read them all! From being a terrible student, he grew into a professional who highly valued education. Somehow, in the midst of an extraordinarily busy apostolic schedule, the Curé of Ars made time every day to read. How many priests or therapists can honestly say the same?

More striking, as previously described, John Vianney absorbed what he read and applied contemporary theology to his pastoral practice. He actually allowed his ministry to be modified by new perspectives, such as the ones he gained reading books by Alphonsus Liguori. If therapists and priests were asked the last time they read a professional book that significantly influenced the way they do their work, what would the answer be?

In our contemporary Catholic Church, clergy are strongly encouraged to participate in regular continuing education, but there is no systematic process to monitor compliance, nor are there any sanctions for not attending continuing education classes. By contrast, mental health professionals will have their licenses suspended for failure to complete the minimum annual/biennial CEU requirements, and compliance is monitored through audits.

But therapists should not feel superior because they accumulate more continuing education hours than the average parish priest. The Curé of Ars also engaged in regular “case consultations” – i.e., his bishop over the years requested John Vianney’s opinion on over 200 difficult moral situations that arose for his priests around the diocese. For his part, John Vianney also consulted with the bishop and other experienced clergy about complicated pastoral dilemmas. I have done my own informal, unscientific survey of my professional colleagues regarding the extent to which they regularly utilize supervision. Counselors in training are supervised nearly to death, having their counseling sessions videotaped, their documentation minutely scrutinized. Once a mental health professional gains independent licensure, however, a point where supervision is no longer mandated by law, my survey results suggest that most therapists have no one to whom they regularly

bring samples of their work. The act of presenting oneself to a peer or a senior practitioner requires the humility of admitting that I might not be perfect, that I still have much to learn, that I could have blind spots. Ongoing supervision, even after one has years of experience, provides an important safety mechanism. Those therapists and clergy who get in trouble for various ethical lapses and boundary violations seem, in my experience, to be the “Lone Rangers” who lack “accountability partners.” If the Curé of Ars, a saint, made a practice of consultation and regular ongoing education, might it not be wise for us decidedly unsaintly therapists and clergy to do the same? We need “a kind of permanent formation that will deepen [our] theological, pastoral, and spiritual reflection” (John Paul II, 1986).

Meditation, Prayer, and Self-Renewal

“Some attribute too much to the effectiveness of external activity and stand ready and eager to immerse themselves in the hustle and bustle of the ministry, to their own spiritual detriment” (John XXIII, 1959). The example of the Curé of Ars highlights the centrality of a deep habit of prayer in order for the ministering person to offer any substantial aid to people in need. Over the course of John Vianney’s life, he spoke more and more of God being the source of all good works. Vianney’s early extreme asceticism, which he himself later called “my youthful folly,” may have been rooted in the mistaken belief that he could make himself into a saint through his own self-improvement projects, his own fierce self-denial. But a spiritual truth is that we can never totally remove our own selfishness; it is “the good God” who gives us the grace to be charitable, generous, and merciful. All helpers, clergy or therapists, need a deep interiority “lest we experience existential emptiness and the effectiveness of our ministry be compromised” (Benedict XVI, 2009).

The Curé of Ars worked passionately to help his people grow in a greater reverence for liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharist. But he also inspired his parishioners to develop a personal prayer life. To what extent are Catholics given regular opportunities to learn how to pray? I am dismayed, as a therapist, when a client expresses a desire for spiritual direction and guidance in prayer, and I am unable to refer them to a priest. Priests cite their full schedules and their lack of formal training in spiritual direction as reasons why they cannot accept such referrals. This comes paradoxically at a time when mental health professionals are endorsing the practice of meditation as an empirically validated treatment for certain serious personality disorders, depression, and anxiety. My clinical experience suggests that clients are hungry for a sense of interiority which will help them cope with daily challenges and to become more loving human beings. It is somewhat troubling that it might be easier to find a therapist to help them with interiority than a priest. A challenging dimension for priests of the Curé of Ars’ life is to reflect honestly on the extent to which they intentionally set aside time to teach people to pray and guide them in spiritual growth.

The challenge for therapists is equally daunting. Counselors can lose sight of the fact that they are engaged in a process with clients that is spiritual as well as psychological. Carl Jung remains the great advocate within psychology of the importance of religious questions, particularly at midlife and onward. Therapists, at least if my experience reflects that of my colleagues, will inevitably encounter situations of such profound suffering and evil that no tidy therapeutic model will keep the therapist from being overwhelmed. Cases that I have had in which children are sexually abused, or clients commit suicide, or families are fractured by violence – such clinical experiences have pushed me close to despair and an a deep sense of powerlessness. Therapists must nurture some consistent spiritual practice that helps them to find meaning and hope in the face of devastat-

ing human misery. Unfortunately, the recent push toward brief therapy can cause us to fool ourselves into slapping band-aids on that “existential emptiness” to which the Pope referred.

Conclusion

The Curé of Ars has much to say to contemporary helpers, clergy and therapists alike. If we are careful to evaluate critically the aspects of his life that reflect a certain cultural milieu in rural France during the 19th century, we can still learn a great deal that applies to our contemporary world situation. St. John Vianney’s example stands as a prophetic challenge to priests and counselors today in the areas of personal prayer, the integration of pastoral care and social justice, the need for ongoing formation and education, and a renewed model of asceticism that opens the individual to God’s grace as it unfolds through the life cycle.

“Father of Mercy, You made St. John Vianney outstanding in his priestly zeal and concern for your people. By his example and prayers, enable us to win our brothers and sisters to the love of Christ...”

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What are the biggest lessons from the life of the Curé of Ars that can be applied today?
2. What are practical ways in which psychotherapy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation can complement one another in pastoral practice?
3. How can a renewed sense of sin and personal responsibility be integrated into our pastoral practice today?
4. How can a person today practice self-denial and asceticism in a healthy manner?
5. What would be some ways to integrate individual pastoral care with larger social justice issues in our contemporary society?
6. What are the greatest needs that priests have in terms of ongoing formation and continuing education? What are the needs of therapists for professional growth?
7. How might parishes do a better job of helping people develop a personal prayer life?
8. What are the core elements necessary for psychological and spiritual renewal and integration as one ministers to the needs of others?

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John Henry Cardinal Newman Model for Catholic Priests

Rev. Theodore C. Ross SJ

This Church will never weaken so long as there are good priests and pastors to attend to the flock (St. Edmund Campion, S.J. prior to his cruel and barbaric martyrdom in 1581).

Cardinal Newman 300 years later gives the truth to Campion's prophecy. Not only England, but the whole Church, was strengthened by the priesthood of this brilliant, sensitive, zealous priest.

May 2, 2010, is the day scheduled for the Beatification of John Henry Newman. The date is aptly chosen – May 2 is the Feast of St. Athanasius, who was prominent in the Arian Controversy of the 4th century. St. Athanasius was a favorite of Newman, whose first published book was a brilliant analysis of this crucial theological battle which concerns the Divinity of Christ – *Is Christ God?* Athanasius played the most important role in defending Catholic Orthodoxy.

Beatification is the first major step towards sainthood. Will Newman eventually be canonized? Who besides the Holy Spirit knows? But an editorial in *The Times* on the occasion of Newman's death in 1890 gives the best answer: "Whether Rome canonizes him or not, he will be canonized in the thoughts of pious people of many creeds in England."

Newman, the Saintly Genius

This great Catholic leader is a veritable litany of giftedness:

- He is acknowledged to be one of the great literary giants of the English-speaking world. Individuals with no faith have studied Newman just for his mastery of language and style.
- He read Latin and Greek as easily as English. This made him a great authority on the Early Church and the all-important Church Fathers.
- Though he never considered himself a theologian, he pioneered many theological positions: e.g. the development of doctrine; the proper position and place of the laity in the Church; the brilliant distinction between real and notional assent, showing the distinction between Faith and Theology; his insights into the meaning of inspiration in Sacred Scripture and historical-critical exegesis.
- He was a brilliant poet. His *Dream of Gerontius* has been compared to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The great Elgar was delighted to put it to music.
- Newman is considered by many to be the Father of Ecumenism. His *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* is a brilliant analysis of conscience. This work contains the famous, often-quoted line:

Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing), I shall drink to the Pope, if you please – still, to conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.

He founded a Catholic university in Ireland, but this venture failed for a number of reasons: it was less than ten years after the Great Famine; he got no co-operation from the Irish bishops who wanted a Catholic university in the first place, but, as it turned out, what they really wanted was a seminary while Newman wanted a university. But his university venture did produce one of Newman's greatest legacies: *The Idea of a University*, brilliant lectures given to his faculty. This work is used especially today by Catholic educators searching for the identity of Catholic higher education.

Newman has the respect of the Catholic world from heretics to popes.

- The Modernist Alfred Loisy maintained that Newman had the greatest mind in the Church since Origen in the third century.
- The brilliant Pope Pius XII said that Newman should be a “Doctor of the Church.”
- Leo XIII made Newman a cardinal less than a year after he was elected Pope.
- John Paul II wrote that Newman should be raised to the altar “if only for his courage and determination in the pursuit of truth.” Our present Holy Father, Benedict XVI, wrote almost the same thing in a letter to Trinity, Newman's college in Oxford, praising “his disciplined commitment to the pursuit of religious truth.”

Newman the Priest

A litany of giftedness! Intellectual, writer, educator, poet, theologian, Churchman! But being a priest was his greatest asset. It was the underlying foundation for all his gifts. So often his fame and respect are based on his brilliant mind and creative imagination. But a closer study shows he was much more than these. He was a Catholic priest of great sanctity and remarkable sensitivity.

- When his closest friend Father Ambrose St. John died, Newman was inconsolable. He threw himself on the bed by the corpse and spent the night there. He requested that he be buried in the same grave as his friend.
- Newman offered Mass every day for a week that his greatest enemy might be successful in office.
- People he loved treated him shabbily, Cardinal Manning, Father Frederick Faber, Cardinal Cullen of Ireland. Like Thomas Aquinas 600 years earlier, he was accused of innovation that challenged Catholic Orthodoxy. This hurt never caused him to love the Church less.

Newman loved Catholic Tradition. He wrote and preached brilliantly defending Transubstantiation, Confession, Benediction, Devotion to our Blessed Mother and the Saints (especially St.

Philip Neri, founder of his community, the Oratorians). He could go into an ecstasy of poetry on these topics and many others. In his *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* he writes:

Oh my dear Brethren, what joy and thankfulness should be ours, that God has brought us into the Church of His Son. What gift is equal to it in the whole world in its preciousness and its rarity.

To Think like Pascal, Write like Bossuet, Preach like Fenelon

With all his gifts, it is the pulpit where Newman has most to offer today's priest. Preaching today is not considered the forte of the average Catholic Priest, though it has improved a good deal. Years ago Jacques Maritain made the comment: "Thousands of sermons preached every Sunday and still the French keep their Faith." (Unfortunately this is no longer true – the French have lost their Faith.) But Newman was most at home in the pulpit. It seemed that all his gifts came together in his preaching. Before his conversion, the authorities at Oxford were not happy with the content of his sermons. In order to prevent the students listening to him, the different houses changed their dinner hour. The students literally sacrificed their meals to listen to him.

His preaching was the source of many conversions to the Church of England before his conversion to Rome, and to Catholicism after his conversion. William Church, eventually the famous Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, became a devout Anglican on hearing Newman's *Ventures in Faith*, a classic of Newman's Anglican period. The most surprising compliment came from James Froude, brother of Newman's closest friend at Oxford, Hurrell Froude. James became a notorious anti-Catholic historian. But in spite of this, he was attracted to Newman. In his own words:

I attended his church and heard him preach Sunday after Sunday; he is supposed to have been insidious, to have led his disciples on to conclusions to which he designed to bring them, while his purpose was carefully veiled. He was on the contrary the most transparent of men. He told us what he believed to be true. He did not know where it would carry him.

Even after he died, his sermons continued to impact people and change their lives. Muriel Spark, the very popular novelist and satirist of the 1960's and 1970's (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brody*) wrote:

It was by way of Newman that I turned Roman Catholic. Not all the beheaded martyrs of Christendom, the ecstatic nuns of Europe, the five proofs of Aquinas, or the pamphlets of my Catholic acquaintances, provided anything like the answers that Newman did.

Newman the Saint

The world has known legions of men of genius, yet very few are saints. Newman's holiness was in his simplicity and his zeal. When he was made Cardinal in 1879, he had a request he wanted to make to Leo XIII on that historical occasion. He wanted to ask the Pope for a dispensation from the strict law of fasting for a sick lady so she might receive Holy Communion more fre-

quently. Very Rev. Klaus Dick, Auxiliary Bishop of Cologne, claims this incident is a touching example of a feature of Newman that easily remains unnoticed when we focus on the great thinker and theologian. Thanks to the publication of Newman's *Letters and Diaries*, we see his pastoral sensitivity, his attempts to console and to aid, his counseling on spiritual matters. At the age of 76, he traveled some distance to visit a young mother who was seriously ill. She had no profound theological problem to be clarified, but the everyday problems of wife and mother of seven children, whom she wanted to bring up in the Faith. (Apparently Newman made an impression. One of the sons entered the Society of Jesus.)

Another example of Newman's pastoral sensitivity: Sister Mary Dominica was one of Newman's many converts and a Visitation nun who died at the age of 36. Newman was heart-broken. He wrote to her mother: "My dear Mrs. Bowden, she has no need of our prayers. But I shall say many Masses for her, and name her in my daily Memento. How joyful you must be amid your grief. May we all die such deaths and leave such memories behind us."

His greatest love was for the Mass. In his book *Loss and Gain*, a novel based on Newman's own conversion, he has Charles Reding say this: "To me there is nothing so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass. I could attend Masses forever, and not be tired....it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth."

He has a special message for the Church of our day with the scandals and the lawsuits, the loss of faith, the exodus of priests and religious, the vocation crisis:

The Church is ever militant; sometimes she gains, sometimes she loses; and more often she is at once gaining and losing in different parts of her territory. What is ecclesiastical history but a record of the ever-doubtful fortune of the battle, though the issue be not doubtful? Scarcely are we singing *Te Deum* when we have to turn to our *Misereres*; scarcely are we in peace, when we are in persecution; scarcely have we gained a triumph, when we are visited by a scandal; our griefs are our consolations; we lose Stephen to gain Paul, and Matthias replaces the traitor Judas (*Historical Sketches*, II, 1).

Newman suffered heroically when he converted to Catholicism. He was often misunderstood. He was the object of pettiness from members of the hierarchy. The Church was simply not ready for him. The 20th century was, and he became the "Invisible Leader of the Second Vatican Council." But with all that he suffered as a Catholic, Newman said it was worth it to be able to come home and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Only a priest filled with Faith and Piety can make a statement like that.

Newman's whole life had been one long controversy, and where there is no beginning, there is likely to be no end (his obituary in *The Times*, August 12, 1890).

Theology of the Priesthood: A Philosophical Prospectus

Rev. Anthony R. Brausch

Benedict XVI's stated intention for declaring the Year for Priests is to promote reflection on the gift and nature of the priesthood and to encourage every priest in his "striving for spiritual perfection." The first task will be our focus here; not, however, by means of a theological reflection on the ministerial priesthood *per se* but by a consideration of certain philosophical trends that have shaped the contemporary theological context and that, in turn, have presented specific challenges to the Church's ability to give an account of her understanding of the nature and role of the ordained priesthood.

Theological scholarship in the last fifty years is marked by the developing sophistication of critical methodologies. It is also characterized by the plurality of philosophical schools to which appeal is made for the foundations upon which theologians build. Theologians are well aware their craft depends on philosophical systems for a consistent, coherent language in which to express themselves. And even more so for the conceptual apparatus by which they effect their analyses and construct their propositions. But rarely do they expose the limitations of the philosophical presuppositions under which they are operating. The relationship between a given theological argument and the philosophical context in which it is formed is such that what is theologically tenable must first be philosophically possible (at least within a given philosophical system). Because today it is much more difficult to pin down what is philosophically possible, it is likewise more difficult to construct a theological system or argument that has a chance at gaining a broad consensus. The fragmentation of theological consensus and the strains this places upon dialogue, and here the effects can be seen even within a generally homogenous community such as the Catholic community, is due in no small measure to an inability to establish general philosophical foundations recognized across the board. When theologians differ significantly in their exposition of the Faith, either among themselves or with the Magisterium, it is often a consequence of incompatible philosophical starting points. This is readily apparent in the theological literature treating of the priesthood.

An awareness of the many influential philosophical trends would serve to place present challenges in a broader context and perhaps allow for a more generous appreciation for what the various approaches offer to the theological endeavor without absolutizing either their virtues or deficiencies. The limits of this essay however will require us to be more specific. And so, in an effort to demonstrate the type of influence and challenges contemporary philosophical trends present to Catholic theology in general and the theology of the ministerial priesthood in particular, we will focus on two of the more significant developments: critical theory and hermeneutics. Of these two, the primary focus will be on critical theory since it has a clear socio-political dimension. A treatment of the philosophy of hermeneutics, as important as that is, will not be presented but it will simply be shown how in the present context it has been tied to critical theory and what effect this has had on theology.

In addition to fostering a better understanding of the connections between these specific philosophical trends and theology, it is hoped that by tracing the developmental lines of critical theory we will be in a better position to anticipate possible trajectories of theological development. To this end I propose to (1) present a brief narrative of the development of critical theory and briefly show how this ties in with fundamental ontology – in the guise of hermeneutics – in such a way as

to create a philosophical context problematic for Catholic theology; (2) show how this general context has impacted concretely the theology of the ministerial priesthood, specifically through the thought of Fr. E. Schillebeeckx, and (3) hazard a prognosis as to where philosophy, at least in terms of undergirding theological discourse about the priesthood, will direct us in the future.

Philosophical Undercurrents: The Crisis of Epistemology

Before looking more closely at critical theory, it might be helpful to first set out in very broad strokes today's situation. The theological disciplines are presently pursued in a context – philosophically, politically, and socially – which can be described as a type of socio-philosophical alienation. This alienation is experienced under three aspects, which, taken singularly or as whole, present challenges to the foundations upon which theological reflection is typically based; for those faith traditions in which historical precedent and development are appreciated as formative and, in some aspects, normative, this is especially true. The convergence of critical theory and hermeneutics over the past sixty years has given a specific philosophical formulation to this alienation, and has made the theological community acutely aware of this alienation as a theoretical and, perhaps, practical reality.

The first aspect is a sense of alienation from our past. The development of a true historical consciousness during the nineteenth century, which at first promised the possibility of correctly appropriating classical texts, notably the scriptures, through the various developments in hermeneutics and philology, became, through its further development as linguistic theory and ontology, the vehicle by which the whole project came to be drawn into doubt. This trend winds its way through the thought of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Foucault and Derrida. The result of each successive theory has been a deepening appreciation for the complexities involved in any communicative event and a growing skepticism as to the theoretical possibility of definitive interpretations of a given text. Alongside this skepticism was the suspicion that no necessarily contingent historical context could produce a text or structure of meanings and value that may be considered normative or ideal. In this way it has become apparent that the past is simply not accessible to us in such a way as to guarantee its stability as a foundation.

The second is an alienation from the future. The cause of this alienation is a general erosion of the confidence so notable of the Enlightenment, a confidence that was fundamentally future oriented and grounded in a belief in the powers of human reason. Philosophically, this confidence took the form of the assertion that reason, critically reflective, can be enlightened in such a way as to free itself from its customary ways of thinking about the world and reality, ways that obstruct reason's further development and humanity's destiny. As a practical project, the confidence was expressed in the belief that emancipated rationality can envision and construct societies and cultures in which structures and values that are oppressive will be altogether eliminated. This trend leads from Hegel, whose thought constitutes the beginning of critical theory, through Marx and the neo-Marxians of the early twentieth century, to the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. The confidence that accompanied this trend collapses under the hammer blows of the totalitarian systems and cataclysms of the twentieth century.

The confluence of these two trends, beginning in the 1960s, is a major factor in the crisis of epistemology, a crisis often described in terms of its symptoms: relativism, an over-accentuated subjectivism and the ennui of post-modernism. The heart of the crisis is that the search for certain

and unassailable foundations for knowledge claims has been shown to be futile. As will be seen in the third section of this essay, the crisis in epistemology has been recognized within theological circles since the late 1960s.

The third aspect of this alienation is situated in the present. This is experienced as the bifurcation of hope. The optimism of the Enlightenment has not been totally lost, rather, it has been transferred from a general notion of the progressive nature of human rationality and institutions to the realm of the empirical sciences and technology. It is these that undergird the still extant societal notion and belief in the idea of progress. However, when placed within the context of the first two alienations, technological progress results in a third type of alienation, an alienation of humanity from the material world they produce and the socio-political structures that support that technological progress. This third alienation is primarily one in which humanity experiences itself as possibly a failed project; for progress and hope are now sought in technology and science and perhaps in the individual's particular circumstances, but not in humanity itself.

As mentioned, this overall situation has a theoretical formulation whose affect on the various fields of theological research, to name just one, is apparent in the efforts of the theological community to establish foundations. Appeals to transcendental structures, individual and class experience, or communication theory, as being properly foundational for theological reflection, as well as the development of a hermeneutics of suspicion as a methodology, are symptomatic of efforts to establish foundations within a philosophical culture that denies that possibility to a historically conditioned Revelation.

Critical Theory

The observations just made call for some justification. If this sense of alienation is in fact descriptive of the present context there should be some way of tracing its development, theoretically and historically. The evolutionary path of the particular philosophical strain that offers the most clear look at this development is critical theory.

Critical theory has its origins in Hegel and Marx and its culmination in the various philosophers of the Frankfurt School. As stated above, it rests on that basic assumption of the Enlightenment period that critical reflection, which makes clear the underlying structures and dynamics of rationality, is emancipatory. In his celebrated *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), Hegel provides the conceptual apparatus by which, he believed, the course of human development could be understood. In contrast to classical and scholastic thought where reason, in its efforts to know the truth, is directed towards the ideal or theoretical, which should direct practical activity, Hegel proposes a philosophy of reflection and action in which the two are co-constitutive. The dynamics of human rationality, which Hegel describes in his famous dialectical pattern, become externalized in practical action in such a way as to constitute the action itself as part of the dialectic and, therefore, of reflection itself. And so, in Hegel's understanding, *praxis* can be transformative of theory since action is a necessary moment in the process of reflection. This conclusion has a number of significant consequences. Since *praxis* is only exhibited in concrete, historically contingent forms, it is the unfolding of the historical process itself that becomes the truth worth contemplating. While the actual historical events provide the material for study, their significance is transitory. Thus no historical event can lay claim to establishing for subsequent generations truths or values that remain normative. More important is the underlying meaning or truth hidden within the process of change.

The subject of this temporal unfolding of the development of rationality is not, for Hegel, the individual but the most universalized manifestation of practical human activity, i.e., the state. With this theory of critical reflection and practical activity it was now possible to see human history as an overall process, a process revealing the progressive development of reason and its emancipation through the practical human activity of developing ever more universal and rational forms of institutionalization.

Marx, while appropriating the Hegelian critical-dialectical methodology as well as the conclusion of the progressive nature of the unfolding of history, did not share Hegel's view that the modern state was the culmination of the development of human freedom. In fact, in was no emancipation at all. For Marx, the state was not the concrete subject of history, the continuing development of which exhibited the advance of reason. Instead the subject is a particular class, the proletariat, who now, owing to a critical theory, could enter into the next phase of historical development: the transformation of society through revolution. The individual's place in this process is to realize, through critical theory, that the modern productive processes in which labor is treated as a commodity fosters a dehumanization of the person and promotes autonomous individuality that is selfish and competitive. Marx proposes a different end or goal of human endeavors. He borrows the concept of "species being" from Feuerbach and it is this, that of being determined through intersubjective social action in which the human species as a whole serves as the object and beneficiary, that is the proper end of practical action and theory.

The Hegelian-Marxist critical theory enters the twentieth century promoting three general theses. The first, that those structures tied to the past, whether political, cultural or religious, must be overcome since they are a phase in the development of human rationality. To hold on to past forms is irrational, for to do so is to arrest the development of rationality itself. Second, the future is produced. It is ushered in through purposive action directed towards societal and political transformation, transformation that can only take place through revolution. An appeal to the concept of an organic development of societal structures is an abdication of responsibility. Third, the condition that is the possibility for this purposive action is the coming to consciousness of the proletariat as that necessary historical subject and agent.

The Hegelian-Marxist critical theory was sustainable as a theory of the progressive emancipation of reason and humanity through practical action as long as historical events supported it. The events of the 1930s and 40s did not. David Rasmussen points to three developments during those years that undermined the classical formulation of this theory: the rise of fascism, the Stalinization of Russia, and the splintering of the workers' movement ("Critical Theory: Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas," in Richard Kearney ed., *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, 260). The foundations for critical theory and its belief in the progressively emancipatory development of reason were undermined precisely because of the theory's linkage between *praxis* and theory. For if the development of reason is played out on the stage of history, and humanity's practical activities both reveal and form what is rational, then the cataclysms of the mid-twentieth century indicate that reason is not by nature directed towards self-reflective enlightenment and emancipation, but is caught in a dialectical vicious circle in which every advance in the area of knowledge leads to more sophisticated systemizations and structures of oppression. This conclusion was reached by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), a work that clearly indicates the advent of post-modernity and that was highly influenced by the thought of Max Weber. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reason is no longer reckoned as the sure path towards emancipation, for its true em-

ployment is purposive and calculating. Horkheimer terms human rationality as “instrumental reason” and argues that, “What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is its only aim.” It is important to note that the argument is not that reason sometimes operates in this way but that it does so by necessity and all thought is instrumental in its fundamental intention. Reason can neither emancipate itself nor seek the authentic emancipation of others.

Habermas sought to rescue critical theory, and thus also the emancipatory project of rationality, from the Weberian analysis that laid the foundations for Horkheimer’s thesis. In order to do so he needed to construct a theory of rationality not limited to purposive, instrumental action-reasoning. During the 1960s and 70s Habermas published a number of works in which he argues that Weber’s analysis is flawed in that it is based on a conception of all interactions as subject-object relations. This type of relation necessarily leads to the instrumentalization of the object and its concomitant form of rationality. The atomistic subject of Weber’s analysis is an abstraction and does not correspond to the true constitution of the rational subject within a social matrix. Thus there is room for a different kind of communication and rationality other than instrumental. Habermas turns to speech-act theory in which there is the possibility of subject-subject communication. He is then able to make a distinction between communicative action and strategic action. He argues that communicative action is more fundamental and, as dialogical, grounds the formation of reason itself in the area of communal activity, most especially in the communal nature of language.

By showing that reason is not limited to instrumentalizing its dialogical partner in the act of communication, the emancipatory project of human rationality is carried forward, and, in a different form, the Enlightenment program of overcoming the past. Whereas before traditional forms had to be overcome in order that they would no longer impede the future by their inherent limitations and contingent character, now they are overcome inasmuch as they do not constitute a true dialogical partner. Within Catholic theology, however, this is exactly the claim: that revelation history, both in terms of content and form, constitutes a dialogical partner for present theological reflection and ecclesial structures.

It is at this point that the evolving philosophy of hermeneutics seems to undercut the Catholic position. As mentioned above, the philosophy of hermeneutics calls into question the possibility of engaging the past in any other fashion than from that of a self-interested perspective by which it instrumentalizes the past. If this is in fact the case, then the past – in other words Tradition – is by nature an obstacle to the further emancipation of humanity. It is not hard to find voices both in the popular culture and academia that make this very argument.

Although critical theory is just one of almost innumerable trends that could be used to trace the development of what is called “post-modernity,” it does highlight the significant impact of Hegelian-Marxist thought and how much this has shaped present Western culture. In the next section its impact will be seen within the specific context of Catholic theology.

Critical theory and the theology of the ministerial priesthood

In the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, even taking into account all the energy, controversy, anticipated freedoms and developments in ecclesial and liturgical forms, it

must still be seen as something of a surprising development that a number of theologians who made significant contributions to the conciliar formulations moved in their own theological positions far enough away from those of the Council as to have materially rejected it. The most striking examples of this phenomenon concerning the theology of the priesthood might be Hans Küng's *Wozu Priester?* published in 1971 and E. Schillebeeckx's works of the 1970's, culminating in his 1985 *The Church with a Human Face*. Both envision ecclesial structures and a theology of the priesthood very much at odds with that of the council documents. What gave rise to such a curious development? Küng's call for greater democratization and Schillebeeckx's arguments for the relative nature and therefore historical contingency of the Church's structure and articulation of the faith reflect the developing relation between critical theory and hermeneutics and their combined influence on theology.

Schillebeeckx's celebrated *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1960) is written from a phenomenological approach. During the 1960s he became acquainted with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and, while retaining Husserl's appreciation for the role of interpretive interests and perspective, finds in the works of Habermas a theory of sociological development that leads to a turn in his treatment of the historical structures and forms of ministry within the Church. Schillebeeckx's interest was two-fold: the question of the mediation of the absolute in history and, hermeneutically, the possibility of miscommunication. It is in reference to this last concern that Schillebeeckx takes seriously the critical theorist's contention that besides misunderstanding there is the possibility of systematic distortion. There is not room here to do justice to Schillebeeckx's effort to engage theology with critical theory, but a few short highlights will make clear the influence and effect.

For Schillebeeckx, the relationship between theory and *praxis* is not such that theory, or, in the case of theology, right belief, can be determined by concrete practice. But it is the case that the concrete needs of the historical community, in its efforts to give expression and witness to its faith in Christ, can give rise to new forms and structures. Practical solutions and adaptations in answer to the needs of the faith community necessarily inform belief. It is the activity of the theological community in conjunction with the magisterium to test and determine whether the particular and, at first, local solutions are congruent with the fundamental identity of the faith community. Here the echoes of Hegel's co-constitutive roles of *praxis* and theory can be discerned.

This raises the question, what principle or rule is to be used in making the judgment as to which practical adaptations are legitimate? Schillebeeckx argues that the fundamental identity of the community and, therefore, the criterion by which practical adaptations are to be evaluated is found in baptismal equality. The Spirit, given in baptism and forming the community, is the source of freedom and equality and produces in the Church all the necessary ministries to support that freedom and equality. Schillebeeckx states his methodological employment of this criterion more formally as, "an interpretive description of facts, in which I am principally interested in the group process as a liberating system of communication" (*Church with a Human Face*, 41). Echoes of Habermas' critical theory are clearly discernable here. Two points are worth noting. First, "facts" never exist or are even accessible outside two interpretive frameworks, that of the recorder and that of the present reader. Thus there is no interpretation free data and the best a researcher can strive for is to be aware of the interests with which he or she approaches the data. The second is the role of "group process." There is not room here to go into the significant theological ramifications entertained within the notion of the Christian community as a group process. It is enough to note

that the group process that is a liberating system of communication is primarily found in the liturgy. For Schillebeeckx, the celebration of the Eucharist is a type of critical remembering, the communicative process the group engages in and what constitutes it as a liberating system. This being the case, the Christian community has a right to engage in, by virtue of their baptism, the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, according to Schillebeeckx, access to the Eucharist is a fundamental right and is the propelling dynamic within the community that gives rise to the ministries and structures that support and fulfill it. This right outweighs all ecclesial structures and considerations. For Schillebeeckx it is theologically inconceivable for a New Testament Christian community not to have access to the Eucharist.

Through the application of these principles Schillebeeckx argues that even within the New Testament sources one can discern lines developing between those who hold to the original, liberating thrust of the gospel and those elements within the community that more readily conform to sociological patterns and seek to institutionalize aspects of ministry and leadership. Within the lines of historical development the tension is highlighted in that by the second half of the second century the original plurality of ministries and fluidity of structures is eventually flattened out and consolidated in the person of the *episcopus*. Schillebeeckx characterizes this sociological development as understandable and perhaps even legitimate, but not necessary. It is merely a development within a particular context, a development that may or may not be advantageous for the community's living out its baptismal call. It is in this light that Schillebeeckx critiques the Church's present theology of the ministerial priesthood, calling for the substitution of the language of function for that of role and the dropping of both concepts and structures that support the idea of ontological character and the sacerdotalization of the one whom the community empowers as a minister.

This short review should be sufficient to make more clear why fundamental theology in general and the theology of the priesthood in particular have been enveloped in controversy for the past forty years. And this is certainly not limited to the halls of academia. It is not uncommon to hear, in the comments and questions of the normal, mass-going Catholic, language reflective of Schillebeeckx's critique. It seems the only way this could be possible is if, on the level of the person in the pew, their experience and living out of the faith is immersed in a culture in which the types of alienation detailed above are unconsciously operative.

Prospectus: Theologically grounded philosophical foundations

The specific developments in theological reflection on the priesthood will, for the foreseeable future, continue to display the characteristics of a confused period in which the competing visions for ministry in the Church attempt to establish their claims as more credibly grounded and argued. This will be the case until the full weight of the crisis in epistemology comes to bear and a new paradigm becomes absolutely necessary. This does not mean that the work that will continue to be done will be without merit or profit for the Church. Those researches that explore the biblical, patristic, and dogmatic development will still yield interesting and enlightening insights. And there are some philosophical contributions of the last century that will both necessarily and beneficially continue to influence theological reflection. But I would like to conclude this paper by indicating what I think will develop on a more foundational level.

The title for this section seemingly inverts the order in which philosophy and theology intersect. This is not to imply that the relationship between faith and reason will be inverted in the

near future. But it does highlight what I think will be one of the general philosophical trends: the re-regionalization of philosophical foundations. What is meant by this is simply that the philosophical failure to adequately ground general epistemological claims has led to the situation in which the first thing that must be affirmed is reality itself. What constitutes reality is as much an indemonstrable claim as it is a demonstrable proof. This leaves open the possibility that philosophy will again be employed within the classic Anselmian formulation, *credo ut intelligam*, where the act of belief is a first, necessary act by which a region is established in which the philosophical sciences can be profitably employed. This act of faith is not necessarily confessional in nature, rather it is the basic acknowledgment, either explicitly or implicitly, of what constitutes the real.

Let me give two examples of this. The first is, then professor, Ratzinger's 1968 work *Introduction to Christianity*. In the first section Ratzinger explores the contemporary situation of belief and the necessity for a person to first take a "stand" vis-à-vis reality before the possibility opens up where they can "under-stand" reality. For instance, if a person's basic stance is one of materialistic determinism, any claims made about the transcendent aspects of human nature, including the mind itself, are ruled out by definition. This corresponds to the growing realization in science that the privileged position of disinterested, objective observer does not exist. Ratzinger displays an almost prophetic appreciation for the precarious nature of the philosophical foundations upon which theological research is being pursued and counsels the necessity of a radical decision, in the true sense of the term, if Christianity is to make any sense at all, even to itself.

The second example is a work by Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Pickstock argues that in the wake of Derridian deconstruction the way forward, in terms of ontology, is a recovery of the ancient ground for the understanding of Being, that is, doxology or liturgy. Again, here is an argument that reality is first a "given," something that is first acknowledged and only then do the structures of epistemological claims come into view. Pickstock argues that it is in liturgical, ritual worship that the crisis of post-modernity is met head-on. Liturgy does so by the very fact that it is social, dialogical, and, as ritual, normative in its characteristics and makes a radical decision in that it gives itself over to a reality that the group process does not create. Other works could be cited, but this is sufficient to indicate a general trajectory that philosophy and theology will travel together. The most striking effect of this transposition, if, in fact, it develops, will be the possibilities it opens up for the overcoming of the three aspects of alienation mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The development of a doxologically grounded stance towards Being holds the promise that faith and reason will not become more alienated in the future, but more complementary.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What language or categories do I use to describe the ministerial priesthood? The Church? Is it institutional/functional language, biblical, or sociological in nature?
2. In what ways, if it all, do the alienations mentioned at the beginning of the essay reflect my own experience?
3. Does the gift of faith and act of belief ground my fundamental views and understanding of what constitutes reality?

Afterword*

Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr

We gather to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and who does not sense the sentiment of great joy and accomplishment that surrounds us. We feel it; we rejoice in it. Perhaps that is because we recognize the years invested, the demands made, and the stages celebrated along the way. And yet, we know there is more. Reflecting upon the day that he and his older brother were ordained to the priesthood, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “everywhere [my brother and I] were received even by strangers with a warmth and affection I had not thought possible until that day. In this way I learned firsthand how earnestly people wait for a priest, how much they long for the blessing that flows from the power of the sacrament. The point was not my own or my brother’s person. What could we two young men represent by ourselves to the many people we were now meeting? In us they saw persons who had been touched by Christ’s mission, and had been empowered to bring his nearness to [all]” (*Milestones:Memoirs 1927-1977*, 100).

We rejoice today because in the lives of those to be ordained we see vividly and concretely God’s love for them and for his Church; we witness God’s call and fidelity to that call. We marvel in the realization that God calls human beings to follow the divine path and to participate in the drama of human redemption. The joy of this day is but a foretaste of the joy that their priestly ministry is to bring to the entire People of God.

Dear brothers, you are about to be ordained to the priesthood in service of God’s People. During your preparation and in your own lives, you have been given a glimpse of the sufferings of Christ in His flock, but ministering to them with words of insight and healing seems such a daunting task – and it is! But, as God did for the Prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament, Christ today puts words in your mouth, words that you will repeat each time you gather the people around the Lord’s table: Taking bread you will say, “this is my body given up for you,” and raising the cup filled with wine you will proclaim, “this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant shed for you.” In these words and with these actions, you will take your cue throughout all of your ministry about how you will carry on the tradition of the elders: Being witnesses to the sufferings of Christ.

Both bread and wine will be the signs that trigger in you a sensitivity to the diversity of Christ’s flock, alerting you to how you are to shepherd and guide. Bread that comes from the harvested grains, and wine made of gathered grapes, offer you a vision of the Church that is made possible by the work of many hands. This should prompt in you gratitude and respect for those in the past and in the present day who have fostered the faith through parishes, families, movements, and the charisms of religious orders. See in the gifts brought forward – grain and grapes once scattered on the hill side, and now gathered to form one bread and one cup – how God calls you to encourage, coordinate, and collaborate with the many gifts that differ. And always remember, to serve with the heart of Christ necessarily means that the disciple does not seek to impose his own preferences but rather is present only to be of assistance in the discernment of the will of God.

* Taken from an ordination homily given by Archbishop Schnurr.

Similarly, as you recall that bread is made of grain that is ground and wine from crushed grapes, you cannot help but become more aware of those who suffer from oppression and heartache. Learn to recognize, through the offering of the gifts at the altar, the sufferings of Christ in the tired worker, in those who mourn the loss of loved ones, in parents who struggle to raise their families, in those crushed by infirmity and – yes – even in those who will criticize you and the Church you love. Give them all a shepherd’s care as one who witnesses the sufferings of Christ.

Patience is a special part of your ministry. The word itself comes from the Latin, *passio*, suffering. Bread and wine are in themselves symbols of patience, coming about in the careful and slow process of baking and fermenting. Just as parents quickly learn that parenting is not an exact science, so too ministry to others requires a flexibility that honors the workings of the Spirit in the various seasons of a person’s life. That kind of patience must begin with yourself. Ordination is not a canonization! You will need to recommit yourselves to the ongoing conversion that brought you thus far and rely on the support of your bishop, your brothers in the priesthood, and the people. As you take the bread and cup in your hands, remember that they came after a long process requiring patience. Be patient, especially with yourself.

Finally, the bread and wine, consecrated, made holy, is broken and poured out in order to give life. Let those actions be a sign of hope to you and a reminder that the sufferings of Christ you witness are the shadow side of the glory of Christ’s triumph. Remember, you must not only preach the good news, you must also be willing to see the good news. Seek to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Seek the face of the Lord in everyone and in every situation. Be open to God’s surprises of success and triumph in those responding to the grace of Christ – in the repentant and recovering, in the fresh voice of a new believer and especially in the generous response of one who has heard the call to serve as you have. Be faith-filled even when the entire world seems to say nay. Be hope-filled always, after all it is the “good news” of Christ that has been entrusted to us.

This witnessing to the sufferings of Christ and the glory revealed seems so much to ask of those who know they are young in experience. But the Lord has put words in your mouth: “This is my body given for you, my blood shed for you.” Let these words over the bread and the cup provide you with the vocabulary to speak other words in giving witness to Christ’s suffering and triumph.

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